



December 20, 2021

Updated COVID-19 Guidelines

Effective December 20, 2021

As always, the health, well-being, and safety of those who are members of our churches and the communities we serve is paramount in the responses and decisions that are made relating to COVID-19. The guidelines and protocols we have followed since March 2020 have proven effective in safeguarding our churches and communities.

All three Public Health Units across our diocese are seeing the rates of new cases of COVID-19 which are well above the threshold which the province considers “Red” (greater than 80 new cases per week). For December 19, Leeds Grenville Lanark was at 178 cases/week, KFLA at 700 and Hastings Prince Edward at 222. Consistent with the provincial medical officer of health’s actions, we seek to put a “Circuit Breaker” in place to slow, contain and eventually reduce the rapid growth of new cases.

Several churches have already had their leadership (incumbent/priest-in-charge and wardens) decide that the safest and most appropriate course is to close for a time. These difficult decisions are made with the full support of the bishop and diocese.

Further to the update issued on December 15, based on the continued developments in the COVID-19 Pandemic, announcements by the Province of Ontario and further discussions with medical experts and other dioceses, the Diocese of Ontario is providing the following guidelines, effective December 21, 2021.

1) Churches may elect to remain open for public worship up until December 26, 2021 if the church leadership (incumbent/priest-in-charge and wardens) determine, that based on the local situation and the needs of the community, they wish to do so. All safeguards of the Restricted Amber stage must apply.

- Proof of vaccination must be provided for all attending.
- Capacity of the building is limited based on physical distancing.
- Masks must be worn by all, at all times.
- No food or drinks.
- No social gathering.
- Congregational singing is allowed, but with all singing softly.
- No one should feel obliged to attend in-person worship during the pandemic.

2) As of 6 pm on Sunday, December 26, 2021, the permission to re-open for public worship which was provided under the Amber Stage is suspended in all churches of the Diocese of Ontario and all churches in the diocese will re-enter the Red Stage.

3) Online worship should be offered wherever possible. This worship should be conducted by liturgical teams of no more than 10 people, who must be properly masked and physically distanced. Proof of vaccination must be provided by all participating.

- 4) Parish meetings, fund raising, and formation activities (including Sunday school and youth programs) should be conducted on-line or outdoors.
- 5) Essential food security or social support services may continue with precautions in place. Facility rental groups that are essential food security or essential social support services may continue.
- 6) Indoor in-person social activities are not permitted at this time.
- 7) Food security programs are limited to no more than 6 fully vaccinated staff. As always, health unit requirements for food and personal Safety must be fully followed.
- 8) Parish staff should work from home where at all possible.
- 9) During this stressful time, clergy and pastoral care teams should regularly communicate with all parishioners by phone, email, social media and/or other remote means, prioritizing those who may be isolated.
- 10) Clergy and lay pastoral assistants are to provide pastoral care by remote means as much as possible. Essential in-person pastoral visits, physically distanced and masked, are permitted but should be as brief as possible and held in well-ventilated spaces.
- 11) Pastoral visits are prohibited with those who are self-isolating, those who have an active case of COVID-19, or with those residing in a unit or facility where an outbreak has been declared.
- 12) All indoor weddings, funerals and baptisms are to be postponed until further notice. In rare and exceptional circumstances, permission may be sought from the bishop's office to conduct a pastoral office for which the extraordinary pastoral needs are such that postponing the service is not possible. If permission is granted, such services are to be held in private and in such a way as the number of those gathered in-person is kept to 25 people or less, all of whom must provide proof that they have received two or three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- 13) Funerals, outside the church building, shall be conducted in compliance with all Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) directives.
- 14) In order to meet Insurance guidelines and to protect our buildings, all church buildings need to be regularly inspected and checked (not less than every two days).

The diocesan Synod Office will be closed for public access as of Tuesday December 21. The bishop and diocesan staff will be working from home and are reachable by phone and/or email. The plan is to have one person in the office each business day.

We expect that this move to the Red Stage will continue until at least January 21, 2022, at which time we will review the situation to determine next steps.

These are difficult times. We continue to look for church leaders to make the decisions that are appropriate for their community in the context of their local situation.

*Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.*



Bishop Michael Oulton
Diocesan Bishop

