



The Diocese of Algoma

Reopening Algoma's Churches (*Amber, moving toward Green*)

April 6, 2022.

Effective Thursday, April 7, 2022.

Ontario is rapidly dropping pandemic regulations, and some dioceses are following/planning to follow suit, though perhaps not as extensively as the government allows initially. Others are taking an approach of respectful caution. On the advice of our epidemiological consultant, we have been doing the latter, taking a few weeks to see what may result after the recent changes in the government's requirements, particularly as we emerge from the March Break in schools.

The present protocol update continues to ground us in our values and principles, particularly our care for one another and the vulnerable we serve. We continue to take principled and balanced action to promote safety and health. So these protocols acknowledge that instances of COVID-19 remain high in the north. They also aim to be responsive to the progress that has been made in terms of protection against the virus, and the strong desire of congregations to resume the practice of singing and opportunities for congregational fellowship.

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 the Incumbent and wardens of a congregation or parish discern stronger measures than those outlined here are advisable for their context, please inform the Diocesan Archdeacon so he and the Archbishop are aware of such a determination. The Archbishop 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. However, every year-round congregation should be meeting for in-person worship no later than the Paschal Triduum (the weekend of Maundy Thursday through to Easter Sunday).

As we monitor conditions related to COVID-19, these guidelines are subject to alteration for all or part of the Diocese. We have many more decisions to make – when to go mask optional, when to restore the common cup, circulation during the greeting of peace, etc. – which we hope will be addressed as we move through the Great Fifty Days of Easter and enter the more favourable conditions of late spring and summer. We will continue to let science, public health officials, and our faith commitments guide us.

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: Our practices in the Diocese concerning improved ventilation are well established now. For review or 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 continue to 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. The preacher, lectors, and intercessor may unmask while performing the liturgical responsibilities of their ministry if physical distancing of a minimum of 4m is maintained. The Presiding Celebrant may also remove their mask for the apostolic greeting, blessing, and presidential prayers, with the exception of dialogue and prayers spoken at the altar when the Communion elements are present. The Presider and other Communion Ministers must remain masked when administering the bread to communicants.

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 self-screening 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. It is advised that congregations post and/or announce (orally or in the

worship bulletin) that any person attending worship services who tests positive for COVID-19, or is a close contact of a COVID case, immediately inform the parish incumbent or other officially designated person of the congregation.

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.

Login Sheets: A record of those persons in attendance – name and contact information – is no longer required. However, congregations may choose to do so. Such information should be kept no longer than 30 days following each worship service.

Decisions about Liturgical Ceremonial and Movement: The ceremonial normative for the congregation's liturgies, including processions, may be reinstated unless noted otherwise in these protocols. When making decisions about liturgical gestures and movement, including processions and liturgical dance, bear in mind the requirements concerning 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.

Sharing Communion: Continue to share the consecrated bread only. You may return to your usual practice of administering communion or continue using the procedure established in compliance with previous pandemic protocols. Individual communion cups for the wine are not permitted. Our present plan is to reintroduce the use of the common cup before summer. To read about the health implications of this practice, 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: Continue 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. Choir members are required by policy to be fully vaccinated. They are not required to physically distance, though it is advisable that they do if space allows.

Instrumentalists, Choirs and Other Vocal Ensembles: Choirs and other vocal ensembles larger than the previous maximum of four persons may serve in the liturgy. Masks are required during liturgies and at rehearsals.

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).
- 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.
- The person to be baptized, if an infant, remains in the arms of an individual from their household.
- 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 (have) 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.

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.

The Archbishop’s policy will be revised to accommodate this change. Proof of vaccination is no longer required to participate in coffee hour/social time. The Archbishop’s policy on the Diocesan website will be updated to recognize this protocol change.

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 speaking or praying in proximity to the Communion elements. The Presider and Communion ministers must be mask during the distribution of the bread. 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 self-screening 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. 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 no longer required. However, congregations may choose to do so. Such information should be kept no longer than 30 days following each worship service.

Congregational Singing: Permitted. If possible, distancing greater than 2m between individuals and social bubbles and/or the use of masks is highly recommended.

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

Sharing Communion: Continue to share the consecrated bread only. You may return to your usual practice of administering communion or continue using the procedure established in compliance with previous pandemic protocols. Individual communion cups for the wine are not permitted. Our present plan is to reintroduce the use of the common cup before summer. To read about the health implications of this practice, 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

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. People must not congregate at beverage or foods stations.

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, and food items may be 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) is no longer required but may be maintained if the Incumbent and wardens together are in agreement. Such records must not be kept for more than 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.

Indoor Pastoral Visitation

- For all inside pastoral visits, pastoral visitors must wear a mask and maintain physical distancing 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.
- 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

Congregations are encouraged to engage in online fundraising initiatives. Indeed, this is an excellent opportunity to try new and less physically intensive approaches to fundraising.

Outdoor Yard Sales:

- For workers, two-metre physical distancing maintained between individuals or social bubbles, and frequent hand hygiene practiced after handling money or items used by others. It is strongly recommended that workers be fully vaccinated, and must be masked if not fully vaccinated.
- Hand sanitizer should be available to patrons at the entrance and exit from the area, and/or at easily accessible locations.
- The vaccination policy of the Diocese must be followed. The policy is available here: <https://www.dioceseofalgoma.com/about-the-diocese-of-agloma/covid-19-pandemic-response/>

Bazaars, Thrift Stores, etc.:

Parishes may hold bazaars or operate their 'thrift stores' with the following protocols in place:

- Physical Distancing must be maintained. If the thrift store or bazaar is held in the church building or parish hall, mask wearing is required of patrons. It is permissible to require patrons to be masked if the sale is in another space.
- Workers need to be posted at the doors to control access in order to ensure the number of persons present does not exceed that which allows for physical distancing. As well, volunteers will be required in each area to assist in crowd control. (For example, to ensure eager customers do not crowd the baked goods table, but rather maintain physical distancing.) For workers, masks must be worn, two-metre physical distancing maintained between individuals or social bubbles, and frequent hand hygiene practiced after handling money or items used by others. For indoor fundraising events, workers must be fully vaccinated.
- All workers must wear facemasks that fully cover the nose and mouth. Plastic face shields of any type, worn without a facemask, are not sufficient.
- It is recommended that extra facemasks be available in case patrons forget to bring one. Hand sanitizer must be available to patrons at the entrance and exit from each room.

Fundraising Meals:

Onsite fundraising meals are permitted at this time under the following conditions:

- The meal must take place in a well-ventilated space;
- Tables must be placed to ensure physical distancing of patrons can be maintained;
- Masks must be worn by cooks and servers at all times, and by patrons when not eating;
- The facility is equipped with a commercial-grade kitchen. (Exception: outdoor barbeque)

Signage regarding the use of masks, physical distancing, and self-screening must be posted at or immediately inside the entrance to the facility.

Other Food-related Fundraisers:

Many congregations have a custom of baking pies or preparing preserves as a means of raising funds. Such activities are permitted, but may only take place:

- If masks are worn, and the required physical distancing is observed;
- If the practices concerning such food preparation, cleaning, and disinfecting protocols meet the requirements and guidelines of your local health unit.

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>

Regular updates re: COVID-19 activity can be found at the bottom of the page available at this link:
<https://www.algomapublichealth.com/disease-and-illness/infectious-diseases/novel-coronavirus/current-status-covid-19/>

The daily cases do not give a full picture of the situation in our Diocese. In addition to current restrictions on who can be tested, many people do not know they have COVID, or are mildly symptomatic and do not get tested, or take a home test and do not report the result. Monitoring of sewage wastewater provides evidence that the number of COVID cases is higher than reported.

More information about wastewater surveillance is available here:
<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/phm/2021/04/public-health-measures-wastewater-surveillance.pdf?la=en>

Your regional health unit may provide data for your area, such as this from the Algoma Public Health Unit: https://www.algomapublichealth.com/media/5412/ww_mar24.png

As an example of the rationale leading us to maintain the requirement for masks as we reintroduce congregational singing, and drop or loosen other measures, see the following:
<https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/ontario-has-eliminated-all-our-defences-against-covid-subvariant-epidemiologist-1.5842670>

Questions or comments may be addressed to

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