



**THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF PORT OF SPAIN**

Health, Safety and Environment Team
c/o Archbishop's House, 27 Maraval Road, Port of Spain

**PROPOSAL FOR THE
REOPENING OF CHURCHES
WEEK BEGINNING 6th SEPTEMBER 2021
BULLETIN # 20**

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INTRODUCTION

In Trinidad & Tobago, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the temporary suspension of in-person worship on three occasions since March 2020. This latest hiatus was the longest and lasted four months. With great anticipation we look forward to the reopening of Places of Worship with effect Monday 6th September 2021. This updated document from the Health Safety and Environment (HSE) Committee of the Archdiocese reiterates the COVID-19 safety guidelines.

PREPARATION OF THE PHYSICAL SPACE

- All churches, chapels, parish halls and their contents i.e. furniture, furnishings and vessels there-in must be cleaned and sanitized **prior to hosting the first public Mass**. Expert servicing of electrical, plumbing and cooling systems is strongly advised as sources of infection and disease beyond COVID-19 must be considered e.g. stagnant water and mosquito breeding sites.
- A routine schedule of cleaning and sanitizing between services must be re-established as we return to in-person worship.
- Do stock all toilets, sinks and sanitizing stations with tissue paper, paper towels, soap and/or 70% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Individual seating and floor markings when queuing must be clearly demarcated to ensure that worshippers maintain a safe physical distance of 6feet or 2metres apart in all directions.
- The natural air ventilation of the building can be achieved by keeping open, internal and external doors and windows. Oscillating fans and open vents on air conditioning units aid the movement of air through the building and keep the space cool for all users. Natural air ventilation is preferred during in-person worship.

THE LAW

- *Emergency Powers (No.2) Regulations 2021, the legal requirements of the Public Health [2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)] (No.18).*

Church leaders must identify the pre-COVID-19 or ordinary (seating) capacity of each facility where Holy Mass is hosted. Calculating twenty-five percent (25%) of this figure will generate the total number of persons currently allowed in the building during Holy Mass, subject to the 6-foot physical distancing. For example, where the ordinary capacity of the building is three hundred (300), the maximum number allowed for Mass until further notice is seventy-five (75), subject to the stipulated 6-foot physical distancing.

NB: Included within this 25% number are the ordinary worshippers, choir members, hospitality team and ministers serving on the altar.

- **CHOIR**

At this time, **the total number allowed in the choir is three (3)**, including vocalists and musical accompanists. Singing in a group setting, especially in an enclosed space, was established early on in the pandemic as a high-risk activity for the transmission of the virus so this restricted number of congregants and choir members is designed to minimise the risk.

If a member of the choir leads the Responsorial Psalm, he/she should remain within the choir stall to do so.

Choir members must wear masks at all times while in the Church

- **LECTORS**

The same lector should read both the 1st and 2nd readings at Holy Mass. This minimises the foot traffic on the altar.

Lectors must wear their masks at all times.

THE POLICY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE

Following the expert advice of public healthcare professionals, it is the mandate of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Port of Spain, that the following members of our congregations be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 before performing their respective duties in the church:

- **Celebrant i.e. priest, deacon**
- **Eucharistic ministers or anyone distributing Holy Communion**
- **Hospitality-team members including those checking off attendees who pre-registered**
- **Choir members**
- **Lectors**

These individuals i.e. ordained ministers, commissioned ministers and laity are the hosts to the congregation during Holy Mass. Their varied roles necessitate movement throughout the building with multiple points of contact i.e. multiple interactions with a number of worshippers and each other. Vaccination of these key members adds a layer of physical protection which benefits all parties. In summary, this policy has been put in place out of an abundance of caution for all involved and for the common good.

HOLY MASS

PRE-REGISTRATION

It is advised that registration for Mass attendance be made available in the days before the scheduled Mass. The Calendly app is one such digital tool as are the parish links via catholicct.org. Alternatively, worshippers can call ahead to the Parish secretary to book their place. When the maximum capacity has been reached registration should cease.

CAMSEL has developed a new portal for registering on catholicct.org. When a person registers for the first time he will be remembered when next he seeks to register.

We should be generous in allowing others to participate in Masses by not booking every weekend unless there is space.

Remember that until further notice, attendance at weekday Masses satisfies the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

Please remind persons that if they know that they will not be attending the Mass for which they registered, they should cancel the registration so that someone else can attend Mass.

COVID-19 TRANSMISSION PREVENTION

All attendees for Holy Mass are required to observe the following COVID-19 guidelines.

ALERT!!

Please stay at home if you are ill. Do not attend Holy Mass if you or anyone in your immediate household is unwell with flu-like symptoms, has a temperature of 37.5C or is under quarantine.

Our Church continues to advocate that the population be vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus as the clear evidence is that the vast majority of those who die or have become severely ill as a result of being infected with the virus, were not vaccinated. Therefore, except as stated above, it is not mandatory to be fully vaccinated to attend Mass.

FACE MASK

- A face mask must be worn by each individual aged 8 years and older. This simple device must extend from across the nose bridge, around both sides of the mouth and under the chin and must be in continuous, direct physical contact with the face on all sides of the mask. A face shield may be worn in addition to the mask. However, please note that the face shield by itself does not provide sufficient protection from limiting the spread of respiratory droplets and the potential transmission of virus particles.

HAND HYGIENE

- All attendees must thoroughly wash their hands with soap and water for a minimum of twenty(20) seconds prior to entry. If not available, water should be substituted by hand sanitizer of at least 70% alcohol content.

TEMPERATURE SCREENING

- At the church entrance, the body temperature of each attendee should be tested by using a contactless thermometer. Anyone with a temperature of 37.5C or higher must be barred from entry and should be encouraged to return home immediately and seek medical advice.

ATTENDANCE RECORD

- Pre-Registration for Holy Mass allows the host to prepare an initial list of named attendees. Additionally, at each Mass, there must be a physical record of ALL actual attendees with documentation of the individual's name and contact details e.g. postal address, e-mail address, telephone number. Upon arrival, attendees must be directed to a 'sign-in' book, prominently positioned on a table or rostrum within the church foyer. At a later date, this personal data may be required for contact-tracing or broadcasting parish news and should be secured at the end of Mass.

CATHOLIC NEWS SALES

- Purchase of the Catholic News should be made by inserting the exact payment through a slot in an appropriately marked box. The buyer should then pick-up the newspaper himself.

SEATING

- Attendees must follow markings on pews and chairs to seats positioned a safe physical distance apart of 2metres/6feet. As the church fills with worshippers, hospitality team members can act as ushers to identify available seats for later arrivals.
- **Members of the same household** may sit together, immediately next to one another, that is, without observing the 6-foot physical distancing

CHOIR & LECTORS

Members of the choir and lectors must observe the guidelines spelt out above. They too must keep their face mask in position, covering the nose and mouth, especially when reading or singing while maintaining a 2metre/6feet physical distance apart from one another. These requirements also apply during practice sessions.

PROCESSION OF MINISTERS

Both the entry procession and the recession can safely be performed. Participants should adopt a single-file arrangement, keeping the required physical distance apart. At the end of Mass, do not linger at the church doors as this encourages congregating by departing worshippers.

OFFERTORY

Collection is permitted and may be retrieved in one of two ways.

Option 1: After the intercessory prayers, with attendants walking the aisles and passing long-handled baskets along the pews.

Option 2: Strategically placed, locked boxes, suitably labelled, at the entrances to the church.

PROCESSION OF GIFTS

There is to be no procession of the gifts.

SIGN OF PEACE

There is to be no Sign of Peace as was customary prior to the pandemic. However, attendees may make a contactless gesture of peace to one another.

DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

At this time, only The Body of Christ will be distributed and must only be placed into the hand of the communicant. **Reception of Holy Eucharist onto the tongue is strictly prohibited.**

There will be no distribution of the Precious Blood at Masses.

1. All ministers must perform careful hand washing or sanitizing immediately before receiving the ciborium with the Holy Eucharist.
2. Communicants wishing to receive Holy Communion should form a single queue, along pre-designated aisles, starting from the pew nearest the altar while keeping 2metres/6feet apart with their face mask in position.
3. Once standing opposite the minister, the communicant extends both arms forward at the level of his/her chest, elbows straight, left palm open over the right palm, facing upwards.
4. The minister will distribute Holy Communion onto the communicant's open palm also from an arm's-length distance, with the words, "Receive the Body of Christ."
5. The communicant responds, "Amen".
6. The communicant will then step aside and turn away from the minister before briefly lowering his/her face mask and slipping the Holy Communion onto his/her tongue to be consumed.
7. He/she returns to his/her seat and should then perform hand hygiene as he/she would have just touched the front of his/her face mask which is considered contaminated.

The maximum duration of any religious service now stands at one(1) hour.

RECESSION

There is to be no congregating in the building or on the compound after the end of Holy Mass.

CHURCH-BASED GATHERINGS

- As there continues to be community spread of COVID-19 across Trinidad & Tobago, we encourage virtual meetings, especially if participants are unvaccinated or are considered to have health vulnerabilities.
- Live streaming of services should continue to be offered.
- Groups that chose to meet in person and use any church facility must adhere strictly to the above guidelines in particular a twenty-five percent (25%) capacity and one (1) hour duration of assembly. *Emergency Powers (No.2) Regulations 2021, the legal requirements of the Public Health [2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV)] (No.18).*

WEDDINGS, BAPTISMS & FUNERALS

The maximum number permitted in physical attendance for any one of the above events is currently set at a total of ten (10).

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