



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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

EFFECTIVE July 16, 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 the realities they face in each of their locations.

All regions of the diocese are subject to the following liturgical, ministry and pastoral care guidelines, mirroring the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario's Amber Stage. 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-constructed, well-fitting masks, practising good hand and respiratory hygiene, and staying home if feeling ill. To help protect the communities we serve, we also encourage [the use of the COVID Alert mobile app](#) 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. Parish ministries, including faith formation and outreach activities, should continue to be conducted online or outdoors, wherever possible.
2. No one should feel obliged to attend an in-person worship service or activity during the pandemic.
3. Physical distance of 2m should be maintained between individuals who are not part of the same household for all ministries activities. Masks must be worn when indoors and when physical distance is difficult to maintain.
4. Childcare, Sunday School, and other in-person programming for children is not permitted. Outdoor youth programming may be organized, where physical distancing is possible.
5. Fundraising activities are to be conducted online or outdoors. Food and beverages are not to be prepared, served, or shared at any meeting, event, study, or other activities organized by the parish, except where permitted by public health officials in order to provide essential food programs to those who are food insecure. Social activities are not permitted at this time.
6. Vestry meetings are to be conducted virtually in accordance with the [regulations approved by Synod Council](#) and published on the online diocesan resource hub.
7. The names and contact information of those attending worship services, office appointments, meetings, and faith formation activities are to be maintained and kept for 30 days to assist public health officials with any necessary contact tracing.
8. Any confirmed case of COVID-19 involving a person who may have attended parish property must be immediately reported to the diocesan executive officer by the rector or priest-in-charge.

B. Building & Property Guidelines

1. Ventilation should be facilitated as much as possible by opening windows and doors to the outside. Fans which recirculate air should not be used.
2. In addition to routine cleaning and disinfecting, surfaces that are frequently touched with hands and spaces that are shared (kitchens, bathrooms) should be cleaned and disinfected more often, twice per day or between services, as well as when visibly dirty.
3. Hand sanitizer stations (with at least 60% alcohol content) should be placed throughout the building to assist with maintaining good hand hygiene.
4. Parish offices are permitted to be open for clergy, staff, wardens, and treasurers. Parishioners may only attend parish offices by appointment only, for essential purposes.
5. Access to church buildings may also 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 worship services, governance and planning meetings and faith formation activities;
 - b. for contractors, staff, and/or parish volunteers to conduct maintenance, upkeep, and repair work, and any necessary inspections;
 - c. for volunteers to provide essential services to those who live in poverty, those who are food insecure, and/or those who are precariously housed;
 - d. for 12-step groups and other programs serving vulnerable populations; and
 - e. for tenants and license agreement holders, including licensed day care centres, to use their designated spaces.
6. The maximum number of people who can attend an in-person worship service held indoors, inclusive of all spaces within a building, shall be the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2m from every other person in the worship space.
7. Clergy and/or licensed lay workers may also organize governance and planning meetings, as well as faith formation activities, including Bible studies, educational events, or prayer sessions, provided such gatherings do not exceed **100** people when held outdoors and **25** people when held indoors.
8. Hall and/or other community space rentals to parishioners or community groups are not permitted.
9. Community gardens and farmer's markets may be operated in compliance with the advice, recommendations, and instructions of local public health officials.
10. Extraordinary permission may be sought from the executive officer for a community-based organization to operate a summer day camp on church property, provided all programming is planned in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of local public health officials and 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. In-person, physically distanced pastoral visits for short periods of time are permitted, preferably in outdoor settings. Masks or face-coverings must be worn during any indoor visits.
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. 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 or to support parish worship teams by providing occasional respite or holiday coverage.
2. Services at retirement homes, long-term care facilities and/or hospitals are permitted, following any additional directives which may be mandated by staff.
3. Music may be pre-recorded for online worship services or performed live during in-person worship services by no more than 6 vocalists and/or instrumentalists at any one time, provided masks are worn, a physical distance of 2m between musicians and 4m between the musicians and congregation is maintained. The frequency and duration of singing by vocalists should be limited as much as possible during in-person worship.
4. Congregational singing and choir practices and performances not permitted.
5. 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 an in-person congregation.

Liturgical Hygiene Practices

1. All worshippers should wash their hands before and after worship.
2. Clergy should greet worshippers in a contact-free manner and avoid unnecessary physical contact.
3. The use of masks and face coverings during worship services is required except for brief instances where those leading the service have speaking roles, where permitted by local by-laws.
4. 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 is permitted only where participants can maintain a physical distance of 2 metres.
5. The Exchange of the Peace is to be conducted without physical contact.
6. Congregations are encouraged to make their offerings using electronic means. During services, offerings should be collected from a stationary location; a collection plate is not to be passed.
7. Counters shall wash their hands before and after handling offerings, consider wearing gloves, and avoid touching their face while counting.
8. Priests and communion ministers shall sanitize their hands immediately prior to handling the elements and administering communion.
9. All vessels, corporals, and purificators set out for worship must be thoroughly cleaned after use.
10. All fonts and stoups are to remain dry.
11. Anointers shall wash their hands before and after rites involving anointing.
12. Prayer and hymn books shall only be used for one service before being left for 3 days prior to re-use.
13. Thuribles are not to be passed between thurifers and/or clergy.

Services of Eucharist

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

Celebrating the Eucharist

- a. 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.
- b. 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.
- c. A deacon or server may prepare the credence table and/or altar, but vessels shall not be passed between persons.
- d. The priest shall stand alone at the altar during the celebration of the Eucharist, wearing a mask and covering the elements with palls, veils, or purificators as much as possible.
- e. 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; communion rails and kneelers are not to be used.
- b. Consecrated bread is to be placed carefully in the communicant's outstretched hand with minimal contact. Hosts and wafers are recommended; homemade bread is not permitted.
- 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. Detailed expectations for the conduct of worshippers must be communicated prior to, and at the beginning of, all weddings, funerals, and baptisms.
2. Weddings may be conducted in compliance with all public health directives and provided that attendance is limited to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2m from every other person in attendance.
3. Funerals may be conducted in compliance with all public health and [Bereavement Authority of Ontario \(BAO\) directives](#), provided that attendance is limited to the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2m from every other person.
4. Baptisms may be conducted in compliance with all provincial directives, normally as part of regular Sunday worship services. If the family and friends of baptismal candidate(s) are of such number that there would be negligible capacity for other parishioners to attend, permission may be sought from the regional archdeacon to hold a baptismal service at a time other than the regularly scheduled services of the parish. If permission is granted, at least 10% of those gathered for the service must be parishioners who are not related to the baptismal candidate, representing by their presence the Body of Christ.