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# **DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE: CONTINUING LIFE DURING COVID-19**

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**'The New Normal' Edition**

**Edition 2  
Dated 25 February 2022**

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## Introduction

As we ease into the 'new normal' and Public Health Orders ease restrictions, it is timely to review our liturgical Instructions and advice.

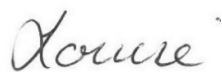
There is a continuing need to remain vigilant and focused on the safety and wellbeing of the community. We continue to live in a liminal time where restrictions could be tightened again if needed.

This current version has removed a lot of information that can now be taken for granted, e.g., that Churches are open.

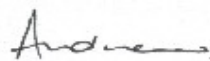
This document will continue to be reviewed and updated to support the local community in making an informed response in its particular context.

We support each other in mutual care as we learn to live and worship in our 'new normal'.

The COVID-19 situation is now at a point where there is no need for a formal Instruction to be in force. The previous Instruction should be considered withdrawn and abrogated.



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## **PART I: Instructions**

**NB:** Compliance with any requirements found in this section is mandatory for parishes within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.

The Public Health Order currently in force is the *Public Health (COVID-19 General) Order (No 2) 2021* ('the Order'), dated 13 December 2021 and coming into effect from the beginning of 15 December 2021. Since then, the Order has been amended several times, with the most recent amendments taking effect from 25 February 2022.

A copy of the current Order can be downloaded from the NSW Legislation website ([legislation.nsw.gov.au/information/covid19-legislation/general](https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/information/covid19-legislation/general)).

### **A. Capacity in Church Buildings**

There is no capacity limit applicable to church buildings. This situation applies to all religious services in our church buildings, including funerals/memorial services and weddings. Even though not mandated by the Order, NSW Health recommends physical distancing be maintained wherever possible.

### **B. Outdoor Celebrations**

There is no limit on the number of persons who may participate in a religious service held in an outdoor setting.

'Mixed' events, i.e. the use of both inside and outside spaces simultaneously, are once again possible under the Order.

### **C. COVID-19 Safety Plans**

COVID-19 Safety Plans are no longer mandatory under the Order.

### **D. Collection and Management of Contact Details**

The collection of contact information for all persons attending a place of worship is no longer required.

Any information previously collected via paper forms is to be kept for four weeks, after which they must be appropriately destroyed, i.e. by shredding.

If requested by the NSW Chief Health Officer (or another authorised person), contact information held by the Parish in paper form must be provided to the NSW Chief Health Officer (or another authorised person).

The contact details collected in paper form are used solely to facilitate contact tracing and are not used for any other purpose.

### **E. Cleaning and Hygiene in Churches**

The need to be attentive to the cleaning and hygiene of church buildings remains.

The decision around how often your church building needs to be cleaned and to what level is left to local leadership.

#### ***F. Public Health Advice***

NSW Health continues to provide advice to the public about general precautions for living with the endemic nature of COVID-19.

The current advice is available on the NSW Government website (visit <https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/stay-safe>).

#### ***G. Singing***

Singing is permitted in all circumstances within places of public worship (including outdoor religious celebrations) without limitation.

#### ***I. Masks***

The wearing of masks in places of worship is not mandatory. Where maintaining physical distancing indoors is particularly challenging, wearing masks is encouraged by NSW Health.

The wearing of masks is not to be required or mandated in our churches contrary to the Order.

## **PART II: Liturgical Directives**

**NB:** This section only contains those things that remain instructions. Other considerations for local discernment are included in Part III: General Considerations.

### **A. Anointing and Viaticum**

Communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick are not to take place, either in parishes or other places, e.g., aged care facilities.

### **B. Distribution of Communion**

The distribution of Communion during Mass continues to present a high risk. Therefore:

- Holy Communion from the Chalice is restricted to the Presider, who is to be the only one to drink from the chalice. Concelebrating priests are to intinct from a second chalice.
- Holy Communion is not to be given on the tongue.

### **C. Baptism**

Baptism is only to be celebrated by the pouring of water; baptism by immersion is not to be celebrated in the current circumstances.

The water is to be used once only. Multiple baptisms during the same liturgy will require preparation in advance to avoid using the same water on multiple candidates (e.g., by having the water in a large pitcher from which it can be poured).

### **D. Holy Water**

The presence of Holy Water in stoups at church doors is presently not permitted as this continues to present a high risk to parishioners and visitors.

Care should be taken when making Holy Water available in church buildings to ensure it can be safely accessed without risk.

### **PART III: General Advice**

As we continue moving into 'the new normal', parish communities are encouraged to consider the following advice and discern the best liturgical response given the circumstances and needs of the local community.

Overall, where touch is integral to the liturgical sign and is limited (i.e. where a minister is touching a person), as long as ministers engage in thorough handwashing and/or sanitising, and participants are comfortable, ministers may resume using physical touch.

#### **A. Adaptations to Mass**

Some of the adaptations and modifications to liturgical celebrations are only temporary; others that improve our celebration of the liturgy may be integrated into our regular ritual practice.

The following advice and suggestions about ritual adaptations are offered:

- Apart from Communion Ministers, parishes may return to using a 'fuller complement' of liturgical ministers.
- The Book of the Gospel can be included in the entrance procession. Otherwise, it could be placed on the altar before Mass commences.
- The Procession of Gifts can take place. The following ritual, which is more in keeping with the Missal, is suggested (view Cathedral live stream to see how it works in practice):
  - Have those carrying the items (bowls, carafes, etc.) sanitise their hands before bringing them forward in procession.
  - If more than one person presents the gifts, have them come forward in a single file.
  - The procession moves into the sanctuary and stands to the Presider's side while observing physical distancing. In the case of two people processing the gifts, have them stand on either side of the Presider to ensure physical distancing.
  - The Presider first takes the bread, prays, and then places it on the altar.
  - The Presider then takes the wine, pours it into the chalice, adds water, prays, and then places it on the altar.
  - Those who presented the gifts can then return to their seats.

This proposal respects the intention of the *General Instruction* that the gifts are not placed on the altar before the prayers are prayed over them.
- The Sign of Peace remains contactless except between those residing in the same household.
- The distribution of Communion is addressed elsewhere.

The following advice is offered about other considerations associated with the celebration of Mass and other liturgies:

- It remains advisable to refrain from handing out items such as hymnals and bulletins.
- The use of collection plates remains problematic. Alternate methods already adopted should stay in place for the time being.

The adaptations and modifications suggested above should be considered in any other liturgy to which they apply.

### **B. Anointing and Viaticum**

Where the sick and the dying, and their families, are not comfortable with physical touch, or where medical advice recommends against it, priests may continue to:

- Lay hands by holding them above rather than on the head of the person being anointed.
- Use cotton wool for the Anointing, which can then be disposed of appropriately after a single use.
- Anoint with the Oil of the Sick on the head alone.

### **C. Baptisms**

Where members of the faithful are not comfortable with touch:

- Care to be taken to minimise any physical contact with the one being baptised.
- The anointings with the Oil of Catechumens and the Oil of Chrism could be accomplished using cotton wool which is to be disposed of appropriately after a single use (preferably by burning) **OR**
- A small amount of the Oil could be applied by the Presider, who then invites one of the parents to rub the Oil into the child's skin.

### **D. Confessions**

Regarding the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, the following advice is offered:

- The First Rite of Reconciliation ("Reconciliation of Individual Penitents") is most appropriately celebrated outside the confessional.
- The celebration of the Second Rite of Reconciliation ("Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution") and Penitential Services may take place with due attention to the general COVID-19 safety.
- Individual confessions during a Second Rite of Reconciliation should be celebrated to maximise the safety of those participating and honour the need for privacy that comes with the act of confession.

### **E. Distribution of Communion**

The distribution of Communion during Mass remains a high-risk activity. The following advice is offered:



- It is recommended that parishes use only the number of Communion ministers absolutely needed, subject to the following general requirements:
  - Appropriate physical distancing is observed between those distributing Communion.
  - The Communion procession takes place in such a way as to allow participants to keep the appropriate physical distancing
  - Generally speaking, a maximum of **two** ministers (including the Presider) should be adequate.
- While not required, Ministers of Communion (ordinary and extraordinary) could wear a mask.
  - Communion ministers who are unvaccinated are particularly at risk while exercising this ministry, and it may be prudent for them to be directed to wear masks while doing so.
- Those distributing Communion are encouraged to practice good hand hygiene. Hand sanitising should occur discreetly before the distribution of Communion at the credence table and not at the altar.
- In keeping with good liturgical practice, using disposable gloves during Communion and the presence of hand sanitiser on the altar is not appropriate.

#### ***F. Funerals***

The celebration of funeral Masses and liturgies resumed without restrictions with effect from 15 December 2021.

The following advice and observations are provided:

- A funeral Mass should be adapted as for any other Mass, as noted elsewhere in this document.
- The placing of Christian symbols, where this is celebrated, needs to be attentive to physical distancing and minimising the passing of objects.
- Families may continue to request a funeral Mass or liturgy to be live-streamed. Pastors are asked to be generous in answering such requests.

#### ***H. Use of Technology***

The nature of the Church's liturgy – in all its forms – is something that is embodied rather than watched, something that requires physical presence rather than virtual connection. With the removal of capacity limits from our church buildings, it is now time for the appropriateness of the regular live-streaming of Parish Masses to be reviewed.

Live-streamed Masses (and other liturgies) are not to be increased beyond the regular schedule of Parish Masses (including funerals and weddings), and they are to be reduced over time as pastoral necessity lessens.

#### ***I. Weddings***

The celebration of Nuptial Masses and wedding liturgies resumed without restrictions with effect from 15 December 2021.

The following advice and observations are provided:

- A Nuptial Mass should be adapted as for any other Mass, as noted elsewhere in this document.
- Couples may continue to request a Nuptial Mass or wedding liturgy to be live-streamed. Pastors are asked to be generous in answering such requests.

### ***J. Ministry in Schools***

Great care is required when contemplating parish ministry in schools.

Both [Catholic Schools NSW](#) and our own [Catholic Schools Office](#) have provided information about ministry in schools, and each school has also received detailed information. Parishes should consult with the school to determine what is possible and under what conditions when proposing any ministry in schools.

The overarching consideration must be the health and safety of all directly involved.