

# **Guidelines for Safe Re-Opening of our Churches**

## **Diocese of Antigonish**

### **Guidelines**

The standards and recommendations outlined in this document 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 Diocese. 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 the COVID-19 virus will not be contracted, they are the best and most practical measures to ensure the safety of our people. While these guidelines may feel strange or uncomfortable, following reasonable restrictions during this pandemic to contain the virus is a matter of faith, charity and justice. 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 celebrations in our churches.

### **Government Notices & Orders**

During this time of pandemic, government orders concerning closing of public institutions such as churches and church facilities must be observed and obeyed. Nothing in this direction should be construed as contradicting 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 diocese.

### **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 Bishop.

### **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 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 virus, they are, if used correctly, a means of lessening the potential of transmission. Their use is 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, all those over the age of two are encouraged to 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.

### **Monitoring for Symptoms**

Those who will be involved in ministry during the Mass (or any other Sacraments) should ensure that they do not have any symptoms of the virus, e.g., cough, fever, headache, etc. If the individual shows ANY compatible symptoms, they must not enter the church and are asked to seek medical help. Parishioners are strongly encouraged to self-screen before attending church. Those who exhibit fever or any other indications of a viral infection are asked to seek medical attention before coming to church.

### **Capacity Control**

Once churches are permitted to re-open and physical distancing continues to be required, 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. Have people register at a computer as they enter the church.

d) Ask those who attend Mass to bring a card with their name and phone number so that we have a record of those who attend a particular Mass.

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.

Each parish will keep a list of those who attend for a period of 30 days including date and times of Mass.

### **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, and 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. A cleaning checklist shall be kept for each building.

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.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>

Keltic Rentals and Tools, 70 Dodd St., Sydney N.S. B1P 1T6 (902)-539-6006

Wood Wyant (agent) Randy MacLeod (902) 331-0416

Home Hardware - there are various outlets in most communities.

If you have the names of other suppliers, please share that information.

### **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. Place garbage containers at entrance/exit doors. Empty after each Mass.

### **Church Halls**

Prior to opening a parish hall, the pastor shall ensure that all requirements are met. 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.

### **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. The penitent who wishes to remain anonymous may use a portable kneeler with a screen. 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**

These rooms are to be closed during the pandemic.

### **Disinfectant Hand Sanitizer Stations**

Each church should have a minimum of two locations at the entrance and exit doors of the church. Parishioners 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 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, i.e., pew closures, floor markings, signage, etc.

## **Holy Water Fonts**

Holy water fonts are to remain empty until 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. Parish meetings may be held provided all restrictions are considered, e.g., masks, physical distancing, cleaning regime, staying home if you are sick, keeping attendance, etc.

## **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.

## **Parish Offices**

Parish offices may be opened provided all restrictions are considered, e.g., masks, physical distancing, cleaning regime, and staying home if you are sick, keeping attendance, etc.

## **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.

## **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. Those who are cleaning the 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-meters (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 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 (with the exception of the priest and ministers) are strongly encouraged to wear a mask. No fans should be directed at the Assembly which could spread any droplets.

#### **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 and Deacon**

The priest and deacon are not to wear a mask or disposable gloves during the Mass. However, they must wash/sanitize their 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. Prior to the start of the Mass, it should be announced to the assembled 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. They may just bow to the altar instead of kissing it. 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 *Excerpts from the Roman Missal* otherwise known as the Book of the Chair 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 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 the ambo. Following the second reading, the lector removes the Lectionary so that the deacon or priest can proclaim the Gospel. No

candles are used for the Gospel. The Creed is professed and the Prayers of the Faithful are offered as usual.

### **Children's Liturgy of the Word**

The celebration of the Children's Liturgy of the Word shall not take place 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 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. The deacon maintains physical distancing throughout the Mass and he does not elevate the chalice.

### **Communion Rite**

The Greeting of Peace shall not take place during the pandemic. Holy Communion is distributed by the priest and extraordinary ministers of Communion (only if necessary). 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 shall be received only in the hand at this time. Communion on the tongue will resume after the pandemic.

If using them, those receiving Holy Communion 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 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 may be consumed or 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**

In the present pandemic, spiritual communion will be encouraged for the sick and homebound. Thus, communion to the Sick and Homebound will not take place for the time being.

### **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 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**

Weddings 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.

### **Daily Mass**

Daily Mass may take place but all restrictions must be followed.

**Checklist:****Entering & Exiting the Church/Seating the Congregation**

It is important that Ushers/Ministers of Hospitality conduct their duties in a kind, thoughtful and charitable manner. We want to ensure that those we welcome back will want to join us again each week.

**Ushers**

All should wear masks and disposable glove if available (or sanitize frequently). An Usher captain should be designated at each Mass to ensure that all tasks are reviewed and performed.

**Prior to Mass**

The Presider, and all liturgical ministers must ensure that they have no symptoms of the virus, e.g., cough, fever, headache, etc. If an individual has any of these signs, the individual must not enter the church and should return home.

Ensure that entrance signs are posted and situated in visible positions at each entrance to the church before every Mass.

Ensure signage is posted at washrooms and in areas that may be closed (e.g. Crying room, etc.)

Designated Usher should ensure physical distancing is maintained.

Ensure that people entering are not mixed with people leaving and that where possible each group use doorways designated for entering and exiting. Ushers may assist by directing people so that physical distancing is maintained.

Review the floor and seat markings to see that they are all in good repair and order.

**Showing People to Their Seats**

Families residing in the same household and individuals should be seated in pews so that there is 2 meters of space between them and next person/family seated. You may wish to seat families in one area with plenty of space for them. Remember to skip rows to ensure the two-meters (six foot) distance is met.

**Collection**

Ensure that the locations of collection baskets are properly noted and draw people to them to make collection. The collection basket should be situated in proximity to the entrance or exit and a person should be assigned to safeguard the basket maintaining physical distancing while people are exiting.

**Communion**

Ushers must keep people distanced two - meters (six-foot) distance from each other and regulate the pace of the Communion procession. Each usher should remain two meters (six-foot) distance

away from persons they are directing. People should be directed by row and, when returning, the people must return to the row they departed.

### **Exiting**

After dismissal, the usher will direct parishioners to exit row-by-row beginning at row nearest the exit (recommended). Parishioners must be reminded to maintain two-meters (six-foot) physical distancing.

### **Overflow Room**

Where the use of the church/parish hall will be used for overflow use, the parish hall seating is to be laid in a manner consistent with the social distancing norms being used in the main church. An usher should be present if an alternative area is opened.

### **Sick Parishioners**

If an usher notices that someone is demonstrating visible signs of COVID 19 including, but not limited to cough, dizziness, fatigue, shortness of breath, aching muscles, confusion – that person and any related parishioner should be asked in a tactful way to leave and seek medical treatment.

### **Traffic Flow**

Entrance and exit doors must be strictly used. Ushers must see that people entering are not mixed with people leaving and that each group use doorways designated for entering and exiting. In smaller churches, Ushers must coordinate traffic flow to maintain order.

Some role of traffic officer might be instituted to have people come in and out so as not to collide or violate the two-meters (six-foot) distance space rule, wherever possible.

Ushers must review the floor and seat markings to see that they are all in good repair and order