



## Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria

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# M E M O

**Date:** March 12, 2020  
**To:** All Clergy  
**From:** Bishop Gary Gordon  
**Re:** Directives for Clergy in Response to COVID-19

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As we manoeuvre through this rapidly evolving situation with the COVID-19 virus, to best serve our faithful in a respectful manner, there are additional precautions that all clergy should practice going forward. It is important to remain confident and charitable, and be an instrument of hope with the gracious assistance of our Lord.

On Wednesday, March 11, 2020, Premier John Horgan, Minister of Health, the Honourable Adrian Dix, and the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry held a conference call with faith leaders in the province to discuss and to ensure we have the most up to date information with regard to COVID-19. Having been part of that conversation and after extensive consultation with faith leaders and government officials, I am strongly recommending the following:

1. While there is no need to panic, we must remain vigilant about hand hygiene, and avoid unnecessary contact such as hand shaking, hugging, and so on.
2. The Premiere, Health Minister, and Health Officer clearly value faith communities gathering to pray to ease fear and anxiety, however out of consideration for the well-being of others in the community, the elderly, anyone with an underlying health condition, and those who feel even remotely unwell are excused from the obligation of attending Sunday Mass.
3. If parishioners have access to a television or the internet, those who remain at home may watch the Mass at <https://dailytvmass.com/> on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/dailytvmass> or on VisionTV.
4. In order to reduce social isolation, parishes are encouraged to find ways to mobilize people to make phone calls to those who must remain at home, and to provide services such as delivering food and necessary items. Being in regular contact with the parish community will alleviate loneliness for the homebound.
5. Social gatherings such as pancake breakfasts, potlucks, buffets, etcetera, that are not essential to the congregation should be suspended until COVID-19 passes.
6. Reinforce the need to wash hands frequently, and precautionary protocols such as coughing into your elbow, wiping and sanitizing door handles, the tops of pews, and all areas that are touched frequently, and practice social distancing (2 metres apart) as much as possible at this time.



7. You may want to consider wiping down hymn books and missals with disinfectant or removing them from the pews completely.
8. Again, I cannot stress enough the importance that **no Communion be given on the tongue** and to avoid contact with the hand when placing Communion onto the palm. Holy Water should be removed from the fonts and the Precious Blood should not be distributed until further notice.
9. Ask your parishioners to avoid hand to hand contact during the Our Father and the Sign of Peace.
10. If you know parishioners who have health or special needs, please have a conversation with them on how to best assist them during this time (e.g. celiac disease or disabilities).
11. You and other pastoral care visitors to homes, care homes, and hospitals should observe all precautions in personal hygiene before and after such visits. This means washing your hands with soap and water, and using the hand sanitizer.
12. When visiting hospitals follow protocols provided by the hospital staff for each patient. This can at times mean gowning up, and using masks and gloves.
13. When anointing, a cotton swab can be used to anoint the sick, which is then disposed of in a plastic zip lock bag and burned when you return home, or to the parish.
14. If you have planned a trip on a cruise ship in the near future, I suggest that trip be deferred until the COVID-19 virus has abated on our planet. If you continue on with the trip, upon your return from the cruise, please self-quarantine for 14 days. The security and well-being of our parishioners should be our primary concern, and the knowledge of your passage on a cruise ship might instill nervousness among your parishioners about attending Mass.
15. You should also seriously consider the implications of international travel at this time, and again defer any plans to travel until the COVID-19 virus has come to an end.

For further inquiries and for the most up to date information, please go to the BC Centre for Disease Control at <http://www.bccdc.ca/>

I am available for consultation at 250-479-1331, or via my cell at 250-415-5778.

Let us continue to pray for one another, for those who are sick, and for our whole society that we may live in charity, be free of anxiety, and that our gracious God will bring a swift end to COVID-19 and grant us strength in these challenging times.