

Parish directives

From Sunday 31 May 2020, Catholic churches and chapels in the Diocese of Wollongong will be able to open for Masses, Weddings, Funerals and Baptisms, subject to the following directives.

The timing of re-opening our church buildings is left to the discretion of the parish priest and local parish leadership but should only take place when the standards required to protect the health and safety of clergy, parish staff and parishioners are met. As always, an abundance of caution and prudence should be exercised when considering the appropriate point when church buildings can or should be reopened for the public celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and the Sacraments.

Overarching directives

- All faithful in the diocese are dispensed from the obligation to physically attend Mass on Sundays
- The faithful can continue to keep holy their Sunday by setting aside time for prayer at home, reading the Scriptures of the day, watching Mass on television or online, and asking God for the graces they would normally receive in Holy Communion (canon 87 §1, canon 1248 §2)
- Churches and chapels can be opened to worshippers and the public for the following reasons only: Masses, weddings, funerals, baptisms and reconciliation (**note: at this stage, Diocese of Wollongong church buildings are not open for private prayer**)
- The decision to open a parish church/chapel for these services is the responsibility of the parish priest with his parish council/leadership team
- The number of people inside a building must never exceed the limits detailed in the latest Public Health Order (see the following pages for specific numbers)
- All worshippers and attendees must register in advance through their parish office (worshippers must identify as members of the same household when registering if they wish to sit within 1.5m of each other)
- When recording details of attendance, no reference to why the person is attending will be recorded (except for essential assistants where their role in the Mass must be recorded)
- People who feel unwell, who have flu/respiratory symptoms, elevated body temperatures or who have been in contact in the previous 14 days with people suspected to have or who have been diagnosed with COVID-19, are not to enter churches or chapels
- Worshippers classified as vulnerable per [AHPPC guidelines](#) are **encouraged not to attend physically**
- Clergy and parish staff will follow a consistently applied process to ensure a fair and equitable attendance of worshippers
- All Holy Water fonts and stoups will remain empty
- Visible signage will be in place in all church buildings
- High touch surfaces will be cleaned and disinfected regularly (including door handles pews, lectern, computer, vessels, shared musical instruments, taps, toilets, handrails) per [AHPPC guidelines](#)

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Overarching directives

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- Sufficient quantities of hygiene products (soap, hand sanitiser, tissues) will be available and accessible to parish staff, worshippers and attendees at doors of churches and confessionals, back of the church, bathrooms, and in the sacristy and sanctuary
- Parishes may utilise a digital thermometer for use by the Attendance Monitor
- Clergy, worshippers and other participants will adhere to physical distancing requirements, including maintaining 1.5m distance and ensuring four square metres per person in a room.
- An Attendance Monitor will be present whenever a church or chapel is opened to the public. The key role of the monitor is to (1) ensure the attendee limit is not exceeded, (2) watch for symptoms in attendees, (3) inform people who are displaying symptoms or attempt to gain unlawful entry that they must leave the premises, and (4) record any incidents that occur while a church building is open.
- Essential assistants who are classified as vulnerable per [AHPPC guidelines](#) must provide medical clearance documentation (signed by a doctor) before serving
- Essential assistants include sacristans, servers, musicians, A/V operators, videographers and monitors
- The faithful are encouraged to have the 'COVIDsafe' app active on their mobile device where they have the capacity to do so (note: this is not a requirement of attendance)

Public Masses

All overarching directives as detailed on page 1–2 are to be observed during the conduct of public Masses. **Only 10 worshippers can attend at any one celebration of the Mass irrespective of connected buildings/chapels.**

In addition, the following specific directives apply where the Parish Priest has opted to celebrate public Mass:

PUBLIC MASSES

- Only 10 registered worshippers will be allowed entry (in addition to clergy and essential assistants). At the time of registration the full names and contact phone numbers for all worshippers will be collected.
- A parish-appointed Attendance Monitor will check names against a list to ensure all worshippers attending have registered
- Worshippers must sanitise their hands upon entry using provided sanitiser at doors of the building
- Allocated seating will be marked with stickers to ensure 1.5m distance between worshippers
- Worshippers can seek assistance from the Attendance Monitor if required during the Mass
- Worshippers must not shake hands and instead offer a verbal exchange of peace
- Members of the same household may sit within 1.5m distance of each other (e.g. married couple, parent with children) if they have advised their relationship during registration
- The Attendance Monitor will maintain alertness to identify worshippers presenting with flu-like symptoms (cough, runny nose, etc.) and advise any worshippers with symptoms they must leave the premises
- The Attendance Monitor will ensure worshippers do not congregate in the entrance or any area of the building
- The Attendance Monitor will ensure staggering of worshippers as they enter the building and walk to their seats
- Communion will be received in the hand only (not on the tongue)
- There will be no communion from the chalice for worshippers
- The Attendance Monitor will coordinate a staggered exit of worshippers

Church/Chapels will not be open for Private Prayer under the current directives due to the significant cleaning and sanitising requirements that are involved to protect parishioners, clergy, parish staff and volunteers.

Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms and Reconciliation

All overarching directives and hygiene, cleaning and social distancing requirements detailed above are to be observed during the conduct of weddings, funerals, baptisms and reconciliation. In addition, the following specific directives apply:

WEDDINGS

- Up to ten persons are permitted (excluding the couple, the celebrant, assisting ministers, and one photographer or one videographer or both)
- 1.5m distance must be maintained between all participants (except the bride and groom)

FUNERALS

- Up to 20 indoor mourners and 30 outdoor mourners are permitted (excluding persons necessary for the conduct of the service)
- Under no circumstances can these numbers be combined into a single funeral of 50 through 20 mourners within the church and 30 mourners outside the church.

BAPTISMS

The Parish priest and local leadership team will determine when baptisms that were postponed because of COVID-19 will be rescheduled. Rescheduled baptisms should only take place when the standards required to protect the health and safety of clergy, parish staff and participants can be met.

- Baptisms may take place at the discretion of the minister in consultation with the family, always providing the limit of 10 persons is able to be observed
- Up to ten persons (including the parents, child to be baptised and godparents) are permitted. The celebrant and assisting ministers are permitted above these 10 persons
- There should be no “immersion” baptisms
- All participants to maintain 1.5m except for the parents and child (and only the parents should hold the child)
- A taper to light the baptismal candle when either celebrant or godparent light baptismal candle directly from Paschal candle

RECONCILIATION

- The Faithful must make an appointment to attend reconciliation
- 1.5m distance is to be maintained between the priest and the penitent

Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament for the Anointing of the Sick (for individuals) will continue to be offered to those in need of it, according to Canon 1001: 'Those who have the care of souls and those who are close to the sick are to see to it that the sick are consoled by the sacrament of anointing at the appropriate time.'

ANOINTING OF THE SICK

- Clergy should only visit the sick or infirm with COVID-19 in a hospital or aged care facility if requested by the patient, family or hospital personnel. Clergy are requested to contact hospital personnel to confirm that the appropriate precautions are met prior to administering the sacraments
- Group celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick (two or more people receiving the sacrament consecutively in a single celebration) remains suspended

Enduring directives

SACRAMENTAL PROGRAMS & CELEBRATIONS OF THE SACRAMENTS

- The Parish Priest and Pastoral Council / Leadership Team will determine when First Reconciliation, Confirmation and First Communion can take place as a result of COVID-19 taking into account the guidelines in this directive.

OTHER MINISTRIES REMAIN SUSPENDED

- Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not to take Holy Communion to the sick
- All parish meetings continue to be suspended at this time

SOCIAL DISTANCING AND HYGIENE

All parishes and parishioners are required to follow social distancing and hygiene guidelines as provided by the health authorities, including:

- Good hand and sneeze/cough hygiene.
- Distancing of at least one person per four square metres (except in family groups)
- Self isolation if diagnosed with COVID-19 or when exposed to symptomatic or diagnosed COVID-19 persons
- Parishioners must ensure they utilise the hand sanitisers provided as they enter and exit churches and chapels.