

Dear friends,

We met as synod leadership in a virtual Town Hall on June 30<sup>th</sup> with about 70 faith leaders, lay and rostered gathering together. Rev. Dr. Ali Tote and I facilitated a conversation. We gathered in Word and prayer, listened to Ali's presentation on the state of the pandemic in our province, and engaged in a conversation about the coming removal of Health Directives on July 11. Pastor Ali and I met following the meeting and, based on the state of the pandemic and on the consultation with synod leadership, present the following synod recommendations for our faith communities.

**Provincial Health Directives planned to begin July 11, 2021:** With provincial vaccination goals being reached, and COVID numbers in sharp decline, the Provincial Health Authority is removing all Health Directives from the province. Nothing will be mandated provincially, beyond high level direction like staying home if you have COVID symptoms and practicing good hygiene. The Health Authority is not providing direction for 'phasing' into this new situation. Synods, churches, faith communities are free to work their way into this new world as they see fit.

**Synod guidelines:** Throughout the pandemic, synod guidelines have shown deep respect for our provincial Health Authorities. We continue to do so with the reopening phase beginning on July 11. Based on Pastor Ali's expertise and our consultation in the Town Hall, the following are synod guidelines for our faith communities beginning July 11<sup>th</sup> (given no change in planned Health Directives).

1. In line with Health Authority advice, synod encourages our faith communities to move forward to in-person worship, complete with Holy Communion, congregational singing, etc.
2. Synod recommends that faith leaders continue to encourage their people to be vaccinated for the safety of the whole community.
3. Synod recommends the continued display of signage directing those experiencing COVID symptoms to stay home.
4. Synod recommends the continued vigilant use of hand-sanitizer when we meet, especially for those who may be serving communion.
5. Synod recommends that we delay, at least until fall.
  - a. the use of the Common Cup in worship
  - b. the practice of physically sharing the peace with hugs and handshakes.
  - c. the practice of the pastor shaking hands with the gathering following service.
  - d. pot-luck meals.
6. Given the low vaccination levels of children, synod recommends that faith communities do not hold in-person Vacation Bible School gatherings this summer.
7. Continuing with masking at worship was discussed at some length in the consultation. Synod recommends:
  - a. That faith communities direct their communities to the Public Health Agency of Canada information for making personal choices as vaccinated or un-vaccinated people: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/phac-aspc/documents/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/awareness-resources/vaccinated-against-covid-19-public-health-measures/vaccinated-against-covid-19-public-health-measures.pdf>
  - b. In Regina and Saskatoon many congregants may feel the need to continue masking during worship. A full church of unmasked people singing, in a city that a month ago, was under heavy restriction might be a lot to take in for those communities. Synod

recommends that congregations, particularly in those cities, announce that that it is quite understandable that some parishioners may choose, at this time, to continue to mask during worship. As the Health Authority is not mandating masks at this time, synod advises congregational councils not to require congregants to mask. However, congregation councils certainly may choose to advise continued masking during worship during the summer to aid congregants in transition.

**Remember that our church polity places the responsibility to decide how worship is conducted on the local congregational leadership—lay leadership and rostered ministers in consultation. Synod guidelines are provided as advice to faith community leaders, based on epidemiological expertise of Dr. Tote, and based on synod’s consultation with synod faith leaders.**

Note that as the next phase of the pandemic journey unfolds this summer, synod will be monitoring the situation and will be in consultation with the Health Authorities. If things roll out as the Provincial Health Authority envisions, synod faith community leaders will not be called into a Town Hall until we meet about Fall opening matters on August 18<sup>th</sup> at 7 pm.

Please make contact with me or with Pastor Ali if you have any questions on Synod guidelines at this time.

Peace,

Bishop Sid