



COVID-19 Update for Religious Services

March 5, 2021

New Measures at a Glance

On Friday, March 5, the provincial government extended its Code Red Alert for all of Manitoba until March 25, but with a lifting of some restrictions.

The Archdiocese of Saint Boniface is therefore issuing the following clarifications, having obtained updated information from the official government liaison to communities of faith during the COVID-19 pandemic, in coordination with the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Winnipeg.

The changes in restrictions affect churches in the following manner:

- ***Masses and religious gatherings can be held at 25% of the usual capacity of the premises or 100 persons, whichever is lower.***

Further clarifications:

- Please note that in the case of weddings, funerals, prayer vigils for the deceased and baptisms, ***nothing has changed***. These events are still limited to ten people. Public Health Officer Dr. Brent Roussin points out that those attending these celebrations often converge from different locations across the province, and even from outside Manitoba. Moreover, given the strong emotions that accompany these celebrations, it is difficult to discourage hugs, kisses on the cheeks and handshakes, which all increase the risk of transmitting COVID-19.

Please note that when a baptism takes place during a regular parish Mass, it is not limited to ten people, but to 25 % of the usual capacity of the premises or 100 persons, whichever is lower, as with any regular parish Mass.

- We bring you ***a further clarification regarding places of worship***, which came from the official representative of the government with whom we are in constant communication: when the orders under *The Provincial Health Act* use the word “premises”, the Province means a ***complete building***.

Therefore, the nave and sanctuary of a church, an annex to the nave, the sacristy, the basement or the parish hall, **IF THEY ARE ALL PART OF THE SAME BUILDING**, can in total only accommodate 25% of the usual capacity of the premises or 100 persons, whichever is lower.

Furthermore, the representative told us that a public health inspector would be justified in levying a fine on any parish that celebrates a Mass or other religious service if it already has the maximum capacity of people in the church proper, **while having a second group of people** in the basement, sacristy, adjoining parish hall, etc. **EVEN IF THESE SPACES ARE SEPARATED BY DOORS.**

For further details please read the ***Reminder of Health Measures and Protocols Still in Effect*** below.

Thank you,

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Communications coordinator
Archdiocese of St. Boniface

Reminder of Health Measures and Protocols Still in Effect

A. Health Measures

- All attendees must wear masks.
- Ensure 2 metres between individuals or family groups (those who live in the same household).
- All high contact areas must be thoroughly cleaned after use.
- A sanitizing disinfectant must be applied throughout all spaces and all surfaces must be wiped down after each use. Especially: pews, doorknobs, bathrooms in particular and any usual high traffic areas.
- Liquid hand sanitizer must be made available at the entrances of church buildings.
- Hymnals should be removed from the church pews and stored.
- If parishes are not able to ensure sufficient sanitization, control of allowable number of people and proper distancing in the government prescribed manner, they must not hold religious services until they are able to do so.
- Persons at a greater risk of serious illnesses, e.g. people 65 years of age or older and individuals with chronic medical conditions, are encouraged to consider staying safe by avoiding public gatherings.
- Anyone who has even the slightest symptoms of sickness should remain home.
- Attendees must write their name on a contact tracing form upon arrival at the church and confirm that they do not have symptoms of COVID-19, nor does anyone in their household.

- Contact tracing information should be kept by parishes for at least 4 weeks.

We ask that parishes enact these directives in a compassionate and understanding manner. No one is prohibited from entering the church or attending Mass. All should be made welcome in our churches.

For further reference, please consult ***Walking Together Towards the Light*** – ***Liturgical Protocol No. IV At A Glance*** by [clicking here](#).

B. Protocols

1) Masks

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, the medical community (1), backed by ongoing scientific studies, has concluded that masks can slow the spread of the virus by protecting others from the respiratory droplets of people who are infected but don't have any symptoms.

While face shields can provide some protection from COVID-19, they are not better than a mask for reducing exposure to the virus, nor are they equivalent to wearing a mask and should not be used as a substitute. (2)

(1) Canada Public Health, Manitoba Public Health, World Health Organization, among others.

(2) Public Health Ontario, Ottawa Public Health, among others.

- Under a Code Red Alert, masks *must* be worn in all public places. In this case, people attending religious services are to adhere to this order.
- The wearing of masks is not required of: children under five years of age, a person with a medical condition that is unrelated to COVID-19, including breathing or cognitive difficulties; a person with a disability that prevents them from safely wearing a mask; a person who is unable to put on or remove a mask without the assistance of another person.

Members of the assembly who may be included in these categories are requested to inform Ministers of Hospitality of their condition, to indicate it

in their contact information and are invited to provide medical information such as a note from their physician.

- Parishes are asked to provide disposable masks free of charge to anyone arriving at a religious service without one, encouraging them to wear it. This should be done in a welcoming, loving, and compassionate manner.
- The Province has indicated to the Archdiocese that masks must be worn on entering and leaving the church, as well as when anyone leaves their pew to move around. This includes people processing for Communion, but also lectors and cantors or leaders of song walking to the ambo, extraordinary ministers of communion, people bringing up the offerings, those participating in the Procession and Recessions.
- Wearing a mask when seated is recommended. However, it is permitted to remove one's mask once seated, provided physical distancing is maintained.

2) Singing

- Cantors or leaders of song are required to position themselves at least 20 feet away from others. Diocesan policy states that ideally, there should be only one accompanying musician and one leader of song.

The more singers the more space is required. Even adding one extra singer means that space dedicated to music is unmanageable (6ft-Accompanist) (16ft-Singer) (16ft-Singer-16ft) (Congregation). Thus, if another person would like to assist with their voice, it is far more reasonable to schedule that singer for another Mass.

- The assembly is encouraged not to sing, and certainly not with full voice. However, if they choose to do so, they are invited to sing quietly, murmur, hum along or even lip-sync.
- Wearing a mask when singing decreases the danger of contagion even more (1).

- Singing by choirs is not permitted by the Province at this time because singing, to a degree much greater than talking, aerosolizes respiratory droplets extraordinarily well. Deep breathing while singing facilitates those respiratory droplets getting deep into the lungs of other choir members. Thus, the situation of choir members standing close to each other and singing with full voice produces a dangerous level of contagion.

(1) The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control has concluded that masks stop the spread of droplets from a person's mouth and nose when singing. Public Health Ontario notes that 35.7% of droplets remain suspended in the air after 30 minutes when singing.

3) Communion On the Hand or On the Tongue

- The highly recommended method for all people to receive communion is only on the hand at this time, in order to reduce the risk of contagion as much as possible (1).
- Communicants who hold to receiving Holy Communion on the tongue should be served at the end of the Communion line, with the minister using hand sanitizer after each communicant.

(1) *"The prudent option is to remain offering The Eucharist on the hand."* – Canadian Federation of Catholic Physicians and Societies executive member.

According to the Ad hoc Committee of Catholic Doctors for the US Catholic Medical Association, "Communion should be received in the hand, because newly available evidence shows that viral burden of COVID-19 is highest in oral secretions. (saliva on the tongue)" Please note that the CMA has changed its position as more conclusive scientific evidence was found. In March, it described Communion on the tongue as a low risk activity, but now has raised it to a level of a more dangerous practice.

4) Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms

- At present, weddings, funerals and baptisms are limited to *ten people*. This includes prayer vigils for the deceased.

Adequate physical distancing must continue to be provided for all participants.

Cohorts are not possible at this time.

Outside funeral gatherings. Please note that the maximum number of people gathered at the grave is ten people. However, more people can participate as long as they stay in a car. Groups of ten can take turns disembarking from their respective cars as long as each group waits for the previous group to board their respective cars.

One can also pay their respects while staying in a car, and by driving slowly near the grave.

Please note that the celebrant, as well as other persons assigned by the parish, such as a cantor or lector, or persons responsible for the livestreaming of the event, are NOT to be counted among the ten persons attending. In the case of funerals, staff from a funeral home are NOT to be counted.

Please note that a baptism taking place during a regular parish Mass is not limited to ten people, but to the approved capacity of the premises for any regular parish Mass.

5) Livestreaming / Broadcasting of Masses, Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms and other Religious Services

- The livestreaming of Masses is permitted. Parish teams providing the service can be composed of more than five persons if needed, but within reason, while following all safety protocols.
- The doubling up of responsibilities (cantor, musician, lector, altar server, etc.) is highly recommended.
- Persons responsible for livestreaming, as well as the liturgical team (presider, deacon, lector, altar server, cantor and musician), are NOT to be counted among the people allowed to attend.

When livestreaming a Mass, please keep in mind that it is *essential* that the proper necessary public health measures are maintained.

6) Nature of Religious Services

- **What is considered a Religious Service?**

The following are to be considered “religious services”:

- Mass
- Prayer Services, such as Adoration, Way of the Cross, Recitation of the Rosary or Divine Mercy Chaplet, etc.
- All celebrations of the Sacraments, i.e. baptisms, reconciliation, confirmation and weddings.
- Sacramental preparation sessions
- Retreats
- RCIA formation meetings
- Bible study, Lectio Divina and Faith Formation activities
- Catechism classes
- Catholic Women’s League Meetings
- Knights of Columbus Meetings
- Parish Pastoral Council Meetings

We remind parishes that proper sanitizing of hands and surfaces must occur, social distancing must be maintained, and contact information must be taken.

- **What is NOT considered a Religious Service?**

- Meetings organized for any other purpose where worship and faith development are not the main goal, such as administrative meetings, and youth games and activities nights are not considered religious services or faith based gatherings.

7) Social Work and Health Care

- The premises of a place of worship may be used for the delivery of health care or social services. Therefore, donations for the poor, etc. may continue to be dropped off at parishes. If collecting and distributing

foodstuffs for a food bank, curbside pickup using all safety precautions would be the best method.

- Parish drop-in centres, such as Bradbury Place at Holy Cross Parish, may continue to operate provided that they follow all safety protocols.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, reception of the Eucharist, as well as counseling, can be made available to parishioners. We invite the faithful to call their priest to set up an appointment to meet either within the church or at the parish office.

8) Parish Offices

- Parish offices may remain open, provided masks, social distancing, and sanitizing protocols are maintained.

Staff can still attend the workplace with proper social distancing, etc. Staff personnel who are able to work from home are encouraged to do so. Managers are encouraged to work with their staff to find ways, wherever possible, to work from home.