



Catholic Diocese of Victoria
Office of the Bishop

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July 2, 2021

Restart Step 3 GENERAL AND LITURGICAL DIRECTIVES
for Churches during Covid-19
To be followed by all Parishes in the Diocese of Victoria

Dear Pastors, Administrators, Deacons, and People of God,

The move to Step 3 of BC's Restart is a joyous occasion for the people of this province. Thanks to the efforts and sacrifices we have all made, and to the continued uptake of the vaccine, we have now reached a point where we can gather and worship in much the same way we did before the pandemic: with full capacity in our churches; with music and singing; with hymnals and bulletins; with altar servers and extraordinary ministers of Communion; and with gatherings, meetings and events before and after Mass.

However, Covid is not over yet. Through these many months, we have learned that many of the practices we detailed in previous Directives are effective tools to prevent the spread of communicable diseases, including physical distancing, good hand hygiene, mask wearing, enhanced cleaning and sanitizing, and improved air quality and ventilation. Although many restrictions are no longer required, each pastor or parish administrator will determine the best practices in their parish to keep our churches safe places to gather for our elders, people with vulnerabilities, and all members of our community.

As we enjoy these happier days, we continue to pray for the many people and places which are still suffering the devastating effects of this pandemic. With God's help, may they soon find peace and healing so that our global joy may be complete.

In Communion,

Most Reverend Gary Gordon
Bishop of Victoria

1. DISPENSATION FROM THE OBLIGATION to attend Sunday Mass:

Parishioners in the Diocese of Victoria *remain dispensed* from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass at a church. The life of prayer, scripture reading, and remote participation in the live

streaming liturgy are indispensable for keeping our faith nourished during the pandemic when health and safety concerns prevent some from going to church.

2. CHARITY, care and concern for others:

All those attending Mass do so at their own risk and must take responsibility for protecting themselves and others. Before attending Mass, each person must carry out a health check by reviewing the entry requirement and key questions which are on the poster at <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/posters/help-prevent-spread-covid-19-entry-check-workers?lang=en>. Any person who does not pass the health check must not attend Mass.

As an act of supreme charity, the following people must also stay home for the sake of others in the community:

- a. People with Covid-19, or those who live with someone with Covid-19.
- b. People who have been exposed to someone with Covid-19 and are waiting for test results.
- c. The sick, including those with ANY symptoms or feelings of sickness, especially if they have a fever, upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms.
- d. Those who have recently travelled outside of Canada, or who have arrived from places in Canada that are experiencing significant Covid-19 outbreaks.

The following people are encouraged to stay home:

- a. People who live with someone with upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms.
- b. People, especially the elderly (over 65 years of age) with underlying or comprised medical conditions.
- c. Family members who live with elderly people or those at risk

3. FACE COVERINGS:

In accordance with the Province's guidance, masks are recommended for all people 12 and older who are not yet fully vaccinated – that is, two weeks have passed since their second vaccine dose. Some people will choose to continue to wear a face covering even after being fully vaccinated, and this choice must be respected.

4. ENTRANCES AND EXITS

Churches should continue to provide hand sanitizer at all entrances to the church. Holy Water and Baptismal fonts are to remain empty.

5. MEETINGS, EVENTS AND RECEPTIONS

Church and Hall Rentals, parish meetings, education programs, wedding and funeral receptions, and other social gatherings (outside of the Mass) are now permitted as long as all regulations in the latest Gatherings and Events Provincial Health Order are followed:

<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>

CELEBRATION OF THE MASS:

6. USHERS AND GREETERS:

Priests may decide if they wish ushers and greeters to wear face coverings while carrying out their ministries.

7. ROLE OF THE DEACON:

Provided the deacon is healthy and comfortable to exercise his diaconal role at Mass, he may function as a Deacon of the Word and of the Eucharist. For Communion, if the deacon receives from the Chalice, a second chalice is to be used, and the deacon must purify his own chalice, and not the celebrant's chalice.

8. OFFERTORY PROCESSION:

Gifts are to be prepared ahead of time, and the Hosts, water and wine must remain covered both before and during the procession. Parishioners are not to put their hosts into a ciborium directly. While a collection may be taken in whatever methods were used before the pandemic, parishes are encouraged to consider safer alternatives, such as providing a place for people to make their offering when they enter the church, and/or promoting the option of online/remote donations (PAD, credit card, e-transfer, etc.)

9. COMMUNION HOSTS FOR THE ASSEMBLY:

When placed upon the altar for the consecration, Communion Hosts should remain covered and be placed at some distance from the celebrant so that there is no danger of him breathing upon them. The priest is not to share his Host with anyone.

10. REFRAIN FROM BREATHING UPON THE BREAD AND THE WINE:

If this is their custom, priests are to refrain from breathing over the bread and wine for the consecration.

11. KISS OF PEACE:

Physical distancing must be respected and parishioners are to be reminded not to shake hands or hug each other, unless they are sitting together as a family unit. Continuing the sign of peace with a gesture, such as bowing, is recommended.

12. COMMUNION:

Communion from the chalice or on the tongue continues to be problematic in terms of transmission of disease. For the foreseeable future, until the pandemic is truly over, Communion in this diocese will continue to be distributed on the hand only. We are grateful for your patience and understanding if these are your preferred ways of receiving Holy Communion, and look forward to returning to these practices when it is safe to do so.

All people distributing communion are to apply hand sanitizer after receiving their own Communion and prior to distributing to others. Hand sanitizer is to be reapplied at the end of the distribution of Communion, and at any time if the fingers of the minister touch the hand of a communicant.

All people distributing Communion must either stand behind a clear Plexiglas screen or wear a face covering.

13. RECEIVING COMMUNION if a person cannot extend their hands:

A person with physical challenges or disabilities might not be able to extend their hands and therefore common sense and pastoral discretion is required.

SACRAMENTS:

14. SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM:

During the ritual, it is occasionally necessary to approach the child / family, and at these times the Celebrant must wear a face covering. This applies to the following acts: signing of the child; anointing with oil of Catechumens; pouring of water; anointing with Chrism; and gifting of the candle. The safest option for signing and anointing continues to be doing so with a cotton ball.

15. RECONCILIATION:

Because Confessional boxes and reconciliation rooms are often too small to respect physical distancing, a larger room or area of the church with clear visibility (*in conformity with the norms established for Responsible Ministry and Safe Environment*) or outside in an open space, may be used if either the priest or parishioner wish to do so.

16. CONFIRMATION AND FIRST COMMUNION:

Priests are delegated by the Bishop to celebrate Confirmation and First Communion until Covid-19 is over and provided the Restored Order of the Sacraments is maintained. For Confirmations, the Celebrant must wear a face covering when they approach the candidate. The safest option for signing and anointing continues to be doing so with a cotton ball. *“The use by the minister of an instrument (gloves, cotton swab...), does not affect the validity of the Sacrament” (Congregation for Divine Worship & the Discipline of the Sacraments, issued October 1, 2020).*

17. SACRAMENT OF THE SICK / PARISH OUTREACH MINISTRY:

Priests / parish visitors must call the home or facility they will be visiting to determine the current regulations and guidelines in place, and must respect these.