



3/19/2021

Dear friends,

We met as synod leadership yesterday with just over 100 faith leaders, lay and rostered gathering together. Rev. Dr. Ali Tote (a pastor on our roster and an epidemiologist) and I facilitated a conversation. During the week before our meeting, Pastor Ali had issued a survey to our leadership, with over 100 responses. Yesterday, we gathered in Word and prayer, listened to Ali's presentation on the state of the pandemic in our province, studied the results of the survey, and engaged in a conversation about the possibilities and risks in moving forward as a synod. Pastor Ali and I met following the meeting and, based on the state of the pandemic and on the consultation with synod leadership, present a summary of provincial Health Directives for faith communities, and synod recommendations for our faith communities.

Provincial Health Directives as of March 19, allow for faith communities to meet in worship with a limit of 1/3 of capacity (to a maximum of 150) while rigorously following Health Directives. With the COVID variants suddenly appearing in Regina last week, that Health Directive has been amended to restrict Regina faith communities to a hard cap of 30 participants. Synod supports provincial Health Directives as a non-negotiable basic standard for our faith communities.

Synod guidelines throughout the pandemic, based on our consultation with synod leadership, have been more rigorous than Health Directives. The church of Jesus is a place of healing. We take that call seriously in the pandemic. We would err on the side of keeping our faith community safe, and avoiding finding our faith communities as a place of COVID outbreak.

A number of factors shape synod guidelines at this point.

1. The survey indicated that there is a great eagerness to return to worship by Easter day. We have already gone through Easter and Christmas under limitation. We would love to worship together.
2. COVID numbers have dropped considerably across the province in the last month. Vaccination levels are growing by the day—though still slower than we had hoped.
3. The concerning increase in COVID numbers in the last week have been centered in Regina (as the new Health Directives recognize) and secondarily in Saskatoon. COVID numbers in other areas of the synod are quite small.

Synod recommendations on the current phase in the pandemic:

1. **Synod advises Faith communities in Regina and Saskatoon (and communities who have a majority of members whose work takes them regularly into the two cities) to continue with Virtual worship services at least until new Health Directives come out.**

2. **Synod advises Faith communities outside of the Saskatoon and Regina region either to continue with virtual service or to worship in person with a cap of 30 participants.** A sudden influx of worshippers in these faith communities including family members from Regina and Saskatoon ‘coming home’ could bring Regina/Saskatoon COVID problems to other areas of our synod. For the same reason, Synod advises against supply ministers based in Regina and Saskatoon agreeing to lead worship in other synod faith communities at this time.

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. Having said that, the synod recommendations do come from advice grounded in science, and from a widely based synod consultation with lay and rostered synod leadership. Please make contact with me or with Pastor Ali if you have any questions on Synod guidelines and Health Directives.

In closing, I was really struck by a prayer offered by one of our bishops in a meeting this past week. He said, simply: “Lead us Lord, as once you led Israel through the wilderness.” My prayer for our synod came to mind: Lead us, loving God, as we continue on a journey that sometimes seems endless. Provide us with ‘manna’, just enough daily blessing to get us through each day in this strange time. Manna that will sustain us until we can once again ‘plant our fields’. And by all means, O God, hold us close in these days, so that we that may together walk the remainder of this pandemic journey in the wilderness trusting that your New Day is coming. Amen.

Peace,

Bishop Sid

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