



Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria

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MEMO

Date: January 20, 2022
To: Clergy, Parishes, Religious, and Staff
From: Bishop Gary Gordon
Re: Update on non-worship church gatherings

As we endeavor to keep our communities safe, and for the well-being of the common good, we wish to clarify and update the restrictions on non-worship gatherings in church buildings.

Throughout this document, references are made to sections of the “*Gatherings and Events*” and “*Face Coverings*” Orders of the Provincial Health Officer. These documents may be found online at:

Gatherings & Events: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-gatherings-events.pdf>

Face Coverings: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-face-coverings.pdf>

To begin, **the requirements for worship services remain the same: proof of vaccination is not required** to attend worship services (reference *Gatherings and Events* E1). However, **face coverings must be worn** by all people aged 5 and older except in certain specific situations (reference *Face Coverings* 13 and 14), and **attendance is limited to 50% of the seated capacity** of the space used for the service (*Gatherings and Events* F3).

All sections of the latest *General and Liturgical Directives* and *Music Ministry COVID-19 Prevention Plan* (available at <https://www.rcdvictoria.org/news/responsetocovid19-0>) must also be followed. We call your attention especially to the recommendations for physical distancing:

It is highly recommended that parishes encourage physical distancing by blocking off pews, adding distancing markers to the aisles used during the Communion procession, posting reminders in the lobby, and other similar methods.

and the masking requirements for musicians:

Members of the choir who are not singing solos must wear face coverings at all times, including while singing.



The current Orders of the Provincial Health Officer do not strictly define the term “worship service” in order to accommodate the wide range of worship practices in use by various faith communities in the province. For clarity, therefore, in the context of current Roman Catholic faith practices in Canada, **we will define “worship service” as a gathering that occurs in the church building that has worship as its primary purpose.** These include, for example:

- Mass, liturgical celebrations of the sacraments, and devotions (eg, adoration)
- Celebration of the Word in the absence of a priest
- Children’s Liturgy of the Word programs that happen during a Mass

Gatherings such as the following may also be held according to the requirements for worship services. However, we strongly recommend that they are held virtually whenever possible:

- RCIA, catechism or youth group programs
- Parish Pastoral or Finance Council, CWL or Knights of Columbus meetings
- Receptions immediately following regular liturgical services
 - Please note that **the current “*Gatherings and Events*” Order specifically prohibits gatherings for wedding receptions, funeral receptions, and for the purpose of acknowledging or celebrating a significant event (eg, baptism receptions) (*Gatherings and Events* D3).** As such, these type of gatherings are not permitted in church buildings at this time.

If such gatherings are held in person, Pastors/Administrators may choose to apply the requirements for non-worship gatherings (see below) if they so desire.

Non-worship gatherings in church buildings are now permitted as long as all regulations of the latest “*Gatherings and Events*” and “*Face Coverings*” Orders of the Provincial Health Officer are followed. Under the current Orders, these regulations include:

- Wedding receptions, funeral receptions, and gatherings for the purpose of acknowledging or celebrating a significant event are not permitted at this time (*Gatherings and Events* D3)
- Face coverings must be worn by all people aged 5 and older except in certain specific situations (*Face Coverings* 2 and 3)
- No more than 50% of the capacity of a place may be used for an event (*Gatherings and Events* D9 and D10)
- Gatherings for performances, lectures or presentations must be held as seated events (*Gatherings and Events* D14)
- Participants of gatherings may not dance, unless they are performing at an event, or are a child or youth participating in a program for children or youth (*Gatherings and Events* D19)
- For events other than programs for children or youth, the organizer of the event must obtain proof that all participants aged 12 and older are vaccinated or have an exemption (*Gatherings and Events* E2 and E3)



- For programs for children or youth, the organizer of the event must obtain proof that all people aged 12 or older who are:
 - leading, supervising or assisting with the program on a volunteer or honorarium basis, or
 - required to be present with the child or youth who is participating are vaccinated (*Gatherings and Events* E8)
- **Organizers who are checking proof of vaccination must use the BC Vaccine Card Verifier App to do so** (*Gatherings and Events* E5)
- If the organizer of the event is not the Pastor/Administrator, the Pastor/Administrator must be satisfied that the organizer is aware of the conditions and requirements of the “*Gatherings and Events*” Order and has the capacity to fulfill them (*Gatherings and Events* D23)

Please note that **essential gatherings such as drug and alcohol support group meetings, or the distribution of food or other supplies to people in need, may happen in church buildings without any restrictions.** The regulations of the “*Gatherings and Events*” Order do not apply to these type of gatherings (*Gatherings and Events* GG).

We have posted a revised version of the *General and Liturgical Directives* online at <https://www.rcdvictoria.org/news/responsetocovid19-0> that includes these clarifications and updates. As always, please do not hesitate to contact the Chancery with any questions or concerns.

Thank you for all your hard work and the sacrifices you have made and continue to make for the good of people of the Diocese of Victoria. We pray for God’s grace as we continue to journey together through this pandemic, and that this latest wave may come to an end soon.