



Catholic Diocese of Victoria
Office of the Bishop

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GENERAL AND LITURGICAL DIRECTIVES
- updated March 11, 2022 -
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. As an act of supreme charity, the following people must also 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. DEFINITION OF A WORSHIP SERVICE

For clarity, a worship service is defined as a gathering that has worship as its primary purpose.

These include, for example:

- Mass, liturgical celebrations of the sacraments, and devotions (eg, adoration)
- Celebration of the Word in the absence of a priest
- Children's Liturgy of the Word programs that happen during a Mass

Gatherings such as the following may also be held according to the requirements for worship services. However, we strongly recommend that they are held virtually whenever possible:

- RCIA, catechism or youth group programs
- Parish Pastoral or Finance Council, CWL or Knights of Columbus meetings
- Receptions immediately following liturgical services

If such gatherings are held in person, pastors and administrators may choose to apply the requirements for non-worship gatherings (Section 7) if they so desire.

4. MAXIMUM ATTENDANCE AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING:

There are no capacity limits on attendance at worship services or other gatherings in church buildings. It is highly recommended that parishes continue to encourage physical distancing by blocking off pews, adding distancing markers to the aisles used during the Communion procession, posting reminders in the lobby, and other similar methods.

5. FACE COVERINGS:

The use of face coverings is now optional in church buildings. However, the continued use of face coverings is highly recommended as a prudent and wise choice to ensure the safety of all.

6. ENTRANCES AND EXITS:

Churches should continue to provide hand sanitizer at all entrances to the church. Holy Water and Baptismal fonts are to remain empty.

7. MEETINGS, EVENTS AND RECEPTIONS:

Church and hall rentals and other non-worship gatherings are permitted as long as all regulations of the latest “Gatherings and Events” Order of the Provincial Health Officer are followed, including **proof of vaccination requirements** (as verified by the BC Vaccine Card Verifier App) as applicable. The latest Order can be found online at:

<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>

Essential gatherings such as drug and alcohol support group meetings, or the distribution of food or other supplies to people in need, may happen in church buildings without any restrictions, as the regulations of the “Gatherings and Events” Order do not apply to these type of gatherings.

CELEBRATION OF THE MASS:

8. MUSIC:

Singing is permitted as long as all policies in the latest *Diocese of Victoria Music Ministry Covid-19 Prevention Plan* are followed. The latest version may be found online at

<https://www.rcdvictoria.org/news/responsetocovid19-0>. *The continued use of face coverings by*

all singers is highly recommended, as the forceful exhalations associated with loud singing increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

9. ROLE OF THE DEACON:

Provided the deacon is healthy and comfortable to exercise his diaconal role at Mass, he may function as a Deacon of the Word and of the Eucharist. For Communion, if the deacon receives from the Chalice, a second chalice is to be used, and the deacon must purify his own chalice, and not the celebrant's chalice.

10. OFFERTORY PROCESSION:

Gifts are to be prepared ahead of time, and the Hosts, water and wine must remain covered both before and during the procession. Parishioners are not to put their hosts into a ciborium directly. While a collection may be taken in whatever methods were used before the pandemic, parishes are encouraged to consider safer alternatives, such as providing a place for people to make their offering when they enter the church, and/or promoting the option of online/remote donations (PAD, credit card, e-transfer, etc.)

11. COMMUNION HOSTS FOR THE ASSEMBLY:

When placed upon the altar for the consecration, Communion Hosts should remain covered and be placed at some distance from the celebrant so that there is no danger of him breathing upon them. The priest is not to share his Host with anyone.

12. REFRAIN FROM BREATHING UPON THE BREAD AND THE WINE:

If this is their custom, priests are to refrain from breathing over the bread and wine for the consecration.

13. KISS OF PEACE:

Physical distancing must be respected and parishioners are to be reminded not to shake hands or hug each other, unless they are sitting together as a family unit. Continuing the sign of peace with a gesture, such as bowing, is recommended.

14. COMMUNION:

The continued use of face coverings by all people who are distributing Communion is highly recommended.

Communion from the chalice or on the tongue continues to be problematic in terms of transmission of disease. For the foreseeable future, until the pandemic is truly over, **Communion in this Diocese will continue to be distributed on the hand only and not from the chalice.** We are grateful for your patience and understanding if these are your preferred ways of receiving Holy Communion, and look forward to returning to these practices when it is safe to do so.

All people distributing communion are to apply hand sanitizer after receiving their own Communion and prior to distributing to others. Hand sanitizer is to be reapplied at the end of the distribution of Communion, and at any time if the fingers of the minister touch the hand of a communicant.

15. RECEIVING COMMUNION if a person cannot extend their hands:

A person with physical challenges or disabilities might not be able to extend their hands and therefore common sense and pastoral discretion is required

SACRAMENTS:

16. SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM:

The safest option for signing and anointing continues to be doing so with a cotton ball.

17. RECONCILIATION:

Because Confessional boxes and reconciliation rooms are often too small to respect physical distancing, a larger room or area of the church with clear visibility (in conformity with the norms established for Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment) or outside in an open space, may be used if either the priest or parishioner wish to do so.

18. CONFIRMATION AND FIRST COMMUNION:

Priests are delegated by the Bishop to celebrate Confirmation and First Communion until Covid-19 is over and provided the Restored Order of the Sacraments is maintained. The safest option for signing and anointing continues to be doing so with a cotton ball. “The use by the minister of an instrument (gloves, cotton swab...), does not affect the validity of the Sacrament” (Congregation for Divine Worship & the Discipline of the Sacraments, issued October 1, 2020).

19. SACRAMENT OF THE SICK / PARISH OUTREACH MINISTRY:

Priests / parish visitors must call the home or facility they will be visiting to determine the current regulations and guidelines in place, and must respect these.