

Parish Re-Opening Guide: Amber Stage

This guide has been created for planning purposes only, to support parishes preparing for the gradual return to our church buildings in the fall, if the public health metrics warrant a move from the red to amber stage of our ecclesiastical province's re-opening framework. The bishop will determine the date on which parishes may re-open for worship.

We recognize this is an anxious time and we invite you to draw support from one another as you undertake the vital preparation work required to return to our church buildings in as safe a manner as possible. It is important to ground your efforts in prayer, and we invite you to use this prayer throughout your planning process:

*Eternal God, you call us to life and compel us to love.
Guide and strengthen us by your Spirit, that the well-being of one another
and our communities is foremost on our hearts and minds
as we make plans to return to our church buildings;
we pray this through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

With provincial emergency orders and public health directives periodically changing, the considerations contained within this guide should not be deemed to be definitive. Our diocesan ministry guidelines will be updated once a date for re-opening has been announced with the specific details. The right-hand column offers a sense of what might be expected to be permitted in the amber stage.

All directives of the Government of Ontario and local public health authorities must be followed at all times, including the following foundational pandemic hygiene guidance: washing hands often; staying home if feeling ill; practicing physical distancing and where not possible, wearing a mask or face covering. Where not already mandatory, we strongly encourage parishioners to wear masks during public worship. If there are differences between what is stated in this guide and provincial directives, the most cautious approach should be adhered to.

It's important to note that when a date is set by the bishop for re-opening, parishes will not be required to do so until they are confident they have appropriate plans in place to uphold provincial public health directives and re-open in as safe a manner as possible.

A summary of each parish's re-opening plan, including a proposed date to resume Sunday worship, will be submitted to the regional dean. They will then facilitate a peer review of the plan and provide feedback before a parish is permitted by their regional archdeacon to re-open.

As you make plans, we are here to help! Please contact your regional archdeacon for support and guidance and draw upon the many resources available through our diocese.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE AMBER STAGE

- In-person Sunday worship; face coverings strongly encouraged, if not required, unless contraindicated.
- Communion will be shared in one-kind only
- Congregational singing will not be permitted.
- The Peace will be shared using non-contact gestures from pews.
- Childcare and children's programming will not be permitted; families stay together during worship.
- Online services continue to be offered in addition to in-person worship.
- Small parish meetings may resume if physical distancing is possible.
- Social gatherings before or after worship will not be permitted, and food and beverages are not to be served or shared.
- Routine pastoral care visits may resume, observing heightened hygiene practices.
- Buildings may re-open for staff, tenants, and license agreement holders.



Amber Stage Parish Re-Opening Checklist

The following checklist is offered to assist parishes to make appropriate preparation to re-open for worship. With provincial guidelines and directives changing periodically, the following list and appended planning documents should not be deemed to be authoritative with regards to the exact parameters of what will be permitted when permission is granted for parishes to re-open; these will be specified in revised ministry guidelines issued by the bishop.

During the re-opening process, be mindful that people vary in how much risk they can tolerate. It's important to respect expressed differences about the level of caution incorporated in various plans and procedures without letting subjective judgment drive decision-making. Be attentive to concerns raised from staff and parishioners and be open to ideas for ways to further mitigate risk.

Initial Planning Steps to Re-Open

- Identify two people to serve as the re-opening coordinators and create a parish re-opening team.
- Read and review the following foundational documents:
 - [Loving Our Neighbours: 3 Stage Template for the Safe Reopening of our Buildings](#)
 - [Ministry of Health's Advice on Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#)
 - [Workplace Safety & Prevention Services Guidance on Health and Safety for Places of Worship During COVID-19.](#)
- Visit the diocesan [online COVID-19 resource hub](#) and review available resources.
- Calculate the maximum number of people who can attend a worship service in your church, while ensuring 2m of physical distance between households or individuals. It will be the lesser of:
 - 30% of the capacity of the worship space, physically distanced; or
 - 50 people, including worship leaders and staff.
- Determine what shared items cannot be cleaned and disinfected easily (e.g. prayer and hymn books, pew materials) and remove them and any non-essential items from the worship space.
- Flush all water lines, paying attention to faucets, water taps, and coffee/ice machines.

Planning to Move to the Amber Stage

Detailed guidance related to each these areas is contained in the attached appendices of this guide, to assist your parish in creating a plan specific to your ministry context.

- Cleaning & Disinfection of Buildings
- Education & Screening
- Physical Distancing, Movement & Contact Tracing
- Returning to the Office Environment
- In-Person Worship
- Communications

Reviewing In-Person Worship Plans

- Once permitted by the Bishop, set a tentative date to re-open your parish for worship.
- Complete the *In-Person Worship Re-Opening Plan* form and share it with your regional dean.
- Review any feedback regarding your plans and revise your re-opening plans, as needed.
- Receive final approval from your regional archdeacon to re-open for Sunday worship.

For inquiries related to re-opening protocols, please contact your regional archdeacon.



Appendix 1: Cleaning & Disinfection of Buildings

Cleaning and disinfection practices are an essential component to the re-opening of our church buildings. The following information has been compiled from resources provided by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), [Public Health Ontario](#), and [Ecclesiastical Insurance](#) based upon provincial directives and best practices in place at the time of writing.

Important Considerations

- Place hand sanitizer (with at least 60% alcohol content) at all entrance and exits, throughout the building, on or near the altar, and at all workstations.
- When cleaning, choose products that clean and disinfect all at once (e.g. premixed store-bought disinfectant cleaning solutions and/or wipes when available).
 - Cleaning products remove germs, dirt, and impurities from surfaces thereby lowering the risk of spreading infection.
 - Disinfecting products kill germs on surfaces using chemicals.
- Commonly used cleaners and disinfectants are effective against COVID-19. Use only [approved hard-surface disinfectants](#) that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN). A DIN is an 8-digit number given by Health Canada that confirms the disinfectant product is approved and safe for use in Canada.
- Check the expiry date of products and always follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Surfaces frequently touched with hands are most likely to be contaminated. These include pews, arm rests, doorknobs, handles, handrails, buttons, light switches, tables, countertops and electronics.
- It is not yet known how long the virus causing COVID-19 lives on surfaces, however, evidence suggests it can live on objects and surfaces from a few hours to days.
- Use damp cleaning methods such as damp clean cloths, and/or a wet mop. Do not dust or sweep which can distribute virus droplets into the air. Contaminated disposable cleaning items (e.g. mop heads, cloths) should be placed in a lined garbage bin before disposing of them with regular waste. Reusable cleaning items can be washed using regular laundry soap and hot water (60-90°C).
- With the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), the risk of exposure to cleaning staff is inherently low, however cleaning staff/volunteers should wear appropriate gloves, masks, and gowns, and wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds immediately after removing PPE.

Minimum Cleaning & Disinfection Requirements for Church Buildings

- Daily: routine cleaning and disinfection of all spaces used during the course of a day.
- Twice-Daily: cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces.
- Frequently: shared spaces such as church sanctuaries, kitchens, and bathrooms should be cleaned and disinfected after each service/activity; shared workstations should be cleaned between each user.

Create a Cleaning & Disinfection Plan

- Develop or review existing protocols and procedures for cleaning and disinfection of buildings.
- Determine all areas to be cleaned and disinfected, including entrances and exit routes, and where additional efforts may be needed, given the enhanced requirements during the pandemic.
- Assign cleaning and disinfection responsibilities to staff, volunteers, and/or contractors, ensuring appropriate training and PPE is provided, and sharing the plan and expectations with the parish.
- [Obtain the supplies necessary for cleaning and disinfection](#) and for ensuring hygienic practices.
- Seek corporation approval of the parish's cleaning and disinfection plan and regularly review it.
- Post a completion log in high-frequency areas and record all cleaning and disinfection activities.



Appendix 2: Education & Screening

Education and screening are important elements to equip parish leaders, staff, volunteers, parishioners and the public to be as safe as possible in our church buildings. The pandemic has changed many aspects of our day-to-day lives, from the way we interact with others to how we take care of ourselves and others. Education about the coronavirus, along with updated information about expectations, practices, and procedures in our church buildings is essential to limiting the spread of COVID-19.

Important Considerations

- The symptoms of COVID-19 are like many other illnesses, including the common cold and influenza.
- Any Information shared by parish leaders related to COVID-19 should be compiled from reputable sources, and reference given to government and/or public health organizations.
- It is recommended that any employee, parishioner, volunteer or worshipper feeling unwell, especially if they have any symptoms related to cold, flu or COVID-19, should be discouraged from attending the church, and/or politely asked to leave the church building immediately. They should be encouraged to seek advice from public health about COVID-19 testing. The cleric-in-charge should be notified of all such situations as they arise for pastoral follow up with the individuals concerned.

Create an Education & Screening Plan

- Review COVID-19 awareness resources and fact sheets produced by the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), [Public Health Ontario](#) and your [local public health unit](#).
- Determine which awareness resources are relevant to your ministry context and share them widely.
- Train parish staff, leaders and liturgical ministers in basic health procedures, such as proper hand washing techniques, wearing a face mask, cough/sneeze etiquette, and modified liturgical protocols.
- Rehearse with staff, leaders and key volunteers COVID-19 scenarios that may be difficult to navigate (e.g. someone who wants to attend a service that is at capacity, or someone who attends while sick).
- Download following educational signage and post them at prominent locations:
 - [COVID-19 Symptom Entrance Signs](#)
 - [Help Reduce the Spread of COVID-19](#)
 - [Hand Washing Poster](#)
 - Other educational resources produced by your [local public health unit](#).
- Develop a protocol(s) for how to ask staff, parishioners, volunteers, and worshipers to regularly screen themselves for COVID-19 using the provincial [self-assessment tool](#).
- Review the plan regularly and revise as needed.



Appendix 3: Physical Distancing, Movement & Contact Tracing

Together, we can impede the spread of COVID-19 by making a conscious effort to keep a physical distance between each other and track of who is attending our services and events. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, [physical distancing](#) has proven to be one of the most effective ways to reduce the spread of illness during an outbreak.

Important Considerations

- Public health officials advise minimizing close contact with others by changing behaviors, including:
 - keeping a distance of at least 2 arms lengths (approximately 2 metres) from others;
 - limiting time spent outside the home;
 - avoiding crowded spaces and being patient in hallways and corridors;
 - refraining from common physical expressions of greetings, such as handshakes and hugs;
 - reducing close physical contact with people at higher risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19 (e.g. older adults and those in poor health);
 - and wearing a mask or face covering.
- Contact tracing is a process that is used to identify, educate and monitor individuals who have had close contact with someone who is infected with a virus. These individuals are at a higher risk of becoming infected and sharing the virus with others. Contact tracing can help the individuals understand their risk and limit further spread of the virus.

Create a Physical Distancing, Movement & Tracing Plan

- Review the physical layout of your church building, making note of entrances and exits and areas which may invite people to congregate in ways where physical distance is difficult to maintain.
- Determine the best way to control movement into and out of the building and within the church to ensure physical distancing is maintained (e.g. timed entry, pre-assigned attendance only, etc.).
- Consider removing seating, or if seating is fixed, mark it unavailable or rope it off to ensure a two metre distance between rows of seating and allow for a two metre distance between individuals or household groups along each row. If the reducing seating capacity will be less than the expected attendance, consider re-arranging the schedule of services to provide more, but smaller, services and/or hold alternate services in other large rooms in the building.
- Develop a plan to contact worshippers in the event that you are later advised that someone has attended church while potentially being contagious with COVID-19. Possible options include:
 - developing an online reservation system and updating it with actual attendance;
 - having someone observe and record names in a tracing logbook or by using a parish list.
- Discourage movement against the flow of people moving in the space. It may be necessary to mark off two metre distances outside and/or in a vestibule if it is anticipated that lines will form.
- Assign and train sides persons to control communion flow and orderly departure from the worship space by seating row, and to monitor movement during other times of the service.



Appendix 4: Returning to the Office Environment

The health and safety of our clergy and staff is a top priority, an extension of the call to love our neighbour as ourselves. We know that every church workplace is unique which makes it so important that every parish assesses functions carried out by their employees to ensure appropriate precautions are put in place to protect against the hazard of exposure to COVID-19. Practicing physical distancing, minimizing contact with droplets of mucous or saliva, keeping hands, surfaces and objects clean, and preventing contact with potentially infected people are all critically important measures as we gradually and cautiously return to the office environment.

Important Considerations

- Parishes are obliged to provide a safe work environment for staff, as set out in the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations and provincial and local public health directives.
- Introducing any new protective measures should be done as part of a full review of other workplace hazards - not just COVID-19.
- Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to keep employees and work sites safe and free of hazards. Employees have the right to refuse unsafe work. [Resources from the Government of Ontario to prevent COVID-19 in workplaces can be found here.](#)
- Keeping safe at work involves understanding how people might potentially come in contact with COVID-19 as they perform their jobs, and then taking steps to reduce possible means of exposure. People such as office administrators, clergy, musicians, and maintenance staff are just some of those who need to consider how they can work safely and prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.
- Where applicable, employers should consult with Joint Health and Safety Committees/Health and Safety Representatives on measures to protect workers in the workplace.
- In the amber stage, parish offices will be permitted to be open for employees, as well as for limited and essential meetings with parishioners and contractors by appointment only, after screening.

Creating a Return to the Office Plan

- Review the activities of parish staff and identify those which may potentially enhance the risk of an employee coming in contact with the novel coronavirus, and other potential workplace hazards.
- [Develop a COVID-19 workplace safety plan](#) unique to your particular parish workplace.
- Order all required cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (masks/gloves) for employees and set and communicate expectations for their use.
- Rearrange or reconfigure workstations if needed to ensure 2m physical distancing and/or to limit exposure with visitors to the building (install plexiglass at reception, buzz in all visitors etc.).
- Assess all meeting rooms, offices and washrooms for maximum capacity given physical distancing requirements, and post signs on rooms advising limits.
- Where applicable, limit elevator use to one-person per trip and post signs advising restrictions.
- Close rooms, including common areas like kitchens, lunchrooms, coffee and tea stations, as well as surplus washrooms. No food or beverages are to be served or shared in the workplace.
- Post signs on photocopier, shared telephones, and other common equipment advising users to sanitize their hands before and after use; make disinfectant wipes available to wipe down surfaces.
- Introduce more fresh air by increasing the ventilation system air intake or opening windows. Avoid central air recirculation where possible. Do not use fans.
- Consider alternative work arrangements, including staggered and/or hybrid in-office and at-home work schedules, and decide on a schedule for staff to return to the office environment.



Appendix 5: In-Person Worship

When we return to worship in our church buildings, it will necessarily look different than it did in March. Our liturgical customs and hygiene practices are continually being adapted for pandemic considerations. While specific worship considerations will be described by the bishops in our diocesan ministry guidelines, it is important to start planning for modified procedures with respect to public worship services.

Important Considerations

- All directives of the Government of Ontario, local public health authorities and the bishop must be followed at all times during the exercise of public worship in our churches.
- No person should feel obliged to attend an in-person worship service; vulnerable people for whom there is an increased risk of more severe outcomes should be encouraged to refrain from in-person worship at this time. This includes people:
 - aged 70 and over;
 - with compromised immune systems; or
 - with underlying medical conditions.
- Worshippers should be cohorted as is practically possible. For instance, organize attendance so the same individuals/families go to the same service each day/week to minimize mixing of different individuals/families, and children and youth must remain with their families during the service.
- A distance of two metres between all persons not in the same social circle should be maintained and the use of masks and face coverings during worship is strongly encouraged, if not mandated.
- Microphones must not be shared and should be sanitized after each use.

Create a Worship Plan

- Review the [Ministry of Health's Advice on Religious Services, Rites or Ceremonies](#).
- Review your current worship schedule, considering the following as you establish a new pattern:
 - some people will not be able, or feel comfortable, to attend in-person worship;
 - thorough cleaning and sanitization will be required between services; and
 - not all people who wish to attend a service may be able to given capacity limits.
- Modify the liturgy as necessary, taking into account the prohibition on congregational singing.
- Plan to create and distribute individual service leaflets for each liturgy or to have the service projected onto overhead screens as prayer/hymn books are not permitted in the worship space.
- Determine how offerings will be received in a way that does not involve the passing of a plate.
- Develop a procedure for the orderly distribution of communion (bread only) from a standing station.
- Consult parishioners with special needs who may need individualized consideration and their caregivers about needed supports to safely return.
- Make a plan to review liturgical changes at the start of each service to reinforce prior messages and give consideration about how best to support parishioners as they adapt to new practices.
- Debrief the worship experience and adapt procedures practices as necessary.



Appendix 6: Communications

Effective and ongoing communication is imperative to set new expectations for our worship spaces, keep everyone as safe as possible and reduce anxiety as we move into a new ministry frontier. Parish leaders should share key messages with parishioners in a timely manner about any new developments and changes to established practices.

Important Considerations

- In stressful times, new information is best conveyed in a simple, easily understandable manner through a variety of media (print, digital, phone) and at regular intervals.
- Tailor the content of your communications to your audience.
- Any information shared by parish leaders related to COVID-19 should be compiled from reputable sources, with reference given to government and/or public health organizations.
- Be empathetic and compassionate, recognizing this return to in-person worship may be anxiety-provoking for some. Communications should acknowledge that we are all in this together and help parishioners understand why decisions are being made and new practices are being implemented without dismissing the variety of feelings people may be experiencing.

Create a Communications Plan for Re-Opening

- Develop one set of key messages and share these with staff and parish leaders so that consistent messages are being conveyed to the congregation. Be sure to address the 'why' question in communications, including both a theological and public health rationale.
- Create a system to dispel myths and misinformation by sharing clear, accurate and evidence-based information, perhaps through a weekly email update or a frequently asked questions document.
- In advance of the resumption of in-person Sunday services, design platform-specific communications for various media (email, social media, website, newsletter, phone messages) to convey essential information, including:
 - Expectations for self-screening for coronavirus symptoms before attending the church building and clear directions to stay home if someone has any symptoms or is feeling unwell, has traveled outside of Canada in the past 14 days, has been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19.
 - Reassurance that no one should feel obliged to attend in-person worship during the pandemic, especially those in a high-risk group for severe outcomes from COVID-19.
 - Information about the limits on the size of congregations and the plan for handling them.
 - Details about how participation at services and parish appointments will be tracked.
 - Guidance about what to expect when a person arrives for worship, including what safety measures and precautions have been put in place.
 - Details on changes to the worship service and liturgical customs (such as no singing allowed, limits on movement, communion in one-kind only etc.).
 - Expectations for the use of masks or face-coverings, in compliance with local by-laws.
- After each Sunday, debrief the experience with parish leaders and staff and adapt your messages and update the congregation, recognizing that procedures and expectations and best practices will evolve over time.

