



# OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

## ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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

EFFECTIVE April 21, 2022

The ongoing provision of worship, ministry, pastoral care is an essential function the Church provides to our communities. The health and wellbeing of all people must always be put at the forefront of our decision-making process. While this is paramount for us all, we also recognize that each parish context is different. We offer the following guidelines secure in the knowledge that parish leaders will make responsible decisions with an abundance of caution, based on local realities they face.

All directives and recommendations of the Government of Ontario and local public health authorities must be adhered to, and masking is required, with limited exceptions, for all indoor activities. We continue to encourage people to follow pandemic best practices and to stay home if they are feeling ill. To help protect the communities we serve, we also strongly encourage facilitating natural ventilation in all spaces, and for people to receive the COVID-19 vaccinations for which they are eligible.

Learn about the [latest public health guidance for your area here](#).

#### A. General Ministry Guidelines

1. Well-fitted masks, preferably medical masks or respirators, must be worn by all people over 2 years of age when indoors and when physical distance is difficult to maintain, except for certain liturgical roles, or when eating or drinking is permitted.
2. a) Food and beverages may be served and shared outside, provided physical distancing is maintained as much as possible, and that food preparation is undertaken by designated volunteers who are masked and in compliance with the diocesan vaccine policy.  
b) Food and beverages may be served and/or shared in church buildings to support important ministry functions, provided the following conditions are met:
  - i) Natural ventilation (open windows and doors) is facilitated and/or a portable HEPA air cleaner / purifier unit appropriate for the room size is in use.
  - ii) Participants must be masked at all times, except when seated to eat or drink.
  - iii) Seating between people and tables is as distanced as much as practically possible.
  - iv) Food is prepared, portioned and served by designated volunteers who are masked and in compliance with the diocesan vaccine policy.
  - v) Food is shared in a different location from the principal worship space, or if in the same space, it is served after the conclusion of the service, ministry activity, or special event.
  - vi) The names and contact information of those in attendance are to be maintained and kept for 30 days to assist with any contact tracing efforts after the gathering.
3. a) Online and outdoor activities for children and youth are encouraged, where practical.  
b) Indoor Sunday School and other children and youth programming may be offered with parental consent, provided the following conditions are met:
  - i) Participants and volunteers are actively screened for symptoms of COVID-19.
  - ii) Activities are held in well-ventilated and spacious rooms, and/or a portable HEPA air cleaner / purifier unit is in active use.

iii) Community norms regarding pandemic protocols, including mandatory masking and distancing, should be established and actively monitored.

c) Extra care, in addition to the above conditions, is strongly encouraged for nursery and other childcare services provided for children 4 and under who are not eligible for vaccination; capacity for such activities should be based on the number of people who are able to be physically distanced by 2m; cohorting by family may be considered as an additional measure.

d) Overnight programming for children and youth is not permitted.

4. Vestry meetings are to be conducted in accordance with the [regulations approved by Synod Council](#) and published on the online diocesan COVID-19 resource hub.
5. Clergy are encouraged to seek guidance from the executive officer in the event of COVID-19 outbreak related to a church service, ministry, or gathering.
6. Vulnerable persons should not feel obliged to attend in-person worship or other activities during the pandemic.

## B. Building & Property Guidelines

1. Natural ventilation should be facilitated as much as possible by opening windows and doors to the outside. Fans and air conditioning units which primarily recirculate air should not be used during ministry activities without enhanced or natural ventilation in the space.
2. In addition to routine cleaning and disinfecting, surfaces that are frequently touched with hands and spaces that are shared (kitchens, bathrooms, etc) should be cleaned and disinfected regularly and between services.
3. Hand sanitizer stations (with at least 60% alcohol content) should be placed throughout the building to assist with maintaining good hand hygiene.
4. Hall and/or other meeting space rentals to parishioners or community groups on a one-time or occasional basis may be permitted, provided food and beverages are not served nor shared.
5. Community gardens and farmer's markets may be operated in compliance with the advice, recommendations, and instructions of local public health officials.

## C. Pastoral Care Guidelines

1. Clergy and pastoral care teams should regularly communicate with all parishioners by phone, email, social media and/or other remote means, prioritizing those who may be isolated.
2. Clergy and lay pastoral assistants who have symptoms of COVID-19 are to refrain from providing in-person pastoral care to high-risk persons for a full 10 days after onset.
3. Pastoral visits are prohibited with those who are self-isolating, those who have an active case of COVID-19, or with those residing in a unit or facility where an outbreak has been declared.

## D. Liturgical Guidelines

### ***General Directives***

1. Services at retirement homes, long-term care facilities and/or hospitals are permitted, following any additional directives which may be mandated.
2. Singing is only permitted when masked. For vocalists and wind instrumentalists, 4m of physical distance must be maintained between them and the congregation. All musicians are expected to maintain physical distance while performing.
3. A service of Eucharist with spiritual communion is permitted to be livestreamed, either as a standalone online worship service or as part of a hybrid service with in-person and online congregations.

### ***Liturgical Hygiene Practices***

1. Hands should be washed or sanitized at the start of all worship and ministry activities, and at their conclusion; this is especially important before administering communion or anointing.
2. The use of well-fitted masks is required during indoor worship services except for brief instances by people who are proclaiming the Word, preaching, or leading the prayers of the people. In addition, the parties to a marriage may remove their mask during the exchange of vows. Those presiding at the celebration of the Eucharist are to wear masks.
3. Clergy should greet worshippers in a contact-free manner and limit any physical contact.
4. The Exchange of the Peace is to be conducted without physical contact.
5. Congregations are encouraged to make their offerings using digital means. During services, offerings should be collected from a stationary location; a collection plate is not to be passed.
6. All vessels and linens set out for worship must be thoroughly cleaned after use.

### ***Services of Eucharist***

1. The celebration of a said Eucharist is permitted, in accordance with the aforementioned liturgical hygiene practices, and the following directions:

#### **Celebrating the Eucharist**

- a. The priest, wearing a mask, will consecrate both the bread and the wine and consume in both kinds, but will distribute only the consecrated bread to all other communicants.
- b. Ablutions, either during or after the service, are to be undertaken by the priest only.

#### **At the time of communion**

- a. Communion is to be distributed from a standing station(s), wherever possible, or brought to communicants in churches where this may cause congestion and/or where mobility issues limit a communicant's movement. Consecrated bread is to be placed carefully in the communicant's outstretched hand with minimal contact.
- b. Communicants are to sanitize their hands, receive the host while continuing to wear a mask and maintaining physical distance with all others except the communion minister. Once physical distance has been re-established, communicants are to briefly lower or remove their mask, consume the host, and replace their mask.

### ***Pastoral Offices***

1. Detailed expectations for the conduct of worshippers with respect to pandemic protocols must be communicated prior to, and at the beginning of, all weddings, funerals, and baptisms. Trained staff and volunteers should actively monitor for compliance during services.
2. Weddings and baptisms may be conducted in compliance with all public health directives.
3. Funerals may be conducted in compliance with all public health and [Bereavement Authority of Ontario \(BAO\) directives](#).