



DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

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GUIDELINES ON THE RE-OPENING OF CHURCHES

June 13, 2020

We are still in the midst of a pandemic, and our primary concern must be for the life and health of the whole community. We must continue to pray for the people in our community and our world, as we begin to move forward and heal from the devastation of this pandemic.

Material Requirements

Wooden pews need to be wiped carefully, with an approved disinfecting solution, and dried promptly. For other areas and surfaces, disinfectant cleaning products should have 70% alcohol to kill the coronavirus. These products are readily available at grocery and department stores.

Directional signage/tape is to be placed on the doors/floors. Use one entrance door, fully accessible. One exit only, except in case of emergency. (NB, it is against the fire code to block emergency exits.)

Remove all hymn books, prayer books and reading material from the church. No printed bulletins at this time.

Post signs on the doors of the church regarding Mass times, Reconciliation, times for private prayer and adoration, and the screening protocols that are in place. The same information should be posted on your website and Facebook pages, and on your outgoing phone message.

Remove kneelers from the front. At this time, it is strongly recommended that communion is by hand.

Place hand sanitizer, preferably touchless, at entrance doors. (NB, parishes should have enough supply of PPE to remain open for the next weeks, not only for their first Mass with a congregation present.)

Place garbage containers at entrance/exit doors. Empty after each Mass.

Assess need/practicality of having an overflow area in the parish hall for Mass to be livestreamed.

Assess parish Sunday Mass schedules. Try to accommodate as many parishioners as possible, being mindful that the church needs to be cleaned and disinfected before each Mass.

Church washrooms are to be restricted to use only when absolutely necessary. No more than one person/family (living at the same address) at a time should use the washroom. Notices to this effect are to be posted outside the washroom. Handwashing signs are also to be placed in the washroom. Any washroom that is soiled must be closed pending cleaning with disinfectant.

Between Sunday Masses, only the tops and arms of pews need to be disinfected. Full cleaning and disinfecting of the church, including pews and kneelers, should be done at least weekly.

Weather permitting, doors are to remain open, with at least one usher attending.

No fans directed at congregants.

Recruit Ushers/Volunteers

- In larger parishes, pastors should assign a person or person to oversee the volunteers (janitorial crew and ushers) to ensure that the guidelines are being followed, capacity is monitored, and that the necessary sanitizing and cleaning is done before every Mass or other gathering. In smaller parishes, this role could be assumed by the pastor.
- **A special janitorial crew** to ensure the church is thoroughly cleaned before each opening of the Church. The COVID-19 virus can live on surfaces for 72 hours; if church openings are scheduled more than 72 hours apart, regular cleaning is required; thorough disinfecting is recommended, but not required.
- **Ushers**
 - **One outside, if needed:**
to monitor capacity,
to pre-screen (optional: did you take your temperature, otherwise please return home),
to direct people to proper entrance door.
 - **One at the inside entrance** (door propped open) to oversee all ushers, and liaise with the pastor, welcome parishioners.
 - **One or two to escort** to pews (every third pew only) and ensure safe traffic flow, physical distancing before and during Mass/Communion time. Those who attend with a personal mobility device should be placed in a designated area to allow a two-meter (six foot) space between each person.
 - **One or two to oversee the church facility** (pews clean/disinfected, washroom cleaned, holy water fonts empty/covered, sanitizer available, nothing left in pews, security of collection basket near the exit).

KEY POINTS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MASS

Ensure that physical distancing is maintained in the sacristy and in the sanctuary. The priest celebrating Mass is not to use a mask and gloves. It is recommended that people assisting at the altar wear masks, but it is not mandatory. Volunteers including janitorial crew and ushers who assist at Masses must wear face masks and disposable gloves; if necessary, these are to be provided by the parish.

There should only be one lector for each Mass who reads from the Lectionary. The pastor/deacon should read from the Book of the Gospels.

The use of extraordinary ministers of Communion is not encouraged at this time. The number of altar servers should also be limited.

For the congregation, the Pastor/lector should make announcements before Mass, noting some temporary changes including:

- No procession into the church, rather from the sacristy.
- No congregational singing. It is the Pastor's discretion whether to have a choir (with physical distancing), as this would encourage congregational singing.
- No sign of peace.
- Parishioners are to remain in their pews until ushered out for communion, exiting. Ushers will direct traffic flow. Each Pastor must determine how to organize this in his particular parish church, so that physical distancing is maintained as much as possible.
- There will be no collection/presentation of gifts. Collection baskets are to be provided near the exit door.
- Reception of Communion by hand is strongly recommended. Communicants are instructed to remove their masks while the person ahead of them is receiving Holy Communion. After the priest says, "The Body of Christ" and the communicant responds "Amen" (at a distance of two meters), the communicant then approaches the priest to receive communion.
- After Mass, parishioners are asked to exit quietly, maintaining physical distancing. Do not congregate at the doors of the church or in the parking lot.

For the priest celebrant:

- Parishes should not use the large host that is broken into pieces and placed in the ciboria. The priest should consume his own smaller host without sharing it with others.
- Ciboria should be covered and if there is no lid, a pall may be placed over the ciborium. If this is not possible, then an additional corporal with the ciboria, should be placed on the altar away from the celebrant.
- Only the celebrant of the Mass should drink from the chalice. If there is concelebration, then there should be intinction from separate chalice(s).
- It is recommended that the celebrant of the Mass purify his hands prior to and after distributing communion. This can be done by using the lavabo bowl filled with warm soapy water rather than hand sanitizer. This water could then be poured down the sacrarium or outside into the ground after Mass.

OTHER RITES CELEBRATED IN THE CHURCH

Since these rites take place in the church, the requirements for preparing the space, physical distancing, the use of music and procedures for liturgical ministers as they apply to the particular rite are to be observed.

Baptism

The baptism of infants and young children are celebrated in the usual manner. In order to respect physical distancing and limit the number of participants, it is recommended that baptisms not be celebrated during Mass at this time. Nor are they to be celebrated communally, i.e., with several families at a time. With the exception of maintaining physical distancing among family and friends, and the priest or deacon sanitizing his hands before and after the pouring of water and anointing, the Sacrament of Baptism is celebrated in the usual manner according to the Rite of Baptism. The water in the font is to be replaced after each baptism.

Christian Initiation of Adults

The Christian Initiation of Adults (including children of catechetical age) is celebrated during Mass, since the rite includes the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. The Reception into Full Communion is also to be celebrated during Mass. It is recommended that these rites not take place at this time during the Sunday Mass.

Marriage

Marriages may be celebrated in the church with up to 30% capacity. The norms for physical distancing pertain to all present with the exception of the bride and groom.

Reconciliation

Confessionals and Reconciliation Chapels

Most confessionals and reconciliation chapels are too small to ensure physical distancing. A larger room elsewhere in the parish complex should be used. A portable kneeler with a screen may be used by the penitent who wishes to remain anonymous, provided the penitent wears a mask. Disposable gloves are also recommended; otherwise, the penitent should sanitize hands upon entering and again upon leaving the room. If a confessional is used, an impermeable screen is to be placed between the penitent and priest. The screen is to be cleaned between each confession.

Funerals

Funeral Masses and Memorial Masses may be celebrated in the church with up to 30% capacity. Outdoor funeral services are limited to 50 attendees. Priests and deacons will collaborate with Funeral Home staff to take all the necessary precautions to ensure the health and safety of all who participate.

First Communion and Confirmation

The scheduling of First Communion and Confirmation for children is the responsibility of the local parish and the bishop's office. The norms for celebrating Sunday Mass apply to these celebrations.

CHURCH REOPENING: INFORMATION FOR PARISHIONERS

We look forward to welcoming our Catholic community home again!

Please contact your parish for information about their reopening schedule which will vary across the 44 parishes in the Diocese of St. Catharines. Church opening schedules will depend on each parish's readiness, including having a team of cleaners and other volunteers, and availability of sanitizing and other PPE.

Since COVID-19 is still a public health threat, Catholics are dispensed from their obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

Many parishes will continue to livestream Masses and other liturgical celebrations.

Churches may be open to a maximum capacity of 30%.

Funerals and weddings in churches may be celebrated to a maximum capacity of 30%. Outdoor funeral services are limited to 50 attendees.

Please take appropriate precautions including taking your temperature before leaving home to attend Mass, ensuring proper hygiene especially hand washing. If you have any symptoms that might be COVID-19 related, or if you have been in contact with someone suffering from possible or confirmed COVID-19 symptoms, please remain at home and contact your doctor/public health.

Screening and public health protocols are in place. It is strongly recommended that parishioners over the age of three wear a mask when attending any church service. BYOM.

There will be no Children's Liturgy of the Word at this time. Crying rooms will be closed.

We are taking precautions to protect the health and safety of everyone who comes into our churches. However, there can be no guarantee of complete protection from infection. There can be risks of contracting viral infection in large gatherings of people.

If you develop COVID-19 symptoms in the days following your attendance at Mass, please phone/email the parish office, in addition to contacting your doctor/public health.

Parish offices remain closed to the public at this time. Parish ministries, meetings and activities are still on hold.

Please address any questions or concerns to your parish, or you may direct them to the Diocesan Catholic Centre at diocese@saintcd.com.