

Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall
Return to Church - WorshipSafe Guidelines

June 10, 2020

The standards and recommendations outlined in this document come from the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario WorshipSafe Guidelines that have been developed with expert consultation. Minimum standards are provided which are prudent and in keeping with medical, legal and risk management advice, and that are, accordingly, to be implemented in all parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall. They are intended to be “best practices” for our Church and for the safety of our parishioners.

While implementing these directives provide no guarantee that viruses such as the Coronavirus COVID-19 will not be contracted, they are the best and most practical measures to ensure the safety of our people.

We recognize that some of the measures contained in these guidelines may feel strange or uncomfortable. However, in these unique days of pandemic, following reasonable restrictions to contain the virus is a matter of faith, charity and justice. We are mindful of the sanctity of every life as we use these guiding principles in our planning:

- I am my brother’s keeper. We are responsible for others. In justice, as well as charity, we must not recklessly endanger others, or cause their death.
- Love your neighbour as yourself.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in implementing these measures for the health and safety of our community. We also thank the faithful for their patience as we work together in partnership to join once again in prayer.

Government Notices & Orders

During this time of pandemic, government orders concerning closing of businesses and public institutions such as churches and church facilities must be observed and obeyed. Nothing in this direction should be construed as over-riding the lawful order of public authorities.

Should any public authority request that a church facility be closed due to health and safety concerns, such an order should be complied with and immediately reported to the episcopal vicar.

Communication/Additional Resources

Effective and frequent communication will be a key component of parish re-opening plans.

Norms Applicable to All Churches and Parish Facilities

Before opening the church, the Pastor must be satisfied that these guidelines can be followed. If there are concerns regarding the ability to follow these guidelines in his parish, he should consult with the episcopal vicar.

Implementing the plan

Each church and office shall designate a minimum of two persons to implement the guidelines and directives outlined in this document. A parish priest may be one of the two who takes on this role, particularly in smaller parishes; however, he must be able to fulfill this role without exception.

General Norms

Prior to the opening of churches and adjacent facilities, the following norms must be implemented in all Catholic churches, and where applicable, all parish halls and offices where the public may attend.

The Universal Application of Physical Distancing

In all cases, when community gatherings take place, or when individuals are using the church or other facilities, a physical 2 m (6 ft) distance, is to be strictly maintained. This is necessary to avoid:

- personal contact
- transmission of any particle fluid/spray from one's mouth or nose
- deposit residue on surfaces from one's hands or face.

Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

While the use of personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, plastic screens) does not guarantee that one will neither give nor receive a pandemic or other virus, they are, if used correctly, means of lessening the potential of transmission. Their use is, therefore, recommended in any situation where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

It is recommended that anyone stationed at an entranceway, where there will be a great number of people passing, wear a mask/face covering and disposable gloves (or ensure that hands are washed or sanitized on a frequent basis).

In order to mitigate the potential spread of the virus, the Chief Medical Officer for the Province of Ontario, is asking that all those over the age of 3 wear a mask/face covering when physical distancing is not possible. While not mandatory, they are highly recommended for the congregation.

Should anyone present become ill during Mass, they should be asked to leave and seek medical assistance. Anyone who might attend to the ill person should wear disposable gloves and a protective mask, and should further wash thoroughly after any contact, even if gloves and a mask are worn.

Temperature Monitoring

Those who will be involved in ministry during the Mass (or any other Sacraments) should take their temperature before arriving at the church. If the individual's temperature is at or above 37.8 C/100 F oral or 37.5 C/99.5 F forehead or they show ANY compatible symptoms, they must not enter the church and are asked to seek medical help. **(All priests should self-administer a temperature check and record their temperature prior to entering the church for Mass. If the priest has an elevated temperature, he should not celebrate Mass).**

Parishioners are strongly encouraged to self-screen before attending church, including taking their temperature. Those with a temperature at or above 37.5 C/99.5 F are asked to not attend Mass. Those who exhibit fever or any other indications of a viral infections are asked to seek medical attention before coming to church.

Positive Covid-19 Tests

Positive tests in clergy, staff, volunteers or parishioners should be communicated to the Archbishop, Vicars General (Fr. Leo Villeneuve and Fr. Kevin Maloney), Episcopal Vicar for that sector and Chancellor as soon as possible so that alternate arrangements for staffing can be made and a positive test can be communicated to the appropriate health authority. We will follow the direction of local health officials relating to the communication of positive tests publicly while not identifying any individuals. Please refer to archdiocesan resources on “Emergency Situations” for additional protocols regarding positive Covid-19 tests.

Capacity Control

On June 8 the Ontario government announced that places of worship may re-open starting on June 12. The limit on the attendance is 30% of capacity and physical distancing continues to be required. Even though many people may still choose to stay home, churches will face the challenge of determining how to ensure compliance with capacity restrictions. To help regulate capacity, parishes may wish to consider the following:

- a) Use of an online type reservation system for Mass (through EventBrite, SurveyMonkey, Sign-Up Genius, etc.) along with phone reservations for those without computer access.
- b) Designate Masses for particular communities e.g., Saturday evening Mass for seniors, Sunday 9 a.m. for those with last name A-G, 10:30 a.m. H-L, etc.
- c) First come, first served – line up similar to what is done at other businesses currently open with limited capacity.

It is recognized that none of these methods is perfect – it will remain a challenge to find the most efficient way to meet capacity restrictions in a pastorally sensitive way. However, once open, it is important that a volunteer be responsible for ensuring the church is not over capacity at any time.

Cleaning of Churches

All staff or volunteers engaged in cleaning should wear a mask and disposable gloves, wherever possible. In addition, hand sanitizer should be available if handwashing is not readily available. Masks are to be disposed of when dirty or no later than the end of the day or thoroughly washed in the case of reusable masks. Gloves should be changed as often as necessary (usually at the end of any task or after cleaning a washroom facility).

All surfaces (floors, seating, kneelers) are to be wiped at least once per week with warm water and an approved multi surface cleaner / disinfectant purporting to kill 99.9% of germs and viruses (note this would include products like Lysol, Pine-Sol, etc). It is recommended all pew fronts and the tops and sides of benches are to be wiped with a sanitizing agent after each event.

During the week, if the church is open for private prayer or for liturgies with small groups, it is recommended that seating be restricted to minimize cleaning areas. Disinfectant cleanser to be used should not be damaging to wooden surfaces, but should be germicidal, meaning having an alcohol content of 70% or 0.5% hydrogen peroxide or 0.1% sodium hypochlorite (bleach) or electrolyzed water (hypochlorous acid).

It is generally accepted that any surface contagion on floors, pews and other surfaces will live no longer than 72 hours. If there are gaps of 72 hours between the use of the church, no further cleaning/disinfecting need take place. When someone falls sick in the church, the area within a 2 m (6 ft) radius is to be thoroughly cleaned before it can be used again.

Church Entrances

Where possible, weather permitting, it is recommended that the doors of the church should be open to avoid contact with handles. If this is not possible, ushers, wearing masks and disposable gloves (if available), should assist. A single entrance should be used wherever possible. Where possible it is preferred that a different door be used as an exit.

Church Halls

Prior to opening a parish hall, the pastor will seek permission from the episcopal vicar. Halls should only be used for additional seating for Mass or for offering the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The same physical distancing guidelines should apply. An usher should be present in the hall to ensure compliance. Holy Communion should be distributed in the hall following the procedure noted in "Celebration of the Eucharist".

Confessionals

Most confessionals are too small to ensure physical distancing. Where available, a larger room elsewhere in the parish facility should be used. Penitents are encouraged to wear a mask/face covering. A portable kneeler with a screen may be used by the penitent who wishes to remain anonymous. Alternatively, the penitent may stand. Where physical distancing cannot be achieved, an impermeable screen is to be placed between the penitent and priest. The screen is to be cleaned between each confession.

Crying Rooms and Small Chapels/Devotional Areas

Unless it is possible to ensure 2 m (6 ft) distancing, these rooms are to be closed.

Disinfectant Hand Sanitizer Stations

Each church should have a minimum of two locations at the entrance and exit doors of the church. Each parishioner should be directed to sanitize their hands before entering the church. A volunteer may also assist with dispensing sanitizer. Dispensers should be cleaned and refilled regularly.

Elevators

Only one person (with an assistant, as needed) is to use the elevator, preferably with an attendant who will ensure that doors and handles are kept clean after each use.

Floors and Aisles

In high traffic areas (entrances and aisles) tape should be used to designate spacing of 2 m (6 ft) increments and also indicate the direction of movement. The tape should be inspected after every Sunday to ensure it is in good condition and remains visible.

General Safety

Prior to commencement of Mass, the ushers should ensure that all slip, trip and fall hazards are identified and corrected, all cleaning and sanitizing measures have been adhered to, all entrance and exit doors are in normal working condition, all signage is adequately displayed and all social distancing measures are functional, that is pew closures, floor markings, signage, etc.

Holy Water Fonts

Holy water fonts are to remain empty until such time as they may be used safely.

Hymnals, Prayer Books, Envelopes

To avoid surface contact, all hymnals, prayer books and other papers are to be removed from the pews at this time. All other printed material (pamphlets, newspapers, etc.) should be removed from the vestibule. Bulletins should be posted electronically and not distributed at this time.

Meeting Rooms

All adjacent meeting rooms are to remain closed during Sunday Mass.

Money Counters

Persons handling money from collections should wear disposable gloves or have access to hand sanitizer and be encouraged to wash their hands regularly.

Overflow Crowds and Standing Room (in the church)

This is to be discouraged unless there is sufficient space to allow for distancing and for aisles to be clear so that traffic is not impeded.

Posting of Notices/Announcements

It is important to post notices in prominent places at all entrances to the church (as well as through social media and the parish website) regarding the guidelines implemented during this time of pandemic. Announcements regarding the reception of Holy Communion, departure and other details can best be made prior to the beginning or conclusion of the liturgy. Please refer to sample notices/announcements provided by the archdiocese.

Sacristy

Entrance to the sacristy is to be limited to those who are required to prepare for the liturgy. If the room is small and does not allow for the required distancing, one person at a time should use the room. All surfaces in the room are to be kept clean. Persons cleaning any facilities or who are involved in sacristan duties before or after the liturgy should wear disposable gloves wherever possible.

Sanctuary

Seating in the sanctuary should be limited and arranged to ensure 2 m (6 ft) distancing.

Seating

During the pandemic, to ensure that physical distancing takes place, seating should be staggered in patterns to promote two metre (six-foot) distances. Seating patterns should avoid individuals sitting next to an aisle. Seats may be designated by tape markings. Families from the same household may be seated together but must be 2 m (6 ft) from any non-household members.

Seating for those with Special Needs

Those who attend church with a personal mobility device should be guided to a designated area with sufficient space to allow a 2 m (6 ft) space between each person.

Supervision

Churches should never be left open unsupervised. Compliance with physical distancing should be the responsibility of a staff member or volunteer. Refusal to comply should be reported to the pastor or member of the pastoral team.

Washrooms

Church washrooms are to be restricted to use when absolutely necessary only. (See sample wording in “resources”.) No more than one person/family (living at the same address) at a time should use a washroom. Notices to this effect are to be posted outside the washroom. Hand washing signs are also to be placed in the washroom. Any washroom that is soiled must be closed pending cleaning with an approved multi-surface cleaner/disinfectant that promotes killing 99.9% of germs and viruses. A sanitizing dispenser should be placed outside each washroom, wherever possible.

Water Fountains

Water fountains or coolers should be turned off for the duration of the pandemic. They should be clearly marked as being “out of service”.

Celebration of the Eucharist

The Assembly

All in the assembly (with the exception of the priest and ministers) are strongly encouraged to wear a mask upon the recommendation of the Ontario Medical Officer of Health.

Ministers of Hospitality

Ushers or ministers of hospitality are to be present before Mass at the entrance(s) to the church to direct people to the hand sanitizers and to their seats while observing physical distancing.

Prayers before Mass

Where it is the custom for the people to pray the Rosary or other devotional prayers before Mass, this practice may continue.

The Priest

The priest celebrating Mass is not to wear a mask or disposable gloves during the liturgy with the exception of the distribution of Holy Communion (when a mask may be worn if desired). However, he must wash/sanitize his hands before and after Mass and before and after distributing Holy Communion.

Music During Mass

Unfortunately, singing provides a significant opportunity for the projection of particles from the mouth. Parishioners attending Mass are asked not to sing at this time to minimize the potential spread of the virus.

A cantor (accompanied by a single instrumentalist) may sing at Mass as long as the cantor is a minimum of 3 m (10 ft) from anyone else while singing. It should be announced to the assembled prior to the start of the Mass that they should not sing.

In a church where physical distancing can be ensured between choir members, then such a choir is possible but only if the choir members are a minimum of 3 m (10 ft) from one another and any other person in the Church.

Entrance Procession

The entrance procession takes place directly from the sacristy. If the sacristy is located at the main entrance to the church, every effort should be made to maintain physical distancing (i.e., by having people seated away from the centre aisle). The cantor may sing an entrance hymn.

It is recommended that only the priest (and deacon) and possibly a single server (not vested) participate in the procession. The Book of the Gospels should be placed on the altar before Mass.

The Introductory Rites

The priest leads the Introductory Rites in the usual manner from the chair. It is recommended that the presiding celebrant should use a simple lectern for the prayers rather than have a server hold the book.

Liturgy of the Word

The Liturgy of the Word takes place in the usual manner. In order to minimize contact with the Lectionary, it is recommended that only one lector (not vested) proclaim the Scripture readings from the Lectionary already placed on the ambo. The lector may be seated in the assembly and should be close to the ambo. The Psalm is sung by the cantor at another lectern. Following the second reading, the lector removes the Lectionary so that the priest (or deacon) can proclaim the Gospel. No candles are used for the Gospel. The Creed is professed and the Prayers of the Faithful are offered. The petitions may be announced by the priest at the chair.

Children's Liturgy of the Word

The celebration of the Children's Liturgy of the Word is not permitted during the pandemic.

Offertory

The bread and wine are not presented in procession as usual. The bread and wine are placed on the credence table near the altar before Mass. If the credence table is placed beside the altar, there is no need for a server to assist at the altar.

The monetary collection is to be received at the doors of the church at the beginning or the end of Mass where people can place their donations in baskets supervised by ushers from a safe distance.

Credence Table

In addition to all that is needed for the Eucharistic Prayer and Communion, hand sanitizer should be placed on the credence table to be used by the priest and ministers before and after distributing Holy Communion.

Vessels on the Altar

It is recommended, where possible, to place the ciboria containing hosts for the assembly at some distance from the priest's chalice and paten. If the ciboria have covers, these may remain in place during the Eucharistic Prayer.

Eucharistic Prayer

The Eucharistic Prayer is prayed by the priest with the assembly making the usual responses and acclamations. Whenever the priest is praying with hands joined, it is important that his hands not be near his face.

Communion Rite

The Greeting of Peace is maintained; however, no sign such as shaking hands is permitted during the pandemic. A simple bow of the head towards one's neighbour may be offered as a sign of peace.

Holy Communion is distributed by the priest and extraordinary ministers of Communion. All ministers of Holy Communion are to sanitize their hands before distributing the Eucharist.

Concelebrants are to receive Holy Communion by intinction and the principal celebrant (or the last to receive) consumes the Precious Blood directly from the chalice. If the number of concelebrants is small, and there are sufficient chalices, then each concelebrant should use an individual separate chalice. The Deacon, at this time, does not receive from the chalice.

The dialogue between the Eucharistic Minister and communicant occurs at a 2 m (6 ft) physical distance. After the dialogue, the communicant approaches the Eucharistic Minister who carefully places the Body of Christ in the communicant's hand **without touching the person**.

Upon the strong recommendation of medical authorities, Holy Communion is received only in the hand at this time. (Since each communicant has the right to receive communion either on the tongue or in the hand, the traditional practice of the option of receiving on the tongue will be restored as soon as the public health situation allows for that). Communicants are instructed to remove their masks, using the straps and without touching the front of their masks, while the person ahead of them is receiving Holy Communion.

It is desirable that the priest remind the people that they are to place one open hand upon the other to reverently receive the Sacred Host.

Ushers need to direct people to the Minister of Communion to ensure physical distancing. Depending on the layout of the church, it may be necessary to distribute Holy Communion to one section at a time so that distance is maintained when people are both coming forward to receive and when they are returning to their seats. Pastors will need to train the ushers beforehand and a simple announcement will need to be made until people are used to this new procedure for the Communion procession.

Following the distribution of Holy Communion, the remaining Eucharist is placed in the tabernacle in the usual manner. All vessels are placed on the credence table, to be taken by a server or sacristan to the sacristy following Mass. There they will be washed with soapy water.

Communion to the Sick and Homebound

The pyxes which have been prepared with hosts are placed on the credence table before Mass. After the Prayer after Communion, they are presented to the ministers who will bring Holy Communion to the sick and homebound. When giving the Eucharist, they are to observe the same procedures (e.g., hand washing) as when distributing Communion during Mass.

Concluding Rites

The concluding rites take place in the usual manner. Any necessary announcements may be made. In particular, people are to be reminded to place their offerings in the baskets provided and to follow the direction of the ushers or ministers of hospitality when exiting the church in an orderly way, while maintaining physical distancing. Parishioners are instructed to leave the church without spending social time with the priest and fellow parishioners at the door or in the parking lot. The use of printed bulletins shall be suspended so as to reduce physical contact.

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 with small communities, according to the number of people permitted by health authorities. The norms for physical distancing pertain to all present with the exception of the bride and groom.

Reconciliation

Opportunities for the celebration of Reconciliation are to be posted for the faithful. An appropriate location where physical distancing can be maintained should be chosen. For those waiting to celebrate the sacrament, physical distancing must be observed.

Funerals

Funeral Masses may be celebrated in the church, according to the number of people permitted by health authorities. 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

At present, First Communion and Confirmation are not able to take place. When larger gatherings are permitted, communication will be shared with parishes regarding these sacraments.