

MEMORANDUM

Memo to: Parish Priests, Deacons and Pastoral Ministers
From: Monsignor Murray J. Kroetsch, PH, VG
Date: 19 July 2021
Re: Updated Directives Concerning Church Use

As the Province of Ontario enters Step 3 of the Reopening Plan (July 16, 2021) the ACBO has updated the *Worshipsafe Guidelines* concerning the use of our parish churches. These revisions have been made with caution, mindful that the pandemic has not come to an end, but aware of the large percentage of people in the Province who have been vaccinated.

We have also come to understand with advancement of medical studies into COVID-19 transmission, that simple touch is a very low means of transmission. Our concern for cleanliness must continue, but the most important element in preventing transmission must concentrate on the aerosol method of transmission. The most effective ways of dealing with aerosol transmission are:

1. Continue wearing masks;
2. Ventilate the air frequently and effectively in interior spaces, if possible;
3. Maintain reduced numbers of people in contained spaces with ongoing physical distancing.

VACCINATIONS AND ATTENDING MASS

The Holy Father Pope Francis has suggested that it is a moral imperative that people be vaccinated so as to prevent the potential for infection and the spread of COVID-19. All Catholics (clergy and laity) are urged to obtain both doses of an anti-COVID-19 vaccine. Should a Catholic wishing to attend Mass not yet have obtained his or her vaccination, they should take all precautions to see that they do not infect others and see to it that they obtain their vaccinations as soon as is possible. Those feeling ill or showing signs of COVID-19 infection should not attend Mass and should contact their physician or nearest hospital.

The following protocols are now to be observed in the Diocese of Hamilton. They replace previously issued directives, including the directives sent to parishes on July 14, 2021.

- The percentage capacity restrictions are lifted. Each church can now accommodate as many people as possible provided that physical distancing of two-metres (six feet) between individuals or family units is observed.
- Mask wearing remains required. Masks should be fitted properly to the face.
- Hand Sanitising, though not required, is strongly recommended for all entering the church.

- Cleaning procedures for pews, washrooms, confessionals, reconciliation rooms are relaxed so as to only require regular cleaning in accordance with pre-Covid-19 routines, with the only exception being when someone with suspected or known Covid-19 has attended, in which case the space should be disinfected as per the previous pandemic requirements.
- Churches should be ventilated where possible. This involves opening windows and utilising fans to exhaust air from the church.
- The use of holy water is still not permitted at the entrances of the church.
- Hymnals, missals and prayer books may be returned to pews; singing is permitted but only an instrumentalist and cantor are permitted to lead the singing. Choirs are not permitted at this time.
- Bulletins, envelopes, pamphlets and newspapers may again be distributed.
- Votive light stands may be re-opened, subject to notices requiring appropriate distancing of 6 feet (two meters).
- Crying Rooms and Small Chapels/Devotional Areas may be used again as long as 6 foot distancing (2 metres) per person or family grouping is maintained.
- Confessionals may be used. However, mask wearing will be required. Priests should employ double masking or use of the N95 mask so as to prevent contamination in closed confessionals. Confessionals should be aired out after each use.
- Collections may again be taken up using baskets in the traditional fashion. All Ushers involved in taking up collection should ensure that they wear masks while undertaking this task and use a collection basket with a long handle to maintain the 6 foot (two metre) distancing. The passing of baskets is discouraged. The collection of offerings at the door of the church may continue for the time being.
- Liturgical ministries (Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, Lectors, Altar Servers) are to be reintroduced as per pre-pandemic practice, as long as they maintain the six foot (2 meter distance).
- The Priest and ministers of Communion must sanitize their hands before and after distributing Communion.
- The individual dialogue with each communicant (*The Body of Christ/Amen*) is restored. (Both ministers and communicants must wear masks).
- Only the priest (and concelebrants) are permitted to receive Communion from the chalice.
- Communion on the tongue is again permitted, however only the priest shall be permitted to dispense Communion in this fashion. The congregation is to be informed prior to distribution of Communion that those who wish to receive the Eucharist on the tongue may approach the priest for Communion after all others have received. Should the priest make accidental contact with the communicant's tongue, he shall immediately cease distributing Communion, step back, apply hand sanitizer, and then return to continue to provide Communion.
- The cleansing of vessels takes place in the same fashion as prior to COVID-19.
- It is recommended that the one-way movement for church entry and exit be retained.
- The dispensation from the Sunday Obligation remains in effect at this time.
- The celebration of the Sacraments can now take place as prior to Covid 19.