

March 8, 2021

Last week, the Quebec government announced its intention to increase the maximum number of people admitted to places of worship for liturgical celebrations in the orange zone to 100. The decree itself was finally published yesterday. This morning we learned a few new details about the changes made to the protocol for places of worship by the Office of Public Health. Here are the rules to follow starting today in our diocese.

- The limit is set at 100 people per worship space for “regular” celebrations.
 - It is not mandatory to keep a register for these celebrations, but the parish must be able to communicate with the participants in the event of an outbreak. You can set up a permanent list of emails or phone numbers, or use a reservation platform to track participants.
 - This limit figure excludes volunteers who ensure compliance with protocol and liturgical ministers.
- For funerals or weddings, the limit remains at 25 people. In addition, families will not be able to receive condolences in church before or after a funeral service. It is strongly recommended that the same limit be applied to baptisms outside of "regular" Eucharistic celebrations.
 - The reason given by the government is that people attending funerals or weddings tend to forget the 2-metre rule and greet each other with a hug or a kiss. This creates a very risky opportunity for contagion.
 - The attendance register is compulsory for these celebrations.
- Wearing a procedural mask is mandatory at all times, even while people are seated (except when taking communion).
 - This rule is the same in cinemas and theaters.
 - A procedural mask is a blue and white tri-fold mask commonly used in healthcare settings. It is not washable and should be thrown away at the end of the day.
 - For the first few weeks, many people will show up with their usual cloth masks. We will need to provide them with procedural masks to enter the church. The diocese has purchased 5,000 for free distribution in parishes to help them manage this time of transition. Someone from your parish can pick them up at the diocesan center starting Wednesday.
- A distance of 2 metres between people or family groups must be maintained at all times, even when people are in their seats.

- Previously, this distance in the pews was set at 1.5 metres. It will be necessary to recalculate the places available in our churches, perhaps by seating the faithful in every third bench.
- It is permitted for one or two people to sing, standing at least two metres from the assembly and the organist, using a microphone as much as possible. If the distance cannot be respected, the singer should stand behind a plexiglass partition.
 - Congregational singing is not allowed. Neither is choral singing. The congregation should be invited to voice their responses in a low voice.
- Movement of the faithful in the church is prohibited during the celebration, except for liturgical ministers. For communion, ministers must bring the Eucharist to the faithful in their pews. They can slide between the pews to reach those who are not seated at the edge of the aisle.
 - This way of proceeding is necessary because of the challenge of maintaining a distance of 2 metres between individuals while they are moving in a procession.
- When concelebrating, priests must be two metres apart from each other and remain in their place throughout the celebration, while wearing a mask. Each priest must drink from "his" cup, unless he intends to communicate through intinction.

All of these new regulations aim to allow gatherings while minimizing the risk of transmitting new variants of the virus that appear to be highly contagious.

I thank and admire our parish employees and volunteers who, since the start of this pandemic, have made celebrations possible in our parishes. Let us make yet another effort to adjust to these regulations by reminding ourselves that we are striving to reach two goals at the same time: to enable as many people as possible to celebrate Jesus Christ, while ensuring the common good of our faithful and of the whole population. May the Lord bless you in your commitment.

+ Paul-André Durocher