



February 22, 2022

Update on Covid Protocols and the Dispensation from Sunday Mass

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As you know, the Government of Saskatchewan has recently revised its COVID-19 protocols. In particular, the public masking health orders will be removed as of February 28. I want to thank everyone for their cooperation with the various measures that have been taken in our parishes over the last two years to keep everyone as healthy and safe as possible. We are learning to live with COVID and how to work together swiftly to contain and fight significant threats to public health when they occur.

Considering the imminent lifting of the public masking orders, I ask that the following be observed by clergy and people in the Diocese of Prince Albert. All prior COVID instructions from the Bishop's Office are hereby to be replaced by the following protocols, effective February 28, 2022.

General Principles

1. Face masks are no longer required in churches, church halls, or parish offices.
2. People, however, are free to wear masks if they wish during the liturgy or at other times.
3. People are asked with charity and kindness to respect other people's comfort level and decision to wear a mask or not.
4. **The dispensation from attending Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation is lifted beginning with the First Sunday of Lent, i.e., Sunday, March 6, 2022.** Of course, we know that the Sunday Eucharist is not merely an obligation but is the "source and summit" of the Christian life! Since apostolic times this celebration has been the weekly memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection. As Christians, we need the nourishment of Christ's Word and his Body and Blood to sustain us and give us life. The general dispensation was necessary during the worst time of the pandemic when there were limits on how many could attend Mass and while vaccines were still being made available.
5. As has always been the case, anyone with a "serious reason" is excused from this obligation (*Catechism* # 2181). The *Catechism* lists sickness and the need to care for small children as examples of possible serious reasons. In the case of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, such reasons still include:
 - a. anyone who is sick, symptomatic, or has been recently exposed to COVID;
 - b. anyone with significant health risk factors that requires them to avoid public spaces;
 - c. anyone who cares for those with significant risk factors;
 - d. anyone who cannot attend Mass through no fault of their own because of frailty or old age.

6. We encourage parishes that have been livestreaming liturgies to continue to do so for the sake of those who are ill or unable to attend.
7. Continue to promote and maintain proper hand hygiene by having hand washing/sanitizing posters visible and placing hand sanitizer stations in convenient and accessible locations in churches, halls, and offices.
8. Continue to sanitize workspaces and church pews between services and meetings.
9. Make every effort to encourage respiratory etiquette (e.g., coughing or sneezing into a bent elbow, promptly disposing of used tissues in a lined garbage bin).

Eucharist and Sacraments

10. As above, Priests and people are no longer required to wear a mask during the celebration of the Liturgy.
11. An individual may choose to wear a mask if he/she is more comfortable. They cannot mandate it for others.
12. Holy Water is to be blessed and made available in the usual Holy Water fonts in Churches and to be renewed regularly. (Holy Water that is no longer clean is disposed of respectfully in the Church's sacarium or in the soil or garden.)
13. Altar servers are to be invited to resume their ministry at Mass and celebrations of the other Sacraments. They are asked to sanitize their hands before they touch the sacred vessels or books.
14. Readers and cantors should also continue to sanitize the microphone before another minister arrives at the ambo or lectern.
15. The usual processions at Mass with the Priest, Deacon, and assisting ministers take place (Entrance, Gospel, and Exit).
16. The Priest and people, the choir, and cantors all may sing without masks. Extra precautions that are in place in some parishes (e.g., plexiglass screens in front of the choir) are good ideas and can be maintained if desired.
17. The collection should still be taken up in a safe way (i.e. with long handles baskets or by people depositing their offering in a box before Mass.) The congregation is not to hand the basket from person to person around the church.
18. The Sign of Peace at Mass is to be given in a non-contact form, e.g. a slight bow to one another or a friendly gesture.
19. The ciborium with Hosts for the people is to be covered with a lid or pall during the Preparation of the Gifts and during the Eucharistic Prayer. If there are concelebrating Priests, the chalices too should be covered with a pall or purificator.
20. For the time being, Holy Communion will still be given to the people only under the species of the Consecrated Host. The Priest is required (for the integrity of the sacramental sign) to also receive from the chalice. If there are concelebrating Priests, they are to do this by intinction or to receive from separate chalices.
21. The Priest, Deacon, or Extraordinary Ministry of the Eucharist are to sanitize their hands before touching the sacred vessels and when they happen to touch a communicant.
22. The ordinary Communion procession is reinstated everywhere. The congregation is to line up before the altar to receive Communion, rather than the Priest and minister going to the pews to distribute Communion.
23. The Communicant may receive Holy Communion on the tongue or on the hand. If appropriate in some parishes, pastors may ask those who wish to receive on the tongue to come at the end of the Communion line to minimize hand sanitizing.

24. At Baptisms, Weddings, Anointings, and Funerals, the above principles are to be applied in parallel instances.
25. In celebrations at hospitals or nursing homes, clergy and people are to follow the COVID protocols in those institutions as they may have particularly vulnerable populations.
26. For the time being, Priests should continue to wear a mask when visiting the sick. If anointing the sick, a Q-tip is to be used. Those visiting the sick or shut ins or who bring Holy Communion to these vulnerable persons should also wear a mask for the time being unless they are members of their own family.

Considerations for Lent and Holy Week

27. Ashes may be blessed and distributed on Ash Wednesday. With sanitized hands, ashes may be sprinkled on the head without touching the person.
28. Palms are blessed in the usual way on Palm Sunday.
29. The Washing of the Feet is optional after the Homily at the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper and can be omitted. Priest and people may be masked for this rite. The Priest does not touch the feet and he uses a separate towel for each.
30. For the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday it is best if each person does not touch the Cross in succession. People are asked to make a genuflection or bow as they pass by the Cross in procession.

Thank you again, everyone, for your cooperation and mutual charity. May the Lenten Season that is soon arriving, be a time of grace and conversion for each of us as we strive to follow the Lord in greater faith, hope and charity and serve Him in one another.

Sincerely in Christ,

† Stephen A. Hero

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