



**Chancery Office  
Eparchy of New Westminster**

**DIRECTIVES FOR THE RE-OPENING OF CHURCHES  
AND THE RESUMPTION OF PUBLIC LITURGICAL SERVICES**

May 21, 2020

Слава Ісусу Христу!  
Glory be to Jesus Christ!

Dear Reverend Pastors and Faithful,

As we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord, Jesus – just before ascending to heaven and returning to the Father – commissions the apostles, saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 19-20).

We too have been commissioned by Jesus through our baptism to share the Good News of the Gospel message with all people, starting with our family, friends and neighbours.

It is in this light that, with joy in our hearts, we announce the re-opening of our churches and the resumption of public liturgical services, although with limits and restrictions.

From time to time, it may be necessary to update our Directives based upon advice from our health care officials and “best practice feedback” from our parishes as they re-open.

As we move towards gradual re-opening and the resumption of public liturgical services, it is critical that we understand the potential for the spread of COVID-19 among our faithful and take steps to minimize the risk of spread, especially among high risk populations within our congregations.

The health and safety of everyone is first and foremost.

To be successful in British Columbia’s relaunch and church re-openings, we will need to continue to do what we are doing, namely:

- follow public health measures,
- practice physical distancing and good hygiene; and
- continue acting responsibly.

The following Directives for the Re-opening of Churches and the Resumption of Public Liturgical Services address the following areas:

- A. Readyng our parishes for re-opening
- B. Deciding whether to attend church services or not
- C. Determining the 50-person or less maximum
- D. Physical distancing seating
- E. Entering and exiting the church
- F. Participating in the Divine Liturgy and other services

## **A. Readyng our parishes for re-opening**

1. Pastors, in consultation with their Parish Pastoral Councils, parish staff and others concerned, must communicate clearly and effectively with their parishioners about their plans for when and how they will resume public liturgical services.
2. Specifically, the communication should cover the following areas:
  - 2.1. How the parish will determine the 50-person or less maximum to participate in the Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services.
  - 2.2. How the parish will ensure physical distancing.
  - 2.3. The measures the parish will take to ensure proper sanitation.
3. The Divine Liturgy schedule, if altered to allow more time between services, should be published.
4. No “drive in” or “parking lot” services are permitted.
5. An adequate stock of hand sanitizer and other cleaning supplies should be readily available at the time of reopening.
6. Social gatherings before or after church services (including coffee and doughnuts) are not to take place at this time.
7. If a parish is unable for practical or other reasons to maintain strict physical distancing and perform the cleaning requirements as indicated in these Directives, the pastor must not celebrate the Divine Liturgy or any other liturgical services publicly until such time as the parish is able to do so.

## **B. Deciding whether to attend or not to attend church services**

8. The faithful continue to be dispensed from the obligation to attend the Divine Liturgy in church at this time.
9. All those attending church services do so at their own risk. It is important for individuals and families to take responsibility for protecting themselves – and others.
10. Prior to attending liturgical services, the faithful should use the self-assessment tool provided by the Government of British Columbia.
11. The following individuals *must* stay home for the sake of the wider community.

- 11.1. Those with COVID-19 and those who live with someone with COVID-19.
- 11.2. Those who have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.
- 11.3. Anyone feeling sick with a cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose or sore throat, even if symptoms appear to be mild or resemble a cold.
- 11.4. Anyone at high risk from COVID-19, for example, those with chronic medical conditions, especially with upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms.
- 11.5. Those who have recently travelled outside of Canada.
12. The following individuals *are encouraged* to stay home for the sake of the wider community
  - 12.1. Those who live with someone with upper respiratory or flu-like symptoms.
  - 12.2. Older persons and persons with pre-existing medical conditions (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease, cancer or diabetes).
  - 12.3. Family members who live with the elderly or those who are at risk.
13. When at home, individuals and families are encouraged to follow the liturgical services on livestream or Telus (channel 876), or set aside some time to pray, read the Sacred Scriptures or some other spiritual reading.
14. Clergy (priests, deacons, subdeacons) and assistants (sacristans, altar servers, lectors, cantors) with a respiratory infection of any kind must not celebrate or participate in public Divine Liturgies and the sacraments.

### **C. Determining the 50-person or less maximum**

15. The Government of British Columbia re-launch limits the number of faithful gathering for the Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services to no more than 50 people or one third of normal worship space, whichever is smaller, and whichever ensures that physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) will be maintained. This includes clergy, sacristans, altar servers, lectors, cantors, etc.
16. All individuals found to be in violation of gathering restrictions are subject to a \$1,000 penalty.
17. Additional Divine Liturgies may be scheduled with greater frequency to accommodate the spiritual needs of the faithful.
18. To ensure that the maximum number of 50 people is not exceeded at any time, the faithful must pre-register through email or by calling the parish, indicating their wish to attend a particular Divine Liturgy or other liturgical service – they must receive confirmation prior to attending.
19. The faithful should not pre-register for more than one liturgical service until everyone who wishes to attend has had an opportunity to do so (which might be every week, or every 2 or 3 weeks).
20. A list of attendees and their contact information must be maintained should someone test positive for COVID-19, thereby assisting public health officials with contact tracing and follow-up. The list must be kept until advised otherwise.

## **D. Physical distancing and seating**

21. Except for members of the same household, physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet) from another person must be maintained by everyone on the church property (in the church, on the church steps, in the parking lot, in the washrooms, etc.)
22. Tape or rope can be used to close off 2 or 3 rows of pews between the seating pews, to ensure physical distancing.
23. Seats which can be used should be clearly marked.
24. Members of the same household may sit together in the same pew.
25. Infants and children should remain with their parents at all times. Cry rooms are closed at this time.
26. When the faithful are required to stand in line, for example, to receive Holy Communion, go to confession, or use the washroom, tape can be placed on the church floor to indicate proper spacing between persons.
27. Clergy and assistants are to remain at least 2 metres (6 feet) from each other and from the congregation during the entire liturgical service.

## **E. Entering and exiting the church**

28. Entry to the church is provided through a single door of entry, taking into consideration access for the handicapped.
29. A separate point of exit is to be used, where possible.
30. Entrance and exit doors should be propped open, where possible, as people enter/exit so that the faithful need not touch the door handles or doors.
31. The faithful are to be welcomed by a greeter/usher, who will:
  - 31.1. assist in staggering the time of their arrival and departure to ensure physical distancing of at least 2 metres (6 feet);
  - 31.2. check their name off the list of confirmed attendees;
  - 31.3. remind them of the requirement for physical distancing;
  - 31.4. remind them to sanitize their hands upon entry to and exit from the church; and
  - 31.5. remind the faithful that the veneration of icons, crosses, etc., should be done without touching or kissing them.
32. Members of the same household may enter and exit together.
33. Once the maximum permitted space has been reached, additional people are not permitted to enter the church building.
34. People who simply show up must be turned away; however, they are to be informed of how they can register for another Divine Liturgy or liturgical service.
35. The greeter/usher will dismiss the faithful by rows at the end of the liturgical service.
36. There should be no social gatherings after the liturgical services. The faithful should promptly leave the church and parking lot upon the completion of the services.

## **F. Participating during Liturgical Services**

### **Use of face masks**

37. The faithful are encouraged to wear face masks, however, it is not required if physical distancing is maintained at all times.

### **Singing led by a single cantor**

38. Congregational and choral (choir) singing is a high-risk activity and is not allowed because infected people can transmit the virus through their saliva or respiratory droplets.

39. Instead, the sung responses during the liturgical services may be led by a single cantor, while the faithful remain prayerfully silent.

40. A designated area, completely separated from the faithful, must be set aside for the cantor, as singing disperses droplets in a wider area than speaking.

41. Where the parish has chosen to recite the entire Divine Liturgy, the faithful may actively participate in the responses, provided that physical distancing is maintained.

42. Where the parish recites some parts of the Divine Liturgy and sings others, again, the sung parts are to be led by a single cantor, while the faithful remain prayerfully silent.

### **Collection**

43. Rather than passing a collection basket hand-to-hand, a basket is to be placed at the front of the Church for the convenience of the faithful in making their financial contribution in support of the mission of the Church.

### **Kiss of Peace**

44. At the Kiss of Peace, the faithful can acknowledge each other with a simple bow and refrain from hand shaking altogether.

### **Distribution of Holy Communion**

45. The priest is to wash his hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer immediately before the preparation of the gifts of bread and wine prior to the celebration of the Divine Liturgy (Proskomedia).

46. The priest prays the prayers of the Rite of Preparation (Proskomedia) silently so that droplets dispersed by speaking is avoided. Alternatively, the priest is to wear a mask. The priest is always must prepare a second chalice from which he will partake at communion.

47. Once the gifts of bread and wine are transferred to the holy table (altar) at the Great Entrance, they are to remain completely covered with the veils until the consecration.

48. During the consecration, when the gifts of bread and wine are uncovered, the priest is to step back from the holy table at least 2 metres (6 feet) and remains there until communion in order to avoid droplets being dispersed in speaking or singing the words of consecration.

49. The priest again is to wash his hands with hand sanitizer immediately before the fraction of the Lamb and the placing of the consecrated particles into the chalice for distribution to the faithful.

50. After the priest partakes of the precious Body of Christ in the usual way, he then partakes from the precious Blood of Christ from the chalice which has prepared for his own use.
51. Where there are concelebrants, the priests receive the Eucharist by intinction, that is, they dip the precious Body of Christ into the separately prepared chalice for clergy, always being careful not to touch the precious Blood with their fingers. For this purpose, specially prepared longer particles (rectangular) can be used. Alternatively, the concelebrants are to receive the precious Blood of Christ from the individual chalices prepared for them.
52. Only one priest should distribute Holy Communion to the entire congregation.
53. The priest should wear a face mask when distributing the Eucharist. He silently prays the usual prayer, “The servant of God, [name], partakes of the precious, most holy and most pure Body and Blood of our Lord...,” as each communicant approaches. This avoids the dispersion of any droplets by the priest.
54. Holy Communion is to be distributed to the faithful at the usual time during the Divine Liturgy.
55. The Eucharist is to be distributed with single-use disposable wooden spoons, which are to be burnt and properly disposed after usage.
56. If the priest senses that his fingers have made contact with a person’s mouth or hands, he should pause, place the chalice on the tetrapod, and use hand sanitizer to cleanse his hands prior to continuing to distribute the Eucharist.
57. For people with celiac disease, a separate small chalice is to be prepared. The amount of wine used must be small enough for the communicant to drink it entirely.
58. After everyone who wishes to approach to receive Holy Communion has done so, the priest is to recite the Prayer of Spiritual Communion, since not everyone may feel comfortable in approaching to receive the Eucharist at this time.
59. All sacred vessels are to be thoroughly cleansed and purified with soap and hot water.

### **Cleaning and disinfecting the Church**

60. Hand sanitizing should take place at the entrance of the church for those attending the Divine Liturgy and other liturgical services. Hand sanitizer must contain at least 60% alcohol.
61. A bottle of hand sanitizer, touched by many, should not be used. Instead, use an automatic dispenser or have an usher/greeter spray the hands of those entering and exiting the church.
62. Holy water fonts are to be remain empty.
63. Personal protective practices are to be promoted (coughing and sneezing etiquette, hand hygiene).
64. Increased frequency of cleaning and disinfecting the church should take place, including surfaces that are touched often, including doors, railings, pews, common areas, washrooms\*).
- 64.1. \*Due to the need for strict cleaning and sanitizing, it is recommended that washrooms be closed or open with limited access and available for emergencies.
65. The church should be cleaned and disinfected between each service using accepted products and practices.

66. All Divine Liturgy books, hymnals, paper, and other items are to be removed from the pews for the protection of the faithful. People may bring their own Divine Liturgy books or download the Divine Liturgy text on their mobile device.
67. Individual church bulletins should not be distributed, unless they are handed out by an usher/greeter as parishioners enter the church.

### **Baptisms, weddings and funerals**

68. The celebration of baptisms, weddings and funerals are permitted, while maintaining the precautions listed above.

### **Grave blessings**

69. Grave-side blessings are permitted, while maintaining the precautions listed above.

### **Parish Pastoral Council meetings**

70. Meetings of the parish pastoral council is permitted, again while maintaining the precautions listed above.
71. No coffee or socializing after meetings is allowed.
72. All other meetings are not permitted at this time, including bible study groups, youth groups, UCWLC, UCBC, and Knights of Columbus.

### **Financial Support**

At this critical time, your financial support is greatly appreciated. Our eparchy and parishes continue to incur expenses as we strive to fulfill the mission which God has entrusted to the Church. Please contact your local parish as to how you can make a donation.

### **Stay safe and healthy**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of British Columbia continues to ask each of us to stay safe and to continue acting responsibly to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The success of the British Columbia re-launch and the re-opening of Churches and the resumption of public liturgical services depends to a great extent on how closely we adhere to the provincial health regulations and church liturgical directives.

Together, our actions can make a difference in the lives of family, friends and strangers alike.

With gratitude for your patience and cooperation, I assure you that your well-being, both spiritual and physical, is of paramount importance as we take these initial steps to resume public participation in our liturgical services.

May the blessings of the All Holy Trinity be upon you and your family.

Bishop David

### **Prayer of Spiritual Communion**

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in these Holy Gifts!  
I love You above all things and I desire to receive You into my soul.  
Since I cannot receive You now, I place before You my whole life and hope, O loving Master;  
and I ask, pray, and entreat You: Make me worthy to partake in a mystical way  
and with a pure conscience of Your awesome and heavenly Mysteries:  
for forgiveness of sins, for the pardon of offenses, for communion of the Holy Spirit,  
for the inheritance of the kingdom of heaven, for confidence before You,  
and not for judgment or condemnation.  
I embrace You as You enter and abide in me, and I unite myself completely to You.  
Permeate my soul and body, and never permit me to be separated from You. Amen.

### **Молитва духовного Причастя**

Мій Ісусе! Я вірю, що Ти присутній у цих Святих Дарів!  
Люблю Тебе над усе і моя душа тужить за Тобою.  
Не можу зараз Тебе прийняти в Євхаристії,  
тому хоча б духовно прийди до мого серця!  
Запрошую Тебе, відчиняю навстіж двері мого серця,  
згадаючи Твої слова: «Ось стою під дверима і стукаю.  
Якщо хто почує Мій голос і відчинить двері,  
Я ввійду до нього, і буду вечеряти з ним, а він зі Мною».  
Я весь єднаюся з Тобою. Ісусе, моє найвище Добро  
й моя солодка Любове!  
Торкнись мого серця і запали його,  
щоб воно завжди палало любов'ю до Тебе! Амінь.