

27 October 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Having consulted with the COVID-19 Taskforce I am pleased to inform you that those parishes wishing to offer in-person worship services may do so, with restrictions, beginning on Sunday, October 31. We are encouraged by the continuing downward trend in both the numbers related to cases and hospitalizations but want to stress that hospitalization numbers are still at a level equal to the high point of the third wave. We should therefore continue to take public health measures seriously and be diligent in following restrictions and available guidance. Please remember that no parish is compelled to return to in-person worship services and that online services and other creative ways of connecting with parishioners continue to be encouraged.

Restrictions and guidance for places of worship include:

- Gathering size limited to 1/3 of fire code capacity.
- Mandatory use of masks.
- Distancing of two metres between individuals and family cohorts.
- Frequent hand cleaning / sanitizing, i.e., entering and exiting, before and after communion.
- Congregational and choir singing is permitted with mask and distance requirements.
- Prayerbooks and hymnbooks may be used if recommended hand cleaning/sanitizing protocols are followed. Sanitizing of the books is not necessary if hands are being sanitized.
- Communion should continue to be distributed using priestly intinction. Masks may be removed temporarily to receive communion. Hand cleaning/sanitizing should be encouraged before and after participants receive communion.

While registration for contact tracing is not necessary, registering participants either in advance or at the door can help with adhering to capacity limits. It also provides a way of being able to communicate with participants when contact with positive cases is reported. Parishes should have some way of informing participants of potential contact when positive cases are reported to them. As per AHS guidance, potential close contacts should be advised to monitor their health and arrange to be tested if they become symptomatic. Personal information gathered from registrations should be destroyed after two weeks.

COVID screening is not necessary to participate in in-person worship. However, it should be communicated to participants when they enter that if they are presenting symptoms or feeling unwell that they should not participate and that they should arrange to be tested. This can be communicated by posting a sign at the door.

Churches are not eligible to participate in Alberta's Restrictions Exemption Program.

In the absence of clear guidance from Alberta Health Services or the provincial government, we offer the following guidance for other church activities and meetings based on our interpretation of guidance for other sectors.

- Indoor social gatherings such as coffee hour, where food and beverages are served, are not yet permitted.

Youth and children's programs can take place using the guidance that is in place for schools.

- Distancing should be maintained where possible.
- Masking is recommended for children in Kindergarten to Grade 3.
- Masking is mandatory for children in Grade 4 and up.
- Masking is mandatory for staff and teachers in all grades.
- Anyone presenting symptoms should not participate.
- In addition to these requirements, food and beverage should not be consumed as part of children's and youth activities.

We recommend that adult meetings such as Parish Council, bible studies, small/home groups continue in an online format. However, at the discretion of the Corporation, church meetings may take place in church buildings. Masking and distancing protocols must be adhered to. Under current AHS restrictions, Home Group meetings in private homes are not permissible.

Parishes may provide space for outside group use but should make expectations regarding masking, distancing, and capacity known. Parishes are responsible for cleaning/sanitizing after outside group use. Outside groups should have their own liability insurance. (This is a long-standing understanding in the diocese not specifically related to COVID).

Recovery programs such as AA and NA should be allowed to continue. Their leadership should be reminded of masking and distancing requirements, and that masks should be worn at all times except when actively eating or drinking.

We know that each parish will have unique situations that have not been specifically covered here. We encourage parish leadership to use their discretion and apply the guiding principles that we have identified to their specific situation, and to seek further guidance if necessary. The COVID-19 Taskforce will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as necessary.

We thank you for your perseverance and creativity in these challenging times. We look forward to a time when we will be able to gather freely and COVID protocols are a thing of the past.

God bless you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory Ken-Wilson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Archbishop Greg and the COVID-19 Taskforce