



DIOCESE OF VICTORIA

Office of the Bishop

September 23, 2020

Dear Pastors,

Last week I informed our faithful that the dispensation from the obligation to participate in the liturgy on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is not being extended beyond September 30. As we anticipate the participation of more of the faithful in the Sunday Eucharist in the coming months I realize it is time to update the guidelines that I published on April 27. Based on conversations with some doctors and local health officials in Victoria and the other counties in our area, I am focusing on four areas to ensure our safe and joyful return to the Sunday Eucharist. I am going to publish some other specific directives on a second page to this letter.

Masks – Parishioners must be strongly encouraged to wear masks during the Sunday worship. Priests and Eucharistic Ministers must wear masks during the distribution of communion.

I realize this has become a political issue and believe the Governor is correct in his approach not to issue a mandate, but instead to offer strong encouragement. I will support a Pastor if the Pastor decides in his particular Church or at particular Masses people must wear masks.

Social Distancing – The Church must be arranged in such a way that people aren't breathing on each other.

I think the easiest set-up has been every other row, with a family on each end of the row. Some larger Churches have scheduled over-flow space in the gym or auditorium, some other Churches have added a Mass time on Saturday and/or Sunday to accommodate.

Handwashing/Sanitization – Priests, Deacons and Ministers must practice good hand hygiene, and the Church must be cleaned after every Mass.

I think the parishes have established pretty good protocols on cleaning before and after every Mass. I know some have been concerned about possible damage to pews and there has been some good discussion about how to care for the furniture and keep the pews sanitized.

Holy Water – Holy Water fonts must remain empty.

This was a surprise to me, I thought it would be all right to re-fill the Holy Water fonts. It became clear to me that each medical person had serious concerns about the possible spread of germs through multiple people touching the same source. Some Pastors have encouraged people to bring their own Holy Water bottles and fill them at the Church, others have used the Sprinkling Rite at some of the Masses.

God bless you all in your blessed ministry of leading the People of God every day – you are an example of shepherds who “smell of the sheep”, walking the road with strength, courage and hope! Let's keep each other in prayer,

+Brendan



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Regarding liturgical directives for Sunday worship, I am establishing new directives to replace the guidelines of April 27. They are:

An usher or team of ushers should be trained to make sure the church doesn't exceed attendance limitations and people follow social distancing protocols.

Ushers/Greeters must wear masks, and should open and close doors for parishioners upon their arrival and departure.

Hand sanitizer should be available and easily visible at the church entrance.

Priests, Deacons and Ushers/Greeters should observe careful social distancing before, during and after Mass.

Parishioners should be careful not to gather too closely when entering or leaving the church, or stand too close in the communion line.

Missalettes and hymnals should not be stored on the pews and should not be utilized by multiple people.

Choir members should practice proper social distancing.

Collection should be done in such a way that no one is required to touch the basket.

The offertory procession *may resume*.

The Sign of Peace and distribution of the Precious Blood should be suspended.

Clergy should not share from the same chalice.

The Distribution of Communion is an especially sensitive time. The person receiving communion should be encouraged to receive in the hand.

Regarding other parish activities:

Parish meetings and gatherings on parish grounds may be held, while utilizing established protocols for social distancing and other safety measures.

Holy Communion may be brought to the homebound. Pastors are asked to check with the administrators of hospitals and nursing homes in their particular parishes about the possibility of pastoral visitations.

In-person ministry and events, including overnight retreats may resume at the Pastor's discretion as long as all safety directives set forth by the diocese and local, state and national authorities are followed.