



March 11, 2022

Dear Clergy and Wardens in the Diocese of Athabasca:

Covid is a terrible disease. In Alberta, as of April 4, 23,031 people have been hospitalized with this disease, and 4,104 have died. It is not something to take lightly, which is why we have twice suspended in-person worship services and have implemented Covid-related restrictions for when we do attend in person. I thank all of you for adhering to these constraints, which are made in the spirit of love – loving our neighbour as we love ourselves.

The 1918 (Spanish) Flu, which is possibly the closest analogy to what we are experiencing with Covid, went through four deadly waves over a 3-year pattern before subsiding into the seasonal flu which we know well. Contrary to my hopes and prayers, our Covid numbers are not declining rapidly. We seem to be transferring from the fifth wave directly into the sixth. Covid is around and we co-exist with it.

With the provincial government totalling eliminating Covid restrictions, as soon as we leave our homes, our worship services, or leave federal institutions like the post office, we are surrounded by the likelihood of contagion. For example, two of my children's families have contracted Covid, despite their best efforts, due to their children bringing it home from school. It is highly likely that all people will get it at some point – therefore vaccines are extremely important.

I am aware that some people have been asking “How long? How long?” – a question which is very biblical!

I, therefore, having been weighing: do I keep in place the current permissions, probably for months into the future, or do I change our approach given the above?

I have decided, after consultation with the College of Clergy, to empower vestries / parish councils to make the decision, based on their context. Please note I retain the right to re-implement specific restrictions if needed, including suspending in-person worship services.

For all cases, please adhere to these:

Core Personal Practices

- Follow public health advice and guidelines
- Practice good hygiene (hand hygiene [i.e., washing or sanitizing], avoid touching face, respiratory etiquette [e.g., coughing into elbow])
- Stay at home and away from others if symptomatic/feeling ill – don't go to school/work and follow jurisdictional/local public health advice
- Maintain physical distancing as prudent when in a public environment
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects regularly, especially if they don't have time to be naturally disinfected between usages
- Stay at home as much as possible if at high risk of severe illness
- When sickness is sweeping through your local community, mask your face around others, especially when it is not possible to consistently maintain a two-metre physical distance from them
- Wear a mask if you are experiencing symptoms and will be in contact with others
- Be careful with personal non-essential travel

Also, for Fort Chipewyan and Wabasca, it is important that any opening up of restrictions be done in consultation with the local council and health authority.

Vestries (clergy and laity working together) may implement Tight Permissions, slightly looser, or much looser, all the way to Loose Permissions. Here is how I define them:

Tight Permissions (implemented September of last year):

- 1) Follow *Core Personal Practices* as noted above.
- 2) All parishioners and clergy thoroughly wash their hands before attending worship. The guidance for handwashing is for at least 20 seconds: saying the Lord's Prayer once while washing is about the right length of time.
- 3) All participants are to wear masks upon entry, for the duration they are in the building, and until they leave. These masks are to cover the chin, mouth, and nose.
- 4) All participants are to be socially distanced (2 metres) from people not in their cohort. Pews or chairs should be marked to facilitate this. Traffic patterns in and out should be designed to facilitate this.
- 5) Instead of passing the plate during the Offertory, place your tithes and offerings into a plate at the entrance, which can then be brought up to the altar. Do not pass the plate through the congregation.
- 6) During the peace, instead of shaking hands or physical contact, wave, smile, or bow. Please remember to pass the peace verbally! You are in effect praying for Christ's shalom to be part of the life of the recipient.
- 7) When entering or leaving worship, greet each other verbally instead of shaking hands.

- 8) Use hand sanitizer. As well as washing with soap and water before attending church, please have hand sanitizer available for approaching and leaving communion, as well as using it at communion in conjunction with the lavabo washing (and during communion if there is any inadvertent touching of hands). If there are allergies or medical reasons why a communicant cannot be exposed to sanitizer, thoroughly washing with soap and water before distributing to that specific congregant will suffice.
- 9) During communion, the presider will take bread, and may optionally take wine as well. The wine will not be shared with others, but bread only. The presider shall re-sanitize his or her hands before distributing communion and if at any time their hands contact that of a parishioner. They may also put on gloves, use tongs, or a patten with an attached handle. Note that if you use these items, they cannot touch the hands of the communicant. Each wafer shall be individually dropped into the hands of the communicant without touching them. Other than when ingesting the communion, all participants shall be masked. When ingesting, people shall be socially distanced as they must briefly adjust their mask to do this.
- 10) The preferred option of receiving Holy Eucharist is as a gathered community. The second option is as Reserved Sacrament. The third option, for those who are unable to physically receive (in this case, participants who are having communion virtually and do not have reserved sacrament at hand, or those who did not feel safe approaching the altar rail so stayed in their seats), the presider may say the following prayers before communion is completed, or prayer(s) of like intent:

“For those who are baptised in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: reflecting that you are aware that Christ died for you and does eagerly forgive you your sins when you earnestly confess them and, remembering how through faith in His death and resurrection you have obtained entrance into His everlasting kingdom; may our Lord God, perfect in love, mercy and righteousness, through the power of His incarnation, death, and resurrection, fill you with His presence. May you have true communion with Him, so you may love Him with all your being, love your neighbor as you love yourself, and may you never be separated from Him. In the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.”

“For those who are not baptized: May the blessing of God Almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit, be with you now and always. May you come to know true communion with Him, in His death and resurrection, for the Kingdom of God has come near to you. Amen.”

- 11) Use only fortified altar wine, of at least 18% alcohol. For our Ecumenical Ministry sites, please confer with your respective authority (Lutheran or United) for their guidance regarding grape juice – individual cups may be used for grape juice (note this is for ecumenical sites only).

- 12) Disinfect all doorknobs, altar rails, pews and toys after each service. To disinfect plush toys, they must be laundered in a washing machine with hot water and dried in a clothes dryer on a hot cycle – so you may just wish to remove them for the time being.
- 13) Any gatherings within the building before or after worship must be socially distanced with no open food being shared while in the building (all food must be individually wrapped).

Keep track of all attendees so that you may follow up with them in case of an actual Covid case.

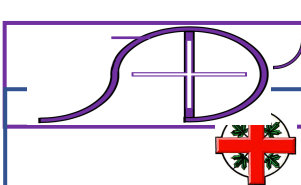
If, somehow, Covid is experienced at your in-door worship gathering:

- 1) Immediately quarantine the church building for two weeks. Quarantine yourselves as well. Notify your parishioners what has happened and recommend to those who attended that they do the same.
- 2) If applicable (ie: if the rules change again to facilitate this), ensure Alberta Health Services (AHS) is notified. Share with them the attendance list from the service in question, and the practices which had been put in place (distancing, masks, etc.).
- 3) Notify me.
- 4) Clean all surfaces before resuming (as per approved guideline), with a basic bleach mixture or cleaning product. If there are allergies or problems with bleach, isopropyl alcohol or hydrogen peroxide may be used. Please be careful with all these products and follow all guidelines for their usage.
- 5) Follow all AHS communications given specifically to you.
- 6) Resume services after documentation from me giving you explicit approval to do so.

Loose Permissions (minimal):

- 1) Follow *Core Personal Practices* as noted above.
- 2) No restrictions on outdoor gatherings beyond the core personal practices. Be respectful some people may wish to mask and / or be socially distant.
- 3) No restrictions on indoor gatherings beyond the core personal practices. Be respectful some people may wish to mask and / or be socially distant.
- 4) Communal Worship
 - a. Be respectful some people may wish to mask and / or be socially distant.
 - b. Instead of passing the plate during the Offertory, place your tithes and offerings into a plate at the entrance, which can then be brought up to the Altar.
 - c. Be respectful that some people may not wish to touch others during the passing of the peace (though touching is now allowed). Instead of shaking hands or hugging you can wave, smile, or bow. Please do, however, remember to pass the peace verbally! You are in effect praying for Christ's shalom to be part of the life of the recipient. If you touch, make sure the other person is ok with it first.

To experience and share Christ's love in all circumstances to all people
so that the family of Christ, the kingdom of God, is further established.



Athabasca Diocese

The Anglican Church of Canada

- d. Have hand sanitizer available to people as they come up for Communion. Either hand sanitizer or washing with soap and water must be part of the lavabo process. If washing with soap and water, please completely pray the Lord's Prayer while doing so – it helps focus you on why you are doing this, as well as ensuring a full amount of time to completely wash all surfaces of the hands.
- e. Wipe and revolve the chalice after each person has received the wine. Individuals can decide for themselves whether to use the common cup; it is more than acceptable to receive in 'one kind' (i.e.: bread) only, or to abstain altogether and receive a blessing. Ensure the next person is always having their portion of the cup wiped with a clean portion of the purificator or get a new one.
- f. Intinction (dipping the bread into the wine) is not permitted. Studies have shown this allows bacteria into the cup from the hands.
- g. Use only fortified altar wine of at least 18% alcohol (for our Ecumenical Ministry sites, please confer with your respective authority (Lutheran or United) for their guidance regarding grape juice – individual cups may be used for grape juice (note this is for Ecumenical sites only)).

Be cautious – we are not afraid of death, but neither do we encourage it. I really don't want anyone to get sick because they worshiped with us or joined us in fellowship or study. One unnecessary death is one too many. Please respect people's boundaries and fears. Ongoing services across the internet are still desired and encouraged. Take all necessary precautions and be mindful of your own health. If you feel ill, even on a Sunday morning, give notice to others and stay home; if you are responsible for leading the service in some way pass your preparation (sermon, reading, or prayers) to someone who is not ill. If the clergy is ill, then Morning Prayer is always an option.

If you wish to consult with me regarding the permissions your congregation wishes to follow (Tight, Loose, or somewhere in between), I would be glad to join with you in conversation. Shalom (peace, health, wholeness) be with you in the name of Christ and please hold each other up in prayer.

Be safe in the arms of our loving God;

David Greenwood, Bishop