

Re-Opening Guidelines Revisited

As it has been two months since we have reopened our churches, it has been suggested that I remind people of the Covid-19 protocols that are in place for those who attend Mass.

In all Bishop Gregory has given more than sixty instructions, but many of these are technical items or items related to the cleaning of the church. In relation to those attending Mass the procedure is quite simple:

wear a mask – keep your distance – and sanitise your hands



But to go through in a bit more detail:

Firstly and perhaps most importantly, all parishioners are still dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass if required. So if you feel it is better not to attend, then you are formally dispensed from this obligation.

Who Should Attend and Who Should Not

Anyone with any type of coughs or colds – even if you think it might just be something like hay fever - are asked not to attend Mass. The reason for this is that it is possible to have Covid-19 and some other health issue, and one might hide the other. To this end, all those attending Mass will be asked certain standard medical questions, and if a person has any relevant health issues they will be asked not to attend the Mass.

In relation to age, the Bishop's instructions are, "*Vulnerable (65+ years) at-risk and otherwise concerned persons should remain home*". This age stipulation came as a shock to many and this week I was asked whether someone older than 65, if they were comfortable coming to church, was allowed to attend? My response was to turn it around and take the focus off the individualistic standpoint of 'what I am comfortable with', and ask what is best for others attending church and indeed, what is best for the whole church community. This is very much what my piece of 26th July was reflecting upon. As I said, going to church is never a private action, it is about being an active and creative member of a community that has the good of others at its heart.

As I write this I hear that yesterday there were 50 new cases of the Covid-19 virus in Saskatchewan, and 44 of these were in one Hutterite community, and this infection was believed to come from a funeral that members of the community attended. This reminds us that the risk is real, and if the coronavirus does come into our church it will not just be those in church who will be affected but all those who live with those attending Mass. So if we are living with or coming into close contact with people who are vulnerable in some way, then it is particularly important that we do not come to church.

For Those Who Attend Mass

Those who do attend Mass will be asked for their name and some contact details – phone number or e-mail address – so that should it transpire that someone else at the Mass is found to have the coronavirus, then everyone attending church that day can be contacted.

There is also a limit of 50 people in the building at any one time, but currently this is not an issue for us in the Valley.

With reference to social distancing the Bishop writes, *“Social distancing must be practiced at all times – a minimum of six foot apart except for members of the same household everywhere on church property.”*

It is worth just mentioning that during the Covid-19 pandemic there is a certain risk associated with being in any space with other people or a space that has been used by other people, and while we try to minimise this risk it is not reduced to zero, so people coming to church must recognise that they do so at their own risk.

The Bishop asks us to *“encourage parishioners to wear non-medical masks”* while they are in the church, but obviously young kids might find this more difficult.

One small point that is easily overlooked is that we are asked not to give out *“hymnals or songbooks, missals or other loose items”* like newsletters. So if you want to have a missal to use at church we would ask you to bring your own. Certainly in Fernie we have a large supply of missals that we are happy to give away if it helps people at weekends.

Finally the Bishop asks all of us to *“continue being vigilant in following”* the rules laid out above.

A full copy of the Bishop’s guidelines are on the diocesan website.

I hope this helps.

*Fr. David.
2nd August 2020*