



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

May 15, 2020

UPDATED Bishops Conference Liturgical and Facilities Advice on COVID-19

The Catholic Church in Australia has joined the rest of the Australian community in working to control the spread of COVID-19. As an essential measure, Catholic churches and other places of religious worship have been closed.

Catholics have been motivated by their concern for the elderly and those most vulnerable and share the sense of relief that our common efforts have helped significantly to lower the number of new infections.

The Church welcomes the Australian Government's "3 Step Framework for a COVIDSafe Australia". This now means that we can begin the process of lifting restrictions on the movement of people in the community.

More than 60 percent of Australians profess a religious belief, and it is vitally important to many people that they can go to churches or other places of worship.

The opening of churches and places of worship contributes to the spiritual, mental and social wellbeing of many, especially for those who have been isolated from their usual support networks. Access to the sacraments and parish communities is also vital for many of our people.

The following protocols should be considered alongside local and national health guidance, including from the Commonwealth Department of Health (<https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novelcoronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>).

Well aware of the danger of complacency in this crisis, the Catholic Church proposes a cautious approach to opening churches in order to protect the health and safety of parishioners and the wider community. The following protocols are proportionate and consistent with both the "3 Step Framework" and the Catholic Church's duty to protect those who are most vulnerable.

Staged re-opening of Churches

Stage 1: Churches reopen for private prayer, confessions, small Masses/services Maximum 10 people

- Churches can open for private prayer, confessions and small Masses/services.
- Weddings may have up to 10 guests in addition to the couple and the celebrant; funerals may have up to 20 mourners indoors and 30 outdoors; religious gatherings (Masses and other services) may have up to 10 attendees.
- The four square metres per person rule is to be observed in determining the total numbers allowed in the space; once this number is reached the doors are to be closed.
- Except for families and household groups, people should be at least 1.5 metres apart. There should be no physical contact outside one's family or household group. There should be no shaking of hands or holding hands during the Mass/service.
- Pews will be marked with 1.5 metre indicators.
- Every gathering must record contact details.
- Officials are to be on duty at all times churches are open to monitor and enforce these requirements.
- Hand sanitiser is to be available at church entrances.

- All Ministers of Holy Communion will take particular care to sanitise their hands before and after distributing.
- Parishes will not distribute Holy Communion from the Chalice until further notice. The faithful should be reminded that when Holy Communion is received under either species, Christ is fully present.
- The coronavirus is easily spread through saliva. In celebrations of the Ordinary Form of the Latin Rite, Holy Communion will be administered only in the hand because of the high risk of transmission if people receive on the tongue. Ministers will seek to avoid contact with the communicant's hands; communicants should also seek to avoid contact.
- Holy Water will be removed from vessels at the doors of churches to reduce the possibility of transmission of the virus. Holy Water should continue to be available for people to take home.
- All surfaces should be cleaned at least daily, with special attention given to frequently touched surfaces. Parishes will be referred to Safe Work Australia advice on effective cleaning related to COVID-19, which can be found here: <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/cleaning-prevent-spread-covid-19>
- Public health posters should be displayed showing physical distancing and good hand sanitisation while entering and leaving a church. Examples can be found here: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-campaign-resources>
- Sick and vulnerable people are to be instructed not to attend; pastors may minister to them at home; services will continue to be live-streamed for those at home.

School Masses

We will advise our schools, as children return to school, that any school Masses or communal prayer should follow the same restrictions and guidelines that are in place for school assemblies in regards to numbers, duration and hygiene.

Stage 2: Mass or other services Maximum 20 people

- Mass/services can be conducted with a maximum of 20 people.
- Weddings may have up to 20 guests in addition to the couple and the celebrant; funerals may have up to 50 mourners; religious gatherings (Mass or other services) may have up to 20 attendees.
- The four square metres per person rule to be observed in determining the total numbers allowed in the space; once this number is reached the entrance is to be closed.
- Except for families and household groups, people should be at least 1.5 metres apart. There should be no physical contact outside one's family or household group. There should be no shaking of hands or holding hands during the Mass/service.
- Pews will be marked with 1.5 metre indicators.
- Every gathering must record contact details.
- Officials are to be on duty at all times to monitor and enforce these requirements.
- Hand sanitiser is to be available at church entrances and also at entrance points for outdoor Mass or other services held outdoors.

- All Ministers of Holy Communion will take particular care to sanitise their hands before and after distributing.
- Parishes will not distribute Holy Communion from the Chalice until further notice. The faithful should be reminded that when Holy Communion is received under either species, Christ is fully present.
- The coronavirus is easily spread through saliva. In celebrations of the Ordinary Form of the Latin Rite, Holy Communion will be administered only in the hand because of the high risk of transmission if people receive on the tongue. Ministers will seek to avoid contact with the communicant's hands; communicants should also seek to avoid contact.
- Holy Water will be removed from vessels at the doors of churches to reduce the possibility of transmission of the virus. Holy Water should continue to be available for people to take home.
- No collection plates or hymn books are to be passed around.
- All surfaces, both within the church building and items used for services to be held outside, should be cleaned at least daily following Safe Work Australia advice. Public health posters should be displayed showing physical distancing and good hand sanitisation while entering and leaving a church.
- Sick and vulnerable people are to be instructed not to attend; pastors may minister to them at home; services will continue to be live-streamed for those at home.

Stage 3: Mass or other services
Maximum 100 people

- Mass/services and other gatherings of up to 100 people.
- The four square metres per person rule is to be observed in determining the total numbers allowed in the space; once this number is reached the entrance is to be closed.
- Except for families and household groups, people should be at least 1.5 metres apart. There should be no physical contact outside one's family or household group. There should be no shaking of hands or holding hands during the Mass/service.
- Pews and communion aisles will be marked with 1.5 metre indicators.
- Every gathering must record contact details.
- Officials are to be on duty at all times churches are open to monitor and enforce these requirements.
- Hand sanitiser to be available at church entrances.
- All Ministers of Holy Communion will take particular care to sanitise their hands before and after distributing.
- Parishes will not distribute Holy Communion from the Chalice until further notice. The faithful should be reminded that when Holy Communion is received under either species, Christ is fully present.
- The coronavirus is easily spread through saliva. In celebrations of the Ordinary Form of the Latin Rite, the Body of Christ will be administered only in the hand because of the high risk of transmission if people receive on the tongue. Ministers will seek to avoid contact with the communicant's hands; communicants should also seek to avoid contact.
- Holy Water will be removed from vessels at the doors of churches to reduce the possibility of transmission of the virus. Holy Water should continue to be available for people to take home.
- No collection plates or hymn books should be passed around.

- All surfaces should be cleaned at least daily following Safe Work Australia advice detailed earlier. Public health posters should be displayed showing physical distancing and good hand sanitisation while entering and leaving a church.
- Sick and vulnerable people are to be instructed not to attend; pastors may minister to them at home; services will continue to be live-streamed for those at home.

These protocols will ensure best practice in the suppression of COVID-19 in Catholic parishes.

Dioceses will monitor health and safety advice from the Australian Government and the relevant state or territory authority and keep parishes informed.

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference will continue to monitor advice from health authorities and other Episcopal Conferences. These protocols will be updated as and when appropriate.

This advice, prepared in collaboration with the National Office for Liturgy, follows an earlier communication from the Bishops Conference to dioceses in March on “National advice on liturgical implications in light of coronavirus”. The Catholic Health Australia COVID-19 Advisory Committee has provided guidance. This advice is also informed by work done by an advisory council and a number of dioceses across Australia. Many dioceses and parishes have issued guidelines relevant to their local context.

Contact your local diocesan office for more information about the liturgical practices relevant to your community. Find out more at www.catholic.org.au/dioceses