



The Diocese of Algoma

Reopening Algoma's Churches

Issued on The Feast of the Visit of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Elizabeth, May 31, 2022

First revision effective Memorial of Justin Martyr, June 1, 2022

*Second revision effective on the Feast of St. John the Baptist,
June 24, 2022*

The two stages of protocol-revision represent our belief that, at the present time, it is reasonable to loosen the restrictions that were necessary when the COVID-19 pandemic posed its greatest threat.

We offer thanks to all the people of The Diocese of Algoma, particularly those who exercised responsibility for carrying out the expectations of our COVID-19 diocesan protocols over the past two years. These have been trying times, and yet you have “gone above and beyond” in your efforts, and this has allowed us to care well for the people in our congregations and those our congregations serve, particularly the most vulnerable. Thank you!

The first section below outlines revisions to the protocols issued on April 7, 2022.

The second section fully moves us into the “Green Stage” described in the *Loving Our Neighbours* document of The Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario: <https://www.dioceseofalgoma.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Loving-Our-Neighbours-Ecclesiastical-Province-of-Ontario-TEMPLATE-FOR-REOPENING-FINAL-2.pdf>

Please remember that, if circumstances warrant, the following protocols may be revised.

SECTION ONE – Effective June 1, 2022

Indoor Worship - General

Capacity: Physical distancing and pandemic-related limitations on capacity for indoor worship are lifted. In church buildings where it is possible, it is recommended that a space be designated where physical distancing may be maintained for those who desire it. For the time being, the mask requirements for worship remain in place. Signage requirements change in accordance with the change to distancing requirements.

The Greeting of Peace: Physical contact during the Greeting of Peace is now permitted.

Sharing Communion: Use of the common cup may be reintroduced. 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

Indoor Worship - Music

Singing: Physical distancing is no longer required for congregational singing. Masks must be worn during singing, unless singers are physically distanced from one another. Choir members still are to be fully vaccinated.

Indoor Worship - Baptism

There are no longer any pandemic-related limitations placed upon the number of candidates who may be baptized at a single celebration. For newly-baptized infants, it is highly recommended that there still should be a separate spoon for each candidate.

Indoor Worship – Coffee Hours/Social Time

Physical distancing and the wearing of masks are no longer required, but recommended. If singing is to occur at any time, masks must be worn, unless physical distancing is maintained.

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

Outdoor Worship

Capacity: Physical distancing and pandemic-related limitations on attendance for outdoor worship are lifted. Signage requirements change in accordance with the change to distancing requirements.

The Greeting of Peace: Physical contact during the Greeting of Peace is now permitted.

Sharing Communion: Use of the common cup may be reintroduced. 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 and the wearing of masks are no longer required, but recommended. If singing is to occur at any time, masks must be worn, unless physical distancing is maintained.

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

Worship - Funerals and Weddings

Wedding and funeral rites will be conducted according to the present 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/>

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, physical distancing is no longer required, but frequent hand hygiene practiced is urged after handling money or items used by other. It is strongly recommended that workers be fully vaccinated, and must be masked if not fully vaccinated.

Bazaars, Thrift Stores, etc.:

- Physical Distancing is no longer required.
- Workers no longer need to be posted at the doors in order to ensure physical distancing.

SECTION TWO – Effective June 24, 2022

All in-person activities of any size are allowed, but some safety practices adopted during the pandemic should continue:

- Mask wearing is up to the individual, but should be supported, even encouraged.
- Maintain a supply of masks for those who want them.
- Encourage everyone to self-screen for symptoms before they come to church for services, meetings or special events.
- Continue to have hand sanitizer readily available throughout the building.
- Retain the practice of having some meetings and formation events online.

Worship

- There is no pandemic-related numerical limit on the size of services, but physical distancing should be encouraged when possible.
- People who are ill should be reminded not to come to church.

Pastoral Care

- Indoor visits are permitted.
- Refrain from pastoral visits if you are symptomatic.
- Wear masks when visiting people who are elderly, ill, physically fragile or immunocompromised.

Service, Outreach, and Other Program or Missional

- All service and outreach programs can open again, subject to public health guidelines.
- In-person formation, fellowship, and fund-raising events of any size are permitted.
- All children's programs can operate with no size restrictions.
- Food and drink are permitted at church events.

Office and Other Building Operations

- Regular office operations can resume.
- Subject to provincial guidelines, all pandemic restrictions on hosting groups or renting facilities are lifted.
- In order to ensure coverage through our insurers, the guidelines in this plan must be followed at all times for services and all other congregational uses of churches. They must also be followed for any other uses of church buildings and property, including ongoing rentals, new rentals and special events.
- If you are planning an event permitted under these guidelines, it is necessary to answer the following questions to obtain insurance coverage: a. Does public health allow this activity? b. What are the specific timelines for this event? c. Does the sponsor of the event have insurance coverage for it? d. Have you planned how you will meet public health standards?

Please contact Archdeacon Jay Koyle, jay.koyle@dioceseofalgoma.com, if you have questions about the protocols in general, or Jane Mesich, jane.mesich@dioceseofalgoma.com, if you have questions that need to be addressed with our insurers.

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>