



12 June 2020

COVID-19 UPDATE FROM BISHOP FABBRO

Reopening our Worship Spaces in the Diocese of London

To: The Priests, Deacons and Lay Ecclesial Ministers of the Diocese of London

Greetings!

The directions and recommendations outlined in the attached document, entitled Directions and Recommendations for the First Stage of Reopening Churches, have been developed in light of guidelines prepared by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO) with experts in various fields, medical, legal, and risk-management.

Having consulted the Episcopal Council, I have approved the directives contained in this document and am requiring that they be implemented in all parishes and Catholic communities in the Diocese of London. In addition to these directives, the document includes recommendations, with a view to the need for pastoral adaptation at the local level. Through this document, we want to ensure that we reopen our churches in a manner which is prudent and responsible and which allows for the reverent celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments and rites of worship.

Our diocesan document, then, distinguishes between directives and recommendations. Directives include the words “must” or “shall”; strong recommendations are indicated by the word “should”; other recommendations are indicated as such, sometimes with the words “may” or “could”.

The implementation of these directives is not a guarantee that viruses, such as the Coronavirus COVID-19, will not be contracted, but they are the best and most practical measures we know at present to ensure the safety of our people. Because the safety of our people is at stake, as well as the safety of you, our priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers, I am compelled to remind you of two important matters:

1. Responsibilities of Pastors and Administrators of Parishes and Catholic Communities

Priests leading parishes and communities of the faithful are responsible – legally and morally – for fulfilling all the directives contained in this document. For the sake of good order and the common good, to prevent further spread of the virus and to observe the laws of the Province of Ontario, I am relying on the priests responsible for parishes and communities of the faithful to adhere strictly to the directives and to apply the recommendations with prudence in collaboration with their parish team and staff. Only in this way will we demonstrate to our parishioners and the wider community that we have their physical and spiritual wellbeing at heart. In the event of any uncertainty regarding these directives, you are to contact my office for clarification so that interpretation is not left to chance. I will expect each priest leading parishes and communities to sign a statement that he has received this document, has participated in one of our explanatory webinars, and intends to comply with these directives.

2. Government Notices and Orders

During this time of pandemic, government orders concerning business and public institutions, including places of worship and church facilities, must be observed and obeyed. Nothing in these directives or recommendations should be construed in any way as overriding the lawful order of public authorities, including Ministers of the Government or Medical Officers of Health.

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I am grateful to all our priests, deacons and lay ecclesial ministers, along with all parish staff members, who have worked tirelessly to support their parishioners in this very difficult time when our churches were closed. We are all happy to see some return to public worship, but we realize that many are still uncertain or unable to join us. For that reason, I extend the dispensation from the Sunday obligation to all the faithful of the Diocese, at least until the First Sunday of Advent. Time will tell whether this dispensation will need to be extended further or whether, by then, our worshipping communities will be able to return to full strength.

To prevent the occurrence and spread of viruses we must conduct ourselves differently. The guidelines prepared by the ACBO make it clear that following reasonable restrictions during this pandemic is really our only course of action.

I thank you, in advance, for your cooperation and assistance in implementing these measures, and I thank the faithful for their patience and collaboration as we work in partnership to ensure the safety of all, so that we can keep our churches open and gather together to celebrate our Catholic faith.

Uniting ourselves in prayer, and seeking the intercession of our diocesan patrons, the Blessed Mother and St. Patrick, we ask for God's protection, peace, and healing. I assure you of daily remembrance in my prayer.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Ronald Fabbro, C.S.B." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Rev. Ronald P. Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London