

HSE Guidelines for the Restoration of Public Masses in the Archdiocese of Port-of-Spain

PREPARED BY THE HSE COMMITTEE OF THE
ARCHDIOCESE OF PORT-OF-SPAIN



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the last three months, there have been several international reports of clusters of individuals who tested positive for COVID-19 and who were found to have contracted the infection while attending services at places of worship, both Christian and non-Christian. Thus, we strongly encourage all parishes to follow closely the recommendations provided in this document, so as to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 infection and even loss of life due to the virus. There is an increased risk of infection as restrictions are lifted, especially when we assemble in groups, so it behoves us all to act judiciously, both individually and collectively, as we restart public assembly in our churches.

In this document, we highlight the measures that the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Port of Spain is putting in place to facilitate the safe reopening of our places of worship, having received approval from the Government. The health and safety of our congregations in particular, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago in general, are of paramount importance to us during this COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to affect all of us in so many ways.

Here, we summarize the principal measures to be put in place in order to ensure that we mitigate against the risks that could harm us during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further details are provided within this document.

1. *SIZE OF CONGREGATION:*

- a. The maximum number of persons allowed for any given service will be based on one (1) person having at least 36 sq.feet to enable physical distancing.
- b. The maximum number of persons allowed will be calculated for each church and will be based on the physical size of each building. This number will be made public
- c. However, out of an abundance of caution in the early days of reopening, we will allow into our churches, only 50% of the maximum capacity (of each church) for each service. This will allow time to address any challenges that

may arise, eventually increasing the number allowed to 75% and then 100% of the maximum, based on the aforementioned formula

d. Appropriate markings will be placed on the floor and pews of the churches to make it easy for the congregation to maintain physical distancing.

2. *PREPARATION OF CHURCH FOR SERVICES:*

a. The building and the microphones will be sanitized and allowed to ventilate for at least 1-2 hours before worship.

b. Focus will be placed on the continuous education of parishioners on 'How to keep safe in a COVID-19 world' and signage of established protocols from the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Church will be clearly visible to the congregation.

3. *PREPARATION & ASSEMBLY FOR MASS:*

a. Each member of the congregation and the Priest must wear a face mask that meets stipulated specifications, and follow proper mask etiquette, while in the building.

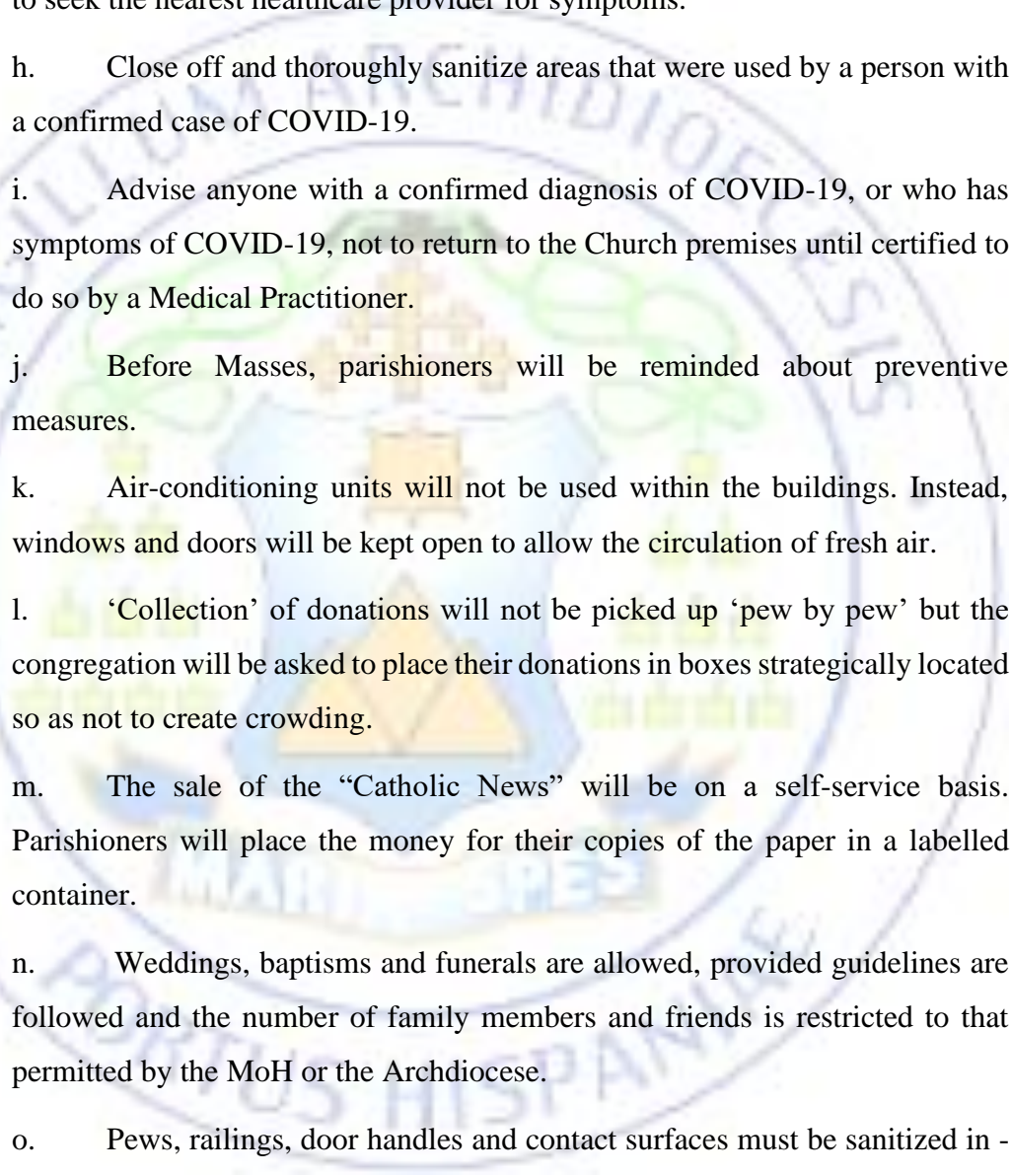
b. All persons entering church buildings will be screened using contactless thermometers for fever and symptoms consistent with COVID-19. If a person has a temperature greater than 37.5°C he will not be permitted to enter.

c. An area should be identified to facilitate the separation of individuals from the general congregation in the event that someone exhibits symptoms of COVID-19 while on the premises.

d. Procedures for safely transporting anyone who becomes sick on the premises and requires assistance to a nearby health facility, should be established in each parish.

e. Local health officials must be contacted if someone diagnosed with COVID-19 has been on church premises.

f. Inform the parish staff and parishioners if someone with COVID-19 has been on the premises, but confidentiality must be maintained

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- g. Advise those who were exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19 to seek the nearest healthcare provider for symptoms.
- h. Close off and thoroughly sanitize areas that were used by a person with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
- i. Advise anyone with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, or who has symptoms of COVID-19, not to return to the Church premises until certified to do so by a Medical Practitioner.
- j. Before Masses, parishioners will be reminded about preventive measures.
- k. Air-conditioning units will not be used within the buildings. Instead, windows and doors will be kept open to allow the circulation of fresh air.
- l. ‘Collection’ of donations will not be picked up ‘pew by pew’ but the congregation will be asked to place their donations in boxes strategically located so as not to create crowding.
- m. The sale of the “Catholic News” will be on a self-service basis. Parishioners will place the money for their copies of the paper in a labelled container.
- n. Weddings, baptisms and funerals are allowed, provided guidelines are followed and the number of family members and friends is restricted to that permitted by the MoH or the Archdiocese.
- o. Pews, railings, door handles and contact surfaces must be sanitized in - between religious services.
- p. The Government has stipulated that the maximum duration for any one religious service is one hour.
- q. As far as possible, special masses for elderly persons will be scheduled to provide the option to this demographic to worship apart from the rest of the parishioners.

SCENARIO 1 – PUBLIC MASSES WITH LIMITS ON SOCIAL GATHERINGS AND STRICT PHYSICAL DISTANCING

The Archdiocese will adhere strictly to the MoH guidelines regarding the number of persons permitted to gather, based on physical distancing. In the initial phases of reopening, additional opportunities for worship will be scheduled, where possible, to facilitate smaller congregations at each celebration.

THE PARTS OF THE MASS AND THEIR CORRESPONDING GUIDELINES	
<i>GENERAL PRINCIPLES</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vigilance in maintaining physical distancing – controlled seating arrangements and proper spacing when forming lines (6 feet apart). Members of the same household will be allowed to sit together. ● Dispensation from the weekend obligation to attend Sunday Mass still applies. ● Until further notice, attendance at Mass on any day of the week will fulfil the obligation to attend Sunday Mass. ● Live-streaming of Masses over the internet and on Trinity TV will be continued as much as possible. ● Those at a higher risk for severe COVID-19 – older persons or those with underlying health conditions – are encouraged to stay at home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Arrangements will be made for Holy Communion to be brought to their homes. ○ Guidelines and training will be provided to those who make home visits to ensure their health and safety and that of persons who are visited. ● Persons with flu-like symptoms should not attend any church ceremonies. ● All hymnals and other printed materials, which are usually stored in pews, should be removed and put into storage.

<p><i>PREPARATION BEFORE MASS</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote frequent hand hygiene. Congregants must wash or sanitize their hands immediately before entering the church. ● All Mass attendees must use face coverings as recommended by the MoH. ● Priests and other ministers must not serve at Masses when manifesting flu-like symptoms. ● Station ushers at the doors to ensure adequate physical distancing when congregants enter and leave the church. Ushers can also assist in opening and closing doors to limit the physical contact of common surfaces. ● Choirs in which members normally sit immediately next to each other have been shown to be a source of viral spread. A single cantor and up to a maximum of two (2) musicians should be used to lead the congregation in song. ● Maintain physical distancing practices among ministers serving in the sanctuary. ● Leave Holy Water fonts empty. ● Prop doors open to lessen contact.
<p><i>THE INTRODUCTORY RITES</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Omit the Entrance Procession if physical distancing cannot be maintained.
<p><i>PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The collection will not be picked up ‘pew by pew’ but the congregation will be asked to place their donations in boxes strategically located so as not to create crowding. ● Omit the Offertory Procession. ● Only one minister is to prepare the altar for the liturgy of the Eucharist. ● Perform the lavabo without the assistance of an altar-server

<p><i>THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The ciboria which contain the hosts to be consumed by the congregants, are to remain covered. ● Omit the Sign of Peace.
<p><i>THE DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Place markers indicating 6-foot intervals for persons in lines. Ushers can also help to maintain physical distancing during the distribution of Holy Eucharist. ● The Ministers of Holy Communion are to wash their hands with soap and water if possible, or use hand sanitizer before distributing the hosts. ● It is recommended that larger hosts be distributed to the congregants to minimize accidental physical contact between those distributing Holy Communion and the communicants. ● No Communion from the chalice. ● The reception of Communion on the tongue is not allowed. ● Priests and Ministers must wear masks, preferably N95 masks, when distributing Holy Communion ● Keep hand sanitizer nearby in case Priests or Ministers distributing Holy Communion accidentally make skin-to-skin contact with a congregant and wish to sanitize their hands again. ● Congregants are to process in single file (i.e. one line) to receive Holy Communion. No parallel lines.

<i>CONCLUDING RITES</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instruct the congregation to leave the church row by row to avoid crowding the exits. ● Clergy should not greet congregants after Masses. ● Ushers should assist in ensuring that persons maintain safe physical distance while exiting the church, and also assist in discouraging persons from crowding together after Mass.
<i>AFTER MASS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash all Communion vessels in hot soapy water. ● Clean all liturgical vestments regularly. Each priest should have his own vestments reserved for his use. ● Sanitize surfaces that are touched frequently after every church service. ● Sanitize restroom facilities after each liturgy. ● A bleach solution, or other EPA-approved disinfectant can be used to sanitize surfaces following the recommendations from the MoH.

SCENARIO 2 – RELAXED LIMITS ON SOCIAL GATHERINGS AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING

THE PARTS OF THE MASS AND THEIR CORRESPONDING GUIDELINES	
<i>GENERAL PRINCIPLES</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Encourage parishioners to avoid crowding of areas, although not required to remain 6 feet apart, ● Designate seating areas for at-risk persons to facilitate their physical distancing. These areas should be clearly marked. ● Encourage persons who are ill or have flu-like symptoms not to attend Mass. ● Encourage the continued practice of good hand hygiene ● Follow the MoH guidelines regarding the use of masks. ● Remove all hymnals and other printed materials that are usually stored in pews and put them into storage
<i>PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do not allow the passing of baskets during the collection. Baskets affixed to long handles can be used once those collecting can maintain physical distancing. An alternative is to use fixed collection boxes. ● The Offertory Procession is to be omitted.
<i>THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Non-contact gestures, such as a nod of the head, are to be used for the Sign of Peace.

<p><i>THE DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Priests and Ministers of Holy Communion must wash their hands with soap and water, if possible, or use hand sanitizer before distributing the hosts. ● Give Holy Communion to at-risk persons first, in order to maintain their physical distancing. ● No Holy Communion from the chalice. ● Distribute Holy Communion only in the palm of the hand. ● Distribute Holy Communion at arm's length to the recipients who must receive it at arm's length, thus achieving close to six (6) feet physical distance between Priest/Minister and Communicant
<p><i>AFTER MASS</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clean and disinfect common surfaces after every service. ● Wash all Communion vessels in hot, soapy water. ● Clean all liturgical vestments regularly. ● Sanitize restroom facilities after each liturgy.

Other activities (e.g. baptisms, funerals, weddings, etc.) are to resume in churches with all of the above measures – especially those pertaining to physical distancing - being closely maintained.

The sacrament of Confession should be accommodated in a private area of the church where there is adequate ventilation.

CONTINUOUS COMMUNITY SENSITIZATION OF COVID-19

The Church will continue to publicly promote the practice of preventive actions before Masses begin and/or during the announcements:

- Frequent handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60 % alcohol.
- Practise good respiratory hygiene such as coughing into the elbow and away from persons situated close by.
- Keep hands away from the face at all times
- Clean frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- When in public, practise physical distancing and wear facial masks, as needed.
- Stay home when sick.

Posters listing the main Ministry of Health guidelines will be placed in areas where they can be easily seen by the congregation.

MASK ETIQUETTE DURING LITURGICAL CELEBRATIONS

CHOIRS

In the choir, now limited to three (3) persons, it is only the cantor/singer who may not wear a nose and mouth covering while singing. The musicians, especially, if in a horizontal plane with the cantor/singer, must cover their nose and mouth throughout the service.

CLERGY

Clergy must wear a mask when in close proximity to others. particularly when:

- in procession
- during the distribution of Holy Communion

- using a hand-held microphone and stepping off the altar into the congregation

The priest may lower his mask:

- **When he is the sole user of a fixed microphone & ambo during any service** e.g. Holy Mass, funeral, wedding, baptism.
- When he is delivering the homily standing between the altar and the congregation **OR** alone at the altar saying presiding prayers during the liturgy of the eucharist **AND** the sacred vessels are covered.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF THE EUCHARIST

Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist must wear a mask when in close proximity to others, especially during:

- processions
- the distribution of Holy Communion

LECTORS

Must wear a mask when in close proximity to others, especially when:

- in procession
- seated in the congregation or choir stalls

During a single service, if more than one lector (and/or cantor) is to use a fixed microphone at a single ambo, **ALL users must wear a mask at all times.**

However, resources permitting, there can be one reader/lector for the 1st & 2nd reading at the ambo on the altar while the cantor leads from another microphone or the choir stall.

THE CONGREGATION

The members of the congregation must keep their masks on while within the church building in keeping with the guidelines and recommendations of the MoH.

VENTILATION

Air pollution is often invisible and insidious. The air quality in enclosed spaces with air conditioning (A/C) is determined by the integrity of the A/C filter, the frequency of maintenance of the A/C unit(s) and the (respiratory) etiquette of the users of the room. There are multiple variables to consider. During the threat of COVID-19 we must not use A/C units. We must open all doors and ventilate the church to allow fresh, natural air to circulate.

In arriving at our decision not to allow the use of A/C units during the threat of COVID-19, we took into consideration a number of factors including the following:

- There is evidence of spread of COVID-19 via air-conditioning. An often-quoted example is of spread of the virus within a restaurant, where an infected person at one table spread it to other diners in the stream of air-flow from the A/C unit.
- The general advice regarding mitigation against the spread of Covid-19 in air-conditioned environments is to stop re-circulation of air and rather increase ventilation from outside air, and use air purification filters that filter viral particles
- If these recommendations cannot be followed, then it is advised that windows and doors are opened to allow fresh air in.

The building should remain open after each service, but, as a security measure, the open building should not be left unattended during this time. Additionally, the ventilation schedule should not be so predictable that the building becomes a soft target for thieves or other persons of ill will.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Archbishop, with the assistance of his designated HSE team, will provide continuous assessment and reporting to the Chief Medical Officer on the implementation of these guidelines and those issued by the MoH.

Resources Used

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Interim Guidance for Administrators and Leaders of Community- and Faith-Based Organizations to Plan, Prepare, and Respond to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)* accessed on 04/05/2020,
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>

The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, *A Synopsis of Pastoral Considerations for the Reopening of Churches and the Resumption of Public Masses* (May, 2020),
https://fdlc.org/sites/default/files/files/Re-Opening_Summary_FDLC.pdf

The Ministry of Health of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, *The New Normal: Guidelines for Places of Worship* (June, 2020),
<http://www.health.gov.tt/covid19/GuidelinesRegulations/WorshipGuidelines.pdf>

The Thomistic Institute, *Guidelines on Sacraments and Pastoral Care: Working Group on Infectious Disease Protocols for Sacraments & Pastoral Care*. Version 1.1 (April 28, 2020),
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