



Bishop Stephen's Pastoral Letter, August 26, 2021
Regarding Current Orders from the PHO
Mask Mandates and Vaccination Passports

Please know of my ongoing prayers for all of you as we continue to determine the best and safest ways to protect one another but still gather for worship and community events during this ongoing pandemic. This has been an extremely trying time for all of us, and I continue to be most grateful to all of you for your diligence, patience and attention to detail. While there has been room for optimism of late, with the advancement of more vaccinations, there is still a need for concern. We must continue to seek ways to care for the most vulnerable amongst us and seek a path forward.

Earlier this week the Provincial Health Officer, Dr Bonnie Henry, made an announcement about a provincial mask mandate and providing proof of immunization. While worship services are exempt from these, we cannot ignore the need to implement greater protection for all of our neighbours.

My personal view is that we wear a mask when we are indoors, even for worship. To that end I am requesting that masks be worn for the duration of indoor worship services. This would mean that all in the congregation would wear a mask for the entirety of the liturgy (keeping the mask on for singing and only removing the mask to receive the Eucharist). Those speaking, preaching, or reading could remove their mask for this purpose. Therefore, I reiterate what I wrote in a previous pastoral letter:

1. It is requested that masks be worn upon entry to the church and kept on for the entirety of the liturgy.
2. Greeters/welcomers should wear masks.
3. Anyone speaking or leading singing may remove their mask for this role.
4. People should be encouraged to still distance from one another (unless from the same household) to help build confidence for those hesitant about returning to in-person worship.
5. Prior to receiving Communion, individuals should sanitize their hands.
6. A choir leading the music in worship is permitted.
7. Congregational singing is permitted.
8. It is no longer necessary to pre-register or collect contact tracing information for those attending worship.
9. Washrooms no longer need to be designated "for emergency only"
10. Social times before or after worship are permitted, however, please ensure that those handling food/beverages have sanitized their hands.

In terms of Communion, the Peace and Offertory plates, there are protocols that will continue to be in place for the time being:

- **Communion is in one kind only (except for the priest), the bread/body of Christ. The cup/wine/blood of Christ will not be offered to anyone other than the presider at this time.**
- **At the time of exchanging the Peace of Christ, there must not be handshaking or hugs (except between members of the same household). Please nod or bow to one another.**
- **At this time, do not pass Offertory Plates. Offertory plates can be placed at the door and may be brought forward during the time that the offering is received.**

The PHO in her guidance for holding low risk worship services, writes this: “Not everyone will feel comfortable being close to others, including sitting, standing shoulder-to-shoulder or shaking hands.” It is important to allow for individuals to keep physically distanced from one another.

In terms of proof of vaccination, now referred to as a vaccination passport, this is not needed for worship. But it will be required for discretionary (e.g., social or non-essential) meetings taking place at our places of worship, effective October 24, 2021. I am currently seeking clarity on this from the PHO and will circulate more information on this as soon as it’s available.

Please note that those renting space within our churches or other buildings must comply with all the PHO’s guidelines. Please ensure that user groups in our buildings are aware of and are following the guidelines (masks, proof of vaccination, etc).

For now:

- **I am requesting the wearing of masks for all indoor worship and other gatherings.**
- **I am requesting that all who are able to be vaccinated get vaccinated.**
- **I request that we all continue to pay attention to protocols that will help keep people safe, secure and comfortable.**

I give thanks to God for all of you and your pastoral care of all God’s people. Many of us are tired of protocols and precautions but we must continue to be cautious and careful to protect our most vulnerable.

May God’s blessing be with you, all those you love and all those for whom you pray.

BLESSINGS of PEACE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized 'J' followed by a horizontal line.