

May 26, 2021

To all lay and ordained members of the diocese;

*(please share widely)*

Yesterday, the government announced its four-step [Restart plan](#). As was the case last summer, there has been growing anticipation in our parishes about when we will begin to regather for worship on our church properties.

Although it's heartening to hear that there is light at the end of what has been a very long tunnel, we in the diocese have learned, over the last fifteen months, not to change course as soon as the government announces a pending change. Unforeseen circumstances, not the least of which is an unexpected spike in COVID cases, can thwart plans within a day or two of them being announced (as was the situation over the Easter weekend this year). Additionally, yesterday's announcement does not offer any significant changes for faith communities until at least July 1.

Further, creating acceptable WorkSafe BC reopening plans and implementing them takes times. Although we learned much last summer regarding how to develop and implement such guidelines, without specific direction from public health, we cannot begin that work in earnest. I am therefore asking you to be patient a little longer. We need to give our staff and lay leadership the time necessary to do this correctly.

Another consideration not anticipated in the government's announcement is that many of our staff and clergy have not taken their full vacation in over a year. It would be unfair and unkind to ask them to begin work on a limited reopening plan for summer and then shift again when the government enters Step 4 of its plan in September, while also trying to prepare to be away and get fall programming in place. Clergy need a break and we need to give them that time this summer to take it.

I will be meeting on June 2 with the archdeacons and the synod staff to begin the work of developing our own reopening plans to coincide with how things are progressing in the wider community. It may be that the best option for many congregations is to wait until September to reopen. We will share with you any developments as they arise between now and then.

In the meantime, in accordance with the provincial guidance, staff can, as comfortable, begin to return to church offices, providing COVID protocols are followed including physical distancing, proper sanitation and wearing a mask in common spaces at all times.

Please read the government's [Restart plan](#) carefully. If, after reading this information, you have specific questions pertaining to your context, feel free to reach out to your archdeacon or [Barry Foster](#), executive archdeacon.

We have journeyed a hard road together this last fifteen months. I continue to be ever grateful for your generosity, compassion, patience and faithfulness.

We will be together again soon, and what a celebration it will be!

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Anna Greenwood-lee". To the left of the signature is a simple blue cross symbol.

Bishop Anna