



THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF PORT OF SPAIN

Health, Safety and Environment Team

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BULLETIN #11

GUIDELINES FOR THE DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES AND OTHER LENTEN SERVICES IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

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BACKGROUND

Since March 2020, the world has been experiencing a pandemic as a consequence of SARS-CoV-2. This is an infectious organism from the coronavirus family which causes a respiratory illness referred to as COVID-19. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended a number of measures to limit the transmission of the virus which include:

- Stay home if you are ill.
- Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
- When in public, wear a face mask which covers the nose and mouth.
- Avoid crowds especially in poorly ventilated or enclosed spaces.
- Practise physical distancing when in public by maintaining a 6-ft distance between yourself and anyone not from your household.
- Regularly wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Clean and disinfect frequently-touched surfaces daily e.g. railings, doorknobs, keyboards.

By adhering to these and other safety protocols, Catholic faithful across the world have been able to participate in public worship.

GUIDANCE

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday, Wednesday February 17th 2021**. Christian churches across Trinidad and Tobago will host their usual services on that date, but in keeping with COVID-19 restrictions there are a few changes.

In an attempt to avoid overcrowding, Archbishop Jason Gordon has granted permission to impose ashes at services on the follow dates:

- Wednesday February 17th 2021
- Thursday February 18th 2021
- Friday February 19th 2021

The two additional dates may be used if considered necessary by the Parish Priest

PRODUCTION OF ASHES

Traditionally, the ashes for the Ash Wednesday service are created by burning the palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday service. However, in 2020 Palm Sunday masses were suspended because the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago were in lockdown and churches were closed because of the pandemic. In advance of Ash Wednesday 2021, each parish must prepare ashes by burning (dried) palm branches or leaves obtained by other means.

DISTRIBUTION OF ASHES

To prevent coronavirus disease transmission the distribution of ashes must occur in a manner that avoids direct skin-to-skin contact.

<u>OPTION 1</u>	<u>OPTION 2</u>
The priest/minister sprinkles the blessed ashes on the <i>top of the head</i> of the penitent	The priest/minister anoints the <i>forehead</i> of the penitent in the sign of the cross with a <i>Q-tip</i> dipped in the blessed ashes

NB Each parish priest should decide which method(s) are best suited to his context and available material and human resources. Each parish is expected to be self-sufficient in this regard including sourcing Q-tips and establishing proficiency in imposing ashes among ministers.

ROLE OF THE PRIEST

In silence, the priest:

- Blesses the ashes
- Sprinkles the ashes with holy water

The priest ***addresses the congregation*** with the words:

- “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” or
- “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

The faithful respond:

- “Amen”

In silence, the priest:

- Secures his face mask.
- Cleanses his hands.
- Takes up the vessel of ashes.
- Stands at the foot of the altar awaiting the procession of penitents, who remain at least 6ft apart as they approach to receive ashes.
 - a. Sprinkles the ashes on the top of the head of each penitent.

OR

- b. Using a Q-tip, dips one end into the ashes and anoints the forehead of the penitent with the sign of the cross. The priest then immediately disposes of the Q-tip as the penitent moves away. The priest repeats this action using a new Q-tip with each penitent.

NB Once the priest avoids direct physical contact with the penitent, he need not sanitise his hands between penitents.

- At the end of service the priest returns to the altar and sanitises his hands.
- The used Q-tips must be safely disposed of.

ROLE OF THE PENITENT

- At the invocation by the priest, “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” the penitent responds “Amen.”
- Prior to processing towards the priest for ashes, each penitent
 - Ensures his/her mask fits securely over the nose and mouth.
 - Removes all/any head covering including shawl, scarf or mantilla to expose the top of the head.
- Processes towards the altar keeping a 6ft distance behind the person ahead of them in the queue.
- Stops in front of the priest, **an arm’s length away**.
 - a. Bows his/her head reverently and receives the ashes on the top of the head.

OR

- b. Keeps head upright and receives the ashes on the forehead which the priest will apply using a Q-tip.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Catholic faithful are encouraged to pray the Stations of the Cross especially on Fridays during Lent, either as private worship or at public services. ***At this time, coordinated, mass gatherings for the procession of worshipers is not permitted.***

Stations of the Cross may be held within the Church but those in attendance **must remain in their pews and the capacity guidelines now used for Mass must be employed.**

Worshipers should be reminded that a face mask, covering the nose and mouth, **MUST** be worn at all times when in public, whether outdoors or indoors, and that they should keep a safe physical distance of 6ft away from anyone not from their own household.

RETREATS

Parishes are encouraged to facilitate directed study or religious instruction employing digital tools and social media e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp or Zoom.

Any physical assembly of the Catholic faithful for Retreats and other worship must follow the Ministry of Health Guidelines for Places of Worship issued in June 2020 and which we have modified to govern attendance at Mass in our Archdiocese.

An electronic copy of this document is available at this address:

(<https://health.gov.tt/sites/default/files/pdf/WorshipGuidelines.pdf>).

OTHER LENTEN SERVICES AND RITES

The HSE Team will soon be issuing other Guidelines for the Lenten Season, especially with respect to Holy Week.

REFERENCES

Vatican modifies distribution of ashes for Ash Wednesday -

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2021-01/ash-wednesday-coronavirus-note-distribution-ashes.html>