

WORSHIPS SAFE



DIRECTIVES CONCERNING
CATHOLIC CHURCH OPERATIONS
IN THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO

COVID-19 UPDATES
JULY, 2021

**THIS ADDENDUM SUPERSEDES AND REPLACES PROVISIONS
OF THE WORSHIPS SAFE DECEMBER, 2020 UPDATED
MANUAL AS IT RELATES TO COVID-19**

FOREWARD

AT THE TIME OF WRITING THIS ADDENDUM, THE SPECTRE OF COVID-19 CASTING ITS SHADOW ACROSS ONTARIO APPEARS DIMINISHED. WE MUST REMAIN VIGILANT, HOWEVER, IN THE FACE OF NEW VARIANTS.

THE PAST MONTHS HAVE TAUGHT US HOW TO LIVE AND COPE WITH PANDEMIC, BUT THEY HAVE ALSO TAUGHT US THAT THROUGH DISCIPLINE AND A BALANCED APPROACH TO PANDEMIC AND OTHER CRISES, WE MAY SERVE THE INTERESTS OF BOTH THE CHURCH AND ONTARIANS EVERYWHERE.

THIS DOCUMENT SUPPLEMENTS THE DECEMBER, 2020 PANDEMIC UPDATE. OUR PURPOSE, IN LIGHT OF THE INCREASING RATE OF VACCINATIONS, RELAXED PROVINCIAL ANTI-COVID RESTRICTIONS AND GREATER SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE CONCERNING COVID-19, IS TO SAFELY REDUCE THE NECESSITY FOR FULL PANDEMIC SAFETY MEASURES WHICH WERE THE DIRECTION OF OUR PREVIOUS PUBLICATIONS. WHILE THERE ARE SOME RESTRICTIONS THAT ARE LESSENED, WE CONTINUE TO PROMOTE AND PROTECT THE SAFETY OF ALL PERSONS WHO WISH TO ATTEND OUR CHURCHES.

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE ACBO INSURANCE MANAGEMENT BOARD, OUR INSURERS AT CATHOLIC MUTUAL, OUR LEGAL COUNSEL AT MILLER THOMSON LLP, AND OUR CONSULTANT PHYSICIAN DR. TIM COOK, FRCPC, MPH, LCOL (RET'D). NONETHELESS, ALL DIOCESES MUST BE MINDFUL OF ONGOING DIRECTIONS PROVIDED BY THE ONTARIO PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS THE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY AND ANY APPLICABLE DIRECTIONS BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. DIOCESES SHOULD FEEL FREE AT ANY TIME TO CONTACT THEIR LOCAL HEALTH UNITS FOR FURTHER DIRECTION OR CLARIFICATION.

SHOULD YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT THE ACBO OFFICE, YOUR DIOCESAN BISHOP OR CHANCELLOR FOR TEMPORAL AFFAIRS FOR ANY CLARIFICATION OR DIRECTION YOU MAY REQUIRE.

JULY 22, 2021, TORONTO, ONTARIO

BRIAN BEAL
GENERAL SECRETARY ASSEMBLY OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF ONTARIO

UNDERSTANDING COVID-19

Recent pronouncements by the Province have seen a lessening of some anti-COVID-19 measures as Ontarians become vaccinated. This trend will likely increase over the balance of the year and the ACBO, in consultation with its medical and legal consultants, have determined that some measures thought previously necessary for the safe operation of our Churches and facilities can now be relaxed.

It appears that aerosol transmission (ie. by breath) is the most common means of transporting the infection.

Advice of provincial authorities remains that the most effective ways of dealing with aerosol transmission are:

1. Continue wearing masks;
2. Ventilate the air frequently and effectively in interior spaces, if possible; and,
3. Maintain reduced numbers of people in contained spaces with ongoing physical distancing.

CHANGES IN PROCEDURES

This document contains a summary of all relevant changes in procedure. A more detailed explanation may be found in the Addendum concerning COVID-19 issued by the ACBO. This publication contains more detailed revisions of the pandemic manual that specifically deal with COVID-19. If there is any doubt between the directions expressed herein and the Pandemic manual (as amended), the manual will govern. In any event, applicable Provincial and Municipal directions shall at all times supersede directives in this update.

ATTENDING MASS

On 21 December 2020, in a note regarding COVID-19 vaccines the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, while recognising that vaccination is not ordinarily a matter of moral obligation, reminded Catholics that “the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one’s own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good”. All Catholics (clergy and laity) are encouraged to consider being fully vaccinated, not only for their own sake but for the sake of others.

All Catholics should take precautions to ensure that they do not put others at risk from COVID-19. Those feeling ill or showing signs of COVID-19 infections should follow the latest advice from their physician or local health authority on how to proceed.

IMPORTANT AMENDMENTS TO PANDEMIC MANUAL (Revised)

CHAPTER 5: BASIC RULES APPLICABLE TO ALL CHURCHES AND PARISH FACILITIES:

- Physical distancing of two metres (six feet) remains the requirement for attendance in church and parish facilities, including seating, however, groups of people from the same household may be seated together.
- Mask wearing remains required. Masks should be fitted properly to the face.
- Cleaning procedures for pews, washrooms, confessionals, reconciliation rooms are relaxed so as to require only regular cleaning in accordance with pre-Covid-19 routines, with the only exception being when someone with suspected or known Covid-19 has attended, in which case the space should be disinfected as per the pandemic manual requirements.
- Churches should be well ventilated when possible. This will vary according to the space but it should be treated with importance. Ventilation may involve opening windows and utilising fans to exhaust air from the sanctuary. Fan placement is important and will vary upon room configuration. Avoid placing fans in areas where they may impede access or cause contaminated air to flow from one person to another.
- Hymnals, missals and prayer books may be replaced in pews, however, the earlier restrictions on singing continue.
- Bulletins, envelopes, pamphlets and newspapers may again be distributed as per pre-COVID-19 practices.
- Votive light stands may be re-opened, subject to notices requiring appropriate distancing of two metres (six feet).
- Crying Rooms and Small Chapels/Devotional Areas may be used again as long as proper distancing is maintained.
- The preference continues that confessions should be heard outside of the Confessional to allow for proper distancing, cleaning and contact tracing (if it becomes necessary). Where Confessionals are used, both priest and confessor will be required to wear masks. Priests should employ double masking or the use of the N95 mask so as to further lower the risk of contamination.
- Collections may again be taken up using baskets in the traditional fashion. All Ushers involved in taking up collection should ensure that they wear masks while undertaking this task and use a collection basket with a long handle to maintain the two metres (six feet) distancing.

CHAPTER 6: CELEBRATION OF SUNDAY MASS

- Hand Sanitizing – It is no longer necessary for all entering a church to use hand sanitizer, though churches are encouraged to have such sanitizer on hand and available should it be asked for.
- Altar servers may be employed again, as long as they maintain the two metres (six feet) distance.
- Communion procedures are unchanged despite the lessening of restrictions in other areas. Both the person distributing communion and the communicant must be fully masked. Once the communicant receives the host, they are to move two metres (six feet) away, safely remove mask, consume host, replace mask, and then proceed back to pew.

ALL OTHER DIRECTIVES IN THE PANDEMIC MANUAL REMAIN IN FORCE AND EFFECT.