



## **Responding to the Provincial Health Orders of December 21, 2021**

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

On Tuesday, Dr. Bonnie Henry spoke to the Province of British Columbia about the increased spread of the Omicron variant of the virus associated with COVID-19. There is clearly great concern about the spread of this variant related to its rate of transmission.

In this press conference, Dr. Henry spoke very little about worship services in the province and therefore we are to maintain the protocols outlined by her earlier this month, which are summarized on the Provincial Government Website as:

- **If all participants are vaccinated as determined by the worship service leader, there are no capacity restrictions on worship services and choirs.**
- **If participants are not all vaccinated, worship services and choirs are limited to 50% seated capacity.**
- **Masks are required but may be temporarily removed for ceremonial eating and drinking, and by officiants, readers or for singing a solo where physical distancing is observed.**

This will continue to be in place for the diocese, as outlined in my previous Pastoral Letter of December 1 ([Bishop's Pastoral Letter Regarding Nov. 30 PHO's Orders | Anglican Diocese of New Westminster](#)). This will be in effect for all Christmas Services and for the foreseeable future, therefore no changes are needed in terms of plans that parishes currently have in place for this most holy time.

## **Social Gatherings**

There needs to be changes in terms of any social gatherings in the parishes of the diocese as we move forward. At this point, in response to Dr. Bonnie Henry's concern for safety and caution related to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant, coffee hours, receptions or lunches scheduled after worship **should not take place** effective December 22, 2021.

Other in-person social gatherings already planned should be cancelled, effective December 22, 2021. This will be in place from December 22, 2021, until January 18, 2022, coming in line with Dr Henry's protocols for other groups and gatherings.

I understand that this is a busy and beautiful time in our parishes as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. And I am also aware that in the context of the pandemic this is an anxious time. It is important to find safe and careful ways that we can worship and gather together. Please know of my gratitude for all that you are doing. Please know of my prayers as we enter this Christmas time and the beginning of a new year.

BLESSINGS & PEACE

+ J