



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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MEMORANDUM

To: All Parishes
All Clergy
All Institutes of Consecrated Life

From: Archbishop Richard Gagnon

Date: May 21, 2020

Re.: Updated Protocols – COVID-19

Since my March 18th memorandum we have been functioning under very restrictive measures. We have endeavoured to carefully follow the guidelines and protocols of the Government of Manitoba and will continue to do so. Recently the Government issued a series of guidelines entitled Restoring Safe Services. Taking this document into consideration, and following consultations with the Bishops of Manitoba, as well as consultation with the Provincial Government, I am now updating the protocols for our parishes and communities throughout the Archdiocese. These newly revised protocols will be effective immediately.

The following protocols look to the near future. As the number of people allowed to gather in our churches expands, these protocols will be adaptable. In addition, the unfolding of these protocols will vary, somewhat, according to the size of each parish community. For instance, if the number of people able to gather reaches 50, some of our parishes and missions may be able to open completely. This of course means that social distancing and sanitization requirements continue to be followed.

Dispensation from Sunday Obligation:

While we continue to move toward a total opening, the dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass is granted to the faithful through Sunday, September 6, 2020.

Liturgical Protocols: *Emerging from the Catacombs*

These protocols are meant to help parishes and communities to move from the current private nature of our celebrations toward public ones. In a certain sense, there is an analogy with the Early Church experience of emerging from the private celebration of the liturgy in the catacombs in Rome to a public practice of the faith. There are, of course, many differences between the present situation from that of centuries ago, yet the time has come to begin the process of celebrating our faith openly in our churches. I wish to say that when pastors feel that

they and their communities are ready to begin this process, they are encouraged to do so. These revised protocols are based on the current provincial guidelines which limit the number of people allowed to gather to twenty-five (25). As this number changes, parishes are to expand the number according to provincial guidelines.

1. **Weekday Mass:** when pastors and administrators are ready, permission is given to resume public weekday Masses in parishes keeping in mind that participation is limited to social/physical distancing protocols, inclusive of the priest-presider. (The matter of how to maintain social/physical distancing limitations will follow later in this document).
2. **Sunday Mass:** when pastors and administrators are ready, permission is given to resume the regular schedule of Sunday Masses keeping in mind that participation is limited to social/physical distancing protocols, inclusive of the priest-presider. (The matter of how to maintain social/physical distancing limitations will follow later in this document.)
3. **Church Accessibility:** parishes are encouraged to keep their churches open, as much as they can, for people to pray privately. Once again parishes must keep in mind that only twenty-five (25) people can, at the present, be allowed in the church at any one time. Therefore, someone will need to be on hand to monitor the situation so that the number of people present in the building will not exceed twenty-five. While churches are open, priests should be available to hear confessions or to provide opportunities to discuss pastoral concerns. In addition, it could be appropriate for the Blessed Sacrament to be exposed and at the end of the daily opening for Benediction to be celebrated.
4. **Live-streaming Sunday Masses:** the Archbishop will continue to live-stream Mass from St Mary's Cathedral every Sunday. Parishes which are currently live-streaming Masses are encouraged to continue to do so if they feel this is of benefit particularly for Sunday Mass.
5. **Communion outside of Mass:** the celebration of the Eucharist is the centre of our life as Catholics. For the past nine weeks, the vast majority of our parishioners have not been able to participate in person in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. With the opening of public celebrations, only a limited number of people can celebrate the Eucharist in the weeks ahead due to the limitations in numbers. I believe that it is prudent, in this extraordinary time, to give permission to temporarily allow for the reception of Holy Communion outside of the celebration of Mass. Permission is therefore given for parishes to provide for the reception of Holy Communion, according to local needs, outside of Mass during weekdays only, provided that it is done within the Word of God and prayer.

A reference should be made that this practice, normally used in nursing homes and for shut-ins, is extraordinary due to the COVID- 19 pandemic. In other words, a reference should be made regarding the intimate and essential connection between the reception of Holy Communion and the celebration of the Eucharist In addition, parishes would need to maintain the regulations around social/physical distancing.

On Sundays, which are the weekly celebrations of the Easter Solemnity, the number of people at any one Mass must be limited to the provincial guidelines. The practice of Spiritual Communion at home will continue to be encouraged. (cf. www.archwinnipeg.ca) Communion services for small groups of parishioners on Sunday are not to take place.

6. **Confirmation:** the celebration of the Sacrament of Confirmation will be determined by each parish according to the provincial guidelines relative to the number of persons allowed at any one celebration. Once the date is determined, pastors/administrators must request the faculty to celebrate Confirmation from the Archbishop's Office.
7. **First Communion:** the celebration of First Communion will be determined by each parish according to the provincial guidelines relative to the number of persons allowed at any one celebration.
8. **Baptisms:** 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.
9. **Reconciliation:** for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation two practices need to be considered: a) confessionals: the use of confessionals must ensure that physical distancing is maintained between the kneeling penitent and the confessor. The wearing of a face covering (mask) by the confessor may be appropriate. Kneelers and surfaces must be sanitized after each penitent; b) face to face confessions: the practice of face to face confessions must ensure physical/social distancing is maintained. The wearing of a face covering (mask) by the confessor may be appropriate. Any surfaces, including door handles and chair arms, that may have been touched, must be sanitized.
10. **Anointing of the Sick:** communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick are not to be held during this time. Individual anointing must ensure physical/social distancing. The presider must wear a face covering (mask) and use a cotton or Q-Tip type swab to apply the sacred oil. Priests who are asked to anoint in hospital settings must abide by the hospital guidelines.
11. **Marriages:** in the event that a wedding is to be celebrated, the established hand sanitizing and social/physical distancing requirements for the assembly must be observed. At the time of the Nuptial Ritual the presider must ensure physical/social distancing from the couple.
12. **Funerals:** in the event that a funeral is to be celebrated, the established hand sanitizing and physical/social distancing requirements for the assembly must be observed.
13. **Sanitizing Worship Spaces:** the worship space and all public spaces must be thoroughly cleaned after use. A sanitizing disinfectant must be applied throughout all spaces and all surfaces wiped down after each use.
14. **Liturgies outdoors:** if a Liturgy is to be celebrated outdoors, physical/social distancing must be observed relative to outside seating. Protocols around the number of people allowed to gather, which according to Manitoba guidelines is currently fifty (50), will need to be followed.

Related Liturgical Protocols

Though the presider and deacon should not use face coverings (masks) during the celebration of the Liturgy, face coverings (masks) may be used at the time of the distribution of Communion. Altar servers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion as well as readers may wear face coverings (masks); readers should remove them for the proclamation of the Word. Gloves should not be worn by any liturgical minister during the celebration of the Liturgy. Those standing or seated in the sanctuary must ensure that physical/social distancing is observed. This same observance applies to music leaders.

1. **Managing approved capacity:** all people should enter the church building using only one entrance. A proper count must be maintained to ensure approved gathering limits. At this time no more than twenty-five (25) people, including the priest-presider, may gather together. Parishes will determine various ways in which to limit the number of people in the church building. These ways might include: having people register or make a reservation with the parish office for the Mass; starting a ticket system could be employed or using an alphabetical list to invite people. I would invite pastors/administrators to discuss how best to accomplish this with their Parish Pastoral Councils.
2. **Hand sanitizing stations:** liquid hand sanitizing stations must be made available at the entrance to church buildings. It is advisable to have multiple stations to accommodate ministers and parishioners in an efficient manner so as to prevent crowding. All ministers and parishioners must be asked to sanitize their hands upon arrival at the church building. Physical/social distancing of two metres must be maintained.
3. **Seating:** accommodation must be made to ensure physical/social distancing within the worship space. It is recommended that, every second row be blocked off. This can be done by using signage or a barrier. Those seated must be asked to maintain physical/social distancing to the left and right between individuals or family units. Those living in the same household however, may sit together without distancing.
4. **Use of disposable music/worship aids:** Hymnals should be removed from church pews and stored. In their place either disposable worship aids or PowerPoint/Overheads could be used. When publishing either a worship aid or projecting worship materials copyright permission must be secured. Paper worship aids must not be reused; they are for one time use only. Receptacles should be located at the exits of the church so participants can dispose of their material as they leave the worship space.
5. **Collection Procedures:** collection baskets must not be passed through the assembly person to person. Collection baskets with long handles may be used, in which case only the usher passes the collection basket. If long handled collection baskets are not available, then the collection should be placed into free standing baskets as the assembly gathers for worship. The collection should not be processed to the altar but stored immediately in a place of safe keeping.
6. **Offertory Procession:** the offertory procession is to be eliminated at this time. The gifts of bread and wine should be placed on a credence table in the sanctuary prior to the Liturgy.

7. **Bread and wine on the altar:** it is important that the bread and wine placed on the altar for consecration be covered, by a pall or other covering, so as to ensure no contamination. The hosts to be consecrated for the faithful should be placed in a ciborium on a corporal towards the side of the altar. The presider should ensure not to speak over the elements or into the elements in such a way as to project possible contamination.
8. **The Sign of Peace:** the sign of peace is expressed with a bow of the head toward the neighbour.
9. **Communion Procession:** new patterns will need to be developed. Physical/social distancing must be maintained during the Communion procession. It is recommended that the assembly approaches the Communion Minister one row at a time. Markings on the floor will assist in establishing proper places to stand as well as help traffic flow.
10. **Communion distribution:** Communion from the cup is to be discontinued during this time. Those distributing communion should sanitize their hands thoroughly in a discreet location immediately after they have received Communion and before accepting a ciborium for distribution. Communion is to be distributed only on the hand of each communicant with great care not to make physical contact. If desired, face coverings (masks) may be worn by those distributing Communion. These face coverings (masks) must be affixed and secured before sanitizing hands.
11. **Exiting the Worship space:** a plan for exiting the worship space is to be established to ensure physical/social distancing. Ensuring that aisles and pathways flow in only one direction may help to prevent congestion. Markings on the floor and/or clear signs will assist in this process.
12. **Foyer/narthex gatherings:** the assembly is to refrain from congregating in the foyer or narthex.
13. **Holy Water Fonts:** Holy Water Fonts are to be drained and kept clean.
14. **Perpetual Adoration Chapels:** Perpetual Adoration Chapels and small chapels of devotion that cannot ensure physical/social distancing are to be kept closed.

Parish Offices

Effective Monday, June 1, 2020 the Catholic Centre will open, with reduced hours, from 10:00 am - 3:00 pm daily. We will observe physical/social distancing and maintain stations for hand sanitizing. We will also be installing a glass protective shield at the receptionist's desk. I would ask that all parish offices open on June 1 and follow similar procedures.

1. **Counting collections:** those responsible for counting the collection must be provided with disposable gloves. The place where the collection is counted must ensure the ability to maintain physical/social distancing. Once the collection is counted and readied for deposit, all surfaces and all equipment used must be thoroughly sanitized.

Conclusion

As we continue to live through the challenging times of COVID- 19 and with the restrictions on large gatherings which follow from the pandemic, it is important that we be united in prayer, Christian solidarity and the practice of patience. These protocols are the beginning of a phased approach, following the guidelines of the province of Manitoba, which will allow for a gradual increase in worshippers in the months ahead. This is a good time to begin enacting these protocols as the numbers of those attending church will be gradually increasing. That being said, even when we fully return, it may be to a different reality than we have been accustomed to in the past.

I would like to reiterate the need for our people to continue to practice spiritual communion if one is unable to come to Mass. This includes the practice of *Lectio Divina* and family prayer. I would encourage those who are ill with compromised health conditions, the elderly and frail to stay at home during this time.

May God continue to bless all of you, so that together we may come through this time of tribulation with renewed faith, unwavering hope and self-giving love.