



September 17, 2021
St. Robert Bellarmine

Further Update on Covid-19 Protocols for the Diocese of Prince Albert

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The text of the Public Health Order from yesterday, September 16, 2021, is now available and clarifies a few details that were unavailable regarding mandatory masking. Section 4 (c) of the document deals with exceptions to the masking mandate. I will summarize them in point form for the sake of clarity as they apply to our celebrations in the Diocese of Prince Albert.

1. “Worship leaders” may remove masks in their churches when distanced 3 metres from others. (A worship leader is understood in the health order as one who leads a service, ceremony, or other public event while speaking from a podium, lectern, platform, stage, desk or other standing or seating area dedicated to speaking, but only when the individual can maintain a distance of 3 metres from others. The priest, deacon, and lay presider would fall into the category of worship leader. The chair, altar, and ambo would fall into this category of space where masks can be removed if the minister is 3 metres away from others.)
2. Choirs or bands providing music for a liturgy must remain masked. (Those playing wood or brass instruments may be unmasked but must be 3 metres from others. The order is not clear about cantors or soloists so, for the time being, a cantor should remain masked.)
3. The congregation remains masked. People may lower their masks briefly and carefully in order to receive Holy Communion.
4. A person in the privacy of his/her office in a parish may remove the mask when alone. When another person enters the space, all should be masked.
5. People who are exempt from wearing a mask are: children aged two and under; children aged 3 – 12 who are not responsibly able to wear a face covering; individuals who cannot wear a face covering due to a particular medical condition, individuals with cognitive impairment, intellectual disability, or severe mental health condition and are unable to understand the requirement.

I believe that these details clarify the other guidelines that I issued yesterday and are what we were expecting. The province envisages this health order remaining in effect until at least October 20 or when the Chief Medical Health Officer determines otherwise (i.e. either sooner or later). Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely in Christ,

Stephen A. Hero

✠ Most Rev. Stephen A. Hero
Bishop of Prince Albert



September 16, 2021

St. Cornelius and St. Cyprian

**Dispensation from the Sunday Obligation to Assist at the Holy Eucharist and
Temporary Measures to Combat Covid-19 in Parishes**

To the Faithful of the Diocese of Prince Albert,

May the pure love of Christ reign in our hearts!

Since the level of Covid-19 infection rates are climbing very rapidly in Saskatchewan and considering today's health orders by the provincial government, I have decided to extend the dispensation from the Church's precept to assist at the Sunday Eucharist until further notice.

This is, of course, not an invitation for everyone to simply stay home. I strongly encourage Catholics to participate in the Sunday Eucharist in their parishes safely. Christ is our Life (John 1:9). He gave us the Sacrament as our daily bread (Mt 6:11) and a pledge of eternal life (John 6:51). As his Church, his body and temple in this world, we need this Sacrament to nourish us and give us strength. We do not stay away from the Eucharist lightly.

The purpose of this dispensation is to free consciences that may be troubled or in doubt regarding whether they are 'sick enough' to stay away from the Sunday assembly as that is usually the way that we discern when we should remain at home (See *Catechism* #2181). People who feel sick or who have Covid symptoms should certainly remain at home and this dispensation should make that clear for all.

There are also people who are significantly still at risk and more vulnerable to Covid: those with underlying health conditions, compromised immune systems, the aged, children who are unvaccinated, etc. The purpose of this dispensation is to ensure that these people also understand that this is a grave enough reason to absent themselves from the Sunday Eucharist. If parents with children decide that it is not safe to attend their parish until circumstances change, I ask that they discuss this with their children and teenagers why they are doing so, so that they still grasp the importance of the Eucharist.

For those who do need to remain at home, I encourage you warmly to 'keep holy' the Lord's Day (through family and personal prayer and an act of spiritual communion.) The Diocese will continue to post weekly links to live-streamed Masses so that you may join an assembly spiritually.

Temporary Measures to Combat Covid-19 in Parishes

In light of today's public health orders, beginning on the morning of September 17, 2021, I ask that the following measures be taken in all parishes in the Diocese of Prince Albert to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. This is mostly a return to practices that parishes were practicing before July 11 and they helped to curb the spread of the virus before.

1. Masks are mandatory for everyone in the parish office and during liturgical services (e.g. Mass). The government has not announced an exemption for presiders or employees in the privacy of their offices, so until

further notice, please wear masks indoors at all times in indoor public space. Further details will be sent out as soon as the government clarifies this. During the Eucharistic Prayer at Mass, Priests are to cover the hosts for the people with a pall or ciborium lid to avoid contact with respiratory droplets as they pray over the gifts. They are to sanitize their hands before and after handling the sacred vessels and distributing the Sacrament. Choirs and cantors can continue to lead congregational singing but are to wear masks and observe physical distances. Cantors may sing the psalm from the choir area rather than going to the ambo to minimize movement and the need to sanitize the ambo again.

2. Parishes are to continue with good sanitary practices: hand sanitizing stations at the doors, sanitizing pews after the service, the microphone at the ambo and in the choir, washrooms, etc.
3. There are no limits on numbers that can attend a service, but parishes are asked to maintain physical distancing between families.
4. There are no altar servers until further notice.
5. There can be one or two readers at the liturgy. For the time being readers should keep their mask on while reading. Then microphone when it has been touched.
6. There will be no gift procession. The collection may be taken up with long-handled baskets or deposited in a basket as people enter the nave at the beginning of Mass.
7. We will continue a non-contact Sign of Peace at Mass.
8. Holy communion may be distributed in the pews in churches with enough space to circulate or they may go up in procession, observing distances between families in line. The pastor will decide.
9. People may receive Holy Communion on the tongue or on the hand. Priests are asked to sanitize their hands if they touch the communicant. Only the priest will receive from the chalice. (Concelebrating priests receive from a separate chalice or by intinction.)
10. For funeral luncheons or wedding receptions at the Church, hand sanitizer is to be available at the beginning of the food line and people may remove their masks while eating. Food is to be served by persons in masks and gloves.
11. For Baptisms, priests and people are to wear masks during the celebration. The priest may remove the mask when reading and preaching from the sanctuary but is to wear the mask during the Baptism itself and other moments of the rite when he cannot maintain physical distancing from the child and family. The priest is to use cotton or a Q-Tip to anoint. He is to sanitize his hands at the appropriate moments of the ritual.
12. All the above principles apply for other sacramental and liturgical celebrations. The rule of thumb: Masks are worn when physical distancing cannot be maintained; regular hand sanitizing.

Thank you for your cooperation in these matters as we deal with the fourth wave of this pandemic. Let us try to do all this motivated by our love for God and our neighbour. Please continue to pray for each other and for those who are in hospital, those caring for the sick, all frontline workers, and those who wait for treatment due to overburdened medical facilities. We have made it through three previous waves of the pandemic and have learned how to do this. We can do it again.

May we find our strength in the Lord and entrust ourselves to the prayers of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph!
Holy Virgin, protect your house! St. Joseph, pray for us!

Sincerely in the Heart of Christ,

† Stephen A. Hero

Most. Rev. Stephen A. Hero
Bishop of Prince Albert