



30 September 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

2020 has been a challenging year and it continues to be so. We continue to live in a world where the pandemic is still lurking and there is ever the possibility of us descending in Levels of what we are and not allowed to do.

I am sure that you join with me in delighting that we are back at Level 1. But Level 1 is not Level 0. We are not back to normal, we are not free of the pandemic, we must be prudent as we have seen how quickly, silently and easily the virus can be passed on.

At yesterday's meeting of the Council of Priests we discussed this at length. It was a good opportunity for me to hear from the priests what is happening in our parishes and add this to what I have observed myself in our parishes. I know that there are a significant number of parishioners who are afraid of Covid and whose fragility of health would make them subject to the worst effects of Covid. As a Church we must be conscious of the needs of the vulnerable as Christ himself was.

Accordingly, I have decided on the following provisions that will continue for the foreseeable future.

1. Holy water is to be removed from stoups and fonts at the church door (unless the water is running and suitably filtered). If you would like Holy Water to use at home please contact your local parish priest.
2. At the Sign of Peace and in greeting people before or after Mass, people should avoid shaking hands or hugging (unless people are in their family or bubble). Instead smile, nod or bow to one another.
3. The priest and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should continue to sanitise their hands immediately before Communion.
4. Holy Communion is not to be distributed from the chalice.
5. Holy Communion is only to be distributed in the hand. I am grateful to those who have embraced this condition graciously. I know for others, this restriction remains a trial. Let us remember that the matter of primary importance is RECEIVING THE LORD, not how WE physically receive the Lord, in other words the reality of who we receive and not our own personal devotion. So,

with St Paul we consider... is my heart prepared to worthily receive the Lord (1 Cor 11:27-30). Then, the instruction of St Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century reminds us that the reception of Holy Communion on the hand is an ancient practice in the Church. He gives us an excellent catechesis for all of us of how we should receive Holy Communion... He says, "Place your left hand as a throne beneath your right, as befits one who is about to receive the King. Then receive him, taking care that nothing is lost."

6. Priests and extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should not touch children's heads when blessing or praying for them at Communion time.

In writing this I know there will be some who will find these guidelines too strict while others will think they do not go far enough. Every individual who wants their own way impacts one way or another on other people in the community. In presenting these guidelines I want to preserve the communion that should flow out of our reception of Holy Communion. Pope Benedict's apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist was called, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, the Sacrament of Charity.

May we bear with these restrictions and one another charitably, so we might indeed be worthy of receiving the Lord's great sacrament of communion and charity.

Yours sincerely in Christ the Good Shepherd

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "+ Steve Lowe," with a plus sign at the beginning and a comma at the end.

✠ Steve Lowe

BISHOP OF HAMILTON