



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

Anglican Church of Canada

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

EFFECTIVE MAY 1, 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. Physical distancing measures and other restriction enacted to limit the spread of COVID-19 require adaptive approaches and ministry practices to be deployed, however, prayer and pastoral care must continue to be a priority of all clergy and lay leaders in the diocese.

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. Stay at home unless it is absolutely necessary to leave your home.
3. Vulnerable people for whom there is an increased risk of more severe outcomes should refrain from engaging in ministry beyond their home and delegate responsibilities to others as necessary.

This includes those who are:

- a. aged 65 and over
- b. with compromised immune systems
- c. with underlying medical conditions.

Building & 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 of the building;
 - 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 a priest, musician, and no more than three others to gather to produce worship services and/or homiletic reflections.
3. Musicians are not permitted to practice in church buildings during this closure, unless it is during the production of a worship service.
4. Community gardens 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.

Pastoral Care Guidelines

Pastoral Visiting and Anointing the Sick

1. Clergy should undertake pastoral care by phone calls and video conferencing wherever possible.
2. In-person visits should be limited to those most in need of care and compassion, where the presence of a minister is essential, for instance to support a highly vulnerable and isolated older adult, to anoint a gravely ill person, and/or to comfort the dying.
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

The Eucharist

1. Priests are directed to fast from the celebration of the Eucharist during this time when the community of the faithful are not able to be gathered and instead to feast on the Word.
2. A final Eucharistic meal to the dying is permitted.

Pastoral Offices

1. All weddings, funerals and baptisms, including graveside interments and nuptial blessings, are to be postponed until further notice.
2. In rare and exceptional circumstances, permission may be sought from the regional archdeacon in order 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 five people or less.

Livestreaming and/or Pre-Recording Worship Services

1. Clergy are encouraged to direct their parishioners to the diocesan Facebook Page for Sunday Prayers with Bishop Susan Bell.
2. Where parish-based online services are established, a weekly service of the Word is permitted to be conducted in the church building, provided that only a priest, musician, and no more than three others gather to produce it for the spiritual nourishment of the parish community.
3. A minimum 2 metres of physical distance must be observed during the production of services.
4. Hygienic practices should be strictly observed, and all microphones and other equipment should be disinfected, both before and after use.