



DIOCESE OF ALGOMA

From the Archbishop

May 26th, 2021

To the people of God in the Diocese of Algoma

Dear friends,

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. The mighty winds and fire that came on Pentecost filled the disciples with a renewed vision, fresh strength, and the ability to proclaim the good news of Jesus, with simplicity and boldness. Let us reaffirm our commitment to being members of Christ's body and, living into its promise, celebrate the global witness of the church, and contribute to the healing of the world.

This Covid update is to keep you abreast of plans for a cautious reopening of in person worship which, God willing, can begin on June 20th, 2021, depending upon provincial directives. A more detailed outline will be distributed by Friday June 4th to enable you to begin preparations in your own context.

But let me offer a word of gratitude for the many ways in which you continue to be the church in these extraordinary times. Thank you for your faithfulness in preparing and offering worship, bible studies, and gathering for regular meetings. Outreach continues in fresh new ways with the hungry being fed and the homeless having strong advocates through your voices. Connections of all kinds continue to take place through your ministry of pastoral care and mutual encouragement. Prayer has sustained us all.

A word about stewardship. Even though we are not in our buildings there continue to be ministry costs – please continue to make your regular offerings for the work of the church. There is no doubt that the pandemic has shown we are an 'essential service'.

Thanks to the responsiveness of Ontarians in the latest 'Stay at Home' order, we are at last seeing encouraging signs that the Third Wave of the Covid -19 pandemic is turning a corner. The number of daily cases in Ontario has decreased from a high of 4,447 on April 18th to a lower count of 1,039 on May 24th.

More good news came with the announcement, over the weekend, by the Federal Government that half of all Canadians have received at least one dose of the vaccination. 8 million doses have already been administered to Ontarians and the province continues to expand booking eligibility and access to the vaccines in mass clinics, pharmacies, hospitals, and in mobile pop-up locations.

Late last week, using an abundance of caution and making no firm promises, the Provincial Government announced its strategy for the slow reopening of our province in three stages, with each stage lasting for **at least 21 days**. Movement to the next stage will depend upon vaccination rates and positive trends in covid cases.

The provincial outline is as follows:

In **Step 1** there will be a focus on resuming outdoor activities where the risk of transmission is lower, with gatherings of up to 10 people.

The forecast date for Step 1 is June 14th, 2021.

In **Step 2** there will be a further expansion of outdoor gatherings and the resumption of indoor religious services at 15% capacity. Outdoor capacity in Step 2 will be 25.

The forecast date for Step 2 is July 5th, 2021.

In **Step 3** greater access will be given to indoor settings, with restrictions.

The forecast date for Step 3 is July 26th, 2021.

I know that many of you are wondering what the plan is in the Diocese of Algoma for reopening our church buildings or grounds for 'in person' worship this summer.

The new provincial guidelines have given us a framework within which to prepare revisions to the Guidelines set out by the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario late last summer.

We are currently working on updating protocols for gathering indoors and outdoors which will be ready for distribution by Friday June 4th.

In anticipation of Steps 1 and 2 outlined above, the revised protocols to the RED STAGE will include the celebration of Holy Eucharist for small groups, as well as the distribution of Reserved Sacrament for those able to drive to the church following a 'live stream', or small in person Eucharist service. For those unable to drive to the church to receive communion, provision will be made to bring Reserved Sacrament to peoples' homes.

If any of these new protocols will not work in your setting, please continue with whatever practice has been working for you. I encourage every congregation to offer a Morning Prayer or Liturgy of the Word on Sundays.

Based on what we learned from provincial officials last week, the earliest date for the revised Algoma protocols we are suggesting to start will be Sunday June 20th. I have invited the Rev. Michael Garner, Advisor to the Ontario House of Bishops, to the House's June meeting to make a presentation on the current status of Covid, and a forecast for the fall. Several leaders in Algoma will be present to hear Rev. Michael speak.

Be assured that we are doing everything to bring us together again as communities of faith following what has been a challenging and sad time for many. We can never go back to 'normal', but we can and must look to the future with hope. God is faithful and is always with us through the precious indwelling of the Holy Spirit. May God's peace be with you, and in you.

+*Anne*

The Most Rev. Anne Germond
Archbishop of Algoma