



Dear People of the Diocese of New Westminster

Greetings, beloved in Christ.

Based on the latest COVID-19 related updates from the Prime Minister and the BC Health Minister, and based on feedback from many of you, I am directing **the suspension of all Sunday and weekday *in-person* worship in our parishes until May 3.** Likewise, I am directing the **suspension of all other in-person parish activities beginning tomorrow, Wednesday, March 18 through Sunday, May 3.**

Also, please know that beginning Wednesday, March 18 **the Synod Office itself will be closed to all visitors.** We will still be working either in the office or from home, so we will be able to speak with you and meet with you via ZOOM or conference call.

About other matters let me say this:

Other Parish Activities

The suspension of all other parish activity includes: all classes, all meetings, most weddings, and all outreach programs including community meals. If you have a question about a parish activity, please be in touch with your Regional Archdeacon. We are taking this step to decrease the possibility of one of our parishes contributing to the spread of COVID-19. It's just not worth the risk at this point, even if our events are under the 50-person threshold that the BC Health Minister has specified for now. Know that I am sad to have to do this but feel that this is the best way to enact the caring love of God in our parishes and communities.

Weddings

To accommodate those who have already made arrangements to be married and to go forward in a more limited way, the liturgy would only involve the priest, the couple and two witnesses.

Funerals

This essential component of our ministry deserves some special attention at this time. We want to remain available and present to provide comfort and care to the bereaved. Funerals and memorials, therefore, will be addressed on an ad hoc basis. Please contact your Regional Archdeacon for more information about gathering and liturgical advice.

Parish Offices

I strongly recommend that Responsible Persons (trustees) close church offices in order to protect the health of those who may from time to time need to work in your office space. If employees go to the office space rather than work exclusively from home, you must sanitize the space, wash hands (before entering the office, during the day, and at the end of the day), maintain the 2-metre distancing norm between people and engage in all the other practices to safeguard health.

User Groups

User Groups fall under the same direction above for "Other Parish Activities," that is, their activity is on pause through May 3rd.

Tenants including Day Care Centres

For all tenants we recommend, parish officers, that you be in touch with them and communicate along the lines listed below:

- Like you, the Diocese has been monitoring the rapidly evolving situation in relation to the Covid-19 virus, and considering how we can best protect our people and communities.
- We expect all users of our premises to comply with directives from government health authorities.
- You will no doubt be aware that BC schools have now been closed, and public gatherings strongly discouraged, to the extent they have not been expressly prohibited.
- We have required our own user groups to temporarily suspend public gatherings in an attempt to help prevent and contain the Covid-19 virus.
- To the extent work can take place remotely or be paused for the time being, we are recommending that this be done.
- We are strongly encouraging you to do the same. If you decide to do otherwise, the Diocese will ask you to provide an acknowledgment confirming that, in making that decision, you have elected to decline the invitation of the Diocese to voluntarily suspend your operations at this time.

Cancellations/Postponement of Diocesan Events

The following are diocesan events and their current status:

- **Treasurer's Day on Saturday March 21:** POSTPONED AND TO BE RESCHEDULED. Shailene Caparas will send all Parish Treasurers and Wardens a new updated Treasurer's Manual which will also be posted on the Diocesan website. Synod staff are available to respond to your questions and concerns.
- **Warden and Trustees Day on April 4:** POSTPONED AND TO BE RESCHEDULED
- **House of Bishops Meeting April 20-24:** The Primate has not decided as yet about cancelling this meeting. I will not be attending in person but will attend by ZOOM should this option be offered.
- **Confirmation Preparation Day on April 25:** POSTPONED AND TO BE RESCHEDULED

- **ACW Annual General Meeting on April 25:** WAITING TO HEAR ABOUT THE STATUS OF THIS EVENT
- **Diocesan Council Meeting April 29th:** Will take place virtually
- **Confirmation on May 2:** POSTPONED AND TO BE RESCHEDULED

Events after May 3: To be addressed in a future communique.

What We Are Working On

Virtual Worship and Meetings: Drawing on the skills of some in our Diocese, Tellison Glover and Randy Murray have publicized a variety of ways for parishes to offer worship, study and meetings in a virtual way. Tellison and Randy are continuing to work on assisting you with skills and tools. We will update you as these become available. For those parishes that are not able to create their own virtual worship, our Cathedral and other parishes will be offering worship that will be accessible to the entire diocese. More later on this.

In this unprecedented time we are called to support each other. There are worshipping communities that would welcome the assistance of parishes that have virtual worship events available. Please talk to one another and invite participation on a broader scale.

Holy Week and Easter Day: We are in the planning stages of developing a full schedule of Holy Week and Easter Day worship and events to be live-streamed, utilizing the many skills and gifts of people in our diocese.

Ways to Support Priests-in-Charge and Parish Officers: The Archdeacons will be meeting with me and Synod staff members this week to discuss and propose a regular way we can support our parish leaders at this time. Again, information about this will go out once it is finalized.

A Communication of a Different Kind from Me

[Please find linked here](#) thoughts I have as we deal with COVID-19. All of you are in my heart and in my prayers as we daily adjust to new information and do our best to enact our Baptismal identity and purpose at this uncertain time.

In Christ,
+ J. Melvin