



The Diocese of Algoma

Reopening Algoma's Churches (*Amber*)

Revision issued on the Commemoration of Clement of Rome,

November 23, 2021.

Effective Thursday, November 25, 2021.

Though there have been pauses or setbacks in some areas of Ontario, including within the geographical boundaries of Algoma, overall the Province continues on its incremental and welcome path of reopening. In this Diocese, we have cause to be thankful for the effectiveness of the measures we have taken together thus far. These updated protocols are issued so congregations in areas of the Diocese where new cases of the COVID-19 virus are sufficiently low may expand what is possible within their worship life and beyond.

As has been true throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the following protocols and revisions have been prepared carefully with both the anxieties and aspirations of our congregations in mind. They are based not only on the convictions and best practices of our faith, but also on the scientific research and health guidance of highly qualified and experienced individuals. Likewise, they are prepared cognizant of the increased risk of transmission that is possible as we move through the months of winter.

Since the Diocese of Algoma covers a wide stretch of Ontario and extends into Quebec, not every parish or region may be in the same situation in terms of vaccination levels, or the number of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations. This may result in variations in local health unit guidelines for your area. When COVID-19 guidance and protocols differ between those of the Diocese and your local health unit or provincial authority, the more cautious guidelines must be followed. In addition, these protocols presume, and should be interpreted in light of the Archbishop's policy on COVID-19 vaccinations. The policy is available here: <https://www.dioceseofalgoma.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/COVID-Vax-Policy.pdf>

As always, if individual congregations are not yet comfortable with living into any less restrictive worship and pastoral care guidelines presented here, then Diocesan leadership will be supportive of the Incumbent's decision to "hold their present course" at this time. Our goal is to gradually and safely emerge together into a time of corporate worship wherein there is deep joy and confidence of personal safety in our fellowship.

As we monitor conditions related to COVID-19, these guidelines are subject to alteration for all or part of the Diocese. Our hope is that, as we progress together, incoming data will suggest the further lifting of restrictions.

Note: If possible, please continue to provide remote worship options for those people who are unable to attend in person.

Indoor Worship - General

Capacity: The maximum allowed for indoor worship is whatever number of persons maintains the physical distancing requirements of these protocols between each individual or social bubble at all times.

Ventilation: Introduce more fresh air by increasing the ventilation system air intake, or opening windows and doors. Avoid central air recirculation where possible. Do not use fans. If the usual worship space of the church building does not allow for good ventilation, but another available space does (example: parish hall), the latter should be used for common worship. In seasons when weather conditions permit, congregations are encouraged to worship outdoors if space is available to do so safely. (See section below.) For more guidance on indoor ventilation, please visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/guide-indoor-ventilation-covid-19-pandemic.html#a7>

Masks: Masks must be worn by all persons over 2 years of age who are capable of removing their own face coverings and who do not have a health condition that would contraindicate the wearing of a face covering while inside any church building during worship, or when in the presence of anyone outside of their social bubble. Masks must be worn in a manner that covers the nose, mouth, and chin. Masks without vents or holes filter out particles containing the virus from inhaled and exhaled air, reducing the chances of infection. It is expected of those unable to wear a mask but able to receive an approved COVID-19 vaccination that they be fully vaccinated if choosing to attend in-person worship. Masks may be temporarily moved aside to share in the bread during Communion. Though it is strongly recommended masks be worn at all times, Presider, preacher, lectors, and intercessors may unmask while speaking if physical distancing of a minimum of 4m is maintained, unless this is not permitted by the health unit serving the congregation's area. The Presiding Celebrant must be masked while praying The Great Thanksgiving in proximity to the Communion elements.

Hand Sanitizer & Extra Masks: Please have these readily available to the congregation.

Entrance and Exit: In order to maintain the required physical distancing, continue to observe your established procedures for ensuring the safe seating and departure of worshippers.

Signage: Signs indicating the use of masks, physical distancing, and the screening procedure must be posted in locations that will be seen by all participants in worship prior to, or immediately upon entering the building. Hand washing/sanitizing posters should be posted in various locations, especially in the washrooms. It is recommended that a "heads up" be posted notifying people they will be turned away if the maximum number of attendees allowed has been reached prior to their arrival. Signs advising worshippers that the liturgy is being live-streamed and/or recorded must be posted, if applicable. In

addition to onsite signage, it is recommended information related to pandemic protocols be provided in any or all of the following: the parish website, newsletters, email blasts, Facebook pages or groups, telephone voicemail greetings.

Screening: Passive screening is required for all activities within the church building. This includes posting at all entrances self-screening posters and signage reminding people of requirements concerning mask wearing, hand hygiene, and physical distancing. Active screening is not necessary (directly questioning individuals about symptoms, possible exposure, and travel) unless required by your local health unit.

Login Sheets: A record of those persons in attendance – name and contact information – is to be kept for the 30 days following each worship service.

Coat Racks: Coat racks should be removed or marked as inaccessible to prevent congestion around them before or after liturgies. People should keep all belongings with them in their pew.

Service books/bulletins: Service books and bulletins may be used.

Decisions about Liturgical Ceremonial and Movement: When making decisions about liturgical gestures and movement, including processions and liturgical dance, bear in mind the protocols of physical distancing and hand sanitizing.

The Greeting of Peace: No physical contact outside of social bubbles is permitted at this time. Physical distancing must be maintained.

Offering/Preparation of the Gifts: Offerings are to be placed in a plate/other container when entering the worship space. The bread and wine for Communion, and the offering plate may be presented by persons with sanitized hands during the Preparation of the Gifts. The bread and wine must remain covered until received at the Table.

At the Altar: The Deacon (or Presiding Celebrant, if there is no Deacon) may be aided by a server in preparing the altar if all involved in the action are fully vaccinated, and if they sanitize their hands before and after handling vessels. The Presiding Celebrant may be joined at the Table by the Deacon during The Great Thanksgiving.

Sharing Communion: Continue to share the consecrated bread only, using the protocols previously established by your congregation to safely distribute it. In the new calendar year, we will consider reintroducing use of the common cup. To read about the health implications of this practice during the present pandemic, you are encouraged to read the following report prepared for the Provincial House of Bishops: https://www.ottawa.anglican.ca/images/COVID-19/July-21-2021/Garner-Common-Cup-and-SARS-CoV-2_Infection-Risk-2021-07-15.pdf?type=file

Cleaning: The intense and stringent deep cleaning required in our first reopening in September of 2020 has been shown to be unnecessary. It does remain necessary for people to wash and/or sanitize after physical contact with anyone, or with any object previously handled by another person. High-touch

areas (doorknobs, light switches, railings, elevator buttons, bannisters, the backs, tops and arms of pews, etc.) are to be disinfected between services.

Remember those parishioners with special needs who may require individualized consideration. Consult with them or their caregivers about needed supports to participate safely in corporate worship.

Indoor Worship - Music

Singing: People in the congregation may sing if they are wearing masks and are at least 2 metres from anyone else (other than members of their household bubble). Unless a distance of 4 metres can be observed, congregations are urged to use quiet music since higher volumes of singing increase the quantity of droplets expelled. At this time, congregational singing is not permitted for churches in health unit areas where the rate of COVID-19 cases is 80 or greater per 100,000 people. The following page provides this information: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/infectious-disease/covid-19-data-surveillance/covid-19-data-tool?tab=maps>

Instrumentalists, Choirs and Other Vocal Ensembles: Choirs and other vocal ensembles larger than the previous maximum of four persons may begin serving in the liturgy as long as all of their members are fully vaccinated. (Those participating in such ensembles are required to be fully vaccinated no later than December 10, 2021.) Masks and physical distancing are required during liturgies and at rehearsals. For vocalists and choirs, and for wind and brass instrumentalists, physical distance of 4m from the congregation must be maintained. In areas in which the rate of COVID-19 cases is 80 or greater per 100,000 people, the previous protocols regarding cantors, soloists, and small ensembles must be followed – specifically, instrumentalists, cantors, soloists, duets, trios, or quartets may provide service music, with singers and wind and brass instrumentalists maintaining a minimum distance of 4 metres (13ft) with each other, other liturgical leaders, and the congregation.

Indoor Worship - Baptism

In addition to the above protocols for worship, the following are observed for the Celebration of Baptism:

- Preference should be given for the Celebration of Baptism during the principal Sunday Eucharist, ideally on the occasions particularly appropriate for baptism (BAS, 146-147).
- If an infant or child candidate's family and friends planning to attend are of such number that there would be little room for other parishioners to be present, a baptismal liturgy may take place at a time other than the principal Sunday Eucharist, and the Territorial Archdeacon informed ahead of time. In such an instance, those at the service must include at least two persons from the congregation, other than the Presider, who are not related to the baptismal candidate, to represent by their presence the larger Body of Christ.
- Baptism should still take place in the context of the Holy Eucharist.

- Communicate screening requirements to the family and anyone who may attend.
- The font is sanitized and filled with clean water.
- Ideally, only one candidate, or candidates from one household, will be baptized at any service. However, if there is more than one candidate, water should be poured freshly from a flagon or other vessel over each candidate into the font so water that has been used for one candidate is not poured over any other candidate. Another option is to place a fresh bowl of water in the font for each candidate.
- The person to be baptized, if an infant, remains in the arms of an individual from their household.
- The baptized may be anointed with Chrism simply by having the oil poured over them above the font. Presiders should sanitize their hands before and after if administering Chrism by hand. If there are multiple candidates from more than one household, the Presider should administer the Chrism by means of a cotton ball, using a new cotton ball for each. Cotton balls are burned after the baptism.
- A member of the baptismal party lights the baptismal candle from the paschal candle as the words of presentation are said.
- If the newly baptized is an infant and is to receive Communion, a spoon with a few drops of wine may be used. There should be a separate spoon for each candidate, and the Presider should not drink from the chalice until the infant candidate(s) has received.

Indoor Worship – Coffee Hours/Social Time

Physical distancing must be maintained and masks must be worn. It is recommended that socializing be limited to a short period of time, and the number of people in the space must allow for a minimum of 2m physical distancing at all times, not exceeding 50% of the maximum occupant load of the space as calculated in accordance with Ontario Regulation 213/07 (Fire Code), made under the *Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997*.

A “coffee hour”/social time may be held before or after worship. Beverages and food may be served while maintaining the required physical distance. It is recommended that stations be set up – one station per item – in order to achieve this, or that someone circulates to bring beverages to people. Such ministers of hospitality should be masked and frequently sanitize their hands.

Only those who are fully vaccinated (or children under 12 years of age) may participate. A gentle announcement should be made verbally and/or printed in the bulletin identifying this requirement, indicating it is necessary in order to comply with provincial regulations. A sign notifying people that proof of vaccination is required to participate in the coffee hour must also be posted in a visible area.

“Coffee hour”/social time is not permitted for churches in health unit areas in which the rate of COVID-19 cases is 80 or greater per 100,000 people. The following page provides this information:

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/data-and-analysis/infectious-disease/covid-19-data-surveillance/covid-19-data-tool?tab=maps>

The website of your local health unit should be consulted for other regulations or guidance that may be applicable to such pre- or post-worship social times.

Outdoor Worship

Capacity: There must be a minimum of 2m physical distance between each individual or social bubble.

Masks: It is not necessary to wear masks outdoors when maintaining the required physical distance between individuals or social bubbles. **Exceptions:** People who are medically susceptible to easily contracting viruses and becoming seriously ill should continue to wear a mask. The Presiding Celebrant must be masked while praying The Great Thanksgiving in proximity to the elements. The Presider or designated Communion minister must wear a mask during the distribution of the bread. Masks must be worn while singing. Greeters/sidespersons must wear masks when functioning in this role. Those who must project their voice in worship (Presider, preacher, lectors, intercessors, cantors) should maintain a minimum of 4m physical distancing when doing so or wear a mask.

Hand Sanitizer & Extra Masks: Have these readily available to the congregation.

Signage: Information indicating the use of masks, physical distancing, and screening procedure must be posted or made available in locations that will be seen by all participants prior to entering the worship area. Hand washing/sanitizing posters should be posted in various locations especially in the washrooms. If possible, it is recommended that a “heads up” be posted notifying people that they will be turned away if the maximum number of people allowed has been reached already in the worship area. Signs advising worshippers that the service is being live-streamed and/or recorded must be posted, if applicable. In addition to onsite signage, it is recommended information related to pandemic protocols be provided in any or all of the following: the parish website, newsletters, email blasts, Facebook pages or groups, telephone voicemail greetings.

Screening: Passive screening is required. In whatever manner most suited to the congregation’s outdoor setting, people must be informed about when they are expected to wear a mask, and reminded to perform hand hygiene and maintain the required physical distancing. Active screening (directly questioning individuals about symptoms, possible exposure, and travel) is not necessary, unless required by your local health unit.

Login Sheets: A record of those persons in attendance – name and contact information – is kept for the 30 days following each worship service.

Congregational Singing: Permitted. Masks must be worn. If possible, distancing greater than 2m between individuals and social bubbles is highly recommended.

Service books/bulletins: Service books and bulletins may be used.

The Greeting of Peace: No physical contact outside of social bubbles is permitted at this time. Physical distancing must be maintained.

Passing the Plate: Offerings are to be placed in a plate/other container when entering the worship area. The bread and wine for Communion, and the offering plate may be presented by persons with sanitized hands during the Preparation of the Gifts. The bread and wine must remain covered until received at the Table.

Sharing Communion: Continue to share the consecrated bread only, using the protocols previously established by your congregation to safely distribute it.

Socializing (pre and post service): Physical distancing must be maintained between individuals or social bubbles. Beverages and food may be served while maintaining the required physical distance. It is recommended that stations be set up – one station per item – in order to achieve this, or that someone circulates to bring beverages to people. Food items should be individually wrapped. People must not congregate at beverage or foods stations. A maximum of 100 people is allowed as long as i) physical distancing can be maintained, and ii) there are sufficient individuals assigned and able to ensure protocols are observed. These individuals are included in the 100.

Cleaning: The intense and stringent deep cleaning that was earlier believed to be necessary is known to no longer be a necessity. It does remain necessary for people to wash and/or sanitize after physical contact with anyone, or with any object previously handled by another person.

Remember those parishioners with special needs who may require individualized consideration. Consult with them or their caregivers about needed supports to participate safely in corporate worship.

Worship - Funerals and Weddings

Wedding and funeral rites will be conducted according to the above guidelines for indoor or outdoor worship, as applicable. Funerals within Ontario also must be in compliance with directives of the Bereavement Authority of Ontario: <https://thebao.ca/category/registrars-directives/>

Other Uses of the Church Buildings

Remote or outdoor meetings (as weather allows) remain a safe option, especially if any person attending the meeting or event is apprehensive regarding the possibility of transmitting/contracting the COVID-19 virus.

If using the church buildings for meetings or small gatherings, masks must be worn at all times, and 2m of physical distancing maintained between individuals or social bubbles. Water, coffee and tea, etc., may be made available. Individually packaged food items may be ordered in or made available.

A logbook recording the name and contact information for each person present at meetings, and for anyone else entering the building besides those whose normal duties involve their regular presence in the facilities (ex. clergy, secretary) will be kept for 30 days after each meeting/gathering.

Outside Groups: Congregations may permit outside groups to use the facility providing they follow all health guidelines regarding physical distancing, masks, and heightened hand washing/sanitizing.

Outside groups are expected to maintain their own logbook.

Indoor Pastoral Visitation

- Pastoral visits should be outdoors when possible. Many long-term care facilities now have set up space to allow for this option.
- Indoor in-person visits with parishioners and others should be limited as much as possible to supporting a highly vulnerable and isolated older adult, anointing and/or comforting a gravely ill or dying person, providing support to the bereaved or others in similarly difficult circumstances.
- For all inside pastoral visits, a mask must be worn, and physical distancing should be maintained throughout the visit as much as possible.
- In-person pastoral visits should not be undertaken to people who are self-isolating or those who have been infected by COVID-19.
- If permitted to visit, follow all institutional guidelines when making visits to long-term care facilities and/or hospitals. If you are unsure of the protocols, call ahead and speak with the nursing station or other appropriate onsite authority.
- Following a visit to an institution where COVID-19 may be present, wash your hands thoroughly, go directly home, change and launder clothes.
- Physical contact such as a handshake or a hug may only be shared between those who are fully vaccinated, and should be brief.
- Clerics or pastoral visitors must be healthy, and should be without an underlying medical condition that makes them vulnerable.
- Clerics and pastoral visitors must self-screen for symptoms of COVID-19 or other illnesses before visiting. Do not visit if there is any sign of illness.
- Hands should be sanitized immediately before and after anointing with the Oil of the Sick.
- If Communion is being administered to a sick or dying person, reserved sacrament is preferable; taking only what is needed for the administration. If the sick or dying person is unable to consume the host, the wine may be administered by spoon. The spoon should only be used once in the visit.
- The cleric or pastoral visitor should sanitize their hands both before and after administering the bread (and/or wine via spoon).
- All purificators and vessels should be washed immediately after the visit.
- Pastoral visitors will maintain a record of individuals visited for 30 days after each visitation.

Fundraising

The most recent protocols addressing fundraising are available here:

<https://www.dioceseofalgoma.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Amber-Fundraising-2021-11.pdf>

Contact Reporting

What should a congregation do if a person who has attended church says they might have COVID-19 or have indeed tested positive for the virus?

A parish should not respond if someone is merely suspected of being infected. However, if a person who has attended church informs the parish they have tested positive for COVID-19, the parish must inform both the local public health authority as well as the Diocesan Archdeacon. When doing so the parish must not provide any personal information (e.g., the name and/or contact information) of the individual. This includes keeping the information strictly confidential within the parish and elsewhere.

If the public health authority requests personal contact information from the parish, it should be provided. A parish official (Incumbent or warden) should contact the public health authority (to confirm they are a legitimate health unit) and provide the information contained on the contact list.

If the congregation has any concern about the scope of any direction or request for information from public health, it should consult with the Diocesan Archdeacon. Again, no personal information should be provided to the Diocesan Archdeacon during this consultation.

Should we ask parishioners to inform us if they test positive for COVID within 14 days after attending church?

No. Public health authorities will inform us if it is deemed necessary.

Are we to inform parishioners of a potential exposure and the need for testing/self isolation?

No. It is the mandate of public health authorities to inform people of potential exposure. The parish should not inform people of potential exposure except at the specific direction of public health.

If public health gets backlogged and the process is delayed, should the parish take steps to inform parishioners about a potential risk?

It would not be appropriate for the parish to attempt to fill any perceived gaps in public health's capacities. If a parish is concerned about public health's management of a matter affecting the parish, the Incumbent or churchwardens should consult with the Diocesan Archdeacon.

Regional Health Units within our Diocese

These sites provide you with updates concerning COVID-19, protocols and regulations, and various helpful resources relevant to your area. Please ensure you know the Health Unit serving the area in which your congregation is located.

Thunder Bay Regional Health Unit

<https://www.tbdhu.com/>

Algoma and District Public Health

<http://www.algomapublichealth.com/>

Public Health Sudbury and Districts - <https://www.phsd.ca/>

Timiskaming Health Unit - <http://www.timiskaminghu.com/>

Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue -

<https://www.ciass-at.gouv.qc.ca/en/>

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit

<https://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/index.asp>

Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

<https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/>

Map of Health Unit Districts in Northern Ontario

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-402-x/2015002/maps-cartes/rm-cr06-eng.htm>

Questions may be addressed to

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