

Dear friends,

The first thing I want to say to all of you is THANK YOU. Thank you for the care you have taken of people in parishes, of our communities. Thank you for continuing to feed and support vulnerable people. Thank you for live-streaming worship and reaching out in this time of physical distancing. Basically, thank you for continuing to ‘be’ the church.

There is no doubt that the last months have stretched us in every way and that for nearly everybody, we were functioning in situations for which we felt ill prepared. I am so grateful for your calm, non-anxious presence and for your patience and willingness to adapt. As we look towards a transitional return to opening our churches, I am asking you for more patience and more flexibility and adaptation.

I must be very clear at this point: **No parish in the Diocese of Calgary will reopen physical gatherings without the Archbishop’s permission. At this point we remain in the protocol of not allowing physical congregational services including weddings and funerals.**

The COVID 19 virus is not going away. The length of time it will take to return to regular in-person worship is to be measured in months not weeks. We have to find clarity of action within a world of mitigation, where local contexts and parishes may transition in (and out of) “stay at home” phased protocols at any time. The inclusion of what we know so far of the Alberta Government reentry plan shows just how fluid the transition will be.

We note from the government statistics on this pandemic that the Calgary Diocese area has almost 10 times the cases of people affected by the virus than the Edmonton Diocese area, and almost 25 times the cases of the Athabasca Diocese area. This will likely mean that our sister Dioceses will transition to new protocols sooner than the Diocese of Calgary.

I also note that the municipalities in Southern Alberta, particularly Calgary, are harder hit than many rural areas. We will need to consider this in the protocols of our own transition plan.

The Government of Alberta is now communicating a strategy to relaunch the economy and relax physical distancing protocols. You may have also seen the government's guidance for places of worship. (You will find the links below.) There remains some ambiguity in these transition plans as to how the protocols are to be implemented, particularly in our Anglican liturgical practices. These issues remain to be resolved.

To help guide our own plan to reopen our physical presence within the rural and municipal parishes of our Diocese I will be commissioning a task force of clergy and health professionals within our Diocese to propose phased protocols for an appropriate transition plan. This guidance document will be circulated to you once Diocesan Council has approved it. Please advise me if you have suggestions of knowledgeable people in your parish who could serve us in the task force.

At this point we remain in the protocol of not allowing physical congregational services including weddings and funerals.

I also request that you comply fully with the Government guidelines. One of the points regards the spread of the virus through public singing. Please adhere to the guidelines even for the recording of your virtual services.

Remember, we stay together by staying apart at this critical time in the pandemic.

Thank you for continuing to serve your parishes courageously and creatively. I leave you with this scripture:

"I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Romans 15:13 NLT

In Christ,

The Most Rev'd Gregory Kerr-Wilson

Archbishop of Calgary & Metropolitan

of the Ecclesiastical Province of Rupert's Land

PS:

- Here is the link to the Alberta Government's relaunch strategy: <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-relaunch-strategy.aspx>
- Here is the Alberta Government's Relaunch Guidance for Places of Worship: <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/covid-19-relaunch-guidance-places-of-worship.pdf>

Here is a vocologist's insights on the issue of spreading the virus through singing:

<https://www.drheathernelson.com/singingandcovid19?fbclid=IwAR0lKM6RLowwiYp8A51t6mwGehTXV6bQlvxYCtCI99YIvF0OXewmOANcPNE>