



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

Anglican Church of Canada

Liturgical, Ministry, & Pastoral Care Guidelines in Response to COVID-19

EFFECTIVE MARCH 30, 2020

The ongoing provision of worship, ministry, pastoral care is an essential function the Church provides to our communities, especially so in times of crisis and illness. Social distancing measures enacted to limit the spread of COVID-19 require new and adaptive approaches and practices to be deployed, however, prayer and pastoral care must continue to be a priority of all clergy and lay pastoral assistants in the diocese.

Guiding Principles:

1. Strictly adhere to all federal, provincial, municipal and diocesan directives and recommendations with regards to social distancing measures, self-isolation procedures, and/or health hygiene.
2. Stay at home unless it is absolutely necessary to leave your home.

Building & General Ministry Guidelines

1. Until further notice, church buildings are to remain closed.
2. Occasional and time-limited access to the building is only permitted in the following circumstances:
 - a. For designated persons to conduct inspections of the building;
 - b. For staff to perform essential functions that could not otherwise be completed from home;
 - c. For staff and volunteers to provide essential services to those who live in poverty, are food insecure, and/or are precariously housed, following the directions of public health officials to mitigate risk as much as possible; and
 - d. For a priest, musician, and no more than three others to gather to livestream worship services.
3. Musicians are not permitted to practice in church buildings during this closure, unless it is during the production of a worship service.

Pastoral Care Guidelines

Pastoral Visiting and Anointing the Sick

1. Clergy should undertake pastoral care by phone calls and video connection wherever possible.
2. In-person visits should be limited to those most in need of care and compassion, where the presence of a minister is essential, for instance to support a highly vulnerable and isolated older adult, to anoint a gravely ill person, and/or to comfort the dying.
3. If you are called to anoint and/or to provide a last Eucharistic meal to the dying, ensure both hands and oil stock are well washed and sanitized prior to use. Replace the lid on the oil stock immediately after dipping your finger. Anoint the dying and wash your hands and the oil stock as soon as possible afterwards.
4. In-person pastoral visits should not be undertaken to people who are self-isolating or to those who have been infected by COVID-19.
5. Follow all institutional guidelines when making visits made to long-term care homes and/or hospitals. Visit only one person at any time, even if that means separated visits to the home or hospital. If you are unsure of the protocols, call ahead and speak with the nursing station.
6. Following a visit to an institution where COVID-19 may be present, wash your hands thoroughly, go directly home, change clothes, and wash the clothes you have worn immediately in hot water.

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Pastoral Care Guidelines continued...

Staying in Touch

1. Ministers should implement a parish plan for regular communication with parishioners, by phone, email, social media and/or other remote means.
2. Pastoral visiting teams should now make their visits by phone, prioritizing those who may not have family or friends to check in on them.
3. Clergy and lay leaders should send regular emails to parish email lists which include prayer resources and spiritual encouragement.
4. Share pastoral care contact information widely so that those in need of care know how to connect with ministers without visiting the church.

Liturgical Guidelines

The Eucharist

1. Priests are directed to fast from the celebration of the Eucharist during this time when the community of the faithful are not able to be gathered and instead to feast on the Word.
2. Parish celebrations of the Eucharist should not be livestreamed.
3. A final Eucharistic meal to the dying is permitted.

Pastoral Offices

1. All weddings, funerals and baptisms are to be postponed until further notice.
2. In rare and exceptional circumstances, permission may be sought from the regional archdeacon in order to conduct a service for which the extraordinary pastoral needs are such that postponing the service is not possible. If permission is granted, such services are to be held in private and in such a way as the number of those gathered in-person is kept to five people or less.

Livestreaming Worship Services

1. Clergy are encouraged to direct their parishioners to the diocesan Facebook Page for Sunday Prayers with Bishop Susan Bell, rather than to initiate their own service.
2. Where parish livestreamed services are established, a weekly worship service is permitted to be conducted in the church building, provided that only a priest, musician, and no more than three others gather to offer it to the parish community.
3. A minimum 2 metres of physical distance must be observed during the production of services.
4. Be mindful of enhanced hygienic practices and disinfect all microphones and other equipment, both before and after use.

Holy Week & Easter

1. The celebration of Palm Sunday is suspended for this liturgical year and the blessing and distribution of Palm Crosses is prohibited.
2. The public celebration of the Easter Triduum including Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday have been suspended in parishes.
3. Clergy are asked to direct those with the ability to do so, to join Bishop Susan's livestreamed service on Palm Sunday 10am, Maundy Thursday 7pm and Easter Sunday 10am. A special Good Friday worship will be made available via Facebook and YouTube on Good Friday morning by 9am.