



COVID-19 Health Measures and Protocols for Religious Services

July 15, 2021

A. Health Measures

- Outdoor services do not require masks, provided proper social distancing, and hand sanitizing measures are followed.
- Indoors, the congregation must wear masks at all times. The liturgical team (presider, deacon, lector, altar server, cantor and musician) need not wear masks when reading, reciting prayer, or singing. Cantors or leaders of song are required to position themselves at least 20 feet away from others.
- Ensure 2 metres between individuals (except 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.
- Liquid hand sanitizer must be made available at the entrances 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 livestream religious services until they are able to do so.
- 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.

B. Protocols

1) Capacity

- Faith-based gatherings are now limited to 50 per cent capacity or 150 people, whichever is lower.

Please note that the maximum number allowed during religious services does not include the celebrant as well as other persons assigned by the parish, such as a cantor or lector, or persons responsible for the livestreaming of the event.

2) 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.

- Under a Code Orange Alert, masks *must* be worn indoors by at all times by people attending religious services.
- 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.

3) Singing

- Cantors or leaders of song are required to position themselves at least 20 feet away from others. Diocesan policy states that ideally, there should be only one accompanying musician and one leader of song.
 - Those attending a Mass are 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 is especially mandatory for the congregation. Why? 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.

4) Communion in 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.

5) Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms

- Weddings, funerals, prayer vigils for the deceased and baptisms are limited to 25 people indoors, and 150 people outdoors.

Public Health Officer Dr. Brent Roussin points out that those attending these celebrations often converge from different locations across the province, and even from outside Manitoba. Moreover, given the strong emotions that accompany these celebrations, it is difficult to discourage hugs, kisses on the cheeks and handshakes, which all increase the risk of transmitting COVID-19.

Adequate physical distancing must continue to be provided for all participants.

Outside funeral gatherings. Please note that the maximum number of people gathered at the grave or columbarium is 150 people.

Everyone must be socially distanced, with household groups remaining together. Other relatives and friends must not mingle with other individuals or households.

One can also pay their respects while staying in a car, and by driving slowly near the grave.

Please note that the celebrant, as well as other persons assigned by the parish, such as a cantor or lector, or persons responsible for the livestreaming of the event, are NOT to be counted among the 25 persons attending indoors. In the case of funerals, staff from a funeral home are NOT to be counted. A photographer or videographer is also NOT to be counted among the 25 persons attending indoors, or the 150 persons attending outdoors.

6) Livestreaming / Broadcasting of Masses, Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms and other Religious Services

- The livestreaming of Masses is permitted. Parish teams providing the service can be composed of more than five persons if needed, but within reason, while following all safety protocols.
- The doubling up of responsibilities (cantor, musician, lector, altar server, etc.) is highly recommended.
- Persons responsible for livestreaming, as well as the liturgical team (presider, deacon, lector, altar server, cantor and musician), are NOT to be counted among the people allowed to attend.

When livestreaming a Mass, please keep in mind that it is *essential* that the proper necessary public health measures are maintained.

7) Communion outside after a private or livestreamed Mass

- Even with the increased capacities permitted in our churches, distribution of communion outside is still an option at this time. 150 people from different households can form a line to receive communion from the pastor or extraordinary minister of communion. They must respect social distancing and wear masks until the moment of receiving the host.
- People can also receive communion via a “drive-thru” approach. With this method, the faithful are asked to drive up in their vehicle to the pastor or extraordinary minister of communion. They can then lower their window and receive communion, or briefly step out of their car and receive communion. Masks must be worn at all times.

8) Nature of Religious Services

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

The following are to be considered “religious services”:

- Mass
- Prayer Services, such as Adoration, Way of the Cross, Recitation of the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet, regularly scheduled Youth Group Meetings and Retreat type events.
- All celebrations of the Sacraments, i.e. baptisms, reconciliation, confirmation and weddings.
- Sacramental preparation sessions
- RCIA formation meetings
- Bible study, Lectio Divina and Faith Formation activities
- Catechism classes
- Catholic Women’s League Meetings
- Knights of Columbus Meetings
- Parish Pastoral Council Meetings

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 administrative meetings, are not considered religious services or faith based gatherings, but are considered an indoor office gathering and so are limited to 5 people.

9) Social Work and Health Care

The most recent public health orders for the Province of Manitoba include the provision for health care and social services by faith communities:

***23(5)** This Order does not prevent the premises of a church, mosque, synagogue, temple or other place of worship from being used by a public or private school or for the delivery of health care, child care or social services.*

The premises of a place of worship may therefore be used for the delivery of health care or social services. Therefore, donations for the poor, etc. may continue to be dropped off at parishes. If collecting and distributing foodstuffs for a food bank, curbside pickup using all safety precautions would be the best method.

Parish drop-in centres, such as Bradbury Place at Holy Cross Parish, may continue to operate provided that they follow all safety protocols.

10) Communion and Reconciliation

A reading of **Order 23(5)** would mean that the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as well as counselling, can be made available to parishioners. It is within the realm of providing ministry towards the spiritual (and emotional) well-being of the public. This reading has been confirmed by the designated government spokesperson in touch with our Diocesan Coordinator of Communications.

We therefore invite the faithful to call their priest to set up an appointment to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, either within the church or at the parish office.

This moment of encounter between pastor and parishioner for the celebration of penance can also be an occasion for the distribution of communion outside of the celebration of the Eucharist. The parishioner can request this of their pastor.

Within the spirit of the present health orders encouraging us to avoid contact with other people outside of our household as much as possible, we ask that appointments be arranged such that there is no “crossing of paths”, the priest welcoming one parishioner at the door only once the preceding person has already left. The usual directives for physical distancing are to be respected, as well as sanitizing between each person’s visit.

10) Parish Offices

- Parish offices may remain open, provided masks, social distancing, and sanitizing protocols are maintained.
- Visiting a parish office is permitted. We ask that any communication with your parish office that can be done via phone, email, Microsoft Teams, Zoom, etc. take precedence over a visit in person. Should an actual visit need to take place, social distancing and other sanitary measures must be respected.
- Staff can still attend the workplace with proper social distancing, etc. Staff personnel who are able to work from home are encouraged to do so. Managers are encouraged to work with their staff to find ways, wherever possible, to work remotely from home.

C) Provincial COVID-19 Prevention Orders

- To read the Provincial COVID-19 Prevention Orders in effect on July 17, 2021, [click here](#).