

# Vancouver's COVID-19 guidelines on Mass emphasize joy, hygiene and brevity

When the first public Masses in months are celebrated in the Archdiocese of Vancouver this weekend, there will be some notable differences, among them the prevalent use of hand sanitizer and hand washing.

Archbishop J. Michael Miller released liturgical guidelines May 21 for the public celebration of Mass, one week after announcing some churches could celebrate public Masses with a maximum of 50 people as early as May 23-24.

During the reopening period, Masses will have a conspicuous emphasis on hygiene, with priests and ministers in the sacristy required to wash their hands before Mass, wash or sanitize before Communion, and sanitize after distributing Communion, according to the guidelines.

Tables with hand sanitizer and an ablution cup (the bowl of water used for cleansing fingers after touching the consecrated host) will be placed at each Communion station, while another ablution cup and hand sanitizer should be placed at the tabernacle.

Although it's expected many of the faithful will be wearing masks and gloves, the priest celebrant and other ministers are not to wear masks or gloves during the Mass, although masks before and after Mass are encouraged.

Beyond that, the emphasis will be on simplicity and brevity, according to the guidelines.

In some cases, the Masses may look more like a simplified weekday Mass, although Archbishop Miller stressed in the guidelines that a weekday Mass may not be celebrated in place of the Sunday liturgy.

"Because time spent in proximity to other persons increases the risk of transmission of COVID-19, priests should consider using the legitimate options given in the Roman Missal to shorten the length of Mass," the guidelines say.

To ensure a "reverent and joyful celebration of Holy Mass, while maintaining the health and safety precautions counseled by the provincial health authority," the guidelines make few mandatory changes, such as omitting the Offertory Procession and the sign of peace, while offering numerous suggestions for shortening the liturgy.

Among the proposals are eliminating announcements, dispensing with the procession, limiting choir members (since singers count toward the 50-person maximum allowed in the church at any one time), shorter songs, shorter versions of readings when available, brief homilies, limited general intercessions, and

purifying the chalice and other sacred vessels after Mass.

Communion may be distributed during or after Mass, say the guidelines, noting that after Mass “allows for easier observance of health and safety precautions” and lets the priest wear a mask or face covering.

Communion should be distributed by the priests and deacons, unless the use of extraordinary ministers who trained in the new procedures is necessary.

Communion in the hand or on the tongue is permitted, although priests may ask those receiving on the tongue to receive afterwards or from a designated minister.

Reception of the Precious Blood by the faithful is suspended for the time being.

The guidelines for celebrating Mass came one week after Archbishop Miller released guidelines on the reopening of some churches to public Masses, saying the decision of when to reopen a church for Masses with a congregation is “left to the pastor’s prudential judgment, due to the different circumstances of each parish.”

The guidelines are on the Archdiocese of Vancouver website.

On May 8, the archbishop’s office said the return to publicly celebrating Mass “will be gradual” and “informed by our provincial health authorities, who have guided the province prudently through the early phase of the pandemic.”

In a video interview, Archbishop Miller said the plan is to reopen most churches, although in “very small churches, physical distancing might not be available.”