



To the Clergy and Lay Leaders of the Diocese,

Thank you for your diligence and vigilance working with the protocols and mandates related to this ongoing pandemic. I am very aware of how difficult and complicated it has been to worship and be in community over the past two years. I am grateful to all of you for your hard work and commitment to health and safety. I have no doubt that lives have been saved by the work that you have done.

And it has had its impacts on all of us. Physical distancing and separation have created loneliness, affected mental health, and disturbed our sense of contentment. Those who have continued to work on the front lines have found it incredibly stressful. They have sacrificed for all of us. In churches as well, we have had to pivot and change, rethinking many aspects of our worship and pastoral care. It has not been easy.

On February 15, Dr. Bonnie Henry announced that several restrictions would be lifted in the province of British Columbia. Due to high vaccination rates and the care and caution of us all, we are now ready to move to different protocols related to COVID-19. More freedoms and easier movement are coming into place. This will affect the churches, worship, and gatherings in our diocese.

Effective February 16 at 11:59 pm, with proof of vaccination and mask-wearing many activities in our province are returning to normal: indoor and outdoor gatherings, indoor and outdoor organized events, fitness classes, restaurants, and the opening up of a variety of other venues.

At this point, though, **there is no change to worship services in BC**, and so in the diocese we will continue with the restrictions that remain in place:

- During worship, **we must always wear masks** (unless we are speaking or singing solo). The mask can be removed to consume the consecrated bread or wine by the celebrant only) at Communion.
- If parishes choose to have worship at full capacity of the church, **vaccine passports must be shown**, OR if they will plan for a reduction in the capacity of the church to 50%, vaccine passports do not have to be shown. (Please note that you do not need to have a scanner for the vaccine passport but only that it must be shown).
- Communion continues to be in one kind only with all communicants receiving the consecrated bread and the presiding priest consuming the consecrated wine on behalf of the entire community.
- At this point, offertory plates are not to be passed amongst the congregation.
- We exchange the peace without any physical contact (except for those of the same household).

There are some things that have changed for events other than worship. We may once again gather for social and community events. **Everyone must be vaccinated and must wear a face covering** (unless when consuming food or drink while seated), but we may now proceed with some additional activities:

Coffee Hour after Church

We can resume having coffee hour after worship services. Beverages and food may be served. All in attendance must be vaccinated and wear a mask (unless consuming food and drink).

Lunches after Church or Social Gatherings During the Week

Food may be served, so if you want to have a meal after worship or during the week, churches may do this. This includes wedding and funeral receptions. Proof of vaccination shown, masking and physical distancing observed.

Meetings in Person

We can return to in-person meetings. Many parishes may still want to offer meetings on Zoom (or other platforms) or a hybrid, but the option is now available to return to in-person meetings

In-Person Prayer Groups, Lenten Studies, or Bible Studies

We can return to in-person Christian Formation gatherings. Parishes may choose to keep these online or as a hybrid option.

Vestry Meetings

If you have already planned for this to be online, no need to change, as it will be difficult and confusing to pivot now. But you may want to consider a hybrid meeting (some onsite and some online). If able to make the changes (please know that this is not expected), your Vestry Meeting can be in person.

Shrove Tuesday

You can have a Shrove Tuesday supper (or other gathering) in preparation for the start of Lent. Proof of vaccination shown, masking and physical distancing observed.

Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday liturgies, if they can be organized in time, can be in-person. Again, either all must be vaccinated or 50% capacity, but all must be masked. Imposition of ashes may proceed as we would prior to the pandemic. Some people may not be ready for this level of contact so consider other options along the lines of those introduced in 2021. But it is permissible to impose ashes in the shape of a cross on the foreheads of worshippers.

Sunday School and Youth Group

Lent may be a good time to consider how to restart or renew Sunday Schools and Youth Groups.

I realize that it will be difficult to move quickly into these new possibilities and will take careful planning and preparation, however, it is important to be moving forward into this planning. **Remember, that outside of worship, for all activities, everyone must be vaccinated and masked.**

Once again we are all being asked to pivot and rethink how we are doing things. I know that this has been exhausting. But this feels different. We are moving to a relaxation of most of the protocols and mandates related to COVID-19. We still need to proceed with caution, and some people may be anxious about moving too quickly. I encourage everyone to begin thinking and planning about how we invite and encourage people to return to attending church in person. As we will soon move into the season of Lent and then Holy Week and Easter, it will be important to consider how we mark these new openings with worship, thanksgiving, and prayer. How we invite people to come to worship once more and feel safe and protected. How we invite people back into in-person community and celebrate this and God's gifts to our lives. We are on the edge of a new start for our churches and other places of worship, and I encourage you to consider embracing the opportunity and possibilities. New beginnings are great sources of inspiration and innovation.

Please know of my ongoing prayers for all of you.

O God, the giver of our life and our hope, we thank you for this time and place where restrictions are being eased so that once more, we can know your presence in the community of others along with places of solitude. We give thanks for our neighbours, health care workers, front line workers, family and friends; all those who remind us of your abiding presence and Spirit despite this pandemic. We give thanks for your gifts of grace and compassion which you shower upon us. May we continue to be bearers of those same gifts in how we walk in this world. In the name of Jesus, the Word and Truth. Amen.

Blessings & Peace
+ Jc