# **Guidelines for Sacramental Celebrations in a Health Care Setting**

The Pastoral Care Advisory Committee of the Catholic Health Association is pleased to offer the following guidelines for the provision of sacraments in a health care setting with attention to public health concerns. Mindful of the dignity and value of those entrusted to our care as well as the unique vulnerabilities of those who are sick, elderly and immune compromised, the guidelines that follow may be more restrictive than local diocesan guidelines due to their greater risk for infection than the general population. These enhanced protective measures are intended to protect those at greater risk of the coronavirus and COVID-19. *Extreme care should be maintained to ensure outside clergy have appropriate access to patients requesting spiritual support from their faith leader, to the degree, this can be available according to current safety protocols.*

In making policy decisions, leadership is encouraged to consider these guidelines along with local diocesan policies and procedures, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and local infection control guidelines, as well as conversations with their local Ordinary who has ultimate authority over the provision of sacraments in their diocese. We are particularly grateful for the review, questions for clarification and recommended edits of the guidelines by infection control specialists, the USCCB Episcopal Liaison to the NACC and the USCCB Office of Worship

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| **General Guidelines** | | | |
|  | **Phase One** | **Phase Two** | **Phase Three** |
|  | *Phase 1 refers to the period of “surge” or extreme pandemic response.* | *Phase 2 refers to the short-term recovery phases in which both COVID-19 positive and non-COVID-19 patients are in a facility.* | *Phase 3 refers to the long-term recovery phase in which a facility may or may not have COVID-19 positive patients but measures are required to mitigate exposure and possible transmission.* |
| **Nature of pastoral care visits**  **(in person, routine, by request and virtual)** | For C+ patients, visits may be primarily virtual, and ensure families are connected and supported virtually.  Support to staff may be in-person and virtual  Chaplain support to patients at the end of life is an “essential service” including PPE priority, unless extreme shortage exists. | For C+ patients, visits may be primarily virtual, and ensure families are connected and supported virtually.  Chaplain support at the end of life is an “essential service” including PPE priority, unless extreme shortage exists.  May limit routine patient visits for others | For C+ patients, visits may primarily be virtual, including family  Routine patient visits for others |
| **Volunteer Ministers, CPE students and CPE residents** | Restricted, consistent with local and volunteer and education protocols  CPE residency programs may continue, shifting to virtual engagement where possible | CPE residents may continue but CPE intern training may be suspended, consistent with local and volunteer and education protocols  Remain restricted for LTC and eldercare | CPE interns may return, consistent with local and volunteer and education protocols |
| **Distance** | Safe distance enforced | Safe distance | Safe distance OR no restrictions |
| **Ministers** | Risk age group – may not be permitted  Outside ministers – may not be permitted, except for inevitable emergencies | Risk age group – may be permitted with restrictions  Outside ministers – permitted with restriction in emergency situations only | No restrictions  Outside ministers permitted as per the needs and policies of the health care center |
| **Holy Water in Fonts, Hymnal, Missalettes** | Removed | Removed | Consider individual vials of Holy Water and/or consider chlorination in water  Literature permitted with weekly disinfections |
| **Chapel Access** | RestrictedSignage should be placed on entrance doors asking anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the chapel Chapel capacity and chairs reduced for social distance  Chapel only accessible with restrictions and disinfection | Chapel (may be streamed)Signage should be placed on entrance doors asking anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the chapelHand sanitizer should be available at all entrances.Entrance doors propped open to limit contact | Chapel (may be streamed)Signage should be placed on entrance doors asking anyone with fever or flu-like symptoms not to enter the chapelHand sanitizer should be available at all entrances. Entrance doors propped open to limit contact |
| **Safety** | Follow institution safety protocols  Masks, physical distance, frequent cleaning required | Follow institution safety protocols  Restrictions on capacity limits | Follow institution safety protocols |

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| **Holy Communion** | | | |
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| **Reception of Communion** | Spiritual Communion is preferred. Non-COVID patients may receive Communion with specific parameters and infection prevention procedures. | By request in an emergency or  Spiritual Communion  Non-pandemic patients may receive Spiritual Communion or Communion with specific parameters and clean procedures in place (see procedures below). | Ensure new clean procedures in place when volunteer ministers of Holy Communion return |
| **Viaticum** | Apostolic pardon and Spiritual Communion are preferred. All safety and infection control protocols need to be followed if Viaticum is administered in person. | Apostolic pardon and Spiritual Communion are preferred. All safety and infection control protocols need to be followed if Viaticum is administered in person. | Resume regular process with new parameters in place |
| **Minister** | Appropriate staff Chaplains  No volunteers  Community Priests/Deacons permitted based on the need and following safety protocols | Appropriate staff Chaplains  No volunteers  Community clergy with proper training and safety precautions | Appropriate staff Chaplains  Volunteers permitted with proper training and safety precautions  Community clergy with proper training and safety precautions |
| **Procedures** | Appropriate PPE, hygiene practicesDisposable ritual printouts in patient room | Appropriate PPE, hygiene practicesCarry only ONE individual Host per pyx, per person into patient’s room, pyx is cleaned and repeat.No Host is returned to ciboriumCiborium and Tabernacle are cleaned and disinfected regularly per infection control protocolSafely drop the Host in the hand of the patient without physical touch. The use of gloves may be required in a health care setting based on safety protocols. If patient cannot receive in the hand, consider Spiritual Communion.Disposable ritual printouts in patient’s room | Follow Institution safety protocols by either carrying one individual Host per pyx, or when safe, may carry multiple hosts in one container, if approved.  * No Host is returned to ciborium  Ciborium and Tabernacle are cleaned and disinfected regularly per infection control protocolSafely drop the Host in the hand of the patient without physical touch. The use of gloves may be required in health care setting. Used gloves to be incinerated. Communion by mouth may be permitted, with the use of gloves, Disinfect before and after. |
| **Celebration of Holy Mass** | | | |
| **In Person Attendees** | Restricted | Limited to number allowing physical distancing of local public health and diocesan recommendations capacity All attendees and assistants are masked | Limited to number allowing physical distancing of local public health and diocesan recommendations capacityReconfigure space to allow for physical distancing |
| **Communion** | Restricted | No physical contact during the Sign of Peace is allowed Spiritual Communion may be preferred in this phase; offer only Spiritual Communion with Mass  High risk age group celebrant may defer distribution to minister/s of Holy Communion. Hand sanitizer to be used before, during and after the distribution of Communion. If inadvertent contact is made, the minister of Holy Communion is to stop and re-sanitize hands before continuing to distribute Communion. Communion in health care-based chapels may be required to receive only in the hand. Local diocesan guidelines need to be followed for receiving Communion on the tongue. Communion will not be distributed by the Cup. Celebrant may be required to wear a mask while distributing Holy Communion. Frequently touched surfaces in the church (pews/pew tops, door handles, microphones, etc.) should be cleaned and sanitized per CDC recommendations after every liturgy. | No physical contact during the Sign of Peace is allowed High risk age group celebrant may defer distribution to minister/s of Holy Communion Hand sanitizer to be used before, during and after the distribution of Communion. If inadvertent contact is made, the minister of Holy Communion is to stop and re-sanitize hands before continuing to distribute Communion. Communion in health care-based chapels may be required to receive only in the hand. Local diocesan guidelines need to be followed for receiving Communion on the tongue. Communion will not be distributed by the Cup. Frequently touched surfaces in the church (pews/pew tops, door handles, microphones, etc.) should be cleaned and sanitized per CDC recommendations after every liturgy. |

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| **Anointing of the Sick** | | | |
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| **Anointing** | Rare exceptions – seek assistance from clinical staff in safely donning and doffing PPE and managing elements for anointing  Facility visitor restrictions and available PPE may limit access by external non-staff clergy  Apostolic Pardon is another option because it may be offered remotely or through physical distance. | By referral  Apostolic Pardon is another option because it may be offered remotely or through physical distance | As needed |
| **Minister** | Only by Priests on staff or Priests trained on safety protocols  Priests in risk group – not permitted | Only by Priests on staff or Priests trained on safety protocols  Priests in risk group – not permitted | Any Priest, following all safety and disinfection protocols |
| **Procedures** | Disposable oil container, rituals and instrument used for anointing. Used items to be incinerated.  Appropriate PPE – including gloved hand | Disposable oil container, rituals and instrument used for anointing. Used items to be incinerated  Appropriate PPE – including gloved hand | Consider disposable oil container, rituals and instrument used for anointing.  Appropriate PPE/Mask |

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| **Sacrament of Reconciliation** | | | |
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| **Minister** | Only Priests on staff or priests trained on safety protocols  Priests in risk group – not permitted | Only Priests on staff or priests trained on safety protocols  Priests in risk group – not permitted | Any Priest following all safety and disinfection protocols |
| **Confession** | Only in an emergency  General absolution with permission from local Bishop | Facility visitor restrictions and available PPE may limit access by external non-staff clergy | Permitted |
| **Procedures** | Minimum six feet distance  PPE as needed | Minimum six feet distance  PPE as needed | As requested, keeping safe distance |

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| Imposition of Ashes | | | |
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| **Imposition of Ashes** | Consider alternative prayer opportunities and include language common to the imposition of ashes without physical contact | Consider alternative prayer opportunities and include language common to the imposition of ashes without physical contact | The imposition of ashes may go on as described by the Vatican 1.12.21 instruction, i.e. blessing of ashes and distribution via sprinkling over the person's head.  Ministers must sanitize their hands before and after the ritual, per person. |