



Catholic Diocese of Victoria
Office of the Bishop

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May 21, 2020

GENERAL DIRECTIVES for the Reopening of Churches during Covid-19

Dear Pastors, Administrators, Deacons, and People of God,

Covid-19 has caused tremendous stress and anxiety for us as we have come to recognize that we are all vulnerable. We have continued to be persistent in prayer and participated in opportunities for Mass remotely via live streaming. As we move forward, we must continue to exercise caution as we prepare to reopen our Churches, in a limited way, to celebrate the Sacred Liturgy together. Though some restrictions have been relaxed, we need to continue to stay vigilant with infection prevention, modelling and monitoring good behaviour, and mandating strict protocols regarding cleaning and sanitization. The strict directives provided by our Provincial authorities, including the limit of all public gatherings for Mass to no more than 50 people, social distancing, etc. must be respected during this time.

During this time of uncertainty, we are being called to embrace a new Pentecost, a new reality that will be ushered in with a gentle breeze and a flame of patient love that speaks to the grace of tenderness. As we prepare our faith communities to reopen to celebrate Pentecost together on May 30, 2020, we recognize that each parish has different resources that must be carefully considered. Each parish must take responsibility for following the established *Guidelines and Liturgical Directives* and make the appropriate adaptations for their individual communities based upon size and resources, and communicate with parishioners via the usual methods of email, webpage, or phone. Due diligence is required as we all have a responsibility to guarantee the well-being of all our communities.

DIRECTIVES:

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

Parishioners in the Diocese of Victoria remain dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass during this initial reopening phase.

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. Individuals may consider the option of wearing a mask to increase their level of safety and comfort.

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
- 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.

The following 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 communicate clearly and effectively with their parishioners their plans for when and how they will resume public Masses.

Specifically, the communication must cover these areas:

- How the parish will determine the 50-person maximum to attend a given Mass?
 - How the parish will ensure physical distancing?
 - The measures the parish will take to ensure proper cleaning & sanitizing.
- b. The Mass schedule, if altered to allow more time between Masses for cleaning or to provide for additional Masses, should be published and the revised schedule sent to the Chancellor.

4. CONGREGATION LIMITED TO 50 Person Maximum (including the Pastor):

- a. **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 are a rotation based on the first letter of last names; an online ticketing system; or the formation of fixed “community Mass groups.”
- b. 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.

- c. Each “community Mass group” will be **assigned a regular Mass time on Saturday, Sunday or a weekday. They may not attend a Mass at another time; nor should they sign up for more than one Mass.** Multiple and easily accessible options for sign-up should be employed, such as a combination of methods including online sign-ups, written sign-ups, email, and phone calls.
- d. 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 otherwise would wish to attend.
- e. **Signs** should be placed on the church doors to indicate the Mass schedule, provide a telephone number, and email address for people wanting to attend Mass.
- f. Physical distancing **guidelines should be posted** on the church doors and, where appropriate, elsewhere inside the church. The Diocese will provide a limited number of posters and social distancing “stand here” decals as templates for each parish to display.
- g. **A database record of the contact information is required** and a detailed list (“**attendance roster**” or log record) of those who attend each Mass must be retained. In the case of an individual who tests positive for COVID-19, the parish will be able to assist public health officials with tracing by contacting everyone who may have been exposed.

5. 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 masked, 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 of the requirement for **physical distancing** of two metres and for **sanitizing their hands**. Members of a single household may enter and exit together, since they do not need to practice physical distancing with each other.
- 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 or an usher/greeter wearing a mask will need to spray the hands of those entering.
- e. The ushers/greeters would also be responsible for pointing out available pews for seating.
- f. The ushers/greeters could also be responsible for spacing and limiting parishioners entering the line for communion.

6. PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL 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. The maximum of 50 people on the Church property (including church, hall, parking lot, etc.) at one time must be strictly followed.
- c. Smaller churches may not be able to accommodate 50 people at a time to allow for the required social and physical distancing requirements; therefore, the parish will need to determine the maximum occupancy permitted in their space.
- d. All churches should post the maximum capacity for occupancy number (50 or under) in a visible space on the doors of the building.
- e. 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 and wearing a facemask should be considered.
- f. Offertory counting procedures must be enhanced to include hand sanitizers, gloves, and a large well-ventilated area to ensure social distancing is respected.

7. ENTRANCES AND EXITS:

- 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 provide for their proper sanitation.
- c. When possible, **multiple exits** should be used at the end of Mass to expedite departure and minimize chances of people encountering one another.
- d. Once the **maximum of 50** persons in the church/hall/parking lot on the property is reached, no one else may enter. People who simply show up for Mass at the door 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.
- e. **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.
- f. **Holy Water and Baptismal fonts** remain empty.

8. 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.

9. CLEANING, SANITIZING AND DISINFECTING:

- a. Cleaning protocols must be defined, implemented and followed and a log of cleaning 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.
- c. An adequate **stock of hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies**, including disposable gloves for cleaners, should be readily available at the time of reopening.
- d. Janitorial staff, volunteers or others who are not vulnerable because of age or health conditions must clean and **sanitize the pews and other common high touch touched surfaces** immediately after every Mass.
- e. 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.
- f. **Parish cry 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.
- g. **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.

Thank you for your prayers and efforts as we work together to embrace a new Pentecost.

In Communion,



Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria