



# OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

Anglican Church of Canada

**TO THE CLERGY, LICENSED LAY WORKERS & WARDENS OF THE DIOCESE**

July 29, 2020

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another:  
just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.  
By this all people will know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another." ~ John 13:34-35*

Greetings in Christ,

As the world continues to struggle with the novel coronavirus, in Ontario we are beginning to put measures in place for a cautious re-opening and for the construction of what will be our "new normal" for the foreseeable future. But even as we do this, we continue to hold in prayer those who have experienced the hardship of grief and continued struggle that this pandemic has caused for so many in our communities and around the world.

In our diocese, we are continuing to monitor improving local public health indicators as we work towards a cautious and gradual return to our church buildings this fall, as described in the amber stage of the document released in June by the Provincial House of Bishops, [Loving Our Neighbours: A Template for the Safe Reopening of Our Church Buildings](#).

After consideration of all the variables and accounting for the important provision of time for holidays for leaders, I have tentatively set the 13th of September, 2020 as the date parishes may begin to re-open for Sunday worship. This date is subject to change, should local public health indicators trend negatively in the coming weeks.

To assist parishes in planning for the return to our church buildings, we have developed [this Parish Re-Opening Guide: Amber Stage](#) which provides helpful guidance and outlines re-opening requirements.

It is important to note that the guidance contained in this document is based on the best available evidence and public health guidance, as well as the precautions enacted by other dioceses and ecumenical partners. Particular directions related to our liturgical practices, will be provided in updated ministry guidelines published on our [diocesan COVID-19 resource hub](#) closer to September.

Our re-opening guide represents the collective effort of a number of people from across the diocese with various policy and health care backgrounds, as well as wardens and clergy, by whom it has been reviewed and edited.

*The Right Reverend Susan J. A. Bell*  
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Before re-opening for Sunday worship, each parish will need to develop a comprehensive re-opening plan, complete and [submit this In-Person Worship Re-Opening Plan form](#) to their regional dean, and receive written permission from their regional archdeacon. I hasten to add that parishes do not have to open on the earliest possible date, and I expect some may choose not to re-open immediately given the preparation that will be required.

As well as the functional details for this time, the exercise of pastoral care will be very important as we all return. Some people may be in a fragile state and they may require specialized pastoral care. The desire for physical touch and singing, the desire for the inconvenience of all our precautions to go away, may be strong. The resistance to wearing masks may well be present in your parish as it is in the general public. People are up against feelings of a loss of control, and they are emerging out of isolating circumstances. Likely they will need pastoral care and spiritual practices that will help them ground themselves as we go forward. Please be patient but firm in asking for compliance from all.

I also want to emphasize that one should not feel obliged to attend an in-person worship service, even if it is now possible. This is especially true for vulnerable people for whom there is an increased risk of more severe outcomes from COVID-19.

In these past months, leaders up and down our diocese have been patient, prudent, and deeply caring. Thank you for your responsible and diligent leadership. It has been a challenge to say the least to figure out how to continue to minister in the midst of these times, but you have done so with creativity and energy.

Although we have fresh challenges ahead of us as we proceed to a measured re-opening - and although this next stage is going to take some patience and some time to work out – nevertheless, we anticipate with joy our reunion with the people of God in our church buildings. It will happen perhaps not in the way we might have hoped, but in the ways that are possible while keeping everyone as safe as we are able.

And as we methodically go about this shift in our present circumstances, it's good for us to remind ourselves why we are taking such important precautions: for the love of our neighbour.

The diocesan staff are here to help with this transition, so please don't hesitate to be in touch with us and/or your regional archdeacons if you have any questions.

Blessings to you all, as ever.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Niagara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small cross symbol at the beginning.

Bishop of Niagara

cc: Members of Synod Council, Diocesan Staff, Parish Administrators