



Bishop Michael J. Pryse

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RE: COVID-19 Update

Dear colleagues,

In some ways, these early days of July have left me feeling the same as I felt last summer. Once again, many of our congregations are in the process of discerning how, when and if they should plan to resume in-person worship; and what exactly such a resumption ought to look like. Undoubtedly, we engage these questions with a healthy dose of both uncertainty and optimism as we watch case numbers across the territory of our Eastern Synod continue to drop.

First and foremost, allow me to express my deepest gratitude to our Rostered Leaders, Lay Leaders, Musicians, Volunteers and congregations for your continued and faithful commitment to the health, safety, and wellbeing of your neighbours. This has been, is, and will continue to be an act of love and service. I am so proud of our church, and the resilience, creativity and faithfulness with which each of you have navigated this long period of pandemic.

A few weeks ago I, along with members of the *Task Force for the Resumption of In-Person Worship*, joined the Ontario House of Bishops in a conversation with Rev. Michael Garner. Michael is an epidemiological consultant who has been advising the leadership of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Michael took time to review current modelling numbers, offered interpretation, and answered our many questions. His recommendation to us, and one that I would echo to each of you, is the need to exercise patience and caution as we make plans to resume in-person worship; even if permitted by our provincial governments to move things along more quickly. This is especially important as we see the Delta variant become dominant in many parts of the Eastern Synod.

I know that we are tired of masks and distancing. I ache with you to sing our favourite hymns in a building filled to overflowing! That time is coming – but it's not here yet.

To that end, I must ask for your continued adherence to the safety protocols which have helped us navigate these turbulent waters thus far. Please continue to follow increased sanitization protocols, maintain physical distance, wear a three-layer mask when indoors or when physical distancing is not possible outdoors, refrain from singing, and continue to limit social events such as coffee hours or potlucks where food is shared. When possible, outdoor visits on patios or front lawns are preferable. As always, please also refer to the most current public health directives which can be viewed at the links below.

One area of frequent concern, is the number of persons who are permitted to gather for indoor public worship. Given the complexity of these rules, I would encourage you to review these regulations frequently by visiting the appropriate provincial government links below.

Of particular note, however, is a recent change to the Government of Ontario's formula used to determine the maximum gathering limit for Places of Worship. Gathering capacity is now based on the square meters of a room (not building), instead of the seating capacity. Churches in the province of Ontario are required to use the same calculations as would apply to other [facilities open to the public](#):

- **15% Capacity**
 - Square Meters divided by 26.67 (Rounded down to the nearest whole number)
- **25% Capacity**
 - Square Meters divided by 16 (Rounded down to the nearest whole number)
- **50% Capacity**
 - Square Meters divided by 8 (Rounded down to the nearest whole number)

These calculations may vary slightly by region. As an added measure, please consult your local public health unit prior to resuming any in-person gatherings.

Please know that I, and the Task Force, remain committed to walking with you as we discern our way forward. I am pleased that we have partnered with the Centre for Spirituality and Media at Martin Luther University College to offer opportunities for discussion and discernment as we journey toward the fall. One such offering will be held this Thursday at 6:30pm EDT (bit.ly/OKWhatsNext). Similarly, the Summer Sermon Series and our growing collection of Worship Resources are available for your use. I encourage you to make use of these resources, and to pool your collective creative energies to support one another.

Siblings in Christ, God is doing a new thing! From the phone trees that were speedily strung up back in March 2020, to the hybrid evolution of our worshipping practices that continue today: we have exemplified a far greater capacity for change that I would have ever thought possible. And while we may wish to revert back to the comfort and predictability of our pre-pandemic practices, I would urge us to take the necessary time to reflect and to discern where the Spirit is leading her church. In order for us to live fully into the new things God is calling us to do, we must pause long enough to pray, look, and listen.

So let us journey forward with patience and caution.

Let us continue the best practices we have followed throughout the pandemic; encourage, those who are able, to get vaccinated as early as possible; and make good use of outdoor opportunities to responsibly gather in God's good creation.

You are in our prayers. Please let us know if we can be of assistance in the days to come.

Peace to you as you discern, pray, plan and prepare.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a cross symbol followed by the name "Michael" in a cursive script.

Bishop Michael J. Pryse

Provincial COVID-19 Reopening Resources

Nova Scotia: Reopening Plan

<https://novascotia.ca/reopening-plan/>

New Brunswick: Path To Green

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/corporate/promo/covid-19/alert-levels/path-to-green.html>

Québec: Reopening Plan

<https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/progressive-regional-alert-and-intervention-system/map-of-covid-19-alert-levels-by-region>

Ontario: Roadmap To Reopen

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/reopening-ontario>