

Funerals, Weddings, Ministry to the Sick in a Time of Pandemic

Through its regular celebrations and rites (e.g. the Daily Office, Baptism, Eucharist), and the temporal rhythms of the liturgical year, the church is rooted in the paschal mystery of Christ and formed as his Body to serve as sign, foretaste, and instrument of the Kingdom of God.

The church's pastoral rites are celebrations responsive to the personal and communal rhythms in the lives of individual Christians (and often others), families or households, and local communities, particularly in the face of critical moments and times of significant transition. Through these rites, such times and moments also find meaning in, and give expression to the paschal mystery of Christ.

During this time of pandemic, however, some of the usual ways we mark these moments are not possible. Provincial and local protocols aiming to reduce the spread of COVID-19 mean for a time we must abstain from gathering for funerals, weddings, and other pastoral rites so people are not put at grave risk.

A number of questions have been fielded on these matters in recent weeks. So the following guidelines are offered as clarification concerning expectations to be followed by clergy and congregations in the Diocese of Algoma.

Funerals

- Indoor funerals are not to take place until further notice.
- Graveside funerals or interments with no more than 10 people (including the Presider), and following other Provincial requirements for such gatherings may be conducted, consulting ahead of time with your Territorial Archdeacon to provide details, and assurance that provincial and local protocols will be observed. For Provincial requirements, see: <https://thebao.ca/registrars-directive/>
- Memorial services related to the above may be celebrated once restrictions on gatherings are lifted.
- If you are concerned that extraordinary pastoral circumstances may exist necessitating a response not authorized by these guidelines, permission from the Archbishop to provide such a response is required. Inquiries and requests should be submitted to The Rev. Dr. Jay Koyle, congdevelopment@dioceseofalgoma.com
- The resource linked below, 'Prayers in a Time of Suffering and Grief', may be made available to households anticipating or mourning the death of a loved one.

Weddings

- Weddings are to be postponed until further notice.
- Permission may be sought from the Archbishop to conduct 'The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage' in a case where extraordinary pastoral circumstances may be such that postponing the liturgy is not possible or advisable. Requests should be submitted to The Rev. Dr. Jay Koyle, congdevelopment@dioceseofalgoma.com
- If such permission is granted, only the Presider, the parties to the marriage, and two witnesses may be present.
- If permission is granted and couples desire to hold a more celebratory rite reaffirming their vows in a larger gathering once restrictions are lifted, a resource for doing so will be provided to clergy.
- In situations where a wedding is postponed, clergy are encouraged to be in contact with, and provide prayers for the couple on the date the wedding had been scheduled to take place.

Pastoral Emergencies and Anointing the Sick

It is wonderful that so many of the clergy, pastoral ministers, and others of this diocese are undertaking pastoral care of people in and beyond their congregation by phone calls and video conferencing wherever possible. This is a faithful and responsible practice given the current provincial and local pandemic protocols, and those of our healthcare institutions. It is recognized, however, there may be instances when extraordinary circumstances raise the possibility that an in-person visit may be necessary. Such visits should be limited to those most in need of care and compassion, situations where the presence of an incumbent or cleric is essential – for instance to support a highly vulnerable and isolated older adult, to anoint a gravely ill person, and/or to comfort one close to death.

In such instances, the following guidelines are to be followed by clergy and congregations in the Diocese of Algoma:

- Pastoral visits with those who are self-isolating or have an active case of COVID-19 are prohibited.
- Always consult and adhere to the protocols of any facility you may be called to visit. If visits are not permitted, respect that condition and inquire if there is another way you can be in contact with the patient, or if there is someone working in the facility to whom you can provide prayers for use with the patient/resident.
- If permitted to visit, adhere to all institutional guidelines when visiting long-term care homes and/or hospitals. If you are unsure of the protocols, call ahead and speak with the nursing station. In addition, visit only one person at any time, even if that means separated visits to the home or hospital.

- If you are anointing and/or providing Viaticum to the dying, ensure hands, oil stock, and vessels are sanitized prior to use. Wear a mask for the protection of anyone with whom you may come into contact.
- For anointing, bring an extra cotton ball. Dip the cotton ball in the oil and then replace the lid on the oil stock. Dip your thumb or finger in the oil absorbed by the cotton ball rather than in the oil stock. Anoint the dying, and sanitize or wash your hands and the oil stock as soon as possible afterwards. Dispose of the cotton ball as instructed by the facility.
- Following a visit to an institution where COVID-19 may be present, wash your hands thoroughly, go directly home, change clothes, and launder immediately the clothes you have worn.
- If there is time to consult, you are asked to contact either your Territorial Archdeacon, or The Rev. Dr. Jay Koyle, congdevelopment@dioceseofalgoma.com (mobile number on the clergy list distributed regularly by Liz Hamel). If not, please inform your Territorial Archdeacon of the visit as soon as possible after the visit.
- The resource linked below, 'Prayers in a Time of Suffering and Grief', may be made available to households anticipating or mourning the death of a loved one.

Prayers in a Time of Suffering and Grief

Here is a resource helpful to households during a time leading up to, and following a death, especially during a period when we cannot gather for funerals in our church buildings. It is photo-ready to be shared as a little leaflet (8 1/2 X11, printed on both sides, and folded in half...).

<https://www.dioceseofalgoma.com/2020/05/04/prayers-in-a-time-of-suffering-and-grief/>