

The Church is the people of God

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

AS OF 23 DECEMBER 2020

Parish directives

From 23 December 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 The Public Health (COVID-19 Restrictions on Gathering and Movement) Order (No 5) 2020 under the NSW Public Health Act 2010 and issued by the NSW Minister for Health and Medical Research.

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: Masses, weddings, funerals, baptisms, reconciliation and private prayer such as adoration. (Whenever a church is open attendance monitors must be present and registration and hygiene practices implemented in accordance with these directives)
- 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.
- 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

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Overarching directives

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- 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
- Shared paper and pens should be removed from tables in the church
- 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 where possible and ensuring two square metres per person in a room. (This may change from time to time through the designation of “hotspots” by Health Authorities that may affect only one or several parishes)
- An attendance Monitor(s) 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 may include sacristans, servers, readers, musicians, (but not singers in a choir), A/V operators, videographers and monitors depending on the type of celebration (see the relevant celebration below for details)
- 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 Plan](#) issued by the NSW Government to the Office of the Bishop:
 - For the parish including masses
 - For funerals
 - For weddings
 - Outdoor masses and liturgies
 - Other one off celebrations not covered above
- Parishes must register each Church/Chapel in a Parish as COVID safe
- Because of possible risk of aerosol transmission, it is preferable and strongly recommended that congregational singing for those over 12 of age is undertaken whilst wearing masks or where this is not possible, congregational singing not take place

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 2 square metres of space for each person (unless varied by Health Authorities through the designation of a Parish as being in a hotspot)**

Note: the space to be measured when calculating the **2m²** 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 (excluding clergy and servers who will be on the Sanctuary and Attendance Monitors where they are not seated in the congregational space). 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
- **1.5 metres between non family groups should be maintained and pews marked accordingly where possible**
- 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 appropriate distancing 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 appropriate distancing of worships as they exit the building

Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms, Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick

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

- Capacity must not exceed one attendee per 2 square metres as noted above for Masses, unless varied by Health Authorities through the designation of a Parish as being in a hotspot. Children count towards the limit.(excluding the couple, the celebrant, assisting ministers / essential personnel, and one photographer or one videographer or both)
- All Parishes must have a completed COVID-19 Wedding Plan
- 1.5m distance must be maintained between all participants (except the bride and groom)
- At least 2 Attendance Monitors will ensure appropriate distancing of worshippers as they enter the building and walk to their seats
- At least 2 Attendance Monitors will ensure physical distancing of worshippers as they exit the building

FUNERALS

- Capacity must not exceed one attendee per 2 square metres as noted above for Masses, unless varied by Health Authorities through the designation of a Parish as being in a hotspot. Children count towards the limit
- All Parishes must have a completed COVID-19 Funeral Plan

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
- Capacity must not exceed one attendee per 2 square metres as noted above for Masses, unless varied by Health Authorities through the designation of a Parish as being in a hotspot. Children count towards the limit. 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

- Reconciliation will be available at set times as advertised by the parish.
- Parishes must ensure that details of attendance at the church for reconciliation are collected in accordance with government requirements but should not record the reason for attendance.
- 1.5m distance is to be maintained between the priest and the penitent
- Penitents should wipe down kneelers and chairs used with antibacterial wipes provided after use.
- Pews used by penitents must be disinfected after use.

Anointing of the Sick

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 may take Holy Communion to the residents in nursing homes. Ministers must always follow directives of the authorities when visiting nursing homes.
- 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 2 square metre rule for that room. (unless varied by Health Authorities through the designation of a Parish as being in a hotspot)
- 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.