

Memorandum

Cathedral Square Plaza

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

To: Priests and Deacons
From: Bishop Edward C. Malesic
Date: 15 January 2021
Re: Pre-Lenten Memo

My brothers in Christ,

We have received a number of calls requesting information and direction about the blessing of throats, the distribution of ashes, palms and the celebration of the Scrutinies as we continue to deal with the pandemic. The USCCB Committee on Divine Worship has provided helpful information. Additionally, the Vatican's Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS) has recently issued specific instructions modifying the Ash Wednesday distribution of ashes found in the *Roman Missal*. Although Ash Wednesday is not a holy day of obligation and while there is no requirement to receive ashes by the faithful, you are instructed to implement the following modifications as directed by the Holy See:

Blessing of Throats on the memorial of St. Blaise (February 3)

Note that the *Book of Blessings* contains the following provision for this rite:

1626. If offered within Mass, it may be prayed after the general intercessions or may take the place of the final blessing. 1628. If, for pastoral reasons, each individual cannot be blessed in the manner described in no. 1627, for example when great numbers are gathered for the blessing or when the memorial of Saint Blaise occurs on a Sunday, a priest or deacon may give the blessing to all assembled by extending hands, without the crossed candles, over the people while saying the prayer of blessing. A lay minister says the prayer proper to lay ministers without making the sign of the cross.

The current circumstances would certainly be considered a sufficient pastoral reason to avoid administration of the blessing to individuals in the usual manner, should there be any concern of danger due to the ongoing pandemic (From the USCCB Committee on Divine Worship).

Ashes

Distribution of Ashes in Time of Pandemic

The Priest says the prayer for blessing the ashes. He sprinkles the ashes with holy water, without saying anything. Then he addresses all those present and only once says the formula as it appears in the Roman Missal, applying it to all in general: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel," or "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The Priest then cleanses his hands, puts on a face mask and distributes the ashes to those who come to him or, if appropriate, he goes to those who are standing in their places. The Priest takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything. (Please note that physical contact is avoided omitting marking the forehead.)

This method of distributing ashes by sprinkling is a common practice in other countries, but is not well known in the United States. It may be helpful to explain this fact to the faithful in order to avoid unnecessary confusion. You should also instruct the faithful present for Ash Wednesday that there is no requirement to physically receive ashes, but they may come forward if they so choose in order to receive them in the manner described above.

Although the Vatican's note does not address the use of additional lay ministers for the distribution of ashes, the *Book of Blessings* no. 1659 indicates that priests or deacons may be assisted by lay ministers. If parishes require the assistance of lay ministers for the distribution of ashes, they are to follow the same procedures for distribution in time of pandemic as indicated for priests in the second paragraph above. The priest and other ministers are required to wear a face mask during this process as well as the distribution of Holy Communion.

Rite of Election

Will take place at the local parish this year. A reminder that the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) is hosting a free webinar on celebrating the Rite of Election in the parish on Tuesday, January 19 at 2:00 p.m. If you have questions on how to best celebrate this rite in your parish, you are encouraged to register for the webinar at <https://www.fdlc.org/formation>. Information will also be forthcoming from our Office of Worship.

Scrutinies

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) calls for Scrutinies to be celebrated with the elect on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. These Scrutinies are an essential part of the Period of Purification and Enlightenment of the Catechumenate (can. 865 §1).

In accord with RCIA no. 34, 3, at least one scrutiny must be celebrated. Out of pastoral concern for the faithful during the continuing coronavirus pandemic, and under the norms of canon 87 §1 and RCIA no. 34, 3, *I have* chosen to dispense the elect entrusted to *my* care from the obligation to participate in more than one scrutiny before celebrating the Sacraments of Initiation at the Easter Vigil, or at some other opportune time during this calendar year 2021. However, the remaining scrutinies may be celebrated if they may be done safely in the prudential judgment of the pastor.

An optional laying on of hands is recommended for the Scrutinies “if this can be done conveniently” (RCIA no. 154). In time of pandemic, this laying on of hands should either be omitted or be done without physical contact, maintaining six feet of physical distancing.

Palms

The blessing of palms takes place in the usual way as instructed in the Roman Missal. The distribution of palms should take place at the end of Mass. Blessed palms can be handed out by ushers who are properly protected with face masks or palms may be placed on tables or in

containers, instructing the faithful to maintain social distancing and being certain to take the palms they have touched.

Miscellaneous

We are in the process of providing helpful resources for Lent and Easter that will be posted on our diocesan website to assist you, pastoral staff members, catechists and the faithful during Lent to help enter more deeply into the paschal mystery and prepare for the celebration of Easter. Please know that we are also working diligently in preparing helpful resources for parishes to invite, welcome and encourage the faithful to return to the public celebration of the Eucharist once the pandemic is officially declared over. Until that time, you are asked to cooperate with pandemic protocols established by state and local health officials as well as implement the diocesan requirement for masks to be worn in church and use of social distancing. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. Be assured of my prayers for you and those you love.