



Bishops comment on expansion of attendance limits for worship services

June 9, 2020

The Catholic Bishops of Alberta are welcoming today's news that attendance limits on worship services will be expanded under Stage 2 of the Alberta government's relaunch strategy.

Over the last few weeks, parishes across the province have worked diligently to implement the health and safety protocols necessary to welcome congregations of up to 50 people at each Mass. The return of these public celebrations has been a source of joy for our parishioners and priests alike. We are grateful to all those who have worked so hard to make the necessary preparations, and to our parishioners for the patience and the responsibility toward others that they have demonstrated as they have returned to Mass.

It is important to note, however, that the pandemic is still with us. Therefore, the expansion of the attendance limit will not mean an immediate return to full churches. Each parish will need to determine the maximum number they can accommodate while still observing physical distancing protocols. The Bishops remain committed to protecting the health of parishioners, volunteers, staff and clergy. Therefore, the current guidelines issued by the Bishops for public celebrations of the Mass remain in place until further notice.

Under these guidelines, parishes will still have to meet several conditions for public celebrations of the Mass. These include:

- Ensuring physical distancing of two metres between people who are not of the same household
- Asking attendees to answer a series of health and travel-related questions as recommended by Alberta Health Services
- Recording contact information of attendees for the purpose of contact tracing if necessary
- Sanitizing hands upon entry and exit
- Requiring masks for all volunteers and all those who wish to receive Communion
- Extra cleaning of the church between masses.

In order to welcome larger numbers of congregants, parishes will have to put extra resources into registration, ushering and cleaning. Understandably, this will take time, and will depend on the facilities, staff and volunteer resources of each parish.

During Stage 2, singing during Mass will still not be allowed, as this activity has been shown to spread respiratory droplets that can infect others with the COVID-19 coronavirus. And any socializing after Mass will still have to take place outside, observing the physical distancing protocol. We encourage parishioners to check their parish websites for local information and updates.

The guidelines for Stage 1 of reintroducing public celebrations of the Mass were developed by a task force the Bishops established under the direction of Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton and Bishop William McGrattan of Calgary. Until further notice, those guidelines remain in effect.