



ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF REGINA OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

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June 18, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ of the Archdiocese of Regina, warm greetings in the Lord Jesus.

As anticipated, at the end of last week, we were informed that the numbers allowed at services of worship, including Catholic Masses, has risen significantly. We are now allowed to gather up to a third of the normal capacity of churches, up to a maximum of 150, but with the following stipulations, which are very important, and have not always been clearly presented in media reports. What is permitted, if our space allows, is up to five groups of 30 people. Each of those 5 groups need to be separated by 5 m. Within each group of 30, we still need to keep 2 m distance between families or individuals. So in fact we don't actually have a facility that could hold 150 unless we also used halls, auditoriums, and other meeting spaces. But it is good news that we are able to gather to that extent, and is a real step forward. Of course those with health risks, the elderly, and anyone who is not yet comfortable gathering in a public place at this stage of the pandemic, are free to remain at home. The dispensation from the Sunday obligation to attend Mass remains in place.

The government-appointed liaison team that has been working with faith leaders has helped us to interpret the government directives, assuring us that a certain trust has been extended to faith communities, in part because of the work we have done to this point in taking the precautions which reduce the chances of a further spread of the virus. Faith leaders have been invited to make decisions for their congregations, and as Archbishop, I in turn entrust local pastors, in dialogue with their parish councils and drawing on our archdiocesan guidelines, to make decisions and take appropriate steps in each parish. We need to make those decisions with public safety and care for the most vulnerable ever in mind.

From the discussions with the government's liaison team, here are a couple of cautions that I would identify for all concerned. First, given the physical distancing directives from the chief medical officer and government, it is more helpful and more realistic for us to think in terms of how many groups of 30 (or less in smaller churches) we can safely accommodate, rather than to think in terms of 150 at the outset. Second, have a plan for cleaning and disinfecting surfaces touched by parishioners prior to and after each Mass, a seating arrangement, and a plan for entering and exiting the church. Third, and most difficult of all in terms of giving communion, when people come within 2 m of each other, both need to be wearing masks.

While many have rejoiced in the last couple of weeks at being able to go to Mass for the first time in several months, there has been much discussion and in some circles, no small controversy, about how communion is being given in various parishes within the Archdiocese. We can understand why some people are upset, and feel so passionately about how we receive communion. It is a sign that your faith matters to you greatly. For some who have shared their concerns, the greatest priority is doing things in the most appropriate liturgical way possible; for others, it is doing things in the safest way possible from a health perspective; for some it is being able to receive communion in their preferred way; for others, it is holding everyone in the community together in the midst of an enormously challenging situation.

When we prepared guidelines based on the government's directives, including several possible ways in which communion could be given, we sought to take all of these concerns into consideration. But these values need to be held in relation to each other. While we are grateful that the numbers allowed at Mass

have risen, the current restrictions are indeed challenging. The surge in new cases a couple of days ago is a reminder that we need to remain vigilant.

Thank you for your patience, care and perseverance, including with those with whom you may disagree; these are tangible signs of your love for your neighbours. Thank you to all who have found creative ways to reach out to parishioners and those in need around you amidst the pandemic, ways within the parameters of what is allowed, which are genuinely helpful to others. Thank you for your efforts at maintaining communication with your fellow parishioners, for your care for the vulnerable, for your love for the Eucharist and your patience with us as we try our best to find a way forward, and to remain united as a community as we do so.

Asking God's abundant blessings upon you all.

Grace and peace in the Risen Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don Bolen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Don" and last name "Bolen" clearly distinguishable.

✠ Donald Bolen
Archbishop of Regina

DJB:bg