



Infofax



Infofax N. 71

ALLELUIA ! ALLELUIA ! ALLELUIA !

June 11, 2020 : **Reopening of our Churches**

Dear Faithful of the Diocese of Timmins,

On Monday June 8th, Premier Doug Ford of Ontario announced that the **churches could resume operations on Friday, June 12.**

- 1- This is a great moment that we have been waiting for a long time. Since last March, in fact, because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to suspend public liturgical celebrations; Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Easter Season and Pentecost could not be celebrated as usual; baptisms, funeral Masses and weddings had to be postponed to another time. We are therefore very happy to be able to gather ourselves as a community of believers around the Lord, with the sacramental life so fundamental to our faith.
- 2- The opening of churches does not mean that we will be immediately as we were before the pandemic. On the contrary, it is a **gradual return** to normality, accompanied by sanitary requirements which we cannot be dispensed of. In this regard, parishes have received a manual from the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO). It contains basic information on the sanitary requirements in our churches, halls and rectories and on the respectful celebration of the Catholic liturgy; each parish obviously has to make the arrangements in its own context.
- 3- As Bishop of Timmins, I gave a Protocol to the parishes, touching on these same three dimensions: hygienic security of our places and of the faithful, respect for the liturgy and available resources.
- 4- Thus, **the churches of the Diocese of Timmins may open on Saturday and Sunday June 13 and 14, for the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ.**
- 5- **This opening will be done gradually:** the staff must be trained to respect sanitary requirements.

The church opens on Sunday, June 14th for personal prayer and worship.

Monday and Tuesday: opening for private prayer.

Wednesday: beginning of daily masses.

Sunday, June 21: Sunday Masses.

- 6- **It is up to each parish to announce to its faithful** how this gradual opening will be done: Mass schedule, health requirements, greeters and volunteers, seating arrangements.
- 7- However, I would like to highlight a few essential elements.
 - a. The faithful can be present at **30% of the capacity of the churches**. Thus, in a 300-seat church, 100 people can be accommodated as long as social distancing can be observed.
 - b. The celebration of weddings and funerals is permitted in the church, with the presence of 10 people at the moment. Baptisms must be celebrated with only one family at a time; First Communion and Confirmations are postponed to the fall; the Sacrament of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick can be celebrated with appropriate hygienic measures.
 - c. In the church, people must be a distance of **two (2) meters** from each other, except those who live under the same roof: spouses, children.
 - d. **Sick** people are requested not to attend church.
 - e. People who are **fragile**, because of their health or their age, are also invited to stay at home for the moment: they can fulfill the Sunday precept by watching the celebration of Mass on television or on social media, or even by reading the Word of God, or by reciting the rosary. The great news is that they can, with the necessary health precautions, receive Holy Communion at home.
 - f. Before going to church, the faithful are asked to take their temperature; if somebody has a fever, he or she should stay at home. In church, wearing a mask is advised.
 - g. Parish staff will indicate the places where the faithful can sit; it is important to follow these instructions to facilitate the disinfection work after the celebrations as well as maintaining social distancing from one another. Missals, hymnals and other leaflets have been removed from the pews for hygienic reasons.
 - h. Communal singing will be suspended, because it may further encourage the possible spread of microbes.
 - i. Children's Liturgy of Word program is temporarily suspended.

- j. The collection will be put in baskets at the doors of the church as parishioners are leaving Mass.
 - k. The exchange of peace is done simply: nod or hand sign.
 - l. The parish will also indicate a path to follow for the communion procession, in order to respect the physical distance between people.
 - m. Communion of the Precious Blood or on the tongue is not possible at this time.
 - n. While the person before us receives Communion, we obviously remove the mask to receive Holy Communion, which is given in the hand.
- 8- Parishes will provide other more concrete information, taking into account the layout of their church and the availability of staff and volunteers.
- 9- We are now almost used to all kinds of restrictions in our daily lives and work because of the pandemic; as faithful, we can expect to have them also in our gatherings and in the liturgy; we obviously have to respect them.

During this period of confinement, I carried you in my prayer and I continue to do so, rejoicing with you at this gradual return to a more normal ecclesial life.



✠ Serge Poitras
Bishop of Timmins