



14 September 2020

COVID-19 UPDATE FROM BISHOP FABBRO (Update #11)

The Episcopal Council met on 10 September 2020 to review the Directives for the Reopening of Churches issued 17 June 2020. There is one change to the Directives that were issued; see below 2 d). In addition, the following points are raised here as important reminders to all the faithful of the Diocese.

1. Vigilance is Needed

It is important to realize that the pandemic will last long into 2021 and possibly into 2022. We must remain vigilant in following the Directives issued for the safe return to our places of worship. These directives are based on the work of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario and reflect in some cases the law, in others, best practices. We cannot relax our efforts or take short-cuts with these Directives, so that we can assure the safest places possible when our communities gather across the Diocese.

2. Transmission of Droplets

Scientists and health care officials are becoming more and more aware that the virus is spread most frequently by the transmission of droplets from saliva and from breath. We need, then, to pay particular attention in four areas.

- a) **Face Masks:** Many health officials have made it mandatory to wear face masks in public buildings, which include places of worship. Municipalities and other jurisdictions have given these directives the force of law through the passage of by-laws. A separate policy for face masks is attached as **Appendix I** to this Update.
- b) **Singing during Mass:** Singing by the congregation is forbidden since it is realized that voices can transmit droplets as far away as 3 metres (10 feet). No parts of the Mass are to be sung, including the Responsorial Psalm, so that the congregation may rightly participate at these moments. This particular directive allows short pieces of music to be played only while the Cross-bearer and priest process to the altar from the sacristy, and for the preparation of the gifts, the Communion procession, and the recessional. A cantor, accompanied by a single instrumentalist, may sing before and after the Mass as people gather and disperse. Cantors must be 3 metres (10 feet) from any person, including the instrumentalist. Other singers who join the cantor in the choir loft (or area) must maintain the same physical distancing from each other and must wear masks.
- c) **Holy Communion only in the Hand:** The transmission of droplets also informs the directives of the Ontario medical officials and others across the country that forbid the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue. Not only could the Blessed Sacrament be contaminated in a ciborium, but the minister of Communion could be at risk to contract the virus, thus more likely to spread it to others even in that moment. A recently published Letter from Rome regarding the return to the Eucharist during the COVID-19 pandemic refers to the right of the faithful to receive the Body of Christ but makes it clear that Bishops have the authority to forbid the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue provisionally. "In times of difficulty (e.g., wars, pandemics), Bishops and Episcopal Conferences can give provisional norms which must be obeyed. ... These measures given by the Bishops and Episcopal Conferences expire when the situation returns to normal" (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, 2020).

d) Holy Communion to the Home-bound: Our Directives state that Holy Communion could be taken to parishioners who are home-bound only by a person who lives with them. Since the Government of Ontario has relaxed certain restrictions for people in a “social circle” or “bubble”, it seems appropriate that **Communion may now be taken by people who are within the home-bound parishioner’s social circle or close contacts, but these requests must be approved by Pastors on a case-by-case basis.** Pastors giving this permission should interpret the directive narrowly so as not to put such parishioners, who are already at risk due to age or a pre-existing condition, at greater risk.

3. General Absolution

The permission to celebrate General Absolution (Form III of the Rite of Penance) is extended to the end of Advent, 24 December 2020.

4. Perpetual Adoration Chapels

Many places are experiencing a reduced number of people available for perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It may be prudent to limit the hours of adoration. Pastors, in conversation with those who normally are present for adoration, may choose to limit hours, for example, from 7:00 a.m to 7:00 p.m.

5. Working with our Catholic Schools during COVID-19

Questions have been raised about pastoral activities in our Catholic schools, with respect to what the various Boards of Education allow, and what should be expected from parish teams. A document from the Pastoral Services office, written in consultation with various representatives of our Boards, was reviewed by the Episcopal Council and is attached as **Appendix II** to this Update.

6. Pastoral Care in our Hospitals

The Episcopal Council considered appropriate ways by which parishes can offer care in our hospitals. First of all, pastoral care in our hospitals is contingent on each hospital’s own directives, and so, will vary from place to place. Father Daniel Bombardier, Episcopal Vicar for Windsor and Essex, provided an outline of “best practices” which may be helpful to those who are able to engage in hospital ministry, local directives notwithstanding. His outline is attached as **Appendix III** to this Update.

Attachments

I - Policy on the Use of Face Masks during Church Celebrations

II - Working with our Catholic Schools during COVID-19

III - Protocols used for the Anointing of the Sick in our Hospitals



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