



Catholic Diocese of Victoria

Office of the Bishop

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October 6, 2022

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:26-39)

Dear People of God,

Our faith in Jesus calls us to love our neighbour in family, workplace, and social encounters, and in our liturgical life. When doing so, we must remember that Christ’s response to the question “who is my neighbour?” was the parable of the Good Samaritan. Encounters with the poor and wounded are the very essence of our encounter with the living body of Christ.

Loving our neighbour in our liturgical action during the Covid pandemic continues to be challenging as we seek to keep people safe and healthy, especially the vulnerable and immunocompromised. I want to thank the pastors, parish support staff, parish pastoral councils, and countless individuals in our liturgical assemblies for the huge efforts they make to provide a safe and healthy environment for gathering. I know how difficult it has been at times to meet provincial health authority requirements and to assist people in working together for the common good.

It is indeed beautiful to see and experience the efforts people make to think of others, when radical individualism and personal preference often want to disrupt the harmony and good will of the Body of Christ gathered in liturgy. Thank you so much to the pastors and parishioners who have selflessly made every effort in dialogue and prudence to take care of one another.

There is much we have learned and experienced by listening in a synodal way about how best to move forward. After consulting the Diocesan Health Care Committee and the Diocesan Liturgical Committee, I offer the following instructions. These are to replace *General and Liturgical Directives* issued on April 6, 2022.

1. The Catholic faith, following the Lord’s command “Do this in memory of me”, holds the sacred liturgy as the source and summit of the Christian faith. It offers us a way to participate in the love of God as a community, gathered on the day of the Lord’s resurrection, the first day of the week. I invite all the faithful to the right and responsibility of participating fully, consciously, and actively in the gathered Christian community celebration of the Eucharist on each Sunday that it is possible and safe to do so.

2. If you are sick with symptoms of Covid, the flu, the common cold, upper respiratory infections, or any other communicable disease, please do not come to church. This sacrifice is an act of charity, and a source of blessings for both you and your community.
3. Face coverings are highly recommended for all, and especially for priests, deacons, and ministers of Holy Communion.
4. Communion from the Chalice remains suspended at this time.
5. Ministers of Communion must sanitize their hand before and after the distribution of Communion.
6. Communion on the tongue is permitted, as per the norms of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2011). I am aware that distributing Communion in this manner will be challenging for many ministers of Communion. The wise and prudent choice for health and safety during flu season is to receive Communion on the hand.
7. Holy water may be restored to fonts and baptisteries, with the hope that it is changed frequently.
8. Collection of the offering may be resumed with the strong recommendation that the basket should not be passed from hand to hand, but rather presented by ushers and extended by a pole or stick.
9. The sign of peace with physical contact (i.e., handshake) may be resumed with people nearby. However, a reverent bow and the spoken words “Peace be with you” are recommended. Please respect your neighbours’ comfort levels. Families of course may continue to share the sign of peace in their usual way.
10. Hand sanitizer and/or hand washing stations are highly recommended at all entrances to church buildings.

My prayer is that these steps will allow us to wisely and prudently continue taking care of one another during liturgical assemblies and parish gatherings. Early in the pandemic, Pope Francis entrusted the world to the protection of Mary. Our Lady, Health of the Sick, pray for us!

In Communion,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Gary Gordon". To the left of the signature is a small blue cross symbol.

Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria