



THE STANDING COMMITTEE
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE

January 15, 2021

A Pastoral Directive On Ash Wednesday

As the churches of the Diocese of Milwaukee plan for the commemoration of Ash Wednesday on February 17, the Standing Committee offers the following pastoral directive to the clergy and churches of the diocese.

All churches are encouraged to observe Ash Wednesday in a manner consistent with the previously published Way Forward Guidelines for worship. While we will not be able to gather in large groups this year, the guidelines do allow for in-person imposition of ashes and reception of Holy Communion both indoors and outdoors by one individual or household at a time (see [this link](#) for the relevant guideline that applies). Please notify the Way Forward Taskforce at bill@stfrancisuw.org if you would like approval to offer these sorts of gatherings for your parishes.

In addition, clergy are reminded that imposing ashes in the traditional manner is a relatively covid-safe activity so long as all other Way Forward Guidelines are followed and social distancing is maintained except for the moment of imposition. Imposing ashes can be considered safer in terms of the virus than the sharing of Holy Communion because no participants remove a mask. Like all activities, being outdoors further minimizes the risk of virus spread, but parishes may elect to use their buildings for the sake of warmth.

With this directive, we are also issuing two changes to existing diocesan liturgical policy.

First, if the clergy and people desire to share Holy Communion as a part of an Ash Wednesday liturgy, they may use the service Communion Under Special Circumstances (BCP pp. 397-99) and distribute the Sacrament from the reserve. The rubrics for that service clearly state that it is to be "[used] with those who for reasonable cause cannot be present at a public celebration of the Eucharist," which, in our estimation, is all of us during this season. In addition, effective immediately, this service may be used on any occasion parishes wish to distribute Holy Communion: a live-streamed or recorded video of a service of Holy Communion is no longer required before distribution of communion in this manner. Of course, if a parish wishes to present a livestreamed or recorded service for Holy Communion and offer in-person distribution, they may still do so.

Second, the Standing Committee wishes to explicitly bless clergy of the Diocese of Milwaukee using liturgies which disconnect the imposition of ashes from the remainder of the proper liturgy for Ash Wednesday. Some versions of these liturgies have become better known as Ashes to Go. While clergy participating in this sort of liturgy are urged to do so in covid-safe ways and according to the Way Forward guidelines, the Standing Committee wishes to clearly state that all clergy of the diocese may offer these liturgies without fear of reprisal from the Ecclesiastical Authority of the Diocese.

We wish you every grace and mercy for the observance of a blessed Lent.

The Standing Committee
Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee

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