



September 14, 2021

To the Clergy and Lay Leaders in the Diocese of New Westminster,

Greetings to you and once more I give thanks to God for all of your work that helps to ensure the safety and protection of the people of the diocese. The last 19 months have been difficult for all of us, and I thank you for your commitment to following the protocols that I have put in place in response to the guidance of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO), Dr. Bonnie Henry.

Recently, I contacted the PHO to ask specifically about meals, coffee hours or receptions following worship services. I'd also asked about meetings during the week (Bible studies, Parish Council Meetings, youth groups, etc). Here is part of the response sent out to faith leaders in our province:

A number of faith-based organizations have requested clarification on the proof of vaccination requirement and mask mandate. All worship services (and receptions following services) are exempt from the mask mandate and the requirement for proof of vaccination. In addition, any public meetings held in faith-based settings that have a worship component such as youth groups and pastor meetings or essential services like NA/AA group meetings, warming and cooling centres, or providing food to people in need, are also exempt from the mask mandate and proof of vaccination requirement.

Dr. Henry is fully supportive of faith leaders putting into place firmer protocols increasing the safety for all people and reducing the spread of the virus. From this, I want to reiterate and clarify my expectations within the Diocese of New Westminster:

1. I strongly encourage all people who are eligible to receive the vaccine be vaccinated. If you have not been vaccinated you may want to consider worshipping online.
2. If you are feeling unwell, please do not attend in-person worship.
3. Masks are to be worn upon entry to the church and kept on for the entirety of the liturgy, with the exception of when speaking in the liturgy, consuming the bread/Body of Christ, or when consuming food or drink at a reception.
4. Greeters/welcomers are to wear masks.
5. Anyone speaking or singing solo may remove their mask for this role.
6. A choir is permitted during worship, but it is requested that they all wear a mask even while singing, and distance from one another as much as is possible. Choirs are permitted to rehearse during the week and/or prior to the liturgy but it is requested that they wear a mask and distance from one another as much as possible in the available space.
7. Congregational singing is permitted but all in the congregation must be wearing masks.
8. Prior to receiving Communion, individuals should sanitize their hands.
9. Sunday Schools may offer classes (the teachers and parents must be comfortable enough for this to happen) but teachers and students (as much as is possible) must be masked at all times.
10. Social times before or after worship are permitted, however, please ensure that those handling food/beverages have sanitized their hands. People must wear a mask (when not consuming food or drink) and distance as much as is reasonable in this setting as well.
11. For meetings (Bible Study, Christian Formation events, Parish Council, Youth Group, other committee meetings), all in attendance must be masked.

Along with this:

- **Communion is in one kind only (except for the priest), the bread/body of Christ. The cup/wine/blood of Christ will not be offered to anyone other than the presider at this time.**
- **At the time of exchanging the Peace of Christ, there must not be handshaking or hugs (except between members of the same household). Please nod or bow to one another. From my travels around our diocese, I realize that this is difficult to implement but please do your best to adhere to this temporary policy.**
- **I am aware that there are a number of parishes passing the Offertory Plates. Please refrain from passing Offertory plates at this time. They should be placed inside the nave near the nave entrance and brought forward during the time that the offering is received.**

Essentially, we are holding the course from my last pastoral letter (August 26), but I felt that it was important to clarify things, in light of the new communication from the PHO. Worshipping communities are being given much leeway allowing us to continue to gather as a community of faith, but we must accept these exceptions to the protocols with

responsibility and gratitude. Please do continue to care for one another and love your neighbour as yourself. Remember that not everyone is ready to return to in-person worship and there continues to be much reticence about being indoors with others.

If your community is planning a social event, indoors and in-person, which does not have a worship component, then there will need to be vaccine passport check before people come in. If you rent out space in your building to another church, they must comply with the PHO; they do not have to comply with my expectations. If you rent out space in your building to a group that is purely social (ie not a worshipping community or AA or NA) they must follow the PHO guidelines of masks and vaccine passports. Please have all outside groups sign the waiver forms and know that they must follow the PHO protocol.

On a slightly different note, it is possible that some requests may come to clergy or other parish leadership seeking vaccination exceptions on religious grounds. The chancellor for the Diocese of Edmonton, after examining various aspects of civil and canon law, drafted this response:

"There is neither legal nor doctrinal authority within the Anglican Church of Canada or any of its ministers to issue the requested religious vaccination exemption"

The chancellor for our diocese, Mr. George Cadman, QC, ODNW, completely supports this response from the Diocese of Edmonton. To be clear, no clergy person of the Diocese of New Westminster is authorized to issue a vaccination exemption on religious grounds.

I continue to give thanks to God for the ministry of all the clergy and lay leaders of our diocese. Please know of my ongoing prayers. May God continue to guide us, encourage us, and strengthen us as the effects of this pandemic persist and still touch our lives.

BLESSINGS & PEACE

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