

The Right Reverend Michael W. Hawkins Bishop of Saskatchewan

The Right Reverend Adam S. Halkett Bishop of Missinipi

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May 17th, 2020

Rogation Sunday

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Things are beginning to look up! We celebrate this Thursday the Ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This is the festival of hope. Our Easter faith gives birth to the new and living hope of the Ascension. In the midst of the present pandemic the proclamation of that faith and hope is needed even more. In the face of racism, hatred, scapegoating, greed, division, and hoarding we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. In the face of the grave, so much sickness and weakness and hurt, we proclaim the resurrection of the body. In the face of death, our last and common enemy, and the loss and grief complicated by our current situation, we proclaim the life everlasting.

Today is Rogation Sunday and along with the next three days this is a season dedicated to prayer, in particular for the life and work of farming. Our call to you and throughout this Pandemic has been simply this, Let us pray.

It is time now for us to consider how and when we might resume praying together in our Churches in small and very limited gatherings**.** As we look forward to the slow and gradual reopening of our Churches for public worship and gatherings, we need to prepare so that we can do so safely and reverently. There is a broad variety of opinion in our province on when and whether pandemic restrictions and precautions should have been imposed and should be lifted. That variety is reflected in our congregations and communities. We need to hold our own opinions and expertise lightly and respect those of others. Some may not yet feel safe or comfortable in gathering for public worship and this is a matter where we must respect each other’s conscience and avoid guilt and heated and futile argument.

Our decisions have been guided as much as possible by the instructions and advice of competent authorities and we will continue in that vein. We expect that Clergy and Congregations under our spiritual jurisdiction will respect all Public Health Orders and Recommendations, even when their legal authority is disputed, especially those limiting the number of people allowed to assemble in private and public gatherings and requiring social distancing (of six feet or two metres). We also need to remind you in the confusion and stress of this pandemic that all Clergy, Congregations and Buildings of the Diocese are bound by our directives. That includes our decision to suspend all public worship and gatherings.

As the Province of Saskatchewan enters Phase Two of its plan to re-open the economy, which includes the opening of retail and select services, we are prepared to ease some of the suspensions we previously issued. These new directives come into effect on Ascension Day, May 21st 2020.

Public Worship and Gatherings

* Those who are ill with a communicable disease and those who are particularly vulnerable must stay home.
* Churches and associated rooms and buildings require special and regular sanitizing, particularly of hard surfaces and contact points (door handles, handrails, pew edges, communion rails etc.). This must take place between every use or gathering.
* Hand sanitizers must be available in **more than one** location in every Church and available in one location every room.
* Handshaking in all Church buildings is forbidden until further notice and physical distancing must be respected.
* The serving of any food or drink in any diocesan church or building is strictly forbidden.
* All those leading in worship must wash their hands thoroughly before every service.
* Collection will not be “taken up” from the congregation. Instead collection plates should be placed in the back of the Church. These need not be brought up to the front/altar but if that is done, direct physical contact with each other and the plates is to be avoided.
* Six feet/two metres of social distancing is required between those of different households. This means that individuals or families must maintain six feet between them (in front and back and to the sides). Seating in pews will need to be staggered and special care and time must be taken to allow people to move safely in the aisle(s) especially at Communion. Our Canons assign to the Wardens the duty of maintaining good order in the church during Divine Service and we ask them or their delegates to ensure that the limits on numbers in the building, safe distancing and movement be observed. The authority of the Wardens and any one they delegate must be obeyed.

Holy Communion

* All those administering communion must use hand sanitizer or wash their hands again at the offertory and must completely avoid touching their face, eyes, nose, and mouth.
* Communion will be offered in only one kind (the consecrated bread) until further notice. Intinction is forbidden. Communion will be administered at the priest’s discretion either at the rail with six feet of separation between communicants or standing at the centre of the rail or nave with six feet of separation between communicants.
* Communion vessels must be cleansed with hot soapy water before each service.

First Stage of Reopening

In accordance with the Public Health Orders of the Government of Saskatchewan, **we will allow the opening of our Churches and buildings for Public Worship and Gatherings for up to a maximum of ten people effective May 21st, 2020.** The number ten includes any priest, deacon, lay reader or musician providing leadership or assistance in the liturgy. This should allow for the resumption of smaller weekday services and for the provision of these where not normally held before and should give ample opportunity for folks to receive Holy Communion in the next month. The decision to provide and schedule such services is up to the Priest in Charge in consultation with the Wardens. Sunday worship is no longer suspended but it will require clear planning and communication as well as discipline to observe the limit of ten people that the Province and your bishops require. Congregational Singing will remain suspended.

Many of you may prefer to begin to re-open with weekday services as you start to imagine how to control numbers for Sundays. We hope to gradually increase the numbers allowed to gather as it is safe and allowed by Public Health.

**All services of worship or gatherings with more than ten people remain suspended without exception.**

In Summary

* Worship and other Gatherings permitted up to a maximum of Ten People
* Six Feet/Two Metres of social distancing must be maintained in the Church and aisles and at Communion.
* Frequent Hand Washing is required especially upon entering the Church or Hall.
* Holy Communion will be administered in one kind only.
* Congregational singing is suspended.

Please continue to pray for those who are sick, for our health care workers, for those who are grieving, for those who are lonely, for those unable by conscience or illness to join us for worship, for all who are in any anxiety or distress.

May we be renewed in the love and power of our ascended Lord and in the devout appreciation and enjoyment of the communion and fellowship of his body.

In Christ,

Adam S. Halkett Michael W. Hawkins