

September 2, 2021

Dear friends,

September is upon us and we had all hoped that we would be returning to 'normal' and that the remaining COVID restrictions would be lifted. Unfortunately, case counts and hospitalizations continue to rise and children are still not vaccinated.

As per provincial health order, as of September 13 proof of vaccination will be required for attendance at many settings including:

- indoor concerts
- organized indoor events (e.g. weddings, parties, conferences, meetings, workshops)
- discretionary organized indoor group recreational classes and activities

This means that for someone to attend a parish council meeting, Bible study, choir practice etc. they are required to provide proof of at least one dose of vaccine. This will increase to two doses on October 24. Parishes need to institute practices to ensure we comply with this order.

While the province is not requiring proof of vaccination for worship, public health officials have made it clear that faith leaders are permitted and encouraged to introduce additional measures beyond the provincial minimum standards.

For this reason, in consultation with the COVID taskforce, archdeacons and the officers of Synod I have decided that beginning Sunday, September 12, unvaccinated individuals over the age of 12 will be asked to participate virtually only for the next few months, while vaccination rates continue to improve. People whose home parish does not have an online option are encouraged to participate in the livestreamed services being offered elsewhere, including our cathedral. We will not be checking for proof of vaccination at the doors of Sunday worship and will trust folk to respect these restrictions. The same standard will apply to wedding and funeral services. While we will not be requiring proof of vaccination at the door we do ask the unvaccinated to participate online instead of attending in person.

The decision to implement these changes is based on our collective responsibility to care for and protect the most vulnerable, particularly at this time, our unvaccinated children.

Regarding things like the return to shared meals, we are taking an incremental approach to resuming activities and, at least for September, will permit socializing outdoors only.

I am aware that these restrictions will not be welcomed by everyone. I am also aware of the burden carried by clergy who are called to oversee and implement them. Although it is expected that we all adhere to the minimum required as outlined in this letter, I entrust to parish clergy the latitude to go beyond the guidance and orders in their community if the context warrants it. For instance, I know of smaller parishes with poor ventilation that are delaying the reintroduction of singing due to safety concerns. I support this.

Through all of this, it is critical that we treat each other with respect and dignity, regardless of whether we agree or disagree with these changes in our common life. Bullying, harassment, and threats must not be tolerated by anyone. If you feel unsafe, please tell someone.

We all long for a return to singing, sharing meals and being together without masks and restrictions. However, until case counts and hospitalizations decline and vaccination rates rise, our call to love our neighbour as ourselves requires us to take extra precautions to protect one another.

Know that in all of this I am with you. May we hold each other up over the coming months so we can continue to be light in the world during uncertain and difficult times.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anna Greenwood-Lee'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

The Right Rev. Anna Greenwood-Lee