



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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

EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 8, 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. To help protect the communities we serve, we also encourage [the use of the COVID Alert mobile app](#).

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. Wherever possible, parish activities should continue to be conducted online. If in-person parish activities are necessary, it is preferable for them to be conducted outdoors rather than indoors.
4. No one should feel obliged to attend an in-person worship service or activity during the pandemic.

A. General Ministry Guidelines

1. Written permission from a parish's regional archdeacon must be received before the resumption of in-person Sunday services. In-person worship services may be suspended at any time by the bishop.
2. Records of those attending worship services, offices, meetings, and faith formation activities are to be maintained and kept for 30 days to assist public health officials with any necessary contact tracing.
3. Any confirmed case of COVID-19 involving a person who may have attended church property must be immediately reported to the diocesan executive officer by the rector or priest-in-charge.
4. Clergy may organize outdoor faith formation activities for their parishioners, such as Bible studies, educational events, or prayer sessions, provided that such gatherings do not exceed 50 people and that physical distancing is maintained. Indoor faith formation activities are not permitted at this time.
5. Small in-person governance and planning meetings of less than 15 people are permitted where physical distancing is possible, preferably outdoors, and wearing a mask or face covering if indoors.
6. Vestry meetings, when necessary, are to be conducted online in accordance with the guidance published on the online diocesan resource hub for holding vestry meetings during the pandemic.
7. In-person childcare, Sunday school and other children and youth programming is not permitted.

8. In-person social or fundraising gatherings are not permitted, and food and beverages are not to be served or shared at any time on church property.
9. Community gardens and farmer's markets may be operated in compliance with the advice, recommendations and instructions of public health officials.

B. Building & Property Guidelines

1. Parish offices are permitted to be open for clergy, staff, wardens and treasurers.
2. Parishioners may only attend parish offices by appointment only, for essential purposes.
3. 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 contractors and/or parish volunteers to conduct maintenance, upkeep, and repair work, and any necessary inspections;
 - b. for volunteers to provide essential services to those who live in poverty, those who are food insecure, and/or those who are precariously housed;
 - c. for licensed day care centres to operate, where permitted by the Ministry of Education;
 - d. for 12-step groups and other programs serving vulnerable populations; and
 - e. for tenants and license agreement holders to use their designated spaces.
4. Hall and/or other community space rentals to parishioners or community groups are not permitted.
5. All spaces used for ministry should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected as frequently as is necessary to maintain a sanitary environment after each use, and at a minimum as follows:
 - Daily: routine cleaning and disinfection of all spaces used during a day.
 - Twice-Daily: cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces.
 - Frequently: shared spaces such as church sanctuaries, kitchens, and bathrooms should be cleaned and disinfected after each service/activity; shared workstations should be cleaned between each user.
6. At all entrances and in every room, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (greater than 60% alcohol) must be available, and all individuals should be encouraged to perform frequent hand hygiene.

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 should undertake pastoral care by phone calls and video conferencing whenever possible.
3. In-person, physically distanced pastoral visits for short periods of time are permitted, preferably in outdoor settings. Masks or face-coverings should be worn during any indoor visits.
4. Pastoral visits with those who are self-isolating or have an active case of COVID-19 are prohibited.
5. Anointing and/or a last Eucharistic meal to the dying is permitted, provided hands are washed or sanitized before and afterwards, and all vessels and linens are cleaned.
6. Where permitted, adhere to all institutional guidelines when visiting retirement homes, long-term care facilities and/or hospitals.
7. Following a visit to an institution where COVID-19 may be present, wash your hands thoroughly, go directly home, and immediately wash clothes worn during the visit in hot water.

D. Liturgical Guidelines

General Directives

1. The maximum number of people who can attend a worship service, inclusive of all spaces within a building shall be the lesser of:
 - 30% of the capacity of the worship space, physically distanced; or
 - 50 people, including worship leaders and staff.
2. Clergy are encouraged to direct their parishioners to the diocesan Facebook Page and/or YouTube channel for Sunday Prayers with Bishop Susan Bell.
3. Services at retirement homes and long-term care facilities are permitted, following any additional directives which may be mandated by staff.
4. Music during worship services may be i) pre-recorded and played or ii) performed by no more than four instrumentalists and/or vocalists, maintaining at least 4m distance from those not in their social circle. Anyone singing or playing wind or brass instruments must be masked except during their performance and face perpendicular to the congregation.
5. Congregational singing, choir practices and performances, and liturgical dancing are not permitted.
6. 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 both 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 at such times when those leading the service have speaking roles, and where contraindicated.
4. Microphones must be sanitized before use, assigned to one person and not shared.
5. A distance of two metres shall be maintained between all persons during worship, or four metres for any vocalists singing or instrumentalists playing wind or brass instruments.
6. Movement during the service is to be limited as much as possible; individuals and families must remain in their assigned seating during worship.
7. Liturgical processions are permitted only where processors can maintain a physical distance of 2 metres between themselves, others in the procession, and the congregation.
8. The Exchange of the Peace is to be conducted without physical contact.
9. 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.
10. Counters are to wash of their hands before and after handling offerings, consider wearing gloves and avoid touching their face while counting.
11. Priests and communion ministers shall sanitize their hands immediately prior to handling the elements and administering communion.
12. All vessels, corporals and purificators set out for worship must be thoroughly cleaned afterwards.
13. All fonts and stoups are to remain dry.
14. Prayer and hymn books, and other items that cannot be sanitized before and after each use are not to be made available, shared or distributed.
15. 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 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 or covering the elements with palls, veils or purificators when speaking.
- e. Ablutions, either during or after the service, are to be undertaken by the priest only.

At the time of communion

- a. All communion ministers must use hand sanitizer immediately prior to distributing communion and must always wear a mask.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- d. Communicants are to 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.
- e. Should physical contact take place, the communion minister must stop and sanitize their hands before resuming distribution of communion.
- f. Blessings and prayers for healing may 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 and baptisms may be conducted in compliance with provincial directives, provided that no more than 100 people are in attendance for outdoor services and no more than 30 per cent capacity of the particular church or room or 50 people, whichever is less, are in attendance for indoor services.
3. Funeral, graveside, and columbarium services may be conducted in compliance with provincial and [Bereavement Authority of Ontario directives](#), provided that no more than 100 people are in attendance for outdoor services and no more than 30 per cent capacity of the particular church or room or 50 people, whichever is less, are in attendance for indoor services.
4. If the family and friends of baptismal candidate(s) are of such number that there would 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, provided that no more than 30 per cent capacity of the particular church or 50 people, whichever is less, are in attendance. If permission is granted, those 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.