

The Church is the people of God

UPDATED PARISH DIRECTIVES AS A RESULT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

AS OF 1 JULY 2020

Parish directives

From Wednesday 1 July 2020, Catholic churches and chapels in the Diocese of Wollongong will be able to open for Masses, Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms, subject to the following directives.

These directives have been revised as result of the release of the Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order (no 4) 2020 under the NSW Public Health Act 2010 and issued by the NSW Minister for Health and Medical Research on 30 June 2020.

The timing of re-opening our church buildings is left to the discretion of the parish priest and local parish leadership but should only take place when the standards required to protect the health and safety of clergy, parish staff and parishioners are met. As always, an abundance of caution and prudence should be exercised when considering the appropriate point when church buildings can or should be reopened for the public celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and the Sacrament.

Overarching directives

- All faithful in the diocese are dispensed from the obligation to physically attend Mass on Sundays
- The faithful can continue to keep holy their Sunday by setting aside time for prayer at home, reading the Scriptures of the day, watching Mass on television or online, and asking God for the graces they would normally receive in Holy Communion (canon 87 §1, canon 1248 §2)
- Churches and chapels can be opened to worshippers and the public for the following reasons only: Masses, weddings, funerals, baptisms and reconciliation (note: at this stage, Diocese of Wollongong church buildings are not open for private prayer)
- The decision to open a parish church/chapel for these services is the responsibility of the parish priest with his parish council / leadership team
- The number of people inside a building must never exceed the limits detailed in the latest Public Health Order (see the following pages for specific numbers)
- All worshippers and attendees must register in advance through their parish office or online (if offered by your parish). Your Parish Priest is best placed to determine the process for admission and monitoring at each Mass
- When recording details of attendance, there should be no reference to why the person is attending (unless the person has registered online where their preference for the relevant sacrament is recorded) except for essential assistants where their role in the Mass must be recorded.

continued on next page ►

Overarching directives

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- People who feel unwell, who have flu/ respiratory symptoms, elevated body temperatures or who have been in contact in the previous 14 days with people suspected to have or who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, are not to enter churches or chapels
- Worshippers classified as vulnerable per [AHPPC guidelines](#) are **encouraged not to attend physically**
- Clergy and parish staff will follow a consistently applied process to ensure a fair and equitable attendance of worshippers
- All Holy Water fonts and stoups will remain empty
- Visible signage will be in place in all church buildings outlining, as a minimum, conditions of entry and the maximum capacity within the building
- High touch surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected regularly (including door handles pews, lectern, computer, vessels, shared musical instruments, taps, toilets, handrails) per [Work Safe Australia guidelines](#)
- Sufficient quantities of hygiene products (soap, hand sanitiser, tissues) will be available and accessible to parish staff, worshippers and attendees at doors of churches and confessionals, back of the church, bathrooms, and in the sacristy and sanctuary
- Parishes may utilise a digital thermometer for use by the Attendance Monitor
- Clergy, worshippers and other participants will adhere to physical distancing requirements, including maintaining 1.5m distance and ensuring four square metres per person in a room.
- Attendance Monitors will be present whenever a church or chapel is opened to the public. The key role of the monitors is to (1) ensure the attendee limit is not exceeded, (2) watch for symptoms in attendees, (3) inform people who are displaying symptoms or attempt to gain unlawful entry that they must leave the premises, and (4) record any incidents that occur while a church building is open.
- Essential assistants who are classified as vulnerable per [AHPPC guidelines](#) must provide medical clearance documentation (signed by a doctor) before serving
- Essential assistants include sacristans, servers, readers, musicians, A/V operators, videographers and monitors
- Parishioners are asked not to congregate outside the Church/Chapel Building after each celebration
- The faithful are encouraged to have the 'COVIDsafe' app active on their mobile device where they have the capacity to do so (note: this is not a requirement of attendance)
- Parishes must submit a completed COVID-19 Safety Plans issued by the NSW Government to the Office of the Bishop
- Because of possible risk of aerosol transmission, congregational singing is prohibited at this time
- Only one musician and one cantor is allowed. The Cantor must maintain 3 metres physical distance
- Keep a record of name and a mobile number or email address for all worshippers, staff, volunteers, visitors and contractors for a period of at least 28 days after their attendance at the parish for any event or reason. Ensure records are used only for the purposes of tracing COVID-19

Public Masses

All overarching directives as detailed on page 1–2 are to be observed during the conduct of public Masses.

- **the total number of persons allowed is calculated by allowing 4 square metres of space for each person on the premises**

Note: the space to be measured when calculating the 4m² per person excludes the sanctuary.

In addition, the following specific directives apply where the Parish Priest has opted to celebrate public Mass:

PUBLIC MASSES

- Only the maximum registered worshippers as calculated above will be allowed entry (in addition to clergy and essential assistants). At the time of registration the full names and contact phone numbers for all worshippers will be collected.
- Parish-appointed Attendance Monitors will check names against a list to ensure all worshippers attending have registered
- Worshippers must sanitise their hands upon entry using provided sanitiser at doors of the building
- Allocated seating will be marked with stickers to ensure 1.5m distance between worshippers
- Worshippers can seek assistance from the Attendance Monitors if required during the Mass
- Worshippers must not shake hands and instead offer a verbal exchange of peace
- The Attendance Monitors will maintain alertness to identify worshippers presenting with flu-like symptoms (cough, runny nose, etc.) and advise any worshippers with symptoms they must leave the premises
- The Attendance Monitors will ensure worshippers do not congregate in the entrance or any area of the building
- The Attendance Monitors will ensure staggering of worshippers as they enter the building and walk to their seats
- Communion will be received in the hand only (not on the tongue)
- There will be no communion from the chalice for worshippers
- The Attendance Monitors will coordinate a staggered exit of worshippers

Church/Chapels will not be open for Private Prayer under the current directives due to the significant cleaning and sanitising requirements that are involved to protect parishioners, clergy, parish staff and volunteers.

Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms and Reconciliation

All overarching directives and hygiene, cleaning and social distancing requirements detailed above are to be observed during the conduct of weddings, funerals, baptisms and reconciliation. In addition, the following specific directives apply:

WEDDINGS

- Only the maximum registered worshippers as calculated above for Masses (excluding the couple, the celebrant, assisting ministers / essential personnel, and one photographer or one videographer or both)
- 1.5m distance must be maintained between all participants (except the bride and groom)
- 2 Attendance Monitors will ensure staggering of worshippers as they enter the building and walk to their seats
- The 2 Attendance Monitors will coordinate a staggered exit of worshippers

FUNERALS

- Only the maximum registered worshippers as calculated above for Masses are permitted (excluding persons necessary for the conduct of the service) subject to the 4 sq metre rule
- All Parishes must have a completed COVID-19 Funeral Plan
- Where a church or chapel has less than 50 allowable worshippers under the 4 sq metre rule they **may have up to 50 if all persons**, who are not part of the same household, maintain a distance of 1.5 metres

BAPTISMS

The Parish priest and Pastoral Council / Local Leadership team will determine when baptisms that were postponed because of COVID-19 will be rescheduled. Rescheduled baptisms should only take place when the standards required to protect the health and safety of clergy, parish staff and participants can be met.

- Baptisms may take place at the discretion of the minister in consultation with the family
- Only the maximum registered attendees as calculated above for Masses are permitted to attend. The celebrant and assisting ministers are permitted above these limits
- There should be no “immersion” baptisms
- All participants to maintain 1.5m except for the parents and child (and only the parents should hold the child)
- A taper to light the baptismal candle when either celebrant or godparent light baptismal candle directly from Paschal candle
- Your Parish Priest will advise you of the maximum number of attendees allowed.

RECONCILIATION

- The Faithful must make an appointment to attend reconciliation
- 1.5m distance is to be maintained between the priest and the penitent

Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament for the Anointing of the Sick (for individuals) will continue to be offered to those in need of it, according to Canon 1001: 'Those who have the care of souls and those who are close to the sick are to see to it that the sick are consoled by the sacrament of anointing at the appropriate time'

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

- Clergy should only visit the sick or infirm with COVID-19 in a hospital or aged care facility if requested by the patient, family or hospital personnel. Clergy are requested to contact hospital personnel to confirm that the appropriate precautions are met prior to administering the sacraments
- Group celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick (two or more people receiving the sacrament consecutively in a single celebration) remains suspended

Other directives

SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMS & CELEBRATIONS OF THE SACRAMENTS

- The Parish Priest and Pastoral Council / Leadership Team will determine when First Reconciliation, Confirmation and First Communion can take place as a result of COVID-19 taking into account the guidelines in this directive.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

- Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not to take Holy Communion to the sick in homes, hospitals and nursing homes. This continues to be undertaken by Priests of the diocese.
- Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion can take Holy Communion to the elderly and vulnerable in their homes who do not attend Mass due to COVID-19 recommendations.
- Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must exercise appropriate physical distancing and hygiene practices when administering the sacrament.
- After purifying the vessel and consuming any remaining particles of the sacred host, all vessels used to contain the sacrament must be disinfected after each use with warm soapy water.

PARISH MEETINGS

- Groups and meetings associated with Parish life may commence at the discretion of the Parish Priest.
- The number of participants in a parish meeting room must not exceed the number of allowable people based upon the 4 square metre rule for that room.
- It is expected that these meetings do not occur in the Church but in the Parish meeting rooms due to the added cleaning burden present at this time.
- The elderly and vulnerable are encouraged not to attend until further easing of government guidelines advise otherwise.
- When advertising parish meetings in bulletins, the allowable person limits of the meeting room/building must be advertised and hygiene practices in accordance with these directives must be promoted and implemented.
- The number of allowable people in the meeting room must be prominently displayed on the door to the meeting room.
- It is the responsibility of the Parish Priest to ensure that the meeting room is cleaned and sanitised immediately following the use of the room.
- It is the responsibility of the Parish Priest to ensure all contact details are recorded and kept in accordance with the Government Guidelines.
- Physical distancing in Parish meetings should be in accordance with Government Guidelines.
- Diocesan meetings can also commence in accordance with compliance with physical distancing requirements in diocesan meeting rooms.
- Relevant overarching directives must also be followed at all times.

SOCIAL DISTANCING AND HYGIENE

All parishes and parishioners are required to follow social distancing and hygiene guidelines as provided by the health authorities, including:

- Good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene.
- Distancing of at least one person per four square metres (except in family groups)
- Self isolation if diagnosed with COVID–19 or when exposed to symptomatic or diagnosed COVID–19 persons
- Parishioners must ensure they utilise the hand sanitisers provided as they enter and exit churches and chapels.