

Your COVID-19

FAQs

Question: How would a person receive the Last Rites if he/she were in danger of death from the Covid-19 virus? Would the priest be allowed to come to the hospital or home? Would this be an improper imposition on the priest since he would be put in danger by being exposed to the Covid-19 virus?

Answer: The Sacrament of anointing of the sick can and should be done if requested in a palliative situation. If a person is in a hospital or nursing home, they would also have to follow the procedures of those institutions. For instance, being on a contact list given by the patient. Regarding the second part of the question it is never inappropriate to ask for the sacraments. To minister to the people of God is literally the *raison d'être* of the priesthood. Priests should of course wear all the protective clothing of the facility. It might be wise however, not to request a specific priest, especially the elderly or immunocompromised.

Q. There's been articles recently about communion in the hand – stating that it is sacrilegious because of particles of the Blessed Sacrament left in the hand. What is the answer to that?

A. Many articles have been written registering this that sadly have no basis in Church law as the Church allows both forms, accepting of course the fact that reception on the tongue is temporarily postponed until the pandemic is over. As soon as the pandemic is over of course reception on the tongue will resume. As for anytime a person receives Communion on the hand and notices a particle of the Blessed Sacrament, they should consume the particle. Checking the hand for particles of the Blessed Sacrament should be the habitual practice. Secondly in this time of pandemic procedures the likelihood of many particles is limited by the fact that the large presiders host that is divided for the congregation is not being used; the round individual hosts that are far less likely to be breaking off particles are being used instead.

Q. Are we able to have 2 singers instead of 1 during Mass?

A. No. diocesan policy states that there may be one accompanying musician and one leader of song. Remember, the singer must be isolated 16 to 24 feet for a talented professional voice. So, the more singers the more space. Even adding one extra singer means that space dedicated to music is unmanageable. (6ft-Accompanist) (16ft-Singer) (16ft-Singer-16ft) (Congregation). Thus, if another person would like to assist with their voice, it is far more reasonable to schedule that singer for another mass.

Q. If a shut-in is okay with people coming in their home, can we bring Communion to them, or should we be more cautious and wait, as these shut-ins are elderly, but in their own apartments?

A. First we must assure the meaning of “is ok”. If a person REQUESTS and asks for a person to come in so that they can receive communion, as is well and good, follow best practices, put on a mask, sanitize, and social distance to ensure safety. A person must DIRECTLY REQUEST A VISIT THEMSELVES, and not through another party. No person should feel forced into actions that they feel are unsafe. Another way to make our distribution of Holy Communion safer would be to take a page out of the practices being used by many nursing homes and having the visits outside in a garden, thus further lowering the danger to the recipient.

Q. Can Holy Water be offered to the faithful upon entering and leaving Church?

A. No. Holy Water fonts and sprinkling rites are not to be done at this time in congregations as they pose a real danger of spreading Covid-19. In fact, at this time, baptisms for multiple persons require that different water must be used. However Holy Water and other sacramentals can be blessed by a priest/deacon for personal use.

Q. Do the parishioners have to actually sign that they have self-screened or can the greeters ask them and then check off their names?

A. Yes, with the contact tracing forms, attendees may either personally answer the questions and fill in the form themselves, or they may be asked by an usher the question as long as they verify that they, nor anyone in their household, have no symptoms of COVID-19. Their contact info must be retained as well (name, phone number, etc). Nonetheless, with either method a COVID-19 Screen Tool – for example posters published on the doors before people enter – is necessary.

Q. Are printed parish bulletins problematic at this time, given that COVID-19 can last a fairly long time on paper?

A. Yes, if at all possible we should encourage our Parishioners to receive bulletins electronically, If this is not possible however, bulletins can be distributed with a few of the following precautions:

- 1) Bulletins should not be handed out by hand in person but should rather be in a discrete place for a person to pick up themselves
- 2) Hand sanitizer should be available so that a person can sanitize their hands **BEFORE picking** up a bulletin. But overall, physical bulletins at the moment are probably more work than they are worth.

Q. On the proper use of Masks: what is the protocol if you choose to wear a mask during the church service when you are approaching the altar for Communion?

A. For the reception of Holy Communion, a person wearing a mask should wear it until they are ready to receive. The ideal for the priest to go to the pews of the parishioners so that there is as little moving about by the parishioners as possible. If this is not possible we must make sure to maintain social distancing (2m) while proceeding in the communion line. Nevertheless, the steps to receive will be the same. 1) Upon coming to the priest for Communion, the mask is removed. 2) The communicant receives as normal; the mask is put back on, and then the communicant goes back to their pew.

Q. Can we have Masses on Sunday with multiples groups within the worship space with distinct groups of 50, separated to prevent contact with other groups?

A. Yes, Masses can be celebrated with separate distinct groups (according to the number being allowed by the provincial government at that moment) within the same worship space at the same time as long as prescribed social distancing procedures are followed. The policy from Manitoba is as follows:

Public gatherings of 50 people will be allowed indoors and 100 people outdoors, where members of the public are reasonably able to maintain a separation of at least two metres from others, except for brief exchanges. This change also applies to social gatherings, worship, weddings and funerals, as well as pow wows and other Indigenous cultural and spiritual events. **These gatherings must follow public health guidelines for the venue where they are being held.**

Larger group sizes are allowed where distinct groups of 50 or 100 can be separated to prevent contact with other groups.

- Indoor gatherings are permitted with a maximum group size of 30 per cent of the site's capacity provided the group can be physically divided into sub-groups of 50 or fewer. *Each sub-group must be able to arrive, depart and participate in the gathering without co-mingling with members from any other sub-group.* Adequate physical distancing must continue to be provided for all participants. <https://www.gov.mb.ca/covid19/restoring/phase-three.html>

Given that at this time several sub-groups of 50 or fewer are permitted, and that up to 30 percent of the total capacity of the church in regular times, each parish needs to decide whether this is feasible for their church. In a small church, allowing two separate sub-groups will most likely not be possible. In a larger building, two, or even three separate sub-groups could be accommodated.

That said, a parish must ensure that no co-mingling between groups can occur. Adequate physical distancing must continue to be provided for all participants. Dedicated entrances could be established to maintain each sub-group's ability to arrive, depart and participate in the gathering without co-mingling with members from any other sub-group. Either that, or each sub-group would have to be given an established timeframe to enter and exit from the same door.

Sub-groups would also need dedicated washrooms.

It is therefore necessary for each parish to examine its ability to safely accommodate separate sub-groups.

Q. Does a Bishop have the right to prohibit receiving communion on the tongue in his diocese?

A. Firstly, let us consider why a Bishop might have the right to *forbid* the reception on the tongue. Indeed, if the Bishop were forbidding communion on the tongue totally this would be going against the fact that we the faithful are given permission to receive both on the hand or on the tongue.ⁱ However, the direction is not a forbidding of communion on the tongue in perpetuity but solely in response to a local need for a limited time and this, as a response to a local issue not envisioned by the law, is within the powers of a bishop. As soon the pandemic is lifted reception of communion of the tongue will of course resume again.

In these times it is an act of charity to the people of God to protect our vulnerable brothers and sisters in the community. Communion on the tongue greatly increases the chances of spreading COVID-19 as saliva is a potent source of infection. Therefore, we should approach the direction to only receive on the Hand during this pandemic under the light of charity to our vulnerable brothers and sisters.

“In the exercise of their freedom, men and women perform morally good acts that are constructive for the person and for society when they are obedient to the truth, that is, when they do not presume to be creators and absolute masters of truth or of ethical norms.”ⁱⁱ

This is expressed in Canon Law in the following way:

“In exercising their rights, Christ’s faithful, both individually and in associations, must take account of the common good of the Church, as well as the rights of others and their own duties to others.

“Ecclesiastical authority is entitled to regulate, in view of the common good, the exercise of rights which are proper to Christ’s faithful.” (Can. 223, §1 & §2).

Therefore, while acknowledging that receiving Communion on the tongue is a right of all the faithful, we also acknowledge as a more substantial right the right to health and to life of the vulnerable. Hence, knowing that as soon as the pandemic is over and these extraordinary times return to normal, distribution on the tongue will of course once again be allowed.

Secondly, let us look at the canon describing the powers of the Bishop under the Roman Catholic Church’s Canon Law:

381 §1. A diocesan bishop in the diocese entrusted to him has all ordinary, proper, and immediate power which is required for the exercise of his pastoral function except for cases which the law or a decree of the Supreme Pontiff reserves to the supreme authority or to another ecclesiastical authority.ⁱⁱⁱ

In this code of the law we see two different realities that must be kept in balance. Specifically, the Bishop has proper and ordinary pastoral power in his diocese for the building up of the people of God. In many ways you could think of it as saying that Bishops are not just branch managers. As a commentary on the law puts it: “The first paragraph of this canon reaffirms a noteworthy point of conciliar teaching on episcopal office: the bishops govern their churches as vicars and ambassadors of Christ, not a vicars of the Roman Pontiff.”^{iv} However, this must be held in tension with the bishops responsibility to defend the deposit of faith. “The present canon reflects an ongoing tension in the constitutional life of the Church: The Bishop is to enjoy increased discretion in the daily exercise of his office; yet he is still situated within a hierarchical structure, which stretches both above and below him.”^v

So, to make a long story short the two parts to keep in mind to answer the question is that the Bishop has the ability to answer and lead in the situations that occur in the local Church as often these occurrences are not considered by the law. The Code of Canon Law does not envision a global pandemic. Therefore, the Bishop does have the right to appropriately respond to an unforeseen situation. But the Bishop does not have the right to overrule in a permanent fashion the decrees of the Pope or his duly authorized in Roman offices.

Q. Would a family of six attending Mass in the crying room in a church be considered as separate from the 25 people who can attend an indoor gathering?

A. No. The faithful gathered in a crying room of a church are part of the assembly of 25 people gathered for a Mass. We can see this in the fact that the people in the crying room of a parish are counted within the maximum occupancy of our Church buildings. Further, parish crying rooms are not isolation rooms, they are not separate from the air supply of the main sanctuary nor are they kept as Negative-pressure isolation rooms.

If, however, a family cannot attend due to the numbers or because of some other contingency, there is the possibility to receive communion outside of Mass if you cannot be present under normal church attendance situations. The best way to go forward in that case would be to check with the pastors to arrange something.

Q. In our parish, the rectory is connected to the church by a door. Could one or two people attend a Mass in the hallway of this rectory door? Must these people be counted amongst the number who are permitted to attend Mass?

A. Yes. If at all possible, all should attend in the church proper, hence they must be counted among the number of people allowed to participate in the Mass. Waiting in a hallway is a poor option as it is without the benefits are actually being able to participate in mass or participation through livestream.

Q. Are tax receipts being issued for donations to the MAMAWESINI-TA Food Sharing Project organized by the Archdiocese of Saint-Boniface with the participation of First Nations? Who will issue these receipts?

A. Yes, tax receipts will be issued for all donations received at the diocese for the First Nations Food Drive. They will be issued directly by the Archdiocese. Any donations given directly to the parish for this project must be receipted by the parish. The parish transfers these funds to the Archdiocese as part of their monthly remittance. Any particular questions about outstanding receipts may be directed to Julie Paquin at the diocesan office. Julie can be reached at 204-594-0264 or jpaquin@archsaintboniface.ca

ⁱ Redemptionis Sacramentum, n. 92

ⁱⁱ Catechism of the Catholic Church - 1749 - 1756

ⁱⁱⁱ Canon Law Society of America, The Code of Canon Law a Text and Commentary, ed. James A. Coriden, Toomas J. Green, Donald E. Heintschel, 381 §1, p.325.

^{iv} Ibid

^v Ibid