



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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

EFFECTIVE December 21, 2021

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 permissions to re-open for public worship, granted in accordance with the Amber Stage of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario's Framework, are suspended until further notice.

All regions of the diocese are subject to the following liturgical, ministry and pastoral care guidelines. All directives of the Government of Ontario and local public health authorities must be always adhered to, including the following foundational pandemic guidance: minimizing the number of persons in a place at the same time, maintaining a physical distance of at least 2 metres, using well-fitting masks, practising good hand and respiratory hygiene, and staying home if feeling ill. To help protect the communities we serve, we also strongly encourage [the use of the COVID Alert mobile app](#), natural ventilation in all spaces, and for all eligible people to receive their COVID-19 vaccination. Find out about the [latest public health measures, advice and restrictions for your area here](#).

A. General Ministry Guidelines

1. No one should feel obliged to attend in-person worship or other activities during the pandemic.
2. Worship is to be conducted online, except in rare and exceptional circumstances for pastoral services, and produced by liturgical teams of no more than 10 people.
3. Parish meetings, events, and studies, including faith formation and outreach activities, should be conducted online or outdoors, wherever possible. In rare and exceptional cases where it is necessary to hold a small in-person gathering, proof of vaccination with two or three doses is required, except for the provision of pastoral care, or essential food security or social services.
4. Physical distance of 2m should be maintained between individuals who are not part of the same household for all activities. 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.
5. Fundraising activities are to be conducted online or outdoors. Parish-organized in-person social activities are not permitted.
6. Food and beverages are not to be served or shared on church property, except where permitted by public health officials in order to provide essential food programs to those who are food insecure. Food may be prepared in church kitchens for this purpose by no more than 6 people at any given time, provided they have received two or three doses of the vaccine.
7. Childcare, Sunday School, and other indoor children and youth programming is not permitted. Occasional outdoor children and youth programming may be organized, with parental consent, and where physical distancing is possible.
8. Vestry meetings are to be conducted virtually in accordance with the [regulations approved by Synod Council](#) and published on the online diocesan COVID-19 resource hub.

9. The names and contact information of those attending worship services, office appointments, and any other in-person essential gathering are to be maintained and kept for 30 days to assist public health officials with any necessary contact tracing.
10. Any confirmed case of COVID-19 involving a person who may have attended church property must be reported to the diocesan executive officer by the rector or priest-in-charge.

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.
2. Access to church buildings for in-person gatherings may be permitted 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 worship services;
 - c. for essential governance and planning meetings;
 - d. for contractors, staff, and/or parish volunteers to conduct maintenance, upkeep, and repair work, and any necessary inspections;
 - e. for staff and volunteers to provide essential services to those who live in poverty, those who are food insecure, and/or those who are precariously housed;
 - f. for staff and volunteers to provide social services, including 12-step groups and other programs serving vulnerable populations; and
 - g. for tenants and license agreement holders, including licensed day care centres, to use their designated spaces.
3. Parishioners may attend parish offices by appointment only, for essential purposes.
4. 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 more often, twice per day or between services, as well as when visibly dirty.
5. Hand sanitizer stations (with at least 60% alcohol content) should be placed throughout the building to assist with maintaining good hand hygiene.
6. Hall and/or other meeting space rentals to parishioners or community groups on a one-time or occasional basis are not permitted.
7. Community gardens and farmer's markets may be operated in compliance with the advice, recommendations, and instructions of local public health officials.
8. Extraordinary permission may be sought from the executive officer for:
 - i) community-based organizations to operate day camps on church property, or
 - ii) film and television production companies to use church property,
 provided all activities are planned in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials and industry-specific provincial directives and regulations.

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 are to provide pastoral care by remote means as much as possible. Essential in-person pastoral visits, physically distanced and masked, are permitted but should be as brief as possible and held in well-ventilated spaces.

- 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

- No more than 10 people shall be physically present for the preparation of any online worship service, and each person shall be masked at all time, double or triple vaccinated, and actively screened for COVID-19 using [this online self-assessment tool](#). The frequency and duration of online services is to be limited as much as possible.
- Services at retirement homes, long-term care facilities and/or hospitals are permitted, following any additional directives which may be mandated.
- Masks are to be worn and physical distance of 2m between musicians is to always be maintained. For vocalists and wind instrumentalists, 4m of physical distance must be maintained between them and the congregation. The frequency and duration of performances by vocalists or wind instrumentalists should be limited as much as possible.
- A service of Eucharist with spiritual communion is permitted to be livestreamed.

Liturgical Hygiene Practices

- All worshippers should wash their hands before and after worship.
- Clergy should greet worshippers in a contact-free manner and limit any physical contact.
- The use of well-fitted masks is required at all times during worship services, including by clergy and those with speaking roles.
- Movement during the service is to be limited as much as possible; individuals and families must remain in their assigned seating during worship. Liturgical processions and dancing are permitted only where participants can maintain a physical distance of 2 metres.
- The Exchange of the Peace is to be conducted without physical contact.
- 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.
- Counters shall wash their hands before and after handling offerings.
- Priests and communion ministers shall sanitize their hands immediately prior to handling the elements and administering communion.
- All vessels and linens set out for worship must be thoroughly cleaned after use.
- Anointers shall wash their hands before and after rites involving anointing.

Services of Eucharist

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

Celebrating the Eucharist

- The priest will consecrate both the bread and the wine, and consume in both kinds, but will distribute only the consecrated bread to all other communicants.
- The elements for Holy Communion are to be pre-positioned in the sanctuary by the priest before the service and are not to be processed during an offertory hymn.
- A deacon or server may prepare the credence table and/or altar, but vessels shall not be passed between persons.
- The priest shall stand alone at the altar during the celebration of the Eucharist, wearing a mask and covering the elements with palls or purificators, as practical.
- 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.
- b. Consecrated bread is to be placed carefully in the communicant's outstretched hand with minimal contact.
- c. 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 from the communion minister has been re-established, they are to briefly lower or remove their mask, consume the host, and replace their mask.
- d. Blessings and prayers for healing should be offered in a contactless manner.

Pastoral Offices

1. All indoor weddings, funerals and baptisms are to be postponed until further notice. 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 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 25 people or less, all of whom must have received two or three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.
2. Funerals, where applicable, shall be conducted in compliance with all [Bereavement Authority of Ontario \(BAO\) directives](#).