



The Diocese of Algoma

Reopening Algoma's Churches (*Amber*)

*Revisions to the document issued on November 23, 2021,
and additional recommendations.
Effective December 22, 2021.*

As we head into the Christmas season, our Diocese, like the rest of the country, finds itself confronted with a new variant of the COVID-19 virus, the variant of concern designated 'Omicron.' This strain spreads more quickly and therefore more widely than previous variants. Therefore, in order to allow for the possibility of continuing to gather for worship and serve the needs of the wider community over the weeks immediately ahead, while also providing reasonable and effective protection against the spread of COVID-19, the following revised regulations and recommendations for the Diocese are issued.

Please remember that, with the arrival of Omicron, it is more important than ever that we ensure we are following closely the best practices advocated by health officials, and the protocols required by civil and ecclesial authority.

Following the revisions provided below, additional information is provided for you, and the listing of health units operating within the geographical boundaries of the Diocese is repeated.

Pandemic conditions will be monitored over the Christmas holiday and the protocols revisited early in the New Year.

Indoor and Online Worship - General

Archbishop Anne permits the clergy, in consultation with parish wardens, to determine whether or not in-person worship will be offered for any or all occasions over the remainder of 2021 and January 2022. Some may choose to continue with all planned in-person liturgies, others may decrease the number of services and/or modify the length, and others may choose to cancel in-person worship altogether for the time being. Please inform your territorial archdeacon of the decisions made for your parish.

Parishes cancelling in-person worship should provide virtual services (live streamed or recorded) if they have the capacity to do so. Those without the capacity to do so should provide a link to an online offering of another parish in their deanery.

Capacity: The maximum allowed for indoor worship is whatever number of persons maintains the physical distancing requirements of our Diocesan protocols between each individual or social bubble at all times, up to a limit of 50% capacity for Christmas Eve services, and 30% capacity thereafter. Please

ensure that people are reminded of what two metres distance looks like. For live streaming and recording, a maximum of 10 persons, including those running the AV equipment, may be present.

Masks: The exception allowing liturgical leaders to remove their masks when preaching, leading prayer, or proclaiming scripture passages is rescinded. Masks must be worn at all times 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. Those for whom the latter applies are urged to consider staying away from in-person worship over the remainder of December and the month of January. For live streaming and recording, all guidelines concerning masking must be followed unless the recording is being made in a room with only one person, or persons from the same household bubble present, in which case the mask may be removed.

Screening: Even where not required by your local health unit, congregations are encouraged (but not required) to practice active screening (directly questioning individuals about symptoms, possible exposure, and travel).

At the Altar: The Preparation of the Gifts is to be done by a single person (Deacon, or Presiding Celebrant if no deacon is present) without the aid of a server in order to reduce the number of persons touching the vessels or standing in proximity to one another. If the Incumbent is not ordained, they may serve in the role of the Deacon for the preparation of the Table and administer the bread at the time of Communion. Only the Presiding Celebrant may stand at the altar. All other persons in the chancel must maintain physical distancing.

Indoor Worship - Music

Singing: Congregational singing is not permitted at this time.

Choirs and Other Vocal Ensembles: Choirs and other vocal ensembles larger than four persons are not permitted at this time. Cantors, soloists, and small vocal ensembles no larger than four people must remain masked and maintain a minimum distance of 4 metres (13ft) with each other, other liturgical leaders, and the congregation.

Indoor Worship - Baptism

If no baptisms are scheduled currently for your congregation for the remainder of 2021 or the early months of 2022, none should be scheduled for any time prior to the Season of Easter, 2022.

Indoor Worship – Coffee Hours/Social Time

Coffee hours and other social times prior to, or following liturgies must not be held until further notice. Likewise, worshippers are not to circulate and ‘visit’ with one another before worship, or linger and socialize after the service.

Outdoor Worship

Recommendation: If you have room for a fire or other heat source, if permissible by local by-laws/regulations, strongly consider holding an outdoor service.

Masks: Masks should be worn at all times 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.

Social Time: Outdoor coffee hours and other social times prior to, or following liturgies must not be held until further notice. Likewise, worshippers are not to circulate and 'visit' with one another before worship, or linger and socialize after the service.

Worship - Funerals and Weddings

If no weddings are scheduled currently for your congregation for the remainder of 2021 or the early months of 2022, none should be scheduled for any time prior to the Season of Easter, 2022.

Other Uses of the Church Buildings

Church buildings are not to be used for meetings or small gatherings such as church bible study or social groups until further notice. At this time, parishes should prepare for Vestry meetings presuming they will be held virtually. Ministries with vulnerable persons and 12-step meetings may continue.

Fundraising

Bazaars, thrift stores, yard sales, and similar fundraising activities are not permitted until further notice.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION...

Mask Guidance

Non-medical masks are the masks worn most often by the general public, whether the masks are homemade or purchased. Medical masks are the N-95 and surgical masks worn by health-care professionals. Non-medical masks are actually not very effective at keeping out the respiratory droplets of others. Masks are more for the protection of the others around you. That is why it is so important that everyone wear masks - so that we are protecting each other. When you acquire your mask, it is important that it be 3-ply (two layers of cotton and one of a non-woven polypropylene fabric). Remember to pinch the wire found in the nose section of your mask. This will fit the mask much better to your face, eliminating a large gap in that area. Your mask should not be gapping anywhere and should completely cover your nose, mouth, and chin. It is important to wash/sanitize your hands before and after you put on/remove your mask as well as if you touch your mask while it's on your face. It is best not to touch the mask at all once you've put it on and do not touch your eyes or other part of your face. Taking the same mask on and off is not a good idea. Bring multiple masks with you when you go

out or leave your mask on the entire time if possible. Masks can be washed but must maintain their shape afterward. Masks that seem to be wearing out in any way should be thrown in the garbage. If your mask becomes dirty or wet, you must change to a new mask. It is strongly recommended you take the time to read through the mask guidance at the link below to familiarize yourself with very important "do's and don'ts" for mask wear and care.

Masks and how to wear them: <https://www.algomapublichealth.com/disease-and-illness/infectious-diseases/novel-coronavirus/non-medical-mask-or-face-covering/>

Things About the Omicron Variant You Should Know

The Omicron variant is repeatedly called "more contagious" or "highly contagious" in comparison to the other COVID-19 variants. Be assured that this variant has not developed a new way of spreading - masks, handwashing, social distancing, and especially vaccinations, are still our best defences against this latest variant of concern. Omicron is very contagious because its incubation time - the time it takes, while in your body, to multiply to the point where you become contagious to others - is shorter than for other COVID-19 variants of concern we have encountered so far. Therefore, people are infecting others in just a few days after contracting the virus, which means the chain of infected people is progressing faster than the contact tracing usually can find the person who started it.

Omicron's short incubation time also means that pro-active testing is less effective. For example, 'Person A' can take a rapid test the day before a big Christmas party and have a negative result after being newly infected with the omicron variant. Person A then becomes contagious so quickly that they infect multiple co-workers at the Christmas party the next day before starting to feel a bit "under the weather" later that evening.

One last thing about the omicron variant: it is likely you are well familiar with the graphic representation of the COVID-19 virus - the round ball with lots of spikes sticking out. Well, the omicron variant has a lot of these spikes, and the spikes are very good at gripping onto cells in your body. So, if the Omicron variant enters into your body - through eyes, nose, or mouth - it is not likely to be easily dislodged.

Tracking the Trends

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/data/case-numbers-and-spread>

Why do we constantly check out the data? Knowing what the COVID-19 variants are doing in our health unit area, surrounding areas, and in Ontario in general, can better help us stay safe. Areas in which cases are doubling, or more than doubling, over the latest two-week period would indicate, for example, that Omicron is likely present along with significant levels of community spread. This might suggest a greater level of caution is necessary - restricting in-person gatherings and, if people are getting together,

to drastically reduce the number of people in any space. Watching the graph of cases for your health unit area also can be a source of hope and comfort.

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.cisss-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>

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