



Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall **Return to Church - WorshipSafe Guidelines**

February 16, 2021

The standards and recommendations outlined in this document come from the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario WorshipSafe Guidelines (Revised December 1, 2020) 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 two-metres (six feet) distance and employment of the use of masks and appropriate hygienic measures are 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, a crucial and necessary means of lessening the potential of transmission.

Anyone stationed at an entranceway, where there will be a great number of people passing, or where administering temperature monitoring, must wear a mask and disposable gloves.

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.

Persons with Exemptions from Wearing Masks

Children under the age of two are not required to wear masks. Other people may be exempted by from wearing masks according to the directives of health authorities. The dislike of wearing masks, age or other condition is insufficient for the purpose of being exempted from wearing masks while attending at Mass or any other service.

Those without exemptions should be told to wear a mask and masks should be made available to them. Those with valid exemptions should be seated in an area where easy access to them for communion may take place. The priest or extraordinary minister should bring them Communion and they should be asked to wear a mask only for the brief period of receiving Communion, removing same to consume Communion. This exercise is only intended to last a few seconds at most and is requested so as to protect both the parishioner and the priest/extraordinary minister of Communion.

Where there is strict impossibility to wear a mask, arrangements for Communion should be made with the parish priest so that a safe means of distribution can be ensured.

Those with exemptions should be encouraged to strictly maintain social distancing at all times.

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 (Msgr. Leo Villeneuve and Msgr. 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.

Contact Tracing

It is mandatory that each parish maintain a list of all attending parishioners including their contact information. The Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall requires that such lists shall be retained for two months. Any list for a celebration attended by a person who within the next 48 hours tested positive for COVID-19 shall placed with parish financial records and maintained for a period of six years.

Cleaning of Churches

All staff or volunteers engaged in cleaning should wear a mask and disposable gloves. 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. 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%. 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 two metres (six feet) 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.

In order to avoid surface contact, all printed material such as bulletins, pamphlets and newspapers should be removed. Areas for the sale of religious articles should be closed.

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 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 and disposable gloves. Alternatively, the penitent may stand. The penitent should wipe the door handle with disinfectant upon leaving the room. 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.

Disabled Area

Those who attend church with a personal mobility device should be placed in a designated area with sufficient space to allow a two metre (six feet) space between each person

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 inspected for use, cleaned and, refilled if it is empty, before each liturgy.

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 two metre (six feet) 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.

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 requirements for entering the church and participating in any liturgical celebrations. Notices should include the following directives:

- If you feel sick or your temperature is elevated, or you are experiencing any of the following symptoms (list the symptoms) you are asked to refrain from entering the church.
- You are reminded that if you are sick or your health is compromised, you are not obligated to participate in Sunday Mass.

- Masks properly worn must be in place at all times save for the act of consuming the Host, but only after moving a recommended two metres (six feet) from the Eucharistic Minister dispensing the Host.
- Be sure to use the hand sanitizer before entering the church.
- Be sure to follow the guidance of the ushers/ministers of hospitality and sit only in the designated places to ensure physical distancing at all times.
- Avoid touching your face or other persons.

The notice may also include information regarding overflow seating or additional Sunday Masses being provided in the Parish on Sunday. Announcements regarding the reception of Communion and egress can best be made during and at the conclusion of the liturgy.

Sacristy

Entrance to the sacristy is to be limited to those who are required to prepare for the liturgy. Social distancing must be maintained while in the sacristy. 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.

Sanctuary

Seating in the sanctuary should be limited and arranged to ensure two metres (six feet) 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 two metre (six feet) from any non-household members.

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. 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 must wear a mask upon the recommendation of the Ontario Medical Officer of Health.

The numbers of persons permitted to attend Mass may be limited or fixed by Governmental authorities.

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.

Altar Servers

Employment of altar servers (if they are to be used at all during the pandemic) should be restricted to the carrying the cross in any processional or recessional or in use of the Sanctus bells. Altar servers used in such capacity should wear masks at all times and sanitise their hands before and after Mass. They should have use of a vestry that gives them appropriate two metres (six feet) social distancing space. Altar servers should not be used to assist with handling any vessels on the altar or in holding the missal, etc.

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.

Parish Team Requirements

The priest celebrating Mass must wear a mask during the processional, recessional and when distributing Holy Communion or at any time when he is less than two metres (six feet) from any person.

Deacons, if they participate in the Mass, must respect social distancing and must also wear masks at all times when not speaking.

Lectors and any other participating lay ministers or servers must wear a mask at all times save if they are doing one of the readings, in which case they may remove the mask to speak as long as they are at least three metres (ten feet) from the assembly or others.

Priests, Deacons and Extraordinary Ministers distributing Holy Communion must wash their hands before and after Mass and before and after distributing Holy Communion.

Extraordinary Ministers of Communion must receive their communion while masked, and must retreat from the priest no less than two metres (six feet) to remove their mask and receive Communion, and then move forward again with mask on to receive the ciborium from the priest to distribute communion.

Music During Mass

Unfortunately, singing is a major way in which moist particulate is pushed out of the body through breathing and the projecting of one's voice. Parishioners attending at Mass shall be advised to not sing on account of the potential spreading of airborne contagion.

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.

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 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. If a priest is to be within two metres (six feet) of a server or any other lay minister or volunteer, masks must be worn by the priest, the server and any lay minister/volunteer.

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 proclaim the Scripture readings from the Lectionary already placed on the ambo (though up to two Lectors may read if they reside in the same household). 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. Masks may be removed for any reading or speaking part of the Mass as long as a three metres (ten feet) distancing is observed.

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 monetary collection is omitted at the usual time and the bread and wine are not presented in procession as usual. The 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

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. If a server is involved, both the Priest and the server must wear masks when within two metres (six feet) of one another.

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, the deacon and extraordinary ministers of Communion. All ministers of Holy Communion are to sanitize their hands before distributing the Eucharist.

All priests and Extraordinary Eucharistic Ministers must wear masks when receiving the ciborium and distributing Holy Communion.

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.

Procedure for Distribution of Holy Communion

Prior to distribution of Holy Communion, the Priest should remind the assembly of the procedures for distributing and receiving Holy Communion in accordance with these guidelines. A suggested means of addressing the assembly is as follows:

"To receive Holy Communion, please come forward maintaining the two metres (six feet) distance between one another, to the place marked at the end of the aisle. Then, after "The Body of Christ", and "Amen", step forward and the priest or extraordinary minister of Communion will put the Host in your hand, without touching your hand. Then move to one of the places marked on either side, and withdrawing your mask, receive Our Lord."

Ushers need to direct people to the Minister of Communion to ensure physical distancing and the wearing of masks. 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.

Distribution involves communicants queuing to receive Holy Communion being directed by ushers to a place two metres (six feet) from the person distributing Holy Communion. At this point the person distributing shall say to the communicant "the body of Christ", to which the recipient responds "Amen". Then, without removing their mask, the recipient shall approach the person distributing and have the Host placed in their hands (one hand placed reverently upon the other). On receiving the Host, the recipient shall move to an area designated approximately two metres (six feet) from the point of distribution, and the same distance from any other communicant. There they shall briefly remove their mask and consume the Host, before returning to their designated pew.

It is recommended that marking tape be placed on the floor to indicate the various places where queuing to receive and receiving Holy Communion are to take place so as to assist the ushers in providing direction.

Upon the strong the recommendation of medical authorities, 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).

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 warm soapy water and a hot rinse.

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. Such presentation should take place with priest placing the sealed pyx upon a cloth for the ministers to receive. Again, both priest and minister should be masked. 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 and continuing to wear their masks. 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 restricting the number of attendees, for preparing the space, physical distancing, the wearing of masks, 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 wearing of masks by all present, including the priest or deacon, 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 and wearing masks pertain to all present. The bride and groom are not required to physical distance from each other and during the exchange of vows they are exempt from wearing masks provided they are at least two metres from others (i.e. the witnesses, the celebrant and the other guests).

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 and the wearing of masks 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

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.