**Church Capacity and the Use of Holy Water**

**March 29, 2021**

The celebration of the Paschal Mystery during Holy Week is the heart of the liturgical year. This year, the Church can once again have public celebrations of these Sacred Liturgies. Due to the pandemic, there are restrictions in place. For a complete listing, see the “Directives for Holy Week 2021” (https://www.rcan.org/sites/default/files/files/Holy%20Week%20Guidelines%202021.pdf)

The Office of Divine Worship has received several inquiries regarding the celebration of Holy Week during the pandemic, especially regarding church capacity and the use of holy water. The following is offered to assist the parishes and institutions of the Archdiocese.

**CAPACITY**

There are different numbers of people permitted at indoor gathering for religious services and general indoor gatherings. The following applies only to religious services, which include but are not limited to Masses, funerals, weddings, Holy Week Liturgies, morning and evening prayer, etc.

According to the New Jersey COVID-19 Information Hub:

* Indoor gatherings for religious services and celebrations, including wedding ceremonies, funerals and memorial services that involve a religious service, must be limited to 50 percent of a room's capacity.
* All attendees at indoor gatherings must wear face coverings and practice social distancing.

Although churches are allowed to have 50 percent capacity, social distancing of 6 feet between households still applies. Therefore, it is unlikely that a church would be able to seat 50 percent of its total capacity.

In order to limit seating, it may be necessary to:

* Require parishioners to pre-register for liturgies
* Prohibit access to alternating pews
* Space chairs 6 feet apart

In order to accommodate crowds for Easter Sunday with limited seating, it may be necessary to:

* Add Easter Sunday Masses (any time after the Easter Vigil is completed)
* Celebrate simultaneous Masses in other on-site locations (gymnasium, large parish hall, etc.)
* Livestream Mass to other on-site locations

**HOLY WATER**

**1. Holy Water**

* Holy water may not be kept in baptismal fonts or receptacles at the doors of the church. Large holy water dispensers, where individuals can fill containers are permitted.
* Small containers of holy water may be blessed and distributed as appropriate.

**2. Baptisms**

A fresh supply of water should be blessed and used for each baptismal ceremony. The water may be blessed in pitcher(s) and poured over each person to be baptized. The water should never be reused and should be removed after the ceremony.

**3. Sprinkling Rite**

* **The Easter Vigil**
* The Holy See has decreed that, when baptisms are not taking place at The Easter Vigil, the Renewal of Baptismal Promises alone is necessary. Therefore, at The Easter Vigil (and all Easter Sunday Masses) the assembly may renew their baptismal promises according to the *Roman Missal*, The Easter Vigil, 55.
* In places where baptism is taking place, the water for baptism and the water for sprinkling must be kept in separate vessels.
* The Renewal of Baptismal Promises is normally followed by a sprinkling of the people with blessed water. Due to the pandemic, the sprinkling may be omitted.
* In places where a sprinkling is desired at The Easter Vigil, the water should be blessed prior to the Renewal of Baptismal Promises (see the *Roman Missal*, The Easter Vigil, 44, when baptism occurs; or The Easter Vigil, 54, when no one is baptized).
* **Easter Sunday**
	+ the Renewal of Baptismal Promises may occur at Easter Sunday Masses.
	+ Due to the pandemic, the sprinkling may be omitted.
	+ In places where a sprinkling is desired at Easter Sunday Masses, water saved in a separate container from The Easter Vigil may be used.
* **Easter Season**
	+ The Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling of Water may be used instead of the Penitential Act as a reminder of baptism.
	+ In places where a sprinkling is desired, fresh water must be blessed each time and reverently disposed of after each liturgy.

