



Re-Opening the Churches for Masses

July 2, 2020

Restoration of Public Masses

General Principles:

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a serious threat to physical health. In response, public authorities are right to place limits on gatherings, to discourage unnecessary activities, and to call for physical distancing. At the same time, for Roman Catholics, access to divine worship and to sacraments is of high importance for their spiritual good and the overall well-being of the faithful. How can spiritual care, including public Masses, be responsibly offered, especially as peak restrictions on public activities begin to be relaxed in phases? With proper safeguards to prevent infection, and integrating the scientific guidance of public health authorities, it will be possible to safely provide the Mass and the sacraments to the faithful in this period.

The following is based on current guidance issued by the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health authorities. These guidelines also integrate the requirements of the Catholic Church for the valid and licit celebration of the Mass, in accord with Catholic teaching, liturgical law, and canon law.

These Guidelines are intended to be implemented during Alert Level 2 in the Diocese of Grand Falls, Newfoundland and Labrador. “COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person, mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Spread is more likely when people are in close contact with one another (within about 2 meters).”¹ “It may be possible that a person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object, like a packaging container, that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes, but this is not thought to be the main way the virus spreads.”¹

The following norms should be observed in our churches and other public spaces.

1. Baptismal fonts and holy water fonts must remain empty.
2. Water for baptism must be changed and blessed before each baptism. As always, blessed water should be properly disposed of in the ground.
3. Vessels must be washed after each Mass in hot soapy water.
4. All liturgical vestments, including server albs, are to be regularly cleaned.

5. High use areas within the church must be wiped down with disinfectant after each liturgy. This will include pews, chairs, and ambos. Please see attached worksheet.
6. Handrails, door handles, push plates, and knobs must be wiped down after each liturgy. Doors might be propped open to lessen contact.
7. Restroom facilities must be sanitized after each liturgy and regularly.
8. All hymnals and missalettes (and other items) must be removed from the pews and stored for the duration of the pandemic.
9. “Cry Rooms” must be closed and locked. Those parishes who utilize these spaces for families with small children must make clear that these rooms are not available.
10. Parishes must prohibit any large gatherings before or after Mass.
11. If pastorally advantageous or possible, a temporary adjustment in the weekend Mass schedule might be considered to ensure proper social distancing. Perhaps add a Mass on Saturday evenings and/or Sundays.
12. Hand sanitizer must be available throughout the Church. If possible, non-touch containers such as those used in hospitals.
13. An individual or several persons must be designated to sanitize the Church after all celebrations. One of them must maintain the detailed log of what has been sanitized (see attached).
14. Communication is critical to successfully implementing these Guidelines. Weekend Bulletins should focus mainly on informing our parishioners about the changes to the way Mass will be celebrated during the pandemic and what will be necessary if they choose to participate.

Alert Level 2: Public Masses with a limited number of persons and strict physical distancing

During Alert Level 2, limits on public gatherings remain in place. Health authorities also recommend frequent hand hygiene, vigilance in maintaining physical distancing, and the use of face coverings in public. Anyone feeling sick should stay home, and anyone who has been in close contact with a COVID+ individual should self-quarantine for 14 days.

Physical distancing calls for avoiding “close contact” with those outside one’s household. “Close contact” generally means avoiding being within 2 meters of another person, especially if this will last for 15 minutes or more. Reception of the sacraments is important for the faithful in the midst of this pandemic, and so the same guidelines apply: one must generally avoid being within 2 meters of others. However, when necessary, a momentary interaction presents an acceptable risk, especially if other precautions are taken. Given how the virus is thought to spread (principally via respiratory droplets from sneezes and coughs), this risk is lower for brief encounters than in cases of prolonged contact.

A. General Provisions

1. The faithful are dispensed from the obligation to attend Mass during this phase.
2. Encourage those who are at higher risk from COVID-19 (i.e. those who are older or who have underlying health conditions) to stay home. As circumstances allow, a visit from priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to bring them the Eucharist may be possible.
3. Tell the faithful that anyone with a cough of any sort, and anyone feeling sick, should not come to the church for a visit or for any ceremonies.
4. All in-person Liturgies of the Word for Children are prohibited.
5. Place hand sanitizer near the entrances to a church. Encourage those entering and exiting to perform hand hygiene.
6. Regularly clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces in the church.
7. In accord with current public health recommendations, the faithful are strongly encouraged to wear cloth face coverings when in public, including when they come to church. Cloth face coverings should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or anyone otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.

B. Limiting the Size of the Congregation & Physical Distancing

During Alert Level 2, Churches are restricted to gatherings of 50 people **or** the number of people who can gather while remaining 2 meters apart at all times – **whichever is fewer**. This number includes the Priests and the Liturgical Ministers. Therefore:

1. Recommendation: Masses could be scheduled with greater frequency.
2. Attendees must register with the Parish Office by Thursday in order to attend Mass on the following weekend. Once the maximum number has been reached, a list of Attendees for the following Mass (either later that same weekend or the following week) should be started. A record must be kept of those who will be attending in the event that Contact Tracing is necessary. Ushers must be given a Master List of Attendees and only those on the list may attend.
3. Consider delegating someone to oversee the strict implementation of these Guidelines.
4. There will be no “drive-in” or outdoor Masses.
5. Strict social distancing must be maintained:
 - a. The faithful must maintain a 2 meter distance from each other at all times.
 - b. Use tape to close off rows of seating in the church, in order to guide the faithful to sit at least 2 meters from each other (for example, allow seating every third row).
 - c. Members of a single household do not need to practice physical distancing with each other and so may sit together in the same row. This also includes a group arriving in a single private vehicle. However, each member is counted individually when determining the total number of persons.

- d. In areas where the faithful might stand in line (for example, waiting to go to confession or to receive Holy Communion), place tape on the floor to indicate proper spacing between persons.
- e. Station ushers at the entrances of the church to help “direct traffic,” to ensure that the faithful keep 2 meters from each other while entering and exiting the building. (Members of a single household may enter and exit together, since they do not need to practice physical distancing with each other.)
- f. Perhaps leaders could dismiss the congregation by rows at the end of Mass to avoid crowding at the exits.
- g. If all the available spaces are filled, do not admit additional people to the church building.
- h. Remind the faithful to maintain physical distancing everywhere on the church property (on the church steps, in the parking lot, etc.).
- i. Develop a plan for restroom use: limit the number of people who enter a restroom at the same time, and place tape on the floor outside of the restroom to indicate where people should stand in line to wait for the restroom, while maintaining a 2 meter distance from each other. In addition to regular restroom supplies, disinfectant spray should be available in the restroom.
- j. Choirs are not permitted. There will be no congregational singing. One musician is permitted to play background music before Mass, during the Preparation of the Gifts, during the Distribution of Communion and following the Dismissal.

C. Specific Provisions for the Parts of the Mass

- 1. A priest with a respiratory infection of any kind should avoid celebrating public Masses or administering sacraments during this phase. The same holds for other ministers who might serve at a Mass (Readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion) as well as for sacristans, ushers, etc.
- 2. The priest celebrant and other ministers should **not** wear masks or gloves during the celebration of Mass. Instead, they should remain more than 2 meters from the congregation during the entirety of the Mass. In such circumstances, there is no substantial risk of infection.
- 3. To the extent possible, the other ministers (lector) must maintain a 2 meter distance from the priest and from each other, except as provided below.
 - a. The priest should place the missal on a stand at the chair when he recites the presidential prayers, rather than having a server hold the book.
 - b. Maintain a proper distance in the sacristy.
 - c. Given the configuration of the church, modify the procession’s route in order to maintain a 2 meter distance from members of the congregation. If it is not

- possible to maintain a 2 meter distance from people, the processions may be eliminated.
- d. Before Mass, the Book of Gospels is placed on a table near the Presider's chair. The Presider will proclaim the Gospel and preach from the Presider's Chair.
 - e. The offertory procession (bringing up the gifts) should be omitted.
 - f. Before Mass begins, a small table should be placed near the Altar with Altar breads, wine, water and all the vessels needed for the celebration. Altar Servers are not needed.
 - g. The lavabo should be done by the priest alone, without assistance at the table near the altar.
 - h. Special provision should be made for the collection -- baskets should not be passed through the Church by ushers nor should they be passed from person to person. As an alternative, collection baskets can be placed near the entrances to the church to allow people to make their offering.
 - h. For the consecration of Altar Breads for the Communion of the Faithful, these breads should be placed on a paten and on a second corporal towards the side of the altar. This allows the priest to offer the words of consecration directly over the Altar Breads he will consume, with the other Altar Breads on the altar but not directly in front of the priest as he prays the Eucharistic prayer.
 - i. For the elevation at the doxology, if a deacon is present, he may stand alongside the priest and elevate the chalice. Since this action is brief, he need not remain 2 meters from the priest while doing so.
 - j. The sign of peace is offered by a respectful bow.

4. The Distribution of Holy Communion

- a. At the start of Mass, or at a suitable point during Mass, the priest should explain that, for those who desire to receive Holy Communion, they may do so at the appropriate moment, but that those who wish to remain in their places may do so. He may add that the faithful should maintain a 2 meter distance from each other as they come forward for Holy Communion.
- b. After the priest acclaims: Behold the Lamb of God...and the people respond: Lord I am not worthy...the priest holds the Consecrated Host before the people and Declares: The Body of Christ and the people respond: Amen. This communal Declaration and Response with replace the individual Declaration and Response during the Communion Procession.
- c. The Precious Blood will not be distributed to the faithful, nor should the faithful receive the Eucharist by intinction. (A deacon or a concelebrating priest, if present, may receive by intinction.)

- d. The Priest and the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are required to wear non-surgical masks for the distribution of Communion. Communicants are asked to lower their masks before the Host is placed in their hand.
- e. Holy Communion may not be distributed with gloves, nor may it be received in the hand if a member of the faithful is wearing gloves. Priests may need to make this point clear to the faithful before the distribution of Holy Communion.
- f. The priest and all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer) immediately before distributing Holy Communion.
- g. People come forward and receive communion in the hand. Communion on the tongue is not permitted at this time.
- h. At the conclusion of the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest (and any other ministers) return the remaining Consecrated Hosts to the tabernacle, and then perform hand hygiene (e.g., with hand sanitizer).
- i. The Mass concludes as normal.

Alert Level 1

1. Alert Level 1 is the new normal.
2. Consideration of lifting long-term public health measures will depend on:
 - a. evaluation of transmission patterns of COVID-19;
 - b. availability of an effective vaccine and/or treatment; and a strong public health system.

GUIDELINES FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY

COMMUNICATION

1. Communicate ahead of time with the entire parish. Give the people a preview of what social distancing or other precautions will be in place. Mail a letter from the pastor, send an e-mail blast, and/or post a video on the parish website or Facebook page.
2. Especially let them know the revised capacity of your church. The number of people will be limited by space and civil decree. Advise them on any plans requiring reservations and ushers counting people at the doors.
3. Parishioners may not be able to sit in their “usual spot” or capacity may be limited. Parking may be rearranged.
4. Let them know if masks may be required or if hand-sanitizer will be available.
5. Advertise any new Mass schedule or additional Masses

LITURGICAL MINISTERS

1. You will still need greeters and ushers. How will they be trained? These volunteers should be aware of any new procedures. Moreover, they should anticipate the need to gently deal with some chaos and fear for the first few weeks. What will they look for? They are not there to “police”, but some rules might put the people at ease.
2. You will need a full contingent of liturgical ministers, perhaps even more Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to distribute the Body of Christ.
3. Educate all liturgical ministers so that they, in turn, can model good practices.

SETTING THE TONE

1. Give thanks to almighty God for what he has done for us!
2. Do not simply begin with “Today is the XXth Sunday in Ordinary Time...” Acknowledge what they are feeling. Prepare a written, heartfelt “welcome back” and express why it is so good for all of us to gather once again around the Lord’s Table.
3. Acknowledge the fact that we are all still very cautious and it will take time to get back to the ways we once did things – if things will ever be the same again.
4. Your assemblies have been watching Mass on television and will need encouragement to fully participate again (even through masks).
5. Mention any restrictions, such as, no handshake at the Sign of Peace or any changes to the distribution of Holy Communion.
6. Use music that makes the assembly feel “at home.”
7. Do not fail to mention those who are sick especially those suffering from COVID-19.
8. Do not fail to mention those in the parish who may have died since we last gathered together, particularly those who have died from the virus.
9. Do not fail to mention that we remain thankful for healthcare workers, first responders, and essential workers.
10. Do not fail to thank all those in the parish who have been so generous in responding to the needs of the poor, the hungry, and the unemployed.

MUSIC MINISTRY

1. Temporarily, music ministry may be limited to one instrumentalist to provide a spiritual ambiance but not to lead the assembly.
2. Remove hymnals and missalettes from pews and store them. Produce a simple, disposable worship aid for every Mass.
3. Parts of the Mass (Penitential Rite, Gloria, Psalm, Holy, Holy, Acclamation of Faith, Great Amen and Lamb of God) normally sung are to be recited. The Gospel Acclamation is to be omitted.

4. Consider the need for longer instrumental music during the Communion Procession.
5. Clean the keyboard, cantor stand, and instruments between Masses.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE MASS

1. Bread and wine should continue to be kept from public areas (brought only from the credence table).
2. Priests, deacons, and all liturgical ministers should model good hygienic practices before, during, and after Mass. Presiders, deacons, and EMHC's may continue to discreetly use hand sanitizer before Mass, before the Communion Procession, and after Mass.
3. When the liturgical day permits, consider using the new Mass texts from Pope Francis – “Masses for Various Needs and Occasions: In the Time of Pandemic.”

¹ These guidelines have been compiled from several sources: CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/reopen-guidance.html>; THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/practical-considerations-and-recommendations-for-religious-leaders-and-faith-based-communities-in-the-context-of-covid-19>; FEDERATION OF DIOCESAN LITURGICAL COMMISSIONS, A Synopsis of Pastoral Considerations for the Reopening of Churches and the Resumption of Public Masses <https://fdlc.org/covid>; Thomistic Institute (Dominican House of Studies in Washington): <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/580e5b23579fb3fdc10ab03c/t/5eab382772d9460d3e375c76/1588279335659/Guidelines+for+Mass+%284.28.2020%29.pdf>