



December 1, 2021

On November 30, the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, announced new orders for worship services in the province. These orders are designed to reduce the risk of COVID-19. She announced:

- A requirement that worship services must be limited to 50% of seated capacity, unless all the participants are vaccinated, in which case the capacity could increase to 100%. While the BC Vaccine Card is an option available for this purpose, faith leaders will have the flexibility to design their own system to ensure that all participants are vaccinated, if that is the model they choose to follow.
- A requirement that participants attending worship services, including choirs, must wear a face covering during worship services, including as participants come into the place of worship and when they leave, until outside. Participants will be able to remove the face covering when consuming food or drink to allow for ceremonial activities. Readers and celebrants will be allowed to speak without a mask, subject to distancing requirements or the presence of a barrier to prevent transmission.

What does this mean for us in the Diocese of New Westminster?

- In worship, we must always wear our masks (unless we are speaking or singing solo). The mask may be removed to consume the consecrated bread or wine (celebrant only at the present time) at Communion.
- Parishes may choose whether they will ask to see a vaccine passport for those attending worship OR if they will plan for a reduction in the capacity of the church to 50%. Parishes have the flexibility to hold services with reduced capacity and others (Christmas worship) where they will check vaccine passports. Please note that you do not need to have a scanner for the vaccine passport but only that it must be shown.
- In worship, people must continue to distance from others not in their own family, as much as is possible.
- 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.
- 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).

These changes are effective immediately and I can appreciate this will take some adjustment. Once again, I appreciate the work that will be involved in making these changes especially as we move closer to our Christmas worship services.

I have been asked about Vaccine Passports in different situations for the life of a parish. After careful consideration and deep concern for the safety of our clergy, staff, parishioners and those who use our church buildings, new policies are being enacted regarding COVID vaccinations in the Diocese of New Westminster. Please begin now to work toward implementing the following new policy immediately but they come into full effect December 31, 2021.

Policy regarding Clergy and Lay Employees of the Diocese

- All clergy licensed by the bishop and exercising active ministry in the diocese must be fully vaccinated (i.e., two vaccinations). This is effective immediately, but individuals have until December 31, 2021, to comply. This includes rectors, vicars, priests-in-charge, deacons, chaplains, honorary assistants, liturgical assistants, lay associate pastors, eucharistic ministers and visitors, those licensed to preach, and retired clergy currently on the Sunday Supply list or who currently have leadership responsibilities in a parish.

- All lay Synod staff of the diocese must be fully vaccinated (i.e., two vaccinations) by December 31, 2021.
- Requests for exemption or extension will be considered on a case-by-case basis by Archdeacon Fenton and Chancellor Cadman, with an appeal of their decision going to the bishop.

Policy regarding lay employees of parishes and those in parish ministries

- All parishes are strongly advised to formulate a parish policy that meets the standard noted above. This means that the priest-in-charge, church wardens, and trustees immediately put in place a requirement that all lay employees of the parish be fully vaccinated (i.e., two vaccinations). Parishes will have until December 31, 2021, to comply.
- Lay administrators of the eucharist are licensed by the bishop, and therefore they must be fully vaccinated (i.e., two vaccinations) by December 31, 2021, in order to continue this ministry. Parishes are required to gather and to keep on file information necessary to show compliance for this requirement.
- Again, requests for exemption or extension will be considered on a case-by-case basis by Archdeacon Fenton and Chancellor Cadman, with any appeal of their decision going to the bishop.

Policy regarding access to church premises in the Diocese of New Westminster

- For user groups or those who rent space in the parish's buildings, they must follow provincial protocols related to their group. Once again, parish leadership does not have to enforce the protocols but ensure that the group knows they must follow the protocols and have signed a waiver to this effect.
- Regarding other visitors to the church buildings: tradespeople, delivery personnel, building inspectors etc., they must remain masked while inside the buildings. If their stay is protracted, i.e., longer than an hour and they are in shared spaces they will need to show a vaccine passport to the parish representative on site.
- As there are many daycares using parish buildings in our diocese, I affirm that they must abide by all Provincial Health Officer's orders. As daycares are held to a high level of compliance, I have confidence that the PHO's orders are being followed.

Policy regarding coffee hour and social times in the parish

- For a coffee hour (or a meal) that immediately follows a worship service, the same policy that is in effect for worship will be in effect: either the fully vaccinated congregation or the reduced capacity congregation may attend coffee hour. People should be distanced as much as possible and must keep their masks on as much as possible.
- For other social activities (anything other than worship and coffee hour) proof of vaccination will need to be shown. Please plan for this immediately but you must comply for all social activities by December 31, 2021.
- In terms of events, if there is food served, a vaccine passport will need to be shown, but if there are simply items for sale at a garage sale or bazaar (but no consumption of food or drink) a vaccine passport does not need to be shown.

I hope this brings some clarity to our current situation. I appreciate that this is a lot of information to comprehend and may not alleviate all your questions and concerns. If this is the case, please be in touch with me or the Reverend Philippa Segrave-Pride (the Reverend Tellison Glover is on a well-deserved vacation until the new year).

I hope and pray that we are approaching the end of this pandemic, but we must continue to support one another and love one another.

May God's blessing be upon you and may God hold you in the palm of God's hand.

BLESSINGS & PEACE
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