



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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

EFFECTIVE March 1, 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 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 always be adhered to, including the following foundational pandemic guidance: screening for symptoms, 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](#), facilitating natural ventilation in all spaces, and for all eligible people to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations. Learn about the [latest public health guidance 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. 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.
3. Fundraising activities are to be conducted online or outdoors. Social activities are not permitted in church buildings.
4. Food and beverages are not to be served or shared in church buildings, 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, with capacity limited by the number of people who can physically distance.
5.
 - a) Online or remote activities for children and youth are encouraged.
 - b) Outdoor children and youth programming may be offered, with parental consent for participation; masking is strongly encouraged where physical distance is difficult to maintain.
 - c) Indoor Sunday School and other children's programming may be offered to children aged 5 to 11 who are double vaccinated, with parental consent. Children who have received one dose of an approved COVID-19 vaccine and who have had a recent COVID-19 infection may be temporarily exempted from this requirement until such time as they are eligible to receive their second dose. Classes should be held in well-ventilated and spacious rooms. Masking and distancing protocols should be actively monitored; cohorting by household may also be considered as an additional measure.
 - d) Indoor programs and activities may be offered to youth ages 12 to 17 who are double vaccinated, with parental consent. Community norms should be established regarding pandemic protocols, including mandatory masking and distancing requirements.

- e) Nursery and other childcare services for children under 5 are not permitted.
- f) Overnight programming for children and youth is not permitted.
- 6. 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.
- 7. The names and contact information of those attending worship services, office appointments, and any other in-person gathering are to be maintained and kept for 30 days to assist with any necessary contact tracing.
- 8. Clergy are asked to make a report to the executive officer in the event that COVID-19 symptoms are developed by anyone who within 48 hours of symptom onset was 1) actively engaged in ministry or 2) attended a church service or gathering.

B. Building & Property Guidelines

- 1. Parishioners may attend parish offices by appointment only for essential purposes.
- 2. 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.
- 3. 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.
- 4. Hand sanitizer stations (with at least 60% alcohol content) should be placed throughout the building to assist with maintaining good hand hygiene.
- 5. The maximum number of people who can attend an in-person worship service held indoors shall be the number that can maintain a physical distance of at least 2m from every other person in the designated space.
- 6. Parish meetings, events, and studies, including faith formation and outreach activities, should be conducted online or outdoors, wherever possible. Indoor gatherings of no more than 50 people may be held, provided that number can be accommodated in the space with physical distancing being maintained.
- 7. Hall and/or other meeting space rentals to parishioners or community groups on a one-time or occasional basis are not permitted.
- 8. Community gardens and farmer's markets may be operated in compliance with the advice, recommendations, and instructions of local public health officials.
- 9. Extraordinary permission may be sought from the executive officer for:
 - i) film and television production companies to use church property, or
 - ii) community-based organizations to operate day camps on church propertyprovided 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. Indoor pastoral visits, physically distanced and masked should be kept as brief as possible.
- 3. 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.
- 4. 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. Quiet singing by masked parishioners is permitted. 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. Choir practices – of no more than 45 minutes in duration – are permitted on a weekly basis.
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 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 limit any physical contact.
3. The use of well-fitted masks is required at all times during worship services, including by clergy and those with speaking roles.
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 are permitted only where participants can maintain 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 digital 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.
8. Priests and communion ministers shall sanitize their hands immediately prior to handling the elements and administering communion.
9. All vessels and linens set out for worship must be thoroughly cleaned after use.
10. Anointers shall wash their hands before and after rites involving anointing.

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 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 or purificators, as practical.
- 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. 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 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 for church services 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 public health 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.