



Modifications to the COVID 19 Guidelines and Protocols for the Liturgical Celebrations of Weddings and Funerals

I: An Introduction

Upon review of the recent “modifications” to our current *Guidelines and Protocols* for the celebration of various liturgies during the COVID-19 Pandemic (which were sent out in a Liturgical Advisory on October 22, 2020), it was determined that it would be good to also offer some “modifications” to our present guidelines regarding the celebration of Marriage (whether celebrated in any of its forms) and Funerals (whether celebrated within or outside of Mass).

NB: Please remember that all guidelines and protocols for social distancing remain in place for ALL liturgical celebrations – weekday, Sunday and Holy Day Masses as well as weddings, funerals, baptisms, and other large worship gatherings – still requiring the use of facial coverings and six (6) feet distancing between individuals and/or household groupings.

The following represent additional “modifications” to our present guidelines that pertain specifically to the Order of Celebrating Matrimony [OCM] and the Order of Celebrating Funerals [OCF]:

II: The Order of Celebrating Matrimony [OCM]

Now that our earlier “modifications” allow for simple processions, the same is applicable to weddings. However, according to the ritual text, all weddings assume a liturgical procession – the inclusion of the Cross, Minister of the Word, Deacon and/or Priest Presider – in addition to the Bride and Groom. Given the present restrictions due to COVID-19, it does not seem appropriate that an entire wedding party (that is all the bride’s and groom’s attendants) should be included.

With Bishop Gruss’ permission, the Bride and Groom may enter into the worship space together (wearing facial coverings). Alternatively, if for pastoral and/or preferential reasons, the Groom may enter alone or with his mother and/or father and the Bride may enter alone or with her mother/and or father (wearing facial coverings). Since the Bride and Groom are the

authentic ministers of the Sacrament of Marriage, Bishop Gruss is granting permission for the Bride and Groom to be seated together in the sanctuary (without facial coverings).

A pastoral suggestion, in regard to the preparations for the celebration of parish weddings at this unique time, is to provide the engaged couple with a template of the church's current (floor plan) seating arrangement and/or layout capacity and have them "assign" seats (according to all social distancing requirements) for:

- The rest of the wedding party (Bride's and Groom's attendants)
- The Bride's family
- The Groom's family
- Other household groups and individual guests

(This could then be shared with the Priest or Deacon Presider, the parish/wedding coordinator and the ushers).

An additional pastoral suggestion is to have someone (the pastoral leader, parish staff member or cantor) read a prepared statement prior to the wedding liturgy. In addition to a welcome message, some details might be offered, such as:

- Continued prayers for the Bride and Groom and her/his families
- A thank you for wearing a facial covering throughout the liturgy
- An invitation to fully participate in the wedding liturgy
- Silencing of all cellular devices
- Explanation and directions about the reception of Holy Communion (if applicable)
- Explanation of procession and recessional (if applicable)
- Reminder of all COVID-19 social distancing instruction

Gift bearers (wearing facial coverings) for the presentation of the gifts (bread and wine in covered vessels) would also be permitted, given all social distancing requirements are kept. Those bringing forward the gifts are to sanitize their hands both before and after bringing up the gifts.

The wedding liturgy ends with a liturgical recessional. Thus, following the current "modifications" it seems appropriate to include the Bride and Groom – following along immediately behind the Cross and before the Deacon and/or Priest Presider.

It is not appropriate for any form of a "Reception Line" to take place at the church.

III: Order of Christian Funerals

Given all the COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions – and the extra restraints placed on Funeral Homes – it appears that there are very few “modifications” that can be made at this time with regard to the celebration of funerals in our parish churches.

To reiterate our current guidelines, the deceased (either as human cremains in an urn or the body in a casket), may be placed at the foot of the altar for both visitation and the celebration of the appropriate liturgy.

In light of the “modifications” for processions and recessions, consideration was also extended to allowing the visitation to now be done in the appropriate location within the gathering space and/or chapel – keeping all social distancing requirements. Moreover, it is recommended that all be seated – including the immediate family – directly after the closing of the casket and prior to the procession into the church’s worship space. It is to be a simple procession led by the Cross and Deacon and/or Priest Presider, followed by the casket (escorted by the funeral home personnel). However, feedback from local directors/managers of funeral homes indicated that, their preference is NOT to offer an alternative location of the cremated remains and casket -- because it is easier for them to control social distancing when the cremated remains and casket stay in front of the altar. This may be something you may want to address and work out with the particular funeral homes that service your parish.

Gift bearers (wearing facial coverings) for the presentation of the gifts (bread and wine in covered vessels) would also be permitted, given all social distancing requirements are kept. Those bringing forward the gifts are to sanitize their hands both before and after bringing up the gifts.

At the conclusion of the Funeral liturgy, a simple procession of the Cross and Deacon and/or Priest Presider may lead out the urn or casket – followed immediately by the family and assembly, given all social distancing protocols are maintained.

A pastoral suggestion is to have someone (the pastoral leader, parish staff member or cantor) read a prepared statement prior to the Funeral liturgy. In addition to a welcome message, some details might be offered, such as:

- Continued prayers for the deceased and his/her family
- A thank you for wearing facial coverings throughout the liturgy
- An invitation to fully participate in the Funeral liturgy
- Silencing of all cellular devices
- Explanation and directions about the reception of Holy Communion (if applicable)
- Explanation of procession and recession of the urn or body (if applicable)
- Reminder of all COVID-19 social distancing instructions