



Catholic Diocese of Victoria
Office of the Bishop

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June 16, 2021

Restart Step 2 DIRECTIVES for Churches during Covid-19
To be followed by all Parishes in the Diocese of Victoria

1. **DISPENSATION FROM THE OBLIGATION to attend Sunday Mass:**

Parishioners in the Diocese of Victoria *remain dispensed* from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass at a church. The life of prayer, scripture reading, and remote participation in the live streaming liturgy are indispensable for keeping our faith nourished during the pandemic when health and safety concerns prevent some from going to church.

2. **CHARITY, care and concern for others:**

All those attending Mass do so at their own risk and must take responsibility for protecting themselves and others. Before attending Mass, each person must carry out a health check by reviewing the entry requirement and key questions which are on the poster at <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/posters/help-prevent-spread-covid-19-entry-check-workers?lang=en>. Any person who does not pass the health check must not attend Mass.

To increase their level of safety and the safety of others, and in accordance with the Province's Face Coverings (COVID-19) Order:

https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/mo/mo/m0012_2021

face coverings must be worn by all people at all times while inside the church building. *Exemptions may be made in certain circumstances as detailed in Section 4 of the Order*, and also as described in the relevant sections of the Variance for indoor worship services. These are summarized in the Restart Step 2 Liturgical Directives.

As an act of supreme charity, the following people must stay home for the sake of others in the community:

- a. People with Covid-19, or those who live with someone with Covid-19.
- b. People who have been exposed to someone with Covid-19 and are waiting for test results.
- c. The sick, including those with ANY symptoms or feelings of sickness, especially if they have a fever, upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms.
- d. Those who have recently travelled outside of Canada, or who have arrived from places in Canada that are experiencing significant Covid-19 outbreaks.

The following people are encouraged to stay home:

- a. People who live with someone with upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms.
- b. People, especially the elderly (over 65 years of age) with underlying or comprised medical conditions.
- c. Family members who live with elderly people or those at risk

3. COMMUNICATION:

- a. Pastors and Administrators, in consultation with their Parish Pastoral Councils, Liturgical Committee, Parish Support Staff and others concerned, must clearly communicate and effectively remind their parishioners of the 50-person *or 10% of capacity* maximum to attend a given Mass; physical distancing and face covering measures in place; and expectations to ensure proper cleaning and sanitizing.
- b. Any changes to the Mass schedule, if altered, to allow more time between Masses for cleaning or to provide for additional Masses, must be communicated appropriately.

4. CONGREGATION LIMITED TO 50 people (including the Pastor) or 10% of the worship space's total capacity, whichever is larger:

- a. *If a space is not large enough for 50 people to gather while still maintaining physical distancing, then the maximum attendance must be decreased until physical distancing can be maintained.*
- b. Parishioners will sign up to attend a specific Mass at a specific time on a regular basis. Aside from people with special needs, preferential treatment should be avoided. Among the possibilities for assigning parishioners a set Mass time, parishes may implement a rotation based on the first letter of last names; an online ticketing system; or the formation of fixed “community Mass groups.”
- c. A sign-up system is the simplest and recommended method for parishes to solicit the names of parishioners who wish to attend a regular Sunday Mass or Mass during the week. Depending on the method of sign-up chosen, the parishioners should be able to choose the Mass they prefer to attend insofar as this is possible.
- d. Each “community Mass group” will be assigned a regular Mass time on Saturday, Sunday or a weekday. To provide an opportunity for all parishioners to attend Mass, parishioners may not sign up for more than one Mass per week at their church, or any other church or chapel in the Diocese. Multiple and easily accessible options for sign-up should be employed, including online sign-ups, written sign-ups, email, and phone calls.
- e. A “first-come, first-served” system, as well as exclusively online or email sign-up systems should be avoided since restriction to these methods might exclude many who would otherwise wish to attend.

- f. Signs should be placed on the church doors to indicate the Mass schedule, along with a telephone number and email address for people wanting to regularly attend Mass, but are unaware of sign-up and contact tracing procedures.
- g. Physical distancing guidelines must be posted on the church doors and, where appropriate, elsewhere inside the church. The Diocese has provided a limited number of posters and social distancing “stand here” decals as templates for each parish to use.
- h. Contact Tracing: A database record of everyone’s contact information is required and a detailed list (“attendance roster” or log record) of those who participate in each Mass must be retained. These lists must be retained for 30 days, and then destroyed. In the case of an individual who tests positive for COVID-19, the parish will provide the public health officials with the “attendance roster”. In the event of an outbreak of Covid-19, the public health authority will determine the steps to be implemented and followed by the Diocese and parish community.
- i. “Unregistered” Walk-ups for Mass: May be permitted, in consultation with the Pastor/Administrator, provided that there are less than 50 people *or 10% of the building’s total capacity* registered to attend the Mass, or that the pre-determined maximum occupancy allowed in the building has not been met. All “unregistered” walk-ups must complete the Covid-19 Assessment and Contact Tracing form, which must be retained by the parish.

5. USE OF PARISH HALL

If a parish has a hall that has its own separate entrance, exit and washrooms, the parish may use this space to offer additional seating for those who wish to attend a Mass via a live video-feed and projector system. This is possible provided:

- a. There are separate entrances, exits and washrooms for the church and the hall;
- b. ***The total number of parishioners present in either space does not exceed 50 people or 10% of either space’s total capacity, whichever is larger. If a space is not large enough for 50 people to gather while still maintaining physical distancing, then the maximum attendance must be decreased until physical distancing can be maintained;***
- c. Parishioners participating in the Mass via live video-feed do not have contact with parishioners attending the Mass in person before, during or after Mass

If a hall is used to accommodate another distinct group, the congregation gathered in the hall will wait until the end of Mass to receive Communion from the priest/presider. Plexiglas must be installed near the exit door, along with appropriate physical distancing decals and maximum occupancy signage. The priest will distribute Communion to those gathered as they exit.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES OF USHERS AND GREETERS:

- a. The responsibilities of the volunteer ushers and greeters will actually increase during this time for they will be the first point of contact for arriving parishioners. They need to be wearing face coverings, identified by badges or other means, and able to interact with the parishioners while still maintaining physical distancing.
- b. The ushers/greeters should have a copy of an “attendance roster” to confirm that those who arrive for Mass have previously signed up and that their contact information is available.
- c. Ushers stationed at the church entrance can monitor those who enter, reminding them to sanitize their hands, respect the physical distancing requirement of two metres, and wear face coverings at all times. Members of a single household may enter and exit together.
- d. Hand sanitizing should take place near the entrance to the church for those coming to Mass. A bottle of sanitizer, touched by many, should not be used. Instead, an automatic dispenser is required or an usher/greeter wearing a mask will need to spray the hands of those entering the church.
- e. The ushers/greeters are also responsible for pointing out available pews for seating.
- f. The ushers/greeters could also assist with spacing and organizing parishioners entering the line for communion.

7. PHYSICAL DISTANCING:

- a. Except for members of the same household, physical distancing is to be observed everywhere on the church property (in the church, on the steps, in the parking lot, etc.); close contact with those outside one’s household must not be within two metres of another person.
- b. Smaller churches may not be able to accommodate *the maximum allowable number of people* at a time to allow for the required physical distancing requirements; therefore, the parish will need to determine the maximum occupancy permitted in their space.
- c. All churches, halls, and rooms must post the maximum capacity for occupancy number in a visible space on the respective doors. (Please see attached form).
- d. People are not to gather in the vestibule or near the doors of the church before or after Mass. If the pastor wishes to greet parishioners after Mass, physical distancing must be maintained.
- e. Offertory counting procedures must be enhanced to include hand sanitizers, gloves, and a large, well-ventilated area to ensure social distancing is respected.

8. ENTRANCES AND EXISTS:

- a. When possible, entrance and exit doors should be propped open as people enter and exit, so that the parishioners need not touch the handles or doors to enter or exit.
- b. At least one entrance should be open and accessible to the handicapped. If more than one entrance is open, care must be taken to control the overall number of people entering and to see to their proper sanitation and contact information.
- c. When possible, multiple exits should be used at the end of Mass to expedite departure and minimize chances of crowding.
- d. Once the *maximum allowable number of people* in the church/hall is reached, no one else may enter and people must be turned away in a polite and respectful manner. Parishioners should also be advised to contact the parish office in order to make the necessary arrangements to be included at a future Mass or added to a wait-list.

9. SEATING IN THE PEWS:

- a. To maintain physical distancing, seating may be restricted to every second or third pew (or row of seats). Seats that can be used should be clearly marked. Rows may be conveniently closed off with painter's tape, which will not damage the pews. In a large church, some sections may be cordoned off to reduce the need for sanitizing everywhere.
- b. All hymnals, missals, pew cards, and other loose items in the pews must be removed, in order to facilitate cleaning.
- c. Collection baskets must not be passed from person to person in the pews. A locked collection box, or other secure box, perhaps under the supervision of an usher/greeter may be provided for parishioners to deposit their offerings.

10. MUSIC

- a. Congregational singing is NOT PERMITTED as it has proven to contribute to the spread of germs. Music will therefore be limited to a single cantor and an accompanist, with no choir. The music provided must only consist of a Processional, Communion, and Recessional Hymn. The Acclamations (ie. Kyrie, Gloria, Responsorial Psalm, Gospel Alleluia, Holy Holy, Lamb of God, etc.) are not to be chanted or sung by the presider, cantor, nor the congregation. The words to the music should not be printed or displayed on a screen. Parishioners are encouraged to participate prayerfully, consciously, and actively in the Liturgy (cf#14 Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy).

11. CLEANING, SANITIZING AND DISINFECTING:

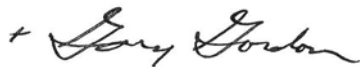
- a. Cleaning protocols must be defined, implemented, and followed. A cleaning log must be kept demonstrating due diligence in keeping the premises sanitized.
- b. All high touch surfaces must be sanitized between Masses in the church proper, including pews, kneelers, doors, handles, etc. An adequate stock of hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies, including disposable gloves for cleaners, should be readily available.
- c. Janitorial staff, volunteers, or others who are not vulnerable because of age or health conditions must clean and sanitize the pews and other high-touch surfaces immediately after every Mass. Due to the need for strict cleaning and sanitizing, it is recommended that restrooms be closed or open with limited access and available for emergencies.
- d. Parish family rooms may be closed or restricted to one family. They may be used only if proper circulation can be assured, and they will need to be carefully cleaned after use.
- e. Kneelers in front of the statues should be removed. All kneelers in front of the Vigil Lights should be removed. The sticks that are used to light the Vigil Lights should be used only once and then discarded.

12. OTHER:

- a. Parishioners must not gather or socially engage with each other before, during or after the service. Parishioners must disperse immediately after the service, and must not mix with others who are leaving an earlier service, the same service, or arriving to attend a subsequent service
- b. Parish bulletins are not to be printed and distributed. All paper and other loose printed items, library books, and religious articles should be removed from the foyer.
- c. Holy Water and Baptismal fonts remain empty.
- d. ***Church and Hall Rentals, parish meetings, education programs, and social gatherings (outside of the Mass) are now permitted as long as all regulations in the Gatherings and Events Provincial Health Order are followed:***

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-gatherings-events.pdf>

In Communion,



Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria