



Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island

The Right Reverend Sandra Fyfe, Diocesan Bishop - bishopsoffice@nspeidiocese.ca

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January 27, 2022

RE: Lifting of suspension of in-person worship in Nova Scotia effective immediately and on Prince Edward Island after January 31st, 2022

Dear Friends,

Effective today, I am lifting the suspension on in-person worship in our Anglican parishes in Nova Scotia. Due to current Public Health directives on Prince Edward Island, in-person worship continues to be suspended there until January 31st. In-person worship will be permitted by CPHO on PEI in February (with restrictions) so I am lifting the suspension on in-person worship in our Anglican parishes on Prince Edward Island after January 31st, 2022.

In a news briefing yesterday, Nova Scotia Premier Tim Houston and Medical Director Dr. Robert Strang provided an update on Covid-19 and its rapid spread in the form of the Omicron variant. While he noted that: “we’re not out of this wave yet,” Dr. Strang said that he believes Nova Scotia has passed the peak for Covid-19 infections and has reached the peak for hospitalizations. He was clear to point out that sustaining this depends on the continued compliance with all Public Health protocols, including masking, physical distancing, hand sanitizing and limiting our circles of contact. The high rate of vaccination among adults, children and youth, including booster shots, where applicable, is also a factor. Both the Premier and Dr. Strang said that the provincial government intends to loosen some of the Public Health restrictions in two weeks’ time, or sooner, if the epidemiology continues on a positive trajectory. This includes gathering limits.

With all of this in mind, it seems prudent to allow parishes in Nova Scotia to return to in-person worship in a cautious way at 25% capacity (to a maximum of 50 people) in keeping with the current Public Health protocols, and to allow parishes on Prince Edward Island to do the same once permitted by their Public Health authorities after January 31st, 2022. Those parishes who choose to return to in-person worship should be mindful of the fact that the strain on our healthcare system at this time is still considerable. Many healthcare workers have contracted Covid-19 or have been exposed to the virus and are isolating. Significant staff shortages have added stress to an already overtaxed healthcare system. Our responsible decisions and continued compliance with Public Health directives will help to ensure that we do not add to that strain. Dr. Strang noted yesterday that Covid-19 is not like the common cold, although some have made that comparison. As we can see from the daily updates in our two provinces, Covid-19 can have severe consequences, particularly for those who are unvaccinated or have underlying health conditions.

For those parishes deciding to return to in-person worship (which should only happen after consultation among clergy and Parish leadership), please note that congregational and choral singing are still prohibited. Only one singer, while remaining masked, is permitted to offer leadership in singing for the entire worship service. It is important to clarify that this does not mean one singer per hymn, nor does this allow for a couple or family or group singing together who are part of a “bubble.” These restrictions on singing apply to in-person, livestreamed and pre-recorded worship where that worship is taking place in a Church building where others are present (an exception would be, for instance, if a family or couple records a musical offering from their own home). Presiders and those offering readings or leading prayer should also keep their masks on while speaking, as a further precaution against the spread of the Omicron variant.

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Public Health protocols require that when eating or drinking, people may remove their masks if seated and may only remove their masks for the time it takes to eat or drink. This applies to the receiving of Holy Communion (recognizing that some may prefer kneeling to sitting). Members of the congregation must remain in their pews to receive Holy Communion and should only remove their mask after the administrator has passed by.

Funerals and weddings are permitted following the protocols noted above and with the addition of Proof of Vaccination, where applicable. Receptions are not permitted at this time.

These restrictions and protocols are offered by our Public Health officials and the Diocese out of a concern for the health, safety and wellbeing of all and apply to parishes in Nova Scotia and on Prince Edward Island.

I appreciate the tremendous care our clergy and Parish leaders have been taking during this pandemic to observe these protocols and want to stress the need for us to continue to do so. I realize that many are weary. For almost two years now we have been living with a global pandemic and have had to continually adapt to changing restrictions and protocols. Covid-19 has also impacted our ability to be with family and loved ones, sometimes at significant moments and milestones. I realize the tremendous strain this has caused and continue to pray for all whose lives have been affected by Covid-19.

Just as I am encouraged to see the daylight increasing as we move through these winter months, so I pray that may all we be encouraged and sustained by the light of Christ that surrounds us always.

In peace and hope,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Sandra Fyfe", enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

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