



The Most Reverend Greg Kerr-Wilson
Archbishop of Calgary and Metropolitan of Rupert's Land

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Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Once again, we are faced with rising COVID numbers with the advent of the fourth wave. Before addressing the question of what that means for us at this moment – it is important to take a moment to express my gratitude for the diligence, perseverance, creativity, caring, and generosity that have been shown across the diocese amongst parishioners and clergy alike as our people both attend to protecting against COVID while finding ways to continue the worship, mission and ministry that we are called to as Christians. Yes, there has been occasional “grumpiness” and even protest in the face of the measures taken, but I have seen far more compassion, patience and faithfulness than anything else.

As the number of Delta Variant COVID-19 cases continues to increase at an exponential rate, The COVID-19 Task Force has identified areas of concern that should be considered when making decisions about in-person gatherings and worship. Vaccination continues to be our best defence against the Delta Variant, and the COVID-19 virus in general, however, a significant proportion of the general population has not been vaccinated. We suspect that within our Anglican congregations that the proportion of people who have been double vaccinated is higher than the general population. Even so, there will still be unvaccinated people present at our gatherings so we should continue in our vigilance to reduce the potential spread of the virus in order to protect those who are most vulnerable.

Unvaccinated groups that we are likely to encounter include children under 12 years of age, people who cannot be vaccinated because of health concerns, and people who, although eligible, have chosen not to be vaccinated. Within our congregations, it is likely to be the unvaccinated children that will give us the greatest concern, although we do need to act responsibly in regard to all unvaccinated persons. Reports out of the United States are demonstrating increased infection and subsequent hospitalization among children, and data is still being collected regarding the long term physical and neurological impact of infection in children.

With these things in mind, we continue to strongly recommend to parishes that have returned to in-person worship, that every precaution designed to mitigate the transmission of the virus be practiced, including the use of masks and social distancing. In parishes where children's programming has resumed, we strongly recommend mandating the use of masks among children old enough to wear them, and staff/volunteers working with them.

As we continue to see this fourth wave gain momentum, at the same time as the province scales back testing and other protocols, it will be increasingly difficult to use daily case counts as a measure for decisions we make at the parish level. A more helpful, although sombre metric will be numbers of hospitalizations and ICU admissions. These will give a strong indication of the severity of infection at the local level. The COVID-19 Task



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Force continues to encourage corporations and clergy to use available data to make the best decisions possible as we seek to protect the most vulnerable among us.

I have often been asked about why Christians would be fearful in the face of the COVID pandemic; after all, do we not live by faith in the saving love of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit? And the answer is, of course, yes – we do. However, our issue is not one of fear. Living by faith in our Lord and Saviour does not equate to assuming that we can do whatever we like, or whatever takes our fancy, and God is obligated to protect us from the consequences of our actions. Most often God permits us to live the consequences of our foolishness. We don't walk off cliffs and expect that God will allow us to walk on air – either on a whim or to demonstrate our faith; when in the Gospel stories Jesus is tempted by Satan to cast himself off the pinnacle of the temple and trust that the angels would bear him up, Jesus rebukes Satan by stating that we “do not put the Lord your God to the test.” Faith is not license to do as we please, it is trust in God's ultimate goodness and love by which God gives us, not what we think we want, but what we need. God's purpose for us is not to indulge our desires, but to transform our lives by the power of the Spirit to show the same kind of love in ourselves that Jesus showed in himself. The first commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind and all your strength” and the second is “to love your neighbor as yourself.” Neither of those points us towards having things the way we want them, or getting the things that we want. As Christians we take the precautions that are set before us seriously because they demonstrate our love for our neighbor. While some have protested that they are being kept from engaging in in-person worship in the manner that they would prefer; the reality is that those most negatively affected by the spread of COVID are those who are the most vulnerable in our society. The insistence that we must be allowed to do what we want despite the threat to the most vulnerable is decidedly not what scripture holds out to us as what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves. To grow spiritually includes growing in love for the vulnerable. Of course, that does not mean everyone hiding away either; we can do much to aid those around us in need, and even be present with and for them, while observing the measures that protect and by which we demonstrate our desire to not do harm by being instruments of the virus's spread.

One of the concerns that has been expressed around the restrictions that we have experienced -distancing, mask wearing, reduced in person contact and the like – is about the negative impacts on mental and even spiritual health. There is certainly a need to consider this and to be concerned, and we do need to attend to the ways that we can assist others by being present and expressing love and concern and providing appropriate human contact. Spiritually speaking very many of us have missed the joy of gathering for worship, singing hymns, exchanging the peace and sharing in communion. Rightly so! However, doing without some things that are good, does not equate to evil. Jesus's own example of his time in the wilderness along with his teaching about fasting points to a profound truth; spiritually we often grow as much or more in times of deprivation as in times of plenty. The people of Israel were forged as God's priestly people, not in the land flowing with milk and



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honey, but in the desert wanderings. Our time of significantly reduced personal contact and communal worship presents us with a challenge, and perhaps even an invitation, to attend more carefully to the disciplines of our personal devotions in prayer, scripture, fasting and giving. It provides an opportunity to teach and witness to our young people about how they might deepen these personal habits of loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves – while continuing to look with hope and desire for the day when restrictions and obstructions are removed for us to be together personally in the community of the Body of Christ.

Once again, thank you for all that you do in the midst of these strange and difficult times. I am reminded of the beautiful way that we end our eucharistic celebrations – something to be said in any and all conditions of life. “Glory to God, whose power working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory to God from generation to generation, in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen”

Peace and grace be with you all.

+ Gregory Kerr-Wilson

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