



## DIOCESE OF ST. CATHARINES

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THE CHANCERY

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### MEMO

To: All Clergy and Religious in the Diocese of St. Catharines

From: Bishop Gerard Bergie

Date: February 25, 2022

Re: **COVID-19 Protocols**

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**As of Tuesday, March 1, 2022**, capacity limits in all indoor public settings including churches will be lifted. Physical distancing will not be required. Masking requirements will remain for all public spaces, including churches and office settings.

For all churches in the Diocese of St. Catharines, as of March 1, 2022, please note the following changes and reminders which can be implemented at once or gradually at the discretion of the pastor.

- Floor markings can be removed. Most signage can be removed with the exception of signage regarding the ongoing requirement to wear face masks.
- It is recommended that health and hygiene signage remain posted in parishes at this time.
- All barriers and markings on pews can be removed.
- Cleaning procedures for pews, washrooms, confessionals, reconciliation rooms are relaxed so as to require only regular cleaning in accordance with pre-COVID-19 routines.
- The use of hand sanitizer remains a best practice and is encouraged.
- For those who are sick, have a compromised immune system or are uncomfortable returning to church at this time, the dispensation for Sunday Mass attendance remains.
- Parishes may wish to continue with distancing at Holy Communion as a best practice.
- Those receiving Holy Communion on the tongue should be at the end of the Communion line.

CATHOLIC CENTRE: 3400 Merrittville Highway, Thorold, Ontario

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- Altar servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion can resume pre-pandemic duties. Distribution of Holy Communion to private homes and long-term care facilities may resume as allowed by provincial and public health requirements.
  - Sacramental celebrations including baptisms, confirmations and weddings can return to pre-pandemic practices.
  - Pastors may wish to continue livestreamed Masses and virtual meetings.
  - Confessionals and confession rooms can reopen, provided that both parties are masked.
  - A bow should still be encouraged as an alternative to handshakes for the sign of peace.
  - Holy water fonts can be refilled. Prayer books, hymnals, magazines, bulletins and votive candles can return to the church, if they have not already.
  - Meetings and gatherings in parish halls may resume with no capacity limit and no physical distancing required. Face masks are still required.
  - Rapid testing for unvaccinated clergy, staff and volunteers is suspended. All clergy, staff, volunteers and parishioners are urged to continue self-screening for COVID-19 symptoms and stay home if they have any symptoms.
  - Contact tracing and online Mass registration systems are no longer required.
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Pastors are encouraged to review the updated procedures with volunteers and others who may be assisting with the celebration of the sacraments, parish ministries and functions.

Parishes are encouraged to make an announcement at the beginning of Mass over the first several weeks of March 2022 noting the lifting of restrictions and reminders regarding updated procedures that may have changed.

Please direct any questions regarding COVID restrictions to the Vice-Chancellor, Margaret Jong.