

Liturgical Guidelines Update

September 25, 2020

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I would like to thank all the Pastors, Associate Pastors, Parish Staff and the many volunteers who have been involved in the re-opening of our churches for mass. We are grateful for your dedication to ensuring access to the liturgy where the word of God is proclaimed and the Eucharist is received, and for safeguarding the health and safety of everyone.

With this in mind, we ask that:

- All Alberta Health and government regulations continue to be observed.
- Parishioners are reminded that the dispensation of the faithful from the obligation to attend Sunday mass remains in place until decreed otherwise by the Bishop of Calgary.
- Previous COVID-19 Diocesan Guidelines continue to be in effect unless otherwise indicated by this document.

Reception of Holy Communion

The Alberta Bishops continue to require and direct the faithful to receive Holy Communion in the hand and not on the tongue at this time. This restriction continues to be only temporary since COVID-19 is understood to be transmitted through saliva and respiratory droplets and that by means of appropriate physical distancing and other health precautions this risk is reduced. In a letter published on September 3, 2020, Let us return to the Eucharist with Joy, Cardinal Robert Sarah, Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship, noted that “In times of difficulty (e.g. wars, pandemics), Bishops and Episcopal Conferences can give provisional norms which must be obeyed. Obedience safeguards the treasure entrusted to the church. The measures given by the Bishops and Episcopal Conferences expire when the situation returns to normal.” This continues to remain a provisional and temporary decision that we ask the faithful to accept in a spirit of humble obedience and charitable consideration for those who remain vulnerable to being exposed to COVID-19 in our parishes.

Liturgical Music

With the publication of updated guidance for singing and vocal performance by the Alberta Government on September 11, 2020, limited singing at mass is now permitted under strict conditions. COVID-19 is understood to be transmitted through saliva and respiratory droplets while singing and speaking. This risk must be carefully managed with appropriate physical distancing and other health precautions.

If such distancing, precautions or the following of these guidelines is not possible at this time due to the layout of the Church then the introduction of singing should be delayed until such safety measures are in place.

During the celebration of mass, singing by one cantor is now permitted. The singing at Mass by choirs or groups is not allowed.

General guidance in all situations:

1. With respect to the cantor, individuals at high risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 should consider carefully the risks involved with participating in singing at this time. Those who already consider themselves at greatest risk, including those over the age of 65 years, are encouraged not to participate in singing at this time, even if they are choosing to attend mass.
2. The cantor (and accompanist) must be counted among the total number of congregants allowed in your church at any one time, in line with provincial guidelines.
3. Congregational singing is not permitted at this time. Announcements to this effect should be made before mass begins to ensure everyone is aware of this. The cantor will be singing for the whole assembly, and the people should be encouraged to interiorize the words the cantor is singing and so align their prayers to those being sung aloud by the cantor.
4. The cantor should not sing from the ambo, but from a different lectern or music stand at least 2 metres in all directions from other musicians or ministers. There should be a minimum of 4 metres distance from the front (or nearest) pew or chair for the assembly. If this distance is impossible, a suitable acrylic barrier is to be employed. Consider the direction in which the cantor is singing. Perhaps it makes more sense for the cantor to sing from a loft, or to face sideways and not face-on to the assembly. Please note, singing from the edge of the loft may not be ideal due to droplets falling onto pews below – use a plexiglass screen or move back from the edge.

5. Like all mass attendees, cantors are required to wear masks. The mask may be removed for singing, provided that the aforementioned precautions are observed. If the cantor chooses to wear a mask while singing, this will not overly obscure or stifle careful diction when using a microphone.

6. Microphones should be sanitized after each use or consider having a separate microphone for each cantor. Consider using a different pop screen or foam microphone windscreen over any shared microphones. Likewise, no instruments, music stands or musical scores or books are to be shared. They must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between each use.

7. The ventilation system in the church must be operational and functioning optimally. Singing should occur only in a space with a high ceiling.

8. The music chosen must not prolong mass unduly. It is essential that people only be in church for the minimum time necessary. At this time, any singing should be limited to the length of time needed to cover any movement or action within the liturgy.

9. Any rehearsal before mass should happen under the same conditions as outlined above. This is best done well before any congregation is admitted to the building.

10. This first introduction of singing into the celebration of Holy Mass will be limited to the following:

a. Entrance

b. Preparation of the Altar/Gifts

c. Communion

11. These three elements of the mass are all associated with a procession or other ritual movement, some of which are suppressed currently due to the pandemic. The Entrance and Communion are moments that have officially mandated antiphons that the Church encourages to be sung. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal allows these antiphons to be sung by a cantor alone, especially if the assembly is unable to sing (Cf. GIRM 48, 74, 86-87, 103 – 104).

12. If necessary, it is permitted for other sacred texts to be sung at these points, e.g. hymns, but preference is to be given to those texts assigned for these moments. Ideally, the text chosen for the particular day should be sung, but the church allows for seasonal antiphons to be used to enable singers not to have to learn new music each week.

13. There are many resources available to parish musicians to implement these sung antiphons. Many of them are suitable for congregations to sing with too, when eventually that is allowed.

14. No other parts of the mass are permitted to be sung at this time, including the Responsorial Psalm, Alleluia before the Gospel, the dialogues or other mass parts, including the Gloria (Glory to God) or Sanctus (Holy, holy). These elements of the mass are to be spoken. Congregational hymns are not allowed.

Other musical considerations at this time:

1. The Alberta government is now recommending that wind instruments must use a mask or cover on the instrument's bell.

2. Continue to sanitize the organ console or piano keyboard and bench/stool after each use or between different users.

3. Continue, as much as possible, to limit practices to hours the church is closed.

4. Ensure the congregation cannot sing along with repertoire, i.e. Hymns are discouraged due to their familiarity.

5. Space and distance are key factors in mitigating the spread of saliva and respiratory droplets. The direction of singing or playing wind instruments is also crucial. When planning to re-introduce these elements back into public worship, thinking about the airflow and ventilation is essential.

6. If your usual space for musicians isn't adequate, consider a different area which might allow for adequate spacing, bearing in mind the nearest pews in front of you, or side transepts or aisles.