



## DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

2110 Broadway • Sacramento, California 95818 • 916/733-0200 • Fax 916/733-0215

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

# Memo

To: Clergy  
From: Bishop Jaime Soto  
Date: September 29, 2020  
Subject: Liturgical and Pastoral Guidelines Under the Statewide 4-Tier Risk Scale

Dear Brothers:

Thank you for your perseverance and hard work as we all maneuver through the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. We continue imploring the mercy of our Heavenly Father to end the pandemic. We ask the intercession of our Mother, Santa María de Guadalupe, for the grace to minister to the faithful, providing them essential spiritual nourishments.

The State of California through the Department of Public Health (CPDH) has provided guidelines (issued July 29, 2020) for the reopening of the State, including indoor services for places of worship, [Blueprint for a Safer Economy](#). The CPDH has also provided a checklist to facilitate the necessary modifications in order to open safely. The guidelines issued by the Diocese of Sacramento pertaining to worship and administration of the Sacraments remain applicable with some modifications in light of the guidance from the CPDH.

***The General Principles pertaining to health and safety protocols still apply (e.g. vulnerable category, facial covering, physical distancing, sanitation, and contact tracing).*** I urge your continued vigilance in practicing these prudent safety measures in the exercise of ministry in the parishes.

The CPDH has implemented a practical 4-tiered system for reopening based on the rate of infections and percentage of COVID-19 positivity in testing per county. The CPDH provides a county-per-county update every week on Tuesday:

- |                                 |   |  |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Tier Purple (Widespread)</b> | – | Outdoors only with modification  |
| <b>Tier Red (Substantial)</b>   | – | Open Indoors with modification ( <b><i>maximum 25% capacity or 100 people whichever is fewer</i></b> ) |
| <b>Tier Orange (Moderate)</b>   | – | Open Indoors with modification ( <b><i>maximum 50% capacity or 200 people whichever is fewer</i></b> ) |
| <b>Tier Yellow (Minimal)</b>    | – | Open Indoors with modifications ( <b><i>maximum 50% capacity</i></b> )                                 |

It is my expectation that every pastor/parochial administrator will check the updated information available at the CDPH website or their county's health department website in order to plan accordingly. Based on the level of risk in each county (e.g. purple, red, orange, or yellow) the pastor should adjust the number of congregants available to attend the Sacrifice of the Mass or other liturgical services.

For example:

- Churches in counties where the risk level is purple must continue to offer Mass outside.
- Churches in counties where the risk level is red may offer Mass inside for the number of congregants equal to 25% of seating capacity or 100 people whichever is less.
- Churches in counties where the risk level is orange may offer Mass inside for the number of congregants equal to 50% of seating capacity or 200 people whichever is less.
- Churches in counties where the risk level is yellow may offer Mass inside for the number of congregants equal to 50% of seating capacity.

Worth noting:

- Meetings with adults and other adult group gatherings, following the same guidelines, are permissible. Gatherings of children or young people must abide by the guidelines established for those activities.
- The assessed risk tier only affects the number of congregants allowed. It does not alter the other necessary public health guidelines for liturgy and other adult social gatherings.
- Given the continued limits on the number of congregants for indoor liturgies and adult meetings, outdoor gatherings may be advisable, weather permitting.

### **On the Celebration of the Mass**

The Guidelines for the Resumption of Public Masses in the Diocese of Sacramento (May 26, 2020), the Addendum (May 27, 2020), Coming Back to the Table (June 9, 2020), and The Directives for the Celebration of Outdoor Masses (July 9, 2020), are still applicable. Pastors/Parish Administrators are to establish effective means to keep the faithful informed in a timely manner of any changes. Parishes are to offer Masses in accord with the tier system and the needs of faithful that come to Mass. Prepare a sufficient number of Mass times to accommodate the needs of the faithful while ensuring all the proper public health protocols for a safe environment.

Continue to transmit the Mass by livestreaming or other social mediums for the faithful who are among the vulnerable population.

***In the event that weather does not permit outdoor services for parishes located in a county designated Tier Purple (Widespread), the pastor or parochial administrator must make appropriate adaptations, including offering livestreamed services. For guidance, call Fr. Michael Vaughan at the Pastoral Center.***

### **On Celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism**

The Guidelines for Resumption of Celebrating the Sacrament of Baptism (June 11, 2020) still applies with the issuance of the CPDH tier system for reopening. Depending upon the number of people allowed to gather indoors (or outdoors), baptisms are to be scheduled accordingly. Individual baptisms are still recommended at this time.

### **On Celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage**

The Guidelines for the Resumption of the Public Celebration of the Sacrament of Marriage (June 11, 2020) remain applicable during this period of reopening. Depending on the county where the parish is located, the Sacrament of Marriage is to be celebrated according to the guidance that corresponds to the county's assessed risk tier. The tier will describe what are the safe protocols regarding the number of congregants and whether the ceremony should take place indoors or outdoors. For guidance regarding celebrations of Marriage in a location other than the parish campus. In such cases, priests are reminded to obtain the necessary delegation, if required. Contact Fr. Michael Vaughan at the Pastoral Center.

### **On the Celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation**

Pastors/Parochial Administrators are reminded to have in hand the written delegation from the Bishop prior to the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation; such delegation must be asked for and received prior to the confirmation or the confirmation will be invalid. The Guidelines for the Celebration of the Conferral of the Sacrament of Confirmation During the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic (June 22, 2020) remain in effect. However, depending upon the county where the parish is located, pastors/parochial administrators are to plan according to the guidance that corresponds to the county's assessed risk tier.

### **On Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Administration of Holy Anointing**

The Guidelines for the Sacrament of Reconciliation During the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic (June 24, 2020) are still in effect. The pastors/parochial administrators are urged to schedule regular hours when the faithful may approach the Sacrament. Be mindful of the number of people who gather together indoors during the regularly scheduled celebration of the Sacrament. The health and safety protocols implemented are to be maintained.

On administering the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, priests are to refer to the message of the Bishop sent to the clergy via email on March 19, 2020. This pastoral guidance still stands during this time.

### **On the Celebration of the Rites of the Order of Christian Funerals**

The Guidelines for the Public Celebration of the Order of Christian Funerals in the Diocese of Sacramento (June 9, 2020) and the Additional Directives (July 15, 2020) are still applicable. The tier system may allow for more people to be present in the rites depending on the county where the parish is located.

### **On Various Lay Ministers and Other Lay Adult Groups**

The Reminders and Additional Instructions for the Various Lay Ministers and Other Parish Volunteers During the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic issued on June 24, 2020 are still applicable.

Pastors/parochial administrators are to be mindful of these guidelines and instructions when volunteers return to serving in various ministries.

In counties assessed at the substantial risk level or below adult parish groups (e.g. Knights of Columbus, Bible Study, Legion of Mary, Saint Vincent de Paul Society, etc.), may gather while following the protocols that correspond to the assessed risk tier. The general health and safety protocols apply when gathering together. Keep the meetings short (no more than 90 minutes).

Catholic Schools, Faith formation programs, and youth ministry have their own appropriate guidelines for gatherings and activities.

### **On Other Pastoral Ministries and Services**

Pastors/Parochial Administrators/Priests/Deacons are encouraged to offer pastoral services (e.g. spiritual direction, pastoral counseling, marriage preparation, etc.) mindful of observing the current health and safety protocols (e.g. physical distancing, masks, etc.).