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June 29, 2021

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the midst of the heat and the beginning of our summer months.

Thank you for your patience as we continue to wait for guidance from the province and prepare to transition into Stage 3 of the Open for Summer Plan. As of Monday, June 28 we are still waiting to see this guidance. In its absence, we offer the following recommendations in order that our parishes might return to unrestricted in-person worship in the safest possible ways. Once guidance does become available it should be incorporated into decision making regarding local return to worship plans.

In last week's COVID Taskforce preliminary update of June 23, we suggested that we would be giving responsibility for making decisions and interpreting guidance to the corporation and clergy of each parish. We understand that variables differ widely from one location to another and that the best decisions at this stage will be decisions made at the local level. To that end, we ask that corporation and clergy consider the following variables when making decisions around reopening plans: vaccination rates in the parish's municipality or area, vaccination rates within the local parish (particularly among those who intend to gather), and positivity rates in the parish's municipality or area. It may be that your parish is situated in an area with low vaccination rates, however this should be considered against local positivity rates. If positivity rates are low, then risk level is lower than if positivity rates are high. It may also be true that while local vaccination rates are low, vaccination rates among your parishioners may be well above the provincial rate. This also would indicate a lower level of risk within the parish itself. Current data is available at alberta.ca When provincial guidance becomes available for "places of worship" it will be posted on this same site, and corporation and clergy should consider it when implementing plans for in-person worship.

Please note that although the province will be dropping its mask mandate, many municipalities, including the City of Calgary, will continue to have local masking mandates in place. You need to be aware of local restrictions and requirements for masking and other matters.

Please consider the following in your plans for worship in the summer months:

1. Under the guidance of corporation and clergy, parishes may open for in-person services. Again, there is no pressure to re-open immediately but if the number of Covid cases does continue to drop, and vaccination rates are able to keep variants of the virus contained, please plan to re-open by September for in-person worship.

2. Contact tracing is no longer necessary. If you are concerned that more people will hope to return than you are able to seat with social distancing in place, please continue to ask congregants to register prior to the service.
3. Masks and/or social distancing for indoor events are strongly encouraged. There is no limit on the % of people you may have in worship, but we continue to recommend that households should be able to maintain 6 feet of distance from one another until such time as we have updated guidance from the province.
4. Parishes may resume passing the peace, as congregations feel comfortable.
5. Communion wafers may be distributed directly into the hands of individuals. Please keep hand sanitizer nearby in case of the need to re-apply sanitizer during distribution. Using the practice of “priestly intinction” makes it possible to return to the distribution of communion in both kinds. In this practice, the priest or person distributing the elements, with properly sanitized hands, “dips” the bread wafer into the common cup and presents it to the communicant. Communicants do not intinct their own wafers. Communicants do not drink from the common cup.
6. Small groups and meetings may be held in person.
7. Youth ministry may resume but please consider vaccination rates and, for the summer, try to prioritize outdoor events.
8. Hymnal and prayerbooks may be returned to the pews and be used.
9. Doors and high-touch areas should continue to be wiped and sanitized after each service. If there is only 1 service taking place during the day, pews no longer need to be sanitized.
10. Outdoor worship services and gatherings do not require the wearing of masks, but masks should be worn while singing.

Guidelines for the summer months:

1. We will continue to refrain from sharing the common cup but see note 5 above for information on using the common cup in the distribution of the communion elements.
2. Congregational singing may resume as long as masks are being worn.
3. Please continue to refrain from coffee hour and sharing social meals. Outdoor social gatherings where participants bring their own beverages are preferable.
4. Please consider children’s ministry very carefully -children under 12 cannot yet be vaccinated and data is still being collected that will help us to understand how the Delta variant will affect children. Please consider outdoor children’s ministry, but use of large, well ventilated indoor spaces may also be possible.
5. Do not forget those people who have benefitted from online services and other ways of staying connected with their church family during this pandemic. Many will not be able to join you in-person. What plans have you made to keep them connected and involved in church life?
6. Even if you are in a municipality that does not have a masking mandate, consider how you will help persons who choose to wear a mask to feel comfortable in doing so. We do not want people to feel pressure not to.

Again, thank you for your patience as we look forward to returning to something that resembles what we remember. God bless those of you who plan to return to unrestricted in-person worship, and God bless you who will plan to wait a little longer yet. We trust that the Lord is with us and guiding us in both decisions.

In Christ,

+ *Gregory Calvey*

