



29 January 2021

COVID-19 UPDATE FROM BISHOP FABBRO (Update #17)

The Episcopal Council gathered on 25 January to look at the how our parishes may be operating during the upcoming Season of Lent. Father Michael Béchar, Director of Liturgy for the Diocese, joined the meeting to offer his expertise.

While we see progress in the decreasing numbers of COVID cases in the province, due to the current lock-down, we expect that it will be some time before we are allowed to open our churches again. With that in mind, we considered each aspect of Lent and Easter with the possibility that the current lock-down would continue and that some or all regions of the Diocese might be declared as “red” or other colours, allowing more openness. Some of the directives will be specified under two titles: “LOCK-DOWN” and “OPEN”. The latter presumes all restrictions are in place for capacity, distancing, the use of masks and cleaning protocols as earlier defined.

1. Extension of the Dispensation from the Sunday Obligation

Since the effects of the pandemic continue in our daily lives, including the lock-down and the need for wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing, Bishop Fabbro hereby *extends the dispensation from Sunday obligation until the end of the Easter Season*; that is, up to and including Pentecost Sunday.

2. General Absolution Permission Extended

Many pastors have spoken of how the opportunity for General Absolution has been a consolation for those who cannot access auricular confession during the pandemic. In light of that, Bishop Fabbro has extended the permission for parishes to host celebrations of the sacrament of Penance in this form. This permission is *extended until the end of the last Saturday of the Easter season*; that is, up to the Saturday before Pentecost. Such celebrations are contingent on being outside a “grey” zone lock-down and being able to open our churches to parishioners for Masses, and they are subject to the requirements of capacity with distancing.

The information regarding General Absolution which was distributed last year is included with this Update as [Appendix I](#).

3. Masses During the “Grey” Zone Lock-down

As outlined in the last directives of 13 January (Update #16), the Government’s regulations allow for ten people to gather for a religious service. Bishop Fabbro, in discussion with the Episcopal Council, directed that only those needed to livestream or otherwise broadcast a Mass may be allowed in the church, namely, the presider, a deacon, a reader, a cantor, an instrumentalist and, if necessary, a technician for the recording. This *directive remains in effect*. A pastor/administrator may choose to invite different people to take the parts, for example, of deacon or reader, but the “state of emergency” and “stay at home order” *does not mean permission to celebrate multiple Masses* in an attempt to accommodate more people at this time.

Much discussion was had with respect to **funerals** and **weddings**. The previous directives limited these celebrations to liturgies of the word with the respective ritual. A change was requested to allow for Masses at these celebrations, and that permission is now given: *a funeral Mass or a wedding Mass may now be celebrated respecting the limit of ten people, the presider being one of the ten.*

Baptism, Confirmation, and the Anointing of the Sick are to be celebrated in cases of danger of death.

Some dioceses are allowing the distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass, with various groups of ten people going through the church, a priest leading some kind of "Communion Service", sometimes including only a short prayer, and then the giving of Communion as people exit the church. As before, *this practice is forbidden in our Diocese.* The only exception is given in the cases of celebrating the sacrament of the Sick or the Rite of Viaticum, which are done only in a person's home when the illness is not related to COVID-19.

4. Ash Wednesday

LOCK-DOWN:

In the event that the Diocese or any region of the Diocese is still in lock-down, there can be no option for Ash Wednesday other than a virtual service or Mass. *Ashes will not be taken to homes or schools.* In this case, pastoral teams are encouraged to plan now for a virtual service. If schools are open, it could be broadcast to schools as well as homes. Any Mass will be celebrated according to Directive #3 above. Ashes may be distributed to those assisting in the broadcast of the Mass or service. (See below for a note on the proper means of distribution.)

OPEN:

If the lock-down ends before Ash Wednesday, *Masses may be celebrated in parishes* according to the directives given last June along with any updated directives since then. School Masses and other Masses outside of churches are still forbidden, but Masses may be broadcast to homes and schools. *Ashes will not be taken to homes or schools.*

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued a note on 12 January 2021 specifying *how ashes may be distributed:*

The Priest says the prayer for blessing the ashes. He sprinkles the ashes with holy water, without saying anything. Then he addresses all those present and only once says the formula as it appears in the Roman Missal, applying it to all in general: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel", or "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return". The Priest then cleanses his hands, puts on a face mask and distributes the ashes to those who come to him or, if appropriate, he goes to those who are standing in their places. The Priest takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything.

The sprinkling is of only those ashes that can be held in the pinch of thumb and index finger.

5. Mass of Chrism

LOCK-DOWN:

Bishop Fabbro will celebrate the Mass of Chrism at the Cathedral at 11:00 a.m. on Monday of Holy Week according to Directive #3 above. The Mass will be *recorded and broadcast in some format.* Episcopal Vicars will be responsible to provide containers suitable for the blessed oils for their own deanery. Oil will be blessed and consecrated as usual, with

distribution to follow the Mass. These details to be decided at a later date. In the absence of priests, the Renewal of Priestly Vows will not take place.

OPEN:

Bishop Fabbro will celebrate the Mass of Chrism at the Cathedral at 11:00 a.m. The Mass will be recorded and broadcast in some format. Members of the faithful, including Religious and other laity, will be invited according to current protocols of the Cathedral. Episcopal Vicars will be invited to concelebrate, and each will provide containers suitable for the blessed oils for their own deanery. Oil will be blessed and consecrated as usual, with distribution to follow in the deaneries. These details to be decided at a later date.

6. The Rest of Lent, Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum

LOCK-DOWN

Pastoral Teams are encouraged *to livestream or otherwise broadcast* their liturgies, devotions, and other spiritual presentations so parishioners can have at least a virtual connection to their own parishes. The Information Technology (IT) Department is willing to help advise on which local companies may be called on to assist with technical equipment but IT is not able to assist individual parishes in all the work required. If you are considering livestreaming, please contact the IT Department before purchasing equipment. IT will determine if the network and internet services can support livestreaming. Reaching out to parishioners in this way will be especially important when the Sacred Triduum approaches.

Pastoral Teams are also encouraged to *consider resources that have been developed for homes*, the domestic church. The Liturgy office has already sent notice about some of these resources, which can be found in the archives of Parish Briefings. The Pastoral Services office may also offer suggestions for use in homes and schools.

Once again, Pastoral Teams are *encouraged to contact all parishioners personally*, such as through a telephone call. Along with electronic messaging and providing resources through the parish website, personal contact goes a long way to assure people they are not forgotten. This outreach is especially important for those who are not connected through the internet.

It has been learned that some suppliers do not even have their regular shipment to make palm branches available for sale. Regardless, *palm branches are not to be distributed in any fashion this year.*

Last year's directives about Holy Week will apply again this year. These directives are added to this Update, as [Appendix II](#).

OPEN

Masses and services throughout Lent, Holy Week and the Sacred Triduum are *celebrated according to the directives* given last June, along with any updated directives since then. School Masses and other Masses outside of churches are still not allowed.

Palm branches are not to be distributed in any fashion this year, nor are bulletins, flyers or even spiritual booklets.

In addition to the above directives, *the necessary adaptations of the celebrations of the Triduum* are as follows:

- a) There will be no washing of the feet at the Mass of Holy Thursday.
- b) The veneration of the Cross on Good Friday will be done at one time for the entire congregation.

- c) Baptism and Confirmation, if celebrated at the Vigil of Easter, will be done according to directives already given. There will be no sprinkling rite to accompany the renewal of baptismal promises.

Some mention of these adaptations should be made in the homily of each celebration or, where possible, through a brief announcement within the celebration.

Together with the members of the Episcopal Council, I realize this extraordinary situation calls for extraordinary effort to help our people live faithfully throughout the holy Season of Lent. The pandemic has gone on much longer than most of us first imagined. We are once again making progress in stopping the spread of the virus and “planking the curve” of the number of those infected, but it is too soon to stop our all-out efforts.

We are grateful for those who are serving the broader community, especially in our hospitals and long-term care homes, risking their own health so that we can be safe. We recognize the great efforts of all front-line workers who tend to our daily needs so that we can continue to have the necessities of life. We applaud all front-line workers who help to keep the peace. We appreciate the many volunteers in our parishes who, along with their priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers, bring the Good News of Jesus to others.

In this upcoming holy and joyful season, let us profess our hope in God’s presence among us through our love for our neighbours. May we prepare our hearts and minds to be renewed in our baptismal commitment as faithful disciples of Jesus.

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London

Attachments:

[Appendix I](#) – Canonical Notes on Absolution, and Service of Penance and Reconciliation

[Appendix II](#) – Update on Holy Week for 2021