

COVID-19 Clarifications For Religious Services

Foreword

Due to the recent surge of COVID-19 cases in Manitoba, coupled with the Code Orange Alert for Winnipeg and the Capital Region, the Archdiocese of Saint Boniface is issuing the following clarifications, having obtained updated information from the official government liaison to communities of faith during the COVID-19 pandemic, in coordination with the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Winnipeg.

Please keep in mind that it is *essential* that these directives always be implemented with the proper necessary public health measures:

- In the province, even in Winnipeg and the Capital Region currently under Code Orange alert, the number of persons attending a religious service may not exceed 30% of the usual capacity of the premises or 500 persons.
- All attendees are strongly recommended to wear their own masks.
- Ensure 2 metres between individuals or family groups (those who live in the same household).
- All high contact areas must be thoroughly cleaned after use.
- A sanitizing disinfectant must be applied throughout all spaces and all surfaces must be wiped down after each use. Especially: pews, doorknobs, bathrooms in particular and any usual high traffic areas.
- Multiple stations with liquid hand sanitizer must be made available at the entrance of church buildings.
- Hymnals should be removed from the church pews and stored.

- If parishes are not able to ensure sufficient sanitization, control of allowable number of people and proper distancing in the government prescribed manner, they must not hold religious services until they are able to do so.
- Persons at a greater risk of serious illnesses, e.g. people 65 years of age or older and individuals with chronic medical conditions, are encouraged to consider staying safe by avoiding public gatherings.
- Anyone who has even the slightest symptoms of sickness should remain home.
- Attendees must write their name on a contact tracing form upon arrival at the church and confirm that they do not have symptoms of COVID-19, nor does anyone in their household.
- Contact tracing information should be kept by parishes for at least 4 weeks.

We ask that parishes enact these directives in a compassionate and understanding manner. No one is prohibited from entering the church or attending Mass. All should be made welcome in our churches.

For further reference, please consult ***Walking Together Towards the Light*** – ***Liturgical Protocol No. IV At A Glance*** by [clicking here](#).

New Clarifications

1) Masks

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the medical community (1), backed by ongoing scientific studies, has concluded that masks can slow the spread of the virus by protecting others from the respiratory droplets of people who are infected but don't have any symptoms.

While face shields can provide some protection from COVID-19, they are not better than a mask for reducing exposure to the virus, nor are they equivalent to wearing a mask and should not be used as a substitute. (2)

(1) Canada Public Health, Manitoba Public Health, World Health Organization, among others.

(2) Public Health Ontario, Ottawa Public Health, among others.

- We wholeheartedly ask that masks be worn at all religious services throughout the archdiocese. This is in line with Public Health directives which state that the wearing of masks is highly recommended.
- *Where mandated by the provincial government*, such as Winnipeg and the Capital Region currently under Code Orange Alert, masks *must* be worn in all public places. In this case, people attending religious services are to adhere to this order.
- In Winnipeg and the Capital Region currently under Code Orange Alert, the wearing of masks is not required of : children under five years of age, a person with a medical condition that is unrelated to COVID-19, including breathing or cognitive difficulties; a person with a disability that prevents them from safely wearing a mask; a person who is unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person.

Members of the assembly who may be included in these categories are requested to inform Ministers of Hospitality of their condition, to indicate it in their contact information and are invited to provide medical information such as a note from their physician.

- Parishes are asked to provide disposable masks free of charge to anyone arriving at a religious service without one, encouraging them to wear it. This should be done in a welcoming, loving, and compassionate manner.
- The Province has indicated to the Archdiocese that masks must be worn on entering and leaving the church, as well as when anyone leaves their pew to move around. This includes people queuing for Communion, but also lectors and cantors or leaders of song walking to the ambo, extraordinary ministers of communion, people bringing up the offerings, those participating in the Procession and Recessions.
- Wearing a mask when seated is recommended. However, it is permitted to remove one's mask once seated, provided physical distancing is maintained.

2) Singing

- Cantors or leaders of song are required to position themselves at least 20 feet away from others.
- The assembly is encouraged not to sing, and certainly not with full voice. However, if they choose to do so, they are invited to sing quietly, murmur, hum along or even lip-sync.
- Wearing a mask when singing decreases the danger of contagion even more (1).
- Singing by choirs is not permitted by the Province at this time because singing, to a degree much greater than talking, aerosolizes respiratory droplets extraordinarily well. Deep breathing while singing facilitates those respiratory droplets getting deep into the lungs of other choir members. Thus, the situation of choir members standing close to each other and singing with full voice produces a dangerous level of contagion.

(1) The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control has concluded that masks stop the spread of droplets from a person's mouth and nose when singing.

Public Health Ontario notes that 35.7% of droplets remain suspended in the air after 30 minutes when singing.

3) Communion On the Hand or On the Tongue

- The highly recommended method for all people to receive communion is only on the hand at this time, in order to reduce the risk of contagion as much as possible (1).
- Communicants who hold to receiving Holy Communion on the tongue should be served at the end of the Communion line, with the minister using hand sanitizer after each communicant.

(1) *"The prudent option is to remain offering The Eucharist on the hand."* – Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians and Societies executive member.

According to the Ad hoc Committee of Catholic Doctors for the US Catholic Medical Association, "Communion should be received in the hand, because newly available evidence shows that viral burden of COVID-19 is highest in oral secretions. (saliva on the tongue)" Please note that the CMA has changed its position as more conclusive scientific evidence was found. In March, it described Communion on the tongue as a low risk activity, but now has raised it to a level of a more dangerous practice.

4) Weddings and Funerals

- At present, weddings and funerals *must* be limited to *ten people* in Winnipeg and the Capital Region currently under Code Orange Alert.

If your parish lies outside Winnipeg and the Capital Region currently under Code Orange Alert, the number of persons is limited to 50 people indoors and 100 people outdoors.

5) Size and Nature of Religious Services

- **What is considered a Religious Service?**

The following are to be considered "religious services" and can therefore accommodate 30 % of the usual capacity of the premises or 500 persons. This includes Winnipeg and the Capital Region currently under Code Orange Alert:

- Masses and Prayer Services, such as Adoration, Recitation of the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet, Funeral Vigils, etc.
- All celebrations of the Sacraments, i.e. baptisms, reconciliation, confirmation, weddings (except in Winnipeg and the Capital Region currently under Code Orange Alert).
- Sacramental preparation sessions
- Retreats
- RCIA formation meetings
- Bible study, Lection Divina and Faith Formation activities
- Catechism classes

We remind parishes that proper sanitizing of hands and surfaces must occur, social distancing must be maintained, and contact information must be taken.

- **What is NOT considered a Religious Service?**
- Meetings organized for any other purpose where worship and faith development are not the main goal, such as PPC meetings, administrative meetings, and youth games and activities nights are not considered religious services.

Appendix – The Code Orange Alert Zone

Winnipeg and the Capital Region are currently under Code Orange Alert. Above and beyond parishes in the City of Winnipeg, the following parishes are affected by the new restrictions: Corpus Christi (Narol), St. Stanislaus (East Selkirk), St. Michael (Cook's Creek), St. John Paul II Catholic Community (Oakbank), St. Paul's (Starbuck), Our Lady of Hope (Anola), St. Hyacinthe (La Salle), Saint-Adolphe, Sainte-Agathe, Notre-Dame-de-la-Miséricorde (Île-des-Chênes), Notre-Dame-de-Lorette (Lorette).

The areas affected include the Cities of Winnipeg and Selkirk, the Town of Stonewall, the RM of Cartier, the RM of Headingley, the RM of Macdonald, the RM of Ritchot, the RM of Rockwood, the RM of Rosser, the RM of Springfield, the RM of St. Andrews, the RM of St. Clements, the RM of St. François Xavier, the RM of Taché, the RM of West St. Paul, the RM of East St. Paul, the Town of Niverville; and the Village of Dunnottar.