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Update for the Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas May 22, 2020

A Blessed Feast of the Ascension to you all,

We had a conference call last night with several bishops from across Western Canada about how to begin opening our Masses safely.

Presently Saskatchewan continues with a limit of 10 for gatherings. Manitoba has just opened the restrictions to 25 people for indoor gatherings and 50 for outside gatherings. The challenge is that we need to work at having these gatherings in a safe manner and respecting the maximum number. Please continue to work with your local health authority and community leaders. It will take some time to prepare our local Church to be able to have these gatherings safely. The Cathedral has decided to wait till Pentecost Sunday (May 31) so that we can begin in a prepared way. Please work out with your local leaders when and how you can safely begin limited attendance gatherings in your Church.

We thank the Archdiocese of Winnipeg for its help in preparing this update. We are following the recently issued guidelines from the Government of Manitoba entitled Restoring Safe Services. Our Saskatchewan communities will have to follow the Saskatchewan Governments Guidelines for re-opening.

The following protocols look to help you in safely restoring your public services. Social distancing and sanitization requirements continue to be followed.

Liturgical Protocols:

I wish to say that when pastors feel that they and their communities are ready to begin the process of opening their services to a controlled number of people, they are encouraged to do so. These revised protocols are based on the current provincial guidelines which limit the number of people allowed to gather to twenty-five (25) in Manitoba and ten (10) in Saskatchewan. As this number changes, parishes are to expand the number according to provincial guidelines.

I would encourage those who are ill with compromised health conditions, the elderly and frail to stay at home during this time.

If you are feeling sick or have the flu, please pray from home.

1. **Weekday Mass:** *when pastors and administrators are ready, permission is given to resume public weekday Masses in parishes keeping in mind that participation is limited to social/physical distancing protocols, inclusive of the priest-president. (The matter of how to maintain social/physical distancing limitations will follow later in this document).*
2. **Sunday Mass:** *when pastors and administrators are ready, permission is given to resume the regular schedule of Sunday Masses keeping in mind that participation is limited to social/physical distancing protocols, inclusive of the priest-president. (The matter of how to maintain social/physical distancing limitations will follow later in this document.)*
3. **Church Accessibility:** *parishes are encouraged to keep their churches open, as much as they can, for people to pray privately. Once again parishes must keep in mind that only ten people in Saskatchewan, 25 in Manitoba can, at the present, be allowed in the church at any one time. Therefore, someone will need to be on hand to monitor the situation so that the number of people present in the building will not exceed their number. While churches are open, priests should be available to hear confessions or to provide opportunities to discuss pastoral concerns. In addition, it could be appropriate for the Blessed Sacrament to be exposed and at the end of the daily opening for Benediction to be celebrated. A sign-in sheet and/or a list of who is attending each mass needs to be kept.*
4. **Live-streaming Sunday Masses:** *I will continue to live-stream Mass from Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Cathedral every Sunday. Parishes which are currently live-streaming Masses are encouraged to continue to do so if they feel this is of benefit particularly for Sunday Mass.*

Communion outside of Mass: *Communion could be given to those unable to attend Mass. This should be in with the Word of God and prayer. The person giving communion needs to be a blessed Communion Minister and should be wearing a mask and disinfect or wash his or her hands before distributing.*

First Communion: *It would be best to delay First Communion celebrations until the numbers allowed to gather are greater.*

Baptisms: *the celebration of Baptism should be held outside of the Eucharistic celebration so as to ensure minimal gatherings and social distancing. There should be only one baby to be baptized at each baptismal celebration. Due to the close proximity with the child, a face covering (mask) should be worn by the celebrant. Baptism by immersion is not allowed at this time. Hand sanitizing stations for the assembly must be provided.*

Reconciliation: *for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation two practices need to be considered: a) confessionals: the use of confessionals must ensure that physical distancing is maintained between the kneeling penitent and the confessor. The wearing of a face covering (mask) by the confessor may be appropriate. Kneelers and surfaces must be sanitized after each penitent; b) face to face confessions: the practice of face to face confessions must ensure physical/social distancing is maintained. The wearing of a face covering (mask) by the confessor may be appropriate. Any surfaces, including door handles and chair arms, that may have been touched, must be sanitized.*

Anointing of the Sick: *communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick are not to be held during this time. Individual anointing must ensure physical/social distancing. The presider must wear a face covering (mask) and use a cotton or Q-Tip type swab to apply the sacred oil. Priests who are asked to anoint in hospital settings must abide by the hospital guidelines.*

Marriages: *in the event that a wedding is to be celebrated, the established hand sanitizing and social/physical distancing requirements for the assembly must be observed. At the time of the Nuptial Ritual the presider must ensure physical/social distancing from the couple.*

Funerals: *in the event that a funeral is to be celebrated, the established hand sanitizing and physical/social distancing requirements for the assembly must be observed. The number of people attending must be according to Health Authority.*

Sanitizing Worship Spaces: *the worship space and all public spaces must be thoroughly cleaned after use. A sanitizing disinfectant must be applied throughout all spaces and all surfaces wiped down after each use.*

Liturgies outdoors: *if a Liturgy is to be celebrated outdoors, physical/social distancing must be observed relative to outside seating. Protocols around the number of people allowed to gather, which according to Manitoba guidelines is currently fifty (50), will need to be followed.*

Related Liturgical Protocols

Though the presider and deacon should not use face coverings (masks) during the celebration of the Liturgy, face coverings (masks) may be used at the time of the distribution of Communion. Altar servers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion as well as readers may wear face coverings (masks); readers should remove them for the proclamation of the Word. Gloves should not be worn by any liturgical minister during the celebration of the Liturgy. Those standing or seated in the sanctuary must ensure that physical/social distancing is observed. This same observance applies to music leaders.

- 1. Managing approved capacity:** *all people should enter the church building using only one entrance. A proper count must be maintained to ensure approved gathering limits. At this time no more than twenty-five (25) people, including the priest-presider, may gather together in Manitoba; no more than ten (10) in Saskatchewan. Parishes will determine various ways in which to limit the number of people in the church building. These ways might include: having people register or make a reservation with the parish office for the Mass. The Cathedral is advertising on the radio and by email and Facebook with one person registering people to attend a particular Mass. We also need a list of who attended Mass in case of a COVID incident. I would invite pastors/administrators to discuss how best to accomplish this with their Parish Pastoral Councils.*
- 2. Hand sanitizing stations:** *liquid hand sanitizing stations must be made available at the entrance to church buildings. It is advisable to have multiple stations to accommodate ministers and parishioners in an efficient manner so as to prevent crowding. All ministers and parishioners must be asked to sanitize their hands upon arrival at the church building. Physical/social distancing of two metres must be maintained.*
- 3. Seating:** *accommodation must be made to ensure physical/social distancing within the worship space. It is recommended that, every second row be blocked off. Those seated must be asked to maintain physical/social distancing to the left and right between individuals or family units. Those living in the same household however, may sit together without distancing.*
- 4. Music and Singing:** **People should not be singing near each other (unless from the same household) and avoid using hymnals that another person has recently used.**

5. **Collection Procedures:** *collection baskets must not be passed through the assembly person to person. Collection baskets with long handles may be used, in which case only the usher passes the collection basket. If long handled collection baskets are not available, then the collection should be placed into free standing baskets as the assembly gathers for worship. The collection should not be processed to the altar but stored immediately in a place of safe keeping.*
6. **Offertory Procession:** *the offertory procession is to be eliminated at this time. The gifts of bread and wine should be placed on a credence table in the sanctuary prior to the Liturgy.*
7. **Bread and wine on the altar:** *it is important that the bread and wine placed on the altar for consecration be covered, by a pall or other covering, so as to ensure no contamination.*
8. **The Sign of Peace:** *the sign of peace is expressed with a bow of the head toward your neighbour.*
9. **Communion Procession:** *new patterns will need to be developed. Physical/social distancing must be maintained during the Communion procession. It is recommended that the assembly approaches the Communion Minister one row at a time.*
10. **Communion distribution:** *Communion from the cup is to be discontinued during this time. Those distributing communion should sanitize their hands thoroughly in a discreet location immediately after they have received Communion and before accepting a ciborium for distribution. Communion is to be distributed only on the hand of each communicant with great care not to make physical contact. If desired, face coverings (masks) may be worn by those distributing Communion. These face coverings (masks) must be affixed and secured before sanitizing hands.*
11. **Exiting the Worship space:** *a plan for exiting the worship space is to be established to ensure physical/social distancing. Ensuring that aisles and pathways flow in only one direction may help to prevent congestion*
12. **Foyer/narthex gatherings:** *the assembly is to refrain from congregating in the foyer or narthex.*

13. **Holy Water Fonts:** *Holy Water Fonts are to be drained and kept clean.*

Parish Offices

Effective Monday, June 1, 2020 the Diocesan Office will open. We will observe physical/social distancing and maintain stations for hand sanitizing. I would ask that all parish offices open on June 1 and follow similar procedures.

1. Counting collections: *those responsible for counting the collection must be provided with disposable gloves. The place where the collection is counted must ensure the ability to maintain physical/social distancing. Once the collection is counted and readied for deposit, all surfaces and all equipment used must be thoroughly sanitized.*

Conclusion

As we continue to live through the challenging times of COVID- 19 and with the restrictions on large gatherings which follow from the pandemic, it is important that we be united in prayer, Christian solidarity and the practice of patience. These protocols are the beginning of a phased approach, following the guidelines of the province of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, which will allow for a gradual increase in worshippers in the months ahead. This is a good time to begin enacting these protocols as the numbers of those attending church will be gradually increasing. That being said, even when we fully return, it may be to a different reality than we have been accustomed to in the past.

May God continue to bless all of you, so that together we may come through this time of tribulation with renewed faith, unwavering hope and self-giving love.

Yours in Christ,



*Archbishop Murray Chatlain
Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas*