



Office of the Bishop

MEMO – Update COVID19

12 March 2020

Dear Pastors, Parish Staff and Parishioners,

Greetings in the Lord! A few days ago, I was on a teleconference organized by the Provincial Government with other faith leaders from across the province to discuss ways to prevent the spread of the COVID19 virus. As you have heard in the news, the situation continues to develop. Daily updates are available at <http://www.bccdc.ca/>. Please check our website <https://www.nelsondiocese.org/> for further information.

In addition to the recent letter I sent to the parishes, the following measures are to be put in place immediately in all parishes in the Diocese of Nelson:

Sunday Obligation

BC's Public Health Officer has now directed that all events larger than 250 people are to be cancelled. Therefore, for the well-being of our parish communities, attendance at Mass or any other Church events in the diocese is restricted to a maximum of 250 people. In order to facilitate this, please consider going to a Mass that is less well attended in your or another parish. Those who are over 65 years of age, those with an underlying health condition and anyone who feels even remotely unwell are excused from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass. If you have attempted to attend Sunday Mass and could not do so for reasons beyond your control, you have fulfilled your obligation.

- Those who stay at home are encouraged, if well enough, to pray and reflect on the Sunday readings. They can also pray along with the televised Sunday Mass, which is broadcast on *Salt+Light TV* and streamed on the Internet at saltandlighttv.org at 8:00 a.m., 12:05 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. PT each Sunday or from Toronto <https://dailytvmass.com/daily-tv-mass/>
- Attached to this memo is also a Prayer for Spiritual Communion which may also be used in these circumstances
- In order to reduce social isolation, parishes are encouraged to find ways to mobilize people to make phone calls to those who must remain at home, and to provide services such as delivering food and necessary items. Being in regular contact with the parish community will alleviate loneliness for the homebound

- Consider suspending distribution of Holy Communion to the homebound and shut-ins

Sign of Peace

- Consider removing the Sign of Peace Rite from the Mass by going immediately into the Lamb of God after the priest offers the “peace of the Lord be with you always”

Reception of Holy Communion

- As a result of direct consultation with the Public Health Officer, the faithful are strongly recommended to receive Holy Communion **only in the hand**.
- Those distributing Holy Communion are encouraged to avoid direct skin-to-skin contact when placing the Host into the hands of the faithful. Hand sanitizers should be used, or washing carefully with soap and water **before and after** the distribution of Holy Communion. Furthermore, no one should feel obligated to serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion if they would rather not at this time.
- If the faithful wish to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, an announcement is to be made, beginning this weekend (March 14/15) and for all subsequent Masses until further notice, that those who wish to receive Communion on the tongue should come forward **after** all other communicants have received. Alternatively, one priest or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion can be designated specifically to distribute Communion only on the tongue. Note: instruction to the faithful may be necessary on how to properly receive on the tongue
- Consider obtaining low-gluten hosts for those with celiac disease, and promote spiritual communion for those who are unable to receive Holy Communion (prayers for a spiritual communion are attached)

Offertory Collection

- Rather than having collection baskets passed around, have several baskets at the front and give time for people to come forward with their offering if your parish does not have ushers taking up the collection
- All those who handle money should wear gloves (ushers, money counters)
- Consider mailing in your Sunday offering or on-line giving instead (Pre-Authorized Giving (PAG) or Stewardship Authorized Giving (SAG) Forms are available at your parish office to sign up)

All Parish Events

- Worship areas, Meeting rooms/halls, washrooms should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected after each activity especially “touch surfaces,” e.g. door handles, pews
- The Public Health Officer suggests that people maintain a two arms’ length between one another (social distancing), to reduce any potential transmission of the coronavirus. Families and others who live under the same roof, could stay closer to each other

- Sacramental celebrations may require special provisions in order to celebrate them safely. Carefully consider how you setup for these celebrations

Other Considerations

- Cease the Procession of the Gifts. Have the gifts already at the altar
- Use projection screens for hymns and singing rather than hymnals. Strongly consider removing the hymnals and missals from the church to prevent community spread of the virus
- Hold parish meetings by teleconference. Only hold gatherings in the parish meeting rooms/hall that are absolutely necessary. Coffee after Mass and pancake breakfasts or other events are to be cancelled
- Follow the directions of any shut-ins, nursing homes, long-term care facilities or hospitals regarding visiting or providing Mass, the sacraments, etc.
- Ensure adequate supplies of gloves, sanitizers, disinfectants, etc. are available
- Consider using one entrance to control flow of people into the Church
- Place sign at entrances reminding those who may be sick to refrain from attending Mass
- Consider not lingering after Mass

We are following the lead of several dioceses in order to protect our vulnerable parishioners and prevent the spread of the virus. Please pray for all those who have become sick from the coronavirus, those who care for them and those working to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. As our government and health authorities have emphasized, these are temporary measures, that, God willing, will only be needed for a short time.

Thank you again for your patience and collaboration as we work together for the well-being of one another.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

✘ Gregory J Bittman
Bishop of Nelson