
Austria: public liturgies can resume as of 7 February. Covid-19 preventive measures reinforced

As of Sunday, 7 February, religious services will again be open to the public in Austria, although with reinforced preventive measures. Religious denominations have agreed with the Minister of Education Susanne Raab that - in addition to the preventive measures already in force such as the sufficient provision of alcohol-based sanitisers, limitations for celebrants and readers, stricter rules for choirs - a distance of at least 2 meters should be kept between people and the use of FFP2 masks is to be made compulsory. Also, in order to contain the virus, churches and religious organisations, under the agreement, will continue collecting donations online, reducing the duration of religious services, and limiting the number of available seats. In recent days, the Catholic Bishops had discussed the key points of the Agreement, the Secretary General of the Bishops' Conference, Peter Schipka, revealed in an interview with the Catholic news agency Kathpress. In light of the new agreement, the Bishops' Conference is developing a framework to regulate Catholic liturgies from 7 February, including rules for the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday. The Minister of Culture Susanne Raab thanked the churches and religious communities and all believers "for resisting the lockdown". According to Raab, "they have made an important contribution to reducing the number of infections". "The faith - she said - is an important support for many people in our country, especially in difficult times", so she is pleased that public religious services can now resume again.

Valentina Bombelli