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Dear friends,

The provincial government announced yesterday that tomorrow, July 1, BC would move into Phase 3 of its reopening plan. Details can be found [here](#).

While many of the restrictions placed on church gatherings have been lifted, of note for us in this phase is the following:

- No capacity limits or restrictions on religious gatherings and worship service
- Masks continue to be recommended

There is reason for optimism for a slow return to a “new normal.” As a full reopening is contemplated, we need to recognize, however that there is still a risk of transmission.

This week so far, BC saw 61 new cases and currently has 876 active cases. Further, the Delta variant is emerging as the predominant form of the virus. The Delta variant is highly transmissible and is more resistant to vaccines, especially in those who have only a single dose. ([link](#)). “The Delta variant currently makes up 12 percent of variant cases, but [that number] has been doubling each week for the past few weeks. Variants now make up more than 90 per cent of all of B.C.’s cases.” (Presentation by B Henry, June 28). In the latest epidemiological modelling data presentation, Henry said the numbers show cases could jump back over 150 per day by the end of August if social contacts get to 80 per cent of normal and the Delta variant makes up 50 per cent of cases. (Presentation by B Henry, June 28)

Lifting of restrictions increases the risk of outbreaks, while vaccination uptake and good virus prevention practice decreases this risk. Balancing these two things is difficult. A measured and cautious approach to reopening continues to be recommended by public health officials. This should be accompanied by a process of continual reassessment, with adaptations being made as new information becomes available.

Right now, outdoors is the safest place, and for that reason it is the only place we in the diocese will gather without masks. All indoor activities will continue to include mask-wearing.

Other diocesan guidelines for worship:

1. Continued availability and use of hand sanitizer and wipes
2. Greeters only at distance
3. Outdoor services when and where possible
4. Distancing except with family groups or established bubbles

5. Sharing of the peace through smiling and nodding
6. Communion in one kind
7. Hymns outdoors or when masked and distanced indoors. Singing must be approached with caution as it is a high-risk activity.  
(<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7808728/>)
8. Outdoor socialization without food or beverage and with distancing (no indoor socializing)

I encourage you to continue to follow the above guidelines as they relate to your context. You no longer need to submit a COVID safety plan but please advise your archdeacon of when you will be opening, if you haven't done so already.

People are going to have different feelings and comfort levels about re-opening and there is no way to satisfy all people. Some congregations have made the decision to stay with online worship through the summer, and I support this option.

Information on cases and spread is well summarized by Dr Henry and should continue to be followed. The government expectation is to return to very limited restrictions by September.

Thank you to our diocesan COVID taskforce including Ruth Seltner, PhD and Carolyn Gretsinger, RN and Archdeacon Clara Plamondon for their expertise in preparing these guidelines.

With every blessing for the rest of your summer,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large cross-like symbol followed by the name 'Anna' in a cursive script.

+Anna