



COVID-19 Health Measures and Protocols for Religious Services

December 21, 2021

A. Health Measures

- Masks are **mandatory** in indoor public settings for everyone, excluding children under 5.
- Measures should be implemented to ensure that households (individuals residing at the same residence) are able to maintain at least a 2-metre distance from other households. Individuals that are not from the same household must not sit together, even those who are fully vaccinated.
- All high contact areas must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after use. (e.g. pews, doorknobs, bathrooms and other high traffic areas.) An approved list of disinfectants can be found at <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- Liquid hand sanitizer must be made available at the entrances of church buildings.
- Anyone who has even the slightest symptoms of sickness should remain home.
- A COVID-19 symptom checklist should be posted in a prominent place at or near the church entrance to ensure individuals self-screen upon arrival.
- Contact tracing information should be collected by parishes (e.g. sign in sheet, pre-registration, etc.) and kept by parishes for 4 weeks. The Archdiocese of St. Boniface does not require proof of vaccination for people attending religious services. Should there be a COVID-19 outbreak at a parish, contact tracing would therefore be the most useful tool available to Manitoba Health.

- Parish bulletins and other printed materials may be made available for the faithful. However, to increase public health, we ask that parishioners take this material home, and not leave them on pews. This underlines the importance of sanitizing your hands when you enter and exit the church.

B. Protocols

1) Capacity

- Indoor faith-based gatherings are now limited to 25 per cent capacity or 25 people, whichever is **lesser** and measures must be implemented to ensure that persons attending the service are reasonably able to maintain a separation of at least two metres from other persons at the service, other than persons who reside at the same private residence.
- Please note that this restriction may be increased to 25% of the capacity of the space, to a maximum of two hundred and fifty (250) people, by separating attendees into cohorts. Fully separated parts of the church building (e.g., worship space and parish hall, choir lofts or wings that may be accessed from different entrances) may be used for different groupings of twenty-five (25) people each, with each grouping having its own entrance and exit.
- A church with an attached hall where the Mass or Religious Service can be transmitted may include that hall's capacity in calculating the overall number of faithful allowed to attend the service.

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.

Please note that choirs are to be counted as part of the **congregation and not part of the liturgical team.**

Capacity for Masses on December 24, 25 and 26, 2021

- In addition to Masses open to all the public, a parish may choose to designate one or more Masses on each of the days of December 24-25-26 to be for fully immunized persons, and those under twelve who are not eligible for the vaccine. In this case, the number attending must not exceed 50 percent of the normal capacity of the church space. Social distancing, mask wearing and sanitizing are to be maintained in effect, as well as contact tracing lists being filled.
- If a parish (or parish cluster) chooses the above option they must necessarily also provide a Mass on the same day which is open to everyone, with the understanding that these celebrations are to be restricted to 25 people. This restriction may be increased to 25% of the capacity of the space, to a maximum of two hundred and fifty (250) people, by separating attendees into cohorts. Fully separated parts of the church building (e.g., worship space and parish hall, choir loft or wings that may be accessed from different entrances) may be used for different groupings of twenty-five (25) people each, with each grouping having its own entrance and exit.
- At the Masses for the immunized, people will need to show proof of vaccination at the door. Those tasked with verifying proof of vaccination must be prepared to deal with people, kindly and firmly.

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.

- Masks are **mandatory** in indoor public settings. A person who enters or remains in an indoor public place must wear a mask in a manner that covers their mouth, nose, and chin without gapping. It is the responsibility of the parish to ensure that everyone not wearing a mask while in the indoor public setting is given a reminder to do so as soon as possible.

There are exceptions to mask wearing:

- a child who is under five years of age
- a person with a medical condition that is unrelated to COVID-19, including breathing or cognitive difficulties, or 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
- a person who needs to temporarily remove their mask while in the indoor public place for the purpose of (i) receiving a service that requires the removal of their mask, (ii) consuming food or drink, (iii) an emergency or medical purpose
- 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 presider, deacon, lector, and cantor need not wear a mask when reading, leading prayer, or singing. Masks must be worn at all other times.

Please note: Parishes are reminded that masks **must** be worn at all religious services and indoor events. Parishes are legally and morally responsible for ensuring that anyone who attends a Mass, religious service or event wears a mask.

Anyone who refuses to wear a mask is to be politely invited to **leave the premises** and participate via livestream, or via television. Such a person may call their priest to set up an appointment, either within the church or at the parish office, to receive the Eucharist other than at Mass.

3) Singing

Preface

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.

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.

- Cantors or leaders of song are required to position themselves at least 20 feet away from others.
- Those attending a Mass are encouraged not to sing. However, they are invited to hum along, lip-sync or speak the lyrics quietly. Parishes can increase participation of the whole congregation by choosing to speak rather than sing parts of the Mass. (e.g. Psalm, Amen, Gloria, etc.)
- Wearing a mask when singing is **mandatory** for the congregation. Why? Wearing a mask when singing decreases the danger of contagion even more.

Singing by choirs is now permitted by the Province. In a grouped setting, choir members **must** wear a mask while singing. Choirs are asked to position themselves at least 20 feet from the congregation and, if possible,

even further. Please note that choirs are to be counted as part of the **congregation and not part of the liturgical team.**

- Cantors who are singing alone or with another singer need not wear their masks when singing. If they are from the same household, they may sing together at one microphone.
- Hymnals may now be used. This underlines the importance of sanitizing your hands when you enter and exit the church.

4) Communion

So as to be attentive to vulnerable people (people with pre-existing medical conditions, those who are not fully vaccinated), masks **must** be worn by pastors, deacons and extraordinary ministers of Communion while distributing Communion.

- At this time, it is recommended that all people receive Holy Communion only on the hand, 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 2020, it described Communion on the tongue as a low risk activity, but now has raised it to a level of a more dangerous practice.

- Distribution of Holy Communion

We remind parish liturgical teams to be mindful of the following public health procedures during Holy Communion:

- Pastor/Priest celebrant **MUST** wear a mask during the distribution of Holy Communion.
- Priest celebrant is to: Consecrate → Completely consume personal host and consume completely from the Chalice → sanitize hands → Mask → Sanitize hands → Distribute from ciborium to the faithful (or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion 'EMHC' if necessary).
- Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to: Receive Holy Communion → sanitize hands → Mask → Sanitize hands → Receive ciborium from the Priest → Distribute to the faithful.

5) Proof of Vaccination at Mass?

With the exception of Masses celebrated on December 24, 25 and 26, the Archdiocese of St. Boniface will not ask people attending Mass or other religious services (see Section 8 of this document *Nature of Religious Services*) to show proof of vaccination. A church is a place for gathering together for prayer and discernment in shared mercy. Our Church seeks conversion to the love of Jesus, not the control of people's thoughts and actions.

We are therefore invited to walk in faith and to grow in love of each other, striving to keep everyone safe, healthy and well, remembering the most vulnerable beside us in the pews and in society.

Animated by this love we are all invited to respect the letter and spirit of the current provincial health orders, as well as the diocesan COVID-19 protocols.

To view a video by Archbishop LeGatt on this question, [click here](#).

NOTE: receptions, banquets, fall suppers and similar events where food is served may require proof of immunization. See Section 10 of this document - Receptions, Falls Suppers and Banquets for further details.

6) Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms

- Indoor weddings, funerals, prayer vigils for the deceased and baptisms are limited to 25 persons or 25 % of the capacity of the premises, whichever is **lower**. Please ensure that persons attending the service are reasonably able to maintain a separation of at least two metres from other persons at the service, other than persons who reside at the same private residence.
- **Outdoor faith-based gatherings.** Please note that the maximum number of people gathered at a grave or columbarium is 50 persons.

These restrictions on the prayer and sacramental life of the faithful often prove burdensome for families. For weddings, funerals, prayer vigils for the deceased and baptisms, the Church wishes to **accompany** such families during these intense times in their lives. We, therefore, at this time, also provide for the following:

- If a family asks to **extend** a wedding, funeral or baptism to a number that exceeds the participation limitations indicated above by restricting attendance only to those **fully vaccinated**, that request is allowed to be arranged in consultation with the parish pastoral leadership.
- In these cases, the family must manage the communication and verification pertaining to proof of vaccination. This, of course, may be arranged on a case-by-case basis by turning to the services of funeral directors or other third parties. However, **this does not include the expectation** that parish personnel and/or volunteers carry out this task.

Please note: 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 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 persons attending indoors, or the 50 persons attending outdoors.

- **Receptions.** Receptions following a wedding, funeral or baptism may take place if the number of persons does not exceed 25 % of the capacity of the premises, or 25 persons, whichever is **lower**.
- If food is served, proof of vaccination will be required if the reception is held in a facility (i.e. church hall) with a permit allowing them to serve food. In such a case, the facility is bound by the same restrictions as restaurants and licensed premises of the current Public Health Orders (see Orders 8 and 9 of the current Public Health Orders).

7) Livestreaming / Broadcasting of Religious Services

- The livestreaming of Masses, weddings, funerals, etc. is permitted.
- 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 current public health measures are maintained.

We very strongly encourage every parish to livestream one or more Masses, whether you are already doing so, have stopped it since a while or have never started. And that this be in place for every Sunday on an ongoing basis. There are always some of our parishioners who cannot or choose not to be present at the Sunday gathering, for whatever reason. Livestreaming is another way of enhancing inclusion and communion.

8) Nature of Religious Services

What is considered a Religious Service?

The following are to be considered “religious services” and must follow the same health measures and protocols as a Mass:

- 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
- Couples for Christ meetings
- Legion of Mary 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, funeral, wedding and baptismal receptions, are not considered religious services or faith-based gatherings, but are considered indoor gatherings. As such, they may take place if the number of persons does not exceed 25 persons or 25 % of the capacity of the premises, whichever is **lower**.

9) Catechism Classes

Catechism classes are religious services and should be organized according to Order 21 – Places of Worship - of the current Public Health Orders. Masks should be worn at all times (except for children under age five and the other exceptions in the public health order). Physical distancing of 2 metres between households applies as in all religious services. Parishes are encouraged to explore other formats, such as online options, limiting class sizes, small cohorts, additional sessions to catechize and still respect the spirit of the order.

- Some classrooms are not able to accommodate the full 2 metre distance between students at all times. Catechists are asked to take reasonable actions to distance students as much as possible from others.

- Children and family members from shared households with shared parental custody may sit next to each other.
- Catechists, parents, and volunteers are not required to be immunized.
- However, if catechism classes are held in a school during regular school hours, they fall under the Public Health Orders for schools. In that case, teachers, volunteers, and participating parents must be immunized.

10) Receptions, Fall Suppers, and Banquets, etc.

- Funeral, wedding and baptismal receptions, fall suppers or other type of banquet or reception event where food is served in a facility **with a health permit** (e.g. a church or church hall **with a permit** allowing them to serve food) is bound by the restaurant and licensed premises restrictions in Orders 8 and 9 of the current Public Health Orders. Only persons providing proof of immunization are permitted to attend. Children 12 years or younger do not need to give proof of immunization. The only attendance limit for such events is the fire code building capacity.
- 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. Hence the proof of immunization requirement.
- Parishes wanting to obtain information about the Manitoba Immunization Verifier Application, how to download and use it, can do so by [clicking here](#).
- Banquets and receptions in facilities **that are not licensed or do not have a permit**, where persons attending bring their own food (e.g., potlucks, family dinners, fall suppers that aren't professionally catered), are considered indoor gatherings, and unvaccinated people may attend,

but they are limited to 25 people or 25% of the venue capacity, whichever is **lower**.

- Banquets and receptions held at a restaurant or licensed premises are bound by the orders governing those facilities and only persons providing proof of immunization are permitted to attend.
- Coffee, tea, and doughnuts served during a Religious Service such as a Bible study etc. (see Section 8 *Nature of Religious Services*) are acceptable and do not require proof of immunization.

11) Parish Meetings (Parish Pastoral Councils/Parish Finance Committee, etc.) Parish Group Meetings (Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League, Parish Assemblies etc.), Formation Events, Conferences and Other Group Meetings

We ask the clergy and the faithful who organize parish meetings, conferences, assemblies and other group meetings to consider using tools such as Zoom and Teams that make remote participation by many people to these gatherings possible.

If in-person meetings are to be held, the maximum number of people is 25:

Order 2(1) *Except as otherwise permitted by these Orders, all persons are prohibited from assembling in a gathering involving more than (a) 25 persons or 25% of the usual capacity of the premises, whichever is lesser, in the case of a gathering at indoor premises that are not a private residence.*

However, there are circumstances where parish or diocesan events, conferences and group meetings may necessitate or warrant a greater number of in-person participants. Using prudential judgement, such events could be organized with more than 25 in-person participants in mind:

Order 2(2) *The restrictions set out in subsection (1) do not apply if attendance at a gathering is restricted to the following: (a) persons who*

produce proof of vaccination; (b) persons who produce proof from the Government of Manitoba that there is a medical reason for the person not to receive a vaccine for COVID-19.

We remind parishes that such meetings can include conferences on a given topic, Adult Faith Formation, RCIA, Parish council or administrative meetings, K of C, CWL, youth groups, sacramental preparation meetings, etc.

If this option is chosen, parishes are responsible for inviting participants in advance and communicating the vaccination requirement to them. Should such a course of action be decided upon, we ask that organizers be mindful of the non-vaccinated, who could participate remotely via Zoom, Teams or other online conferencing tools. They must also prepare for the online participation of those who will not be attending in person.

On the day of the meeting, parishes must ensure that **all** the people attending in person are vaccinated. The verifying of vaccination status must be made at the door.

Beverages and light snacks can be served. Individually packaged foods are encouraged. Alternately, participants can bring their own snacks and meals.

C) Provincial COVID-19 Prevention Orders

To read the Provincial COVID-19 Prevention Orders in effect on December 21, 2021, [click here](#)