



# Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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## MEMORANDUM

To: All Parishes

From: Archbishop Richard Gagnon

*+ R. G.*

Date: October 30, 2020

Re: Clarifications on Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals, and the Notion of Cohorts

### Introduction

Please be advised of the following clarifications on COVID-19 protocols with recent information obtained from the provincial government liaison to communities of faith, and in close collaboration with the Archdiocese of St. Boniface and the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Winnipeg.

### Baptisms

The celebration of Baptism is now included in the definition of a "Faith Gathering" and therefore may accommodate up to 30% of a church's occupancy limit. As before, sanitizing, physical distancing, and face mask procedures remain. The following procedure outlined in my May 21, 2020 memo still applies:

"The celebration of Baptism should be held outside of the Eucharistic celebration so as to ensure minimal gatherings and social distancing. There should be only one baby to be baptized at each baptismal celebration. Due to the close proximity with the child, a face covering (mask) should be worn by the celebrant. Baptism by immersion is not allowed at this time. Hand sanitizing stations for the assembly must be provided."

### Cohorts

For the purposes of Archdiocesan communications on COVID-19, a cohort is a subgroup of people physically separated from the rest of the Assembly, preventing them from co-mingling with any other subgroup at any given time. Arrangements must be made to ensure that there is no physical interaction between cohorts. Additionally, different cohorts must arrive and depart separately from a church or other parish space. In some instances, this can only be achieved by ensuring that there is a volunteer or staff member who directs the arrival and departure of those gathered. In the Winnipeg Metropolitan Health Region for public gatherings, cohorts are currently limited to five (5) people for indoor and outdoor gatherings, while the limit is fifty (50) people for indoor gatherings and one hundred (100) people for outdoor gatherings in other areas of the Archdiocese.

## **Weddings and Funerals**

The celebration of Weddings and Funerals continue to be considered “public gatherings” and are therefore subject to the five (5) person restriction in the Winnipeg Metropolitan Health Region. However, following the above procedure on cohorts, these celebrations can have more than five people in attendance if:

- the number of persons attending does not exceed 30% of a church’s usual capacity;
- separate areas of the church have been physically divided so as not to contain more than one cohort;
- persons in these separate cohorts are at all times prevented from coming into close proximity with persons in another cohort; and finally, if
- arrangements have been made to ensure that cohorts enter and depart from church premises at different times and/or doors.

## **Exceptions to the Attendance Count**

In liturgical celebrations, the priest presider, one (1) cantor, and one (1) accompanist, are not to be counted in the attendance restrictions. In the case of funerals, funeral home staff are also not included in the attendance restrictions. Physical distancing, sanitizing, and face mask procedures remain.

## **Contact Tracing**

Currently it is recommended that places of worship collect contact tracing information. From the Province of Manitoba website, *Guidelines for Faith-Based Gatherings in Places of Worship* (page 1): “Where possible, congregants should register for attendance at in-person services to ensure occupancy limits are followed. This also allows the facility to maintain lists of all congregants for at least 21 days to ensure appropriate public health follow-up can take place if a congregant is exposed to COVID-19 during the service.”

## **Conclusion**

We will continue to monitor Provincial Government communications for any further necessary changes. Thank you for your kind cooperation during this time.