



Procedure during acts of blessing

Interim protocols



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INTRODUCTION

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated the need for an alternative approach to the general conduct and administration of acts of blessing. It is imperative for all Priestly ministers to ensure that the necessary precautions aimed at protecting both minister and member from contracting COVID-19 are observed.

This protocol must be read in conjunction with the most recent revised *Return to church guideline*. In line with the various lockdown regulations, it is imperative to adhere to protocols as outlined for each act of blessing.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

COVID-19 continues to impact our livelihoods and way of worship. For this reason, we have implemented 'RETURN TO CHURCH' guiding principles to curb the spread of the coronavirus in our places of worship:

- Fighting COVID-19 is our collective responsibility.
- Attendance of any religious activity where a person is symptomatic is not permitted.
- Adherence to the protocols and practices of the New Apostolic Church and obeying all posted placards are mandatory.
- Completing a screening questionnaire and attendance register before entering the place of worship must be done.
- Wearing of a face mask is compulsory.
- Keeping physical distance of at least 1.5m (2 arms' lengths) from others is for the protection of all.
- Handwash with soap and water or hand sanitising with alcohol-based hand sanitiser (at least 70% alcohol) for 20 seconds.
- Practise respiratory hygiene by sneezing and coughing into your bent arm or a tissue.
- Disinfect all surfaces, common touchpoints, and equipment.
- Maximize ventilation by keeping doors and windows open wherever possible.

These principles will help us achieve our goals while keeping ourselves, our fellow congregants, and our communities from being overwhelmed by the pandemic.



1. Holy Communion

1.1 Cleaning protocol

- Sanitise chalices and fill with wafers. Same applies to mini-chalice to serve members at home.
- Communion wafers must not be touched while filling the chalices.
- Communicate to all congregants/members beforehand what has been done to prepare the venue and chalices to ensure their safety.

1.2 Social distancing

- Social distancing is to be observed for altar seating; ministers are to serve at marked serving positions; aisle indicators will guide members as to the direction they must walk and Priests and members are to stretch their arms when serving and receiving Holy Communion.
- Ministers are to ensure that there is one queue per aisle.
- Members are to walk through the first bench/row of chairs, alternatively, clearly marked where members must stand before receiving Holy Communion.

1.3 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Serving ministers are not to wear gloves as it creates a false sense of safety.
- Emphasis should be placed on regular sanitisation and/or washing of hands.
- Both Priest and member must wear a mask when communion is served.

1.4 Procedure

- When the officiant announces: “*And now we shall celebrate Holy Communion ...*” designated minister(s) responsible to open and close the chalices must sanitise their hands before opening the chalices and again after he/they close the chalices.
- The chalices are uncovered, and the officiant opens the two chalices on the altar.
- The second cup on the altar will not be used to serve Holy Communion.
- Before the consecration, the officiant puts on his mask, sanitises his hands, opens the cup, does the consecration, takes a wafer, places the cup away from him, serves himself (saying the words “The body and blood...”), ingests the wafer, prays, and sanitises his hands.
- This is followed by the minister taking the same cup and proceeding to serve the Priestly ministers.



- Priests must sanitise their hands before and after being served.
- This is followed by each Priest taking a chalice from the table with his non-serving hand.
- There is to be no sharing of cups. Serving ministers may only use single cups.
- A designated person is responsible to sanitise the hands of members prior to being served.
- Members ingest wafer at their seat. (Note: Some members have their own sanitisers and must be allowed to use them.)
- After serving Holy Communion, serving ministers return the chalices to the table and each one closes the chalice himself.
- Thereafter, the serving minister must sanitise his hands and then takes his seat.
- The officiant then proceeds to close the two cups on the altar once all congregants have been served and the organ stops playing.
- Note to Priestly ministries:
 - If a Priest accidentally touches the hand of a member, he must stop serving and sanitise his hands before continuing to serve.
 - If a Priest touched his mask, he must stop serving and sanitise his hands before continuing to serve.
 - Should a communion wafer fall on the floor, a Deacon should pick it up, proceed to throw it away and sanitise his hands afterwards.



2. Marriage blessing

1. NAC marriage officers (MOs) are allowed to solemnize legal marriages.
2. Such gatherings must take place in compliance with COVID-19 regulations and may be conducted at a church building or a private venue. Church buildings are advisable instead of homes of members for the following reasons:
 - a) Controlled sanitisation protocols.
 - b) Social distancing can be adhered to from a space perspective.
 - c) Afford control over the number of attendees to comply with current regulations.
3. No marriage officer should feel forced to solemnize legal marriages. Should a marriage officer feel at risk of contracting COVID-19, and chooses not to officiate, he is at liberty to decline.
4. Prior to the solemnization, a screening attendance register must be completed. This serves two purposes:
 - a) to indicate who was present at the solemnization, and
 - b) in the event of an attendee testing positive for COVID-19, people can be traced via the attendance register.
5. The attendance register must contain the following details: full names, contact number and/or physical address of the attendee. The Rector must keep the register in a safe place for at least 6 months after the solemnization.
6. The solemnization must be limited to 30 minutes. Attendees must disperse immediately after the solemnization.
7. Spiritual preparation:
 - a) It is advisable that spiritual leaders also prepare couples requesting marriage solemnization for their marital life. Where possible, online platforms are to be utilized for such preparatory sessions.
8. Personal protection:
 - a) Couples and their witnesses must always wear face masks. This includes the marriage officer. **No** mask – **No** entry.
 - b) Any person handling and counting offerings must sanitise their hands before, during and after the counting and must ensure that he or she does not touch his or her face during the process. Again, face masks must be worn during this counting process. Electronic offering is to be encouraged.
9. Sanitisation:
 - a) During the signing of the register, all surfaces to be sanitised. It is preferable that 5 pens are made available for: the couple, witnesses, and marriage officer. Alternatively, the pen needs to be sanitised after every individual signed the register.
 - b) Both the marriage officer as well as the couple and witnesses to sanitise hands before and immediately after taking of fingerprints.



- c) A hand sanitiser must have at least 70% alcohol content or be a generic alternative with a similar sanitising effect.
 - d) Sufficient quantities of hand sanitiser must be available at the entrance of the church, which all attendees are required to use.
 - e) There must be facilities for the washing of hands with water and soap (**NO** cloth hand towels should be used, only paper).
 - f) All surfaces and equipment are to be sanitised before and after the solemnization.
 - g) There must be no sharing of equipment, drinking utensils, pens (where possible).
10. All areas such as toilets, sacristy, door handles, handrails, electronic equipment, Bibles, marriage registers and books, etc. are sanitised before and after every solemnization.
11. Blessing:
- (a) Couples who did not receive the marriage blessing during the lockdown period, may approach their rector to arrange accordingly.
 - (b) Only the couple to stand in front of the altar.
 - (c) Couple to wear a mask.
 - (d) Option 1: The officiant (behind the altar) asks the couple for their “yes” word.
 - (e) Option 2: Should couple recite their vows, they must do so with a mask on.
 - (f) The officiant prays a short prayer, asking for God’s blessing and help.
 - (g) Officiant and couple sanitise their hands.
 - (h) Depending on local custom, the bride and groom exchange rings.
 - (i) The officiant (with mask on) grants the wedding blessing by placing his (one) hand on the extended right hands of the bridal couple.
 - (j) Officiant and couple sanitise their hands.
 - (k) “You may kiss the bride” is not permitted.;
 - (l) Officiant returns to the altar (removes his mask) for closing prayer and benediction.
12. Music limited to organ and vocal/instrumental solo. Ensemble playing is limited to string instruments only, provided a 1,5m distance is maintained between players and masks are worn.
13. The ceremony may be live-streamed via social media.



3. Wedding anniversary blessing

1. The bestowing of the blessing for Silver (25 years), Ruby (40 years), Golden (50 years) and Diamond (60 years) anniversaries are similar to the marriage blessing, however, the couple is not requested to answer with a “yes”.
2. The dispensation of an anniversary blessing takes place after the celebration of Holy Communion.
3. The act may be introduced by the organ and vocal/instrumental solo.
4. Couple to wear masks.
5. The officiant and couple sanitise their hands.
6. The officiant (with his mask on) grants the anniversary blessing by placing his (one) hand on the extended right hands of the bridal couple.
7. Officiant and couple sanitise their hands.
8. No flowers will be handed over to the couple.
9. Officiant returns to the altar (removes his mask) for closing prayer and benediction.

4. Prenatal blessing

1. The dispensation of the prenatal blessing occurs outside of the divine service during a pastoral care visit.
2. All in attendance to wear a mask.
3. Officiant with his mask on, sanitise hands and with outstretched (one) arm, briefly touches the forehead of the mother.
4. The mother must wipe her forehead with a wet wipe, while officiant must sanitise his hands.



5. Adoption

1. Adoption does not require any touching or laying on of hands .
2. The act may be introduced by the organ and vocal/instrumental solo.
3. Ensure that a social distance of 1.5m is maintained if there is more than one soul to be adopted.

6. Retirement

1. The retirement of a minister takes place after the celebration of Holy Communion.
2. The act may be introduced by the organ and vocal/instrumental solo.
3. Retirement may take place in front or behind the altar.
4. Note social distance of 1.5m with mask on for both officiant and retiree.
5. Should the officiant be without a mask then the distance from the retiree should be at least 2.5m.
6. No handshaking is permitted.