



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

Liturgical, Ministry, & Pastoral Care Guidelines in Response to COVID-19 EFFECTIVE April 8, 2021

In response to the locally surging levels of COVID-19 cases, all regions of the diocese are subject to the following liturgical, ministry and pastoral care guidelines, mirroring the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario's Red Stage and the Government of Ontario's White-Shutdown regulations and Stay-at-Home Order.

All permissions to re-open for in-person worship, granted in accordance with the Amber Stage of the Province's Re-opening Framework, are suspended until further notice.

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. Adaptive approaches and ministry practices are to be deployed and prayer and pastoral care ministries must continue to be a priority of all clergy and lay leaders.

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; practising physical distancing and where not possible, wearing a mask or face covering. To help protect the communities we serve, we also encourage [the use of the COVID Alert mobile app](#).

Find out about the [latest public health measures, advice and restrictions for your area here](#).

A. Building & General Ministry Guidelines

1. Until further notice, church buildings are to be closed, except for the operation of licensed day care centres, where permitted by the Ministry of Education, and in the following limited circumstances, following the guidelines and directions of public health officials to mitigate risk as much as possible:
 - a. for staff to perform essential functions that could not otherwise be completed from home;
 - b. for online worship services, provided no more than 5 people are gathered at any one time;
 - c. for designated contractors, staff and/or volunteers to conduct inspections and/or essential maintenance of the building;
 - d. for volunteers to provide essential services to those who live in poverty, those who are food insecure, and/or those who are precariously housed;
 - e. for 12-step groups and other programs serving vulnerable populations, provided no more than 10 people are gathered at any one time; and
 - f. for tenants and license agreement holders to access their designated spaces, where permitted by provincial and/or municipal regulations.
2. Any confirmed case of COVID-19 involving a person who may have attended church property must be immediately reported to the diocesan executive officer by the rector or priest-in-charge.
3. Vestry meetings are to be conducted virtually in accordance with the regulations approved by synod council and published on the online diocesan resource hub.
4. Hall and/or other community space rentals to parishioners or community groups are not permitted.
5. Fundraising activities are to be conducted online, unless exceptional permission has been granted by the regional archdeacon for appointment-based curbside pick-up initiatives to be held.

B. Pastoral Care Guidelines

1. Clergy and pastoral care teams should regularly communicate with parishioners by phone, email, mail, social media, and/or other remote means, prioritizing those who may be isolated. Non-essential porch-drops are prohibited.
2. Clergy and lay pastoral assistants are to provide pastoral care by remote means for all but the most essential visits and/or emergency care; in such instances outdoor visits are advised wherever possible.
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 facility where an outbreak has been declared.
4. Where permitted, clergy and lay pastoral assistants are to adhere to all institutional guidelines when visiting retirement homes, long-term care facilities, and/or hospitals.
5. In circumstances where COVID-19 is not known to be present, anointing and/or a last Eucharistic meal to the dying is permitted, provided hands are sanitized, and all vessels and linens are thoroughly cleaned.

C. Liturgical Guidelines

1. Clergy are encouraged to direct their parishioners to the diocesan Facebook Page and/or YouTube channel for Sunday Prayers with Bishop Susan Bell, if online parish services are not available.
2. Every person involved in worship shall be actively screened for COVID-19 using [this online self-assessment tool](#). The frequency, number of participants, and duration of online services is to be limited as much as possible.
3. All worshippers should wash their hands before and after worship. Priests and communion ministers shall sanitize their hands immediately prior to handling the elements and administering communion.
4. A distance of 2 metres shall be maintained, except for vocalists who shall maintain 4 metres distance.
5. The use of masks and face coverings is required except for brief instances where those leading the service have speaking roles, where permitted by local by-laws. Vocalists must wear masks while singing.
6. External ventilation (open doors or windows) during worship is strongly recommended.

The Eucharist

1. Priests are permitted to celebrate the Eucharist with spiritual communion as part of an online worship service, provided that:
 - a. the service is conducted from a consecrated church building;
 - b. member(s) of the laity will be present and take a part in the offering of the service;
 - c. all liturgical hygiene practices and foundational pandemic practices are observed;
 - d. those present may only be seen to receive in one kind (bread) and that wine is consumed solely by the celebrant, off-camera if possible; and
 - e. a communal prayer of spiritual communion is said and the congregation watching is offered prayers to make their personal spiritual communion.

Pastoral Offices

1. Outdoor graveside interments may be conducted in compliance with all public health and [Bereavement Authority of Ontario \(BAO\) directives](#), provided that attendance is limited to no more than 10 people.
2. Weddings, funerals and baptisms are to be postponed. In rare and exceptional circumstances, permission may be sought from the regional archdeacon to conduct a pastoral office for which the extraordinary pastoral needs are such that postponing the service is not advisable. If permission is granted, such services are to be held in private and attendance must be limited to 10 people or less.