



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF NIAGARA

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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

EFFECTIVE November 1, 2021

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 be always adhered to, including the following foundational pandemic guidance: 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](#), natural ventilation in all spaces, and for all eligible people to receive their COVID-19 vaccination. Find out about the [latest public health measures, advice and restrictions for your area here](#).

A. General Ministry Guidelines

1. It continues to be safest for ministry activities to be conducted online or outdoors.
2. No one should feel obliged to attend an in-person worship service or ministry activity during the pandemic.
3. Physical distance of 2m should be maintained between individuals who are not part of the same household for all activities. Masks must be worn by all people over 2 years of age when indoors and when physical distance is difficult to maintain.
4. Proof of vaccination is required to be shown for attendance at any meeting, event, study, or other organized activity parish property. No such proof is required to be shown for worship or pastoral appointments.
5. Food and beverages are not to be served or shared at any meeting, event, study, or other organized activity on parish property.
6. Food may be prepared in church kitchens where permitted by public health officials by no more than 6 people, provided they are fully-vaccinated, for essential programs to those who are food insecure and/or for occasional parish fundraising activities.
7. Childcare, Sunday School, and other indoor programming for children under 12 is not permitted. Occasional outdoor children's programming may be organized, with parental involvement, where physical distancing and cohorting by family is possible.
8. Indoor fundraising and social activities, including concerts and bazaars, may be organized, provided all participants show proof of vaccination, distancing is able to be maintained in the event space, and no food or beverages are served.
9. 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.

10. The names and contact information of those attending worship services, office appointments, meetings, and faith formation activities are to be maintained and kept for 30 days to assist public health officials with any necessary contact tracing.
11. Any confirmed case of COVID-19 involving a person who may have attended parish property must be reported to the diocesan executive officer by the rector or priest-in-charge.

B. Building & Property Guidelines

1. 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.
2. 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 more often, twice per day or between services, as well as when visibly dirty.
3. Hand sanitizer stations (with at least 60% alcohol content) should be placed throughout the building to assist with maintaining good hand hygiene.
4. Parishioners may attend parish offices by appointment only, for essential purposes.
5. The maximum number of people who can attend an in-person worship service or other ministry activity 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. Hall and/or other meeting space rentals to parishioners or community groups on a one-time or occasional basis are not permitted.
7. Community gardens and farmer's markets may be operated in compliance with the advice, recommendations, and instructions of local public health officials.
8. Extraordinary permission may be sought from the executive officer for:
 - i) community-based organizations to operate day camps on church property, or
 - ii) film and television production companies to use church property,
 provided 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, are permitted but should be kept as brief as possible.
3. 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 by staff.
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, physical distance of 4m between them and the congregation must also to be maintained. The frequency and duration of performances by vocalists or wind instrumentalists should be limited as much as possible during in-person worship. 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 masks during worship services is required except for brief instances where those leading the service have speaking roles, where permitted by local by-laws.
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 a 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.
- b. Consecrated bread is to be placed carefully in the communicant's outstretched hand with minimal contact.
- c. 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 from the communion minister has been re-established, they are to briefly lower or remove their mask, consume the host, and replace their mask.
- d. Blessings and prayers for healing should 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 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 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 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.