



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

Anglican Church of Canada

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

EFFECTIVE July 24, 2020

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.

Guiding Principles

1. Strictly adhere to all federal, provincial, municipal emergency orders and directives, and as well as diocesan guidelines with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Public health officials advise staying at home as much as is practically possible, especially vulnerable persons for whom there is an increased risk of more severe outcomes from COVID-19 (older adults, those with compromised immune systems, and those with underlying medical conditions).
3. All spaces used for ministry should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary environment after each use.

Property & General Ministry Guidelines

1. Until further notice, church buildings are to remain closed.
2. Occasional and time-limited access to the building is only permitted in the following circumstances:
 - a. for designated persons to conduct inspections and maintenance and repair work;
 - b. for staff to perform essential functions that could not otherwise be completed from home;
 - c. 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, following the guidelines and directions of public health officials to mitigate risk as much as possible;
 - d. for licensed day care centres to operate, where permitted by the Ministry of Education;
 - e. for 12-step groups totaling no more than 30 persons to meet, following the guidelines and directions of public health officials to mitigate risk as much as possible;
 - f. for a priest, musician, and no more than eight others to gather to produce online worship services and/or homiletic reflections; and
 - g. for musicians to record music to contribute to parish life, with the permission of the rector or priest-in-charge.
3. Community gardens and farmer's markets may be operated in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials, including any advice, recommendations or instructions on physical distancing, cleaning or disinfecting.

4. 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 the directions outlined in the [Ontario Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Guidance: Summer Day Camps](#).
5. Clergy may organize small, outdoor faith formation activities for their parishioners, such as Bible studies, educational events, or prayer sessions, provided that such gatherings do not exceed 15 people and that physical distancing is maintained at all times.

Pastoral Care Guidelines

Pastoral Visiting and Anointing the Sick

1. Clergy should undertake pastoral care by phone calls and video conferencing whenever possible.
2. In-person, physically distanced pastoral visits for short periods of time are permitted, preferably in outdoor settings. Masks or face-coverings should be worn for any indoor visits.
3. Pastoral visits with those who are self-isolating or have an active case of COVID-19 are prohibited.
4. If you are called to anoint and/or to provide a last Eucharistic meal to the dying, ensure both hands and oil stock are sanitized prior to use. Replace the lid on the oil stock immediately after dipping your finger. Anoint the dying and wash your hands and the oil stock as soon as possible afterwards.
5. If permitted to visit, adhere to all institutional guidelines when visiting long-term care homes and/or hospitals. Visit only one person at any time, even if that means separated visits to the home or hospital. If you are unsure of the protocols, call ahead and speak with the nursing station.
6. Following a visit to an institution where COVID-19 may be present, wash your hands thoroughly, go directly home, change clothes, and wash the clothes you have worn immediately in hot water.

Staying in Touch

1. Clergy and pastoral visiting teams should regularly communicate with parishioners by phone, email, social media and/or other remote means, prioritizing those who may not have family or friends to check-in on them.
2. Pastoral care contact information should be posted and shared widely so that those in need of care know how to connect with ministers without visiting the church.

Liturgical Guidelines

Liturgical Hygiene Practices (for those limited situations where in-person worship is permitted)

- All worship participants should wash their hands both before and after worship as well as sanitize their hands before administering communion.
- Clergy should avoid physical contact and greet worshippers in a contact-free manner.
- A distance of two metres between all persons should be maintained as much as possible.
- The use of masks and face coverings during worship is to be encouraged, and required if, in rare circumstances, physical distancing is not possible.
- Singing is to be limited to one or two persons, physically distanced.
- Items that cannot be cleaned and sanitized before and after use are not to be shared or distributed (e.g. prayer and hymn books). Printed single-use service leaflets may be produced for distribution.
- Limit opportunities for the virus to spread through touch, either directly or indirectly through surfaces and objects, including objects that may be used in services; and clean all vessels thoroughly after use.

The Eucharist

1. Priests are permitted to celebrate the Eucharist with spiritual communion as part of an online worship service, provided that:
 - a. no more than 10 people will be physically present for the celebration of this liturgy;
 - 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 will be observed;
 - d. those present may only be seen to receive in one kind (bread) and that wine will be consumed solely by the celebrant, off-camera if possible; and
 - e. a communal prayer of spiritual communion will be said and the congregation watching will be offered the prayers to make their personal spiritual communion.
2. A final Eucharistic meal to the dying is also permitted.

Pastoral Offices

1. Outdoor funerals and graveside services, with no more than 50 people in attendance, and indoor funerals and visitations at licensed funeral establishments (not churches), with no more than 30 per cent capacity of the particular room or 50 people, whichever is less, may be conducted in compliance with provincial and [Bereavement Authority of Ontario directives](#).
2. Outdoor weddings, with no more than 50 people in attendance, and indoor weddings at community venues (not churches), with no more than 30 per cent capacity of the particular room or 50 people, whichever is less, may be conducted in compliance with provincial directives.
3. In rare and exceptional circumstances, permission may be sought from the regional archdeacon in order to conduct a baptism, wedding or funeral indoors at a church. 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 10 people or less, and the building is thoroughly cleaned and sanitized in advance.

Livestreaming and/or Pre-Recording Worship Services

1. Clergy are encouraged to direct their parishioners to the diocesan Facebook Page and/or YouTube channel for Sunday Prayers with Bishop Susan Bell.
2. A weekly service of the Word or Eucharist with spiritual communion is permitted to be conducted in the church building, in accordance with the guidelines for building access and liturgical hygiene practices. The worship space should be regularly cleaned and all microphones, cameras and other equipment should be sanitized both before and after use.