

Clergy News

- from Bishop Colli's Office

December 8, 2020

Important Update on Covid-19 - WorshipSafe Document

Highlights of the expanded and revised WorshipSafe directives include:

- 1. Mask Wearing Within Two Metres.** A Diocesan requirement that clergy with Diocesan faculties wear face masks at all times when within two metres (six feet) of parishioners, and that they and church volunteers enforce the same rule upon parishioners;
- 2. Reception of Holy Communion Mask Protocol.** Adoption of a common reception of Holy-Communion protocol, whereby a mask is worn by both the minister of Holy Communion and the recipient when within two metres (six feet) of one another. No words are spoken.
- 3. Pew Cleaning.** A lessened standard for pew cleaning whereby only frequently touched areas will require wipe-down that will hopefully provide some relief for parish volunteers in that the frequency and scope of pew sanitization may be reduced. - Only pews that need to be used again within one hour would need to be wiped down, by running a sanitized cloth along the tops and sides of each pew.
- 4. Mask Exemptions.** As confirmed by legal counsel, a priest may require that those seeking an exemption from wearing a mask bring evidence of same, that when seated that they be placed in a designated area, and that masks be worn in order to receive Communion. The exemption may be provided by a physician or other medical professional;
- 5. Contact Tracing Record Keeping.** A requirement that contact tracing sheets be maintained and stored for churches that presently keep records of their parishioners attending Mass.

Rationale for Review:

Pandemic Resurgence

The timing of this review appears appropriate, coming well into the period where many Ontario centres are entering into “**phase two**” of the pandemic and on the start of the fall/winter cold and flu season.

The government has recently instituted new levels of restrictions, and many areas of the province have moved into increased areas of restriction. There is anxiety that more of the province will move the “lockdown” phase in the near future, which could mean the cancellation of all Masses.

Need for Vigilance

While parishes have been overwhelmingly successful in their campaign to prevent the spread of Covid-19, recently, a parish, on report by a parishioner concerned that anti-Covid measures were not being enforced, was cited by a Provincial Occupational Health and Safety Inspector for failure to implement the full scope of the measures outlined by the Province and that were suggested in the WorshipSafe manual. Further investigation undertaken by the diocese revealed that the WorshipSafe guideline which **suspended the reception of Holy Communion on the tongue** had not been fully implemented. Such situations could have led to provincial prosecution of the pastor, which has for the moment been avoided.

As Holy Communion is an important part of our Mass, and promotes the most person-to-person contact, there must be a universal application of the practice of the communion rite within our churches. Communion **only** in the hand at this time.

Moreover, all parishes must be seen to have first-rate standards in place for the protection of parishioners so as to inspire confidence in not only the public, but with municipal, regional and provincial government upon whose decisions rest the ability to open and close our Catholic churches.

· The revised WorshipSafe directives will be available at the Diocesan website: **www.dotb.ca**

Thank You:

+Fred J. Colli

Bishop of Thunder Bay