



MEMO

TO: Priests, Deacons and Faithful
FROM: Archbishop Anthony Mancini
DATE: June 1, 2020
RE: New protocols for Sacraments

Dear Friends in Christ,

I want to keep you informed regarding the developments associated with the re-opening of our churches as well as the regulations connected with the celebration of sacraments that continue to affect us during this pandemic.

This has been a difficult period for everyone and I am grateful for the patience and understanding that is seen in parishes. I believe government officials health care authorities have been working overtime to ensure that our society is protected as much as possible from the COVID -19 virus. Some people experience an incongruity between empty/locked churches and a greater opening of businesses and services. While I appreciate this, I do not hold that perspective.

Here is the way that I see our situation. I believe that the government has a fundamental role in guaranteeing the human rights and personal dignity of all its citizens. Thus, when civil officials issue orders about what is good for public health, I believe as a Catholic bishop that I should listen, because civil officials have the proper authority to enforce public health rules. Indeed, Church Authorities should ordinarily heed those rules, because we are not expert in the field of public health. Thus, Church leaders all over the world, including here in Nova Scotia, suspended the celebration of the Eucharist as soon as public officials imposed emergency rules and highlighted the conditions to fight against the pandemic. The decision to suspend the public celebration of Mass was very painful indeed, especially since it was made at a moment that would impact the major celebrations connected with Holy Week. We made that decision not because we were compelled to do so, but out of our deepest respect for human life and health. We judged that the circumstances of the pandemic required it and that as disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to be instruments of God's protection for the vulnerable and the public good.

Here in Nova Scotia we have received clear guidance from the health authorities who have taken a slow cautious approach in terms of the lifting of restrictions. Dr. Robert Strang has an appreciation of faith communities and has had discussions with various sectors to protect public health and safety. I have met with Dr. Strang together with other religious leaders of the area and we discussed the re-opening of churches, synagogues and mosques. This discussion lead to an awareness on the part of Dr. Strang that religious services are indeed a different category from merely 'social gatherings'. He has considered how the guidelines might be adjusted and has done so last Friday with some adjustments for weddings and funerals. In the next few weeks, we will meet again with Dr. Strang to consider what the further possibilities there may be and what the conditions might be for the re-opening of places of worship.

He reiterated that we are indeed coming out of the first wave of the virus and that the virus will be with us for a long time, i.e., until we have a vaccine or until a high portion of the population will be immune. Thus, our 'new normal' will demand that we be tolerant of some level of the spread of COVID - 19, but we need to do what we can to limit the spread of the virus. In this new normal, certain measures will continue to be necessary: social distancing, limiting numbers of people coming together because large social gatherings can spark infection, supporting good hygiene (washing hands, cough etiquette, good cleaning high touch surfaces, not touching our face), minimizing physical contact and encouraging people to stay home if they are sick. All of these measures are necessary to prevent a second or third wave and to prevent resurgence of the virus. Moreover, they create an environment to reduce fear, for people need to have confidence in a safe environment. All this will contribute to a rebuilding of trust in society and in the church.

While I would like to bring people back to Mass as quickly as possible, I will wait to schedule the re-opening of churches when it is safe and when we are prepared to do so. It is my hope that we will soon be able to gather responsibly and safely for worship. On this, I will collaborate in an approach which respects both our Catholic tradition as well as our civic responsibilities.

Thus, the following regulations are now in effect until further direction from the Health Authorities:

1. Churches will remain closed to the public for **private prayer, devotions and the celebration of Mass.**
2. By way of exception, the church may be used for **Funerals and weddings**, following the new "10-person rule".
3. If the church is used for a **funeral**, the following is to be observed:
 - a. The funeral home staff, with the pallbearers (wearing masks) will bring in the remains to the front of the church. They would leave the church and then the mourners would enter wearing face masks.
 - b. The prescribed Catholic ritual will be the Funeral liturgy Outside Mass (no mass).
 - c. When the liturgy is terminated, the mourners leave the church and the pallbearers and funeral staff return and take the remains to the hearse.
 - d. In the event of a cremation, with the family bringing the urn, there would be no need for the family to wait to enter the church.
 - e. Live streaming of the service is permitted.
4. During the **internment at the cemetery**, the funeral home staff and pallbearers (wearing masks) would bring the remains to the grave site and leave the area. The priest or deacon would arrive with the mourners (because this is outside, there can be 15 mourners). Following the prayers, the mourners leave and then the cemetery staff complete their work.
5. **For Weddings**, the priest or deacon together with the couple, two witnesses and 6 more people can gather at the Church (photographers, musicians make up part of the 10). The

prescribed Catholic ritual will be the Order of Celebrating Matrimony without Mass. Live streaming of the service is permitted.

6. **The Sacrament of Baptism** is to be delayed; if this is not possible, then the 10-person rule is to apply.
7. **Sacrament of Penance** may be arranged through appointment.
8. In all these circumstances the rules of social distancing must be observed, as well as hygiene protocol which includes ensuring that the church building is cleaned and made safe.

I trust that these reflections and regulations will help you to understand my perspective. May the Holy Spirit guide us all as we deal with the issues that affect us during this pandemic.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anthony Mancini". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.