



DIOCESE OF SAINT JOHN
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Office of the Bishop

May 8, 2020

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Saint John,

RE: Outdoor Masses with Communion and Relaxation of GNB Restrictions

During this difficult and unprecedented time in the Church and in the world, I want to thank you for your patience and support. It is with great joy that I write to you today. Following our meeting between Government of New Brunswick (GNB) officials and faith leaders Thursday morning, and in light of Premier Higgs' announcement this afternoon that we are moving to the next phase (orange) in the relaxation of restrictions here in New Brunswick, we have been advised that Communion is now being permitted at outdoor (parking lot) Masses.

I know that our Catholic faithful have been anxiously awaiting the opportunity to return to some sense of normalcy with the opportunity to participate in public worship, along with the desire to receive the Eucharist. I am grateful for the efforts that have been made already by a number of parishes successfully conducting parking lot Masses these past few weeks. It is clear, however, that this may not be feasible for every church, based on the layout or size of the parking lot. It can also be a bit of a daunting prospect with lack of personnel and equipment. I am certain your pastors would be grateful for any assistance that might be offered if indeed the possibility exists in the next few weeks. If your parish is offering a parking lot Mass, please follow the directions of the parish staff and volunteers, especially in following GNB guidelines that require vehicles to be 2 metres apart, and taking every precaution for the safe distribution of Communion to each carload of passengers.

If parking lot Masses are not possible, I have suggested another alternative to our pastors and parishes. I have encouraged pastors to celebrate a Mass at a specific time within the church, and, if possible, livestream the Mass. If livestreaming is not possible, the parish could provide a resource for parishioners to participate in a Mass from home (ie. by providing a link to another livestream Mass or information for TV Mass). Following the Mass, at a predetermined time and time frame, you could then proceed to the church to receive Communion, while remaining in your vehicles, following the directions of staff and volunteers when you arrive. In order to maintain reverence for the reception of Holy Communion, even if connected to a Mass in which you have participated online or via the TV, a short Rite would be celebrated before receiving Communion at one of the vehicle windows for each communicant. Our priests have been instructed to take every precaution with hand sanitizing and ensuring, as best they can, the safety of all involved. In order to ensure reverence for the Eucharist, I would encourage you to do your best to enter into the online or TV Masses in a spirit of prayer, maybe even designating a special prayer space for the viewing of the Mass with candles and a bible, not using your phone during Mass, observing the one hour Eucharistic fast, and maintaining a time of silence before and after the Mass, on your way to the church for the reception of Communion.

These are unusual circumstances, and we are doing what we can to satisfy the longing that so many of you have expressed to me and our priests for the reception of Holy Communion. With the understanding that Communion may be received on either the tongue or in the hand, in these exceptional circumstances, in charity, I am asking you to please consider and pray strongly about receiving Communion in the hand. This will ensure the safety of all who are receiving Communion, including the priest celebrant who is giving Communion. Many of our priests also fall in the “vulnerable” category, and some have pre-existing health conditions. For their sake and yours, and doing our best to maintain physical distancing as much as possible, we thank you in advance for your cooperation and charity. It is our joy to be able to offer you Communion at this time.

Some flexibility will be required especially for those parishes that have multiple churches. Please check with your parishes to inquire as to their plans, which could be in effect for some, as early as this weekend, but probably more realistically for most, by next weekend. It has also been confirmed that in this next orange phase, funerals, weddings and other religious services are now permitted in our churches with a cap of 10 people at a time. More details will be forthcoming on how parishes will manage this.

The Chrism Mass, which had been postponed, will now be celebrated at the Cathedral on Tuesday, May 26th, at 5 pm, most likely with only a cap of 10 people. More details will be forthcoming, especially in regards to livestreaming information. Catechumens and candidates who were planning to be received into the Church this Easter will be contacted by their parish to schedule these celebrations.

With this next phase announced today, church offices can safely re-open using every precaution. The GNB will be providing some guidelines and protocols that we will share with parish offices next week to assist with this transition. Thank you for your patience, and also your generosity in continuing to support your parishes both with the offer of your time and talents, but also with your financial contributions, preferably done electronically.

We are already looking forward and starting to plan for the next phase (yellow), which will, most likely, come into effect in the next 3-4 weeks. We have been advised that public worship may be able to resume in our churches with a cap of 50 people at a time. More details will be forthcoming.

Please note that in this phase and the next, those who fall into the “vulnerable” category because of age, sickness, or predisposed health conditions should be re-assured that the dispensation from the observation of Sunday obligation remains in effect. If you show any COVID-19 symptoms outlined by GNB authorities, please stay home, and consider being tested.

Please be assured of my pastoral solicitude and ongoing prayers for your safety and well-being. I continue to commend the people of our diocese, all the sick, and all those who are caring for them to the intercession of our Patroness, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception and Mother of the Church.



✠ Christian Riesbeck, CC
Bishop of Saint John