

3/4/2022

To the faith communities of the Saskatchewan Synod,

Opening

Last night, March 3, about 70 rostered ministers and congregational leaders met in a Synod Town Hall. Once again, we met to have a conversation about the latest events in the pandemic and about how we as synod leaders were planning on addressing those events. Our agenda included Dwelling in the Word, a presentation by Dr. Tote on the state of the pandemic and relevant Health Orders, and a time for questions and comments from around the 'virtual' table. It was a fine conversation. Firstly, it was just good to see familiar faces working with the same issues as we are. Secondly, the conversation gave us all a better understanding of where we are situated in the world.

I promised to put out in the next day or two, 'synod guidelines' based on this consultation.

Two Principles

What came out of the consultation? I would say two key principles:

1. Faith communities need to be encouraged in person. We are starving for gathering together, receiving sacrament together, and just being together. It has been almost two years now of interrupted, limited community. Our faith communities need to be encouraged to find a way of being together in person.
2. On the other hand, we also realize that the pandemic is not over, in spite of the lifting of Health Orders. In order for faith community members to confidently meet together, churches will need to provide protection from the risks of the pandemic.

Based on those two principles synod recommends the following Encouragements and Restrictions.

Encouragements:

Meet in person: With high vaccination numbers across the country there has been every reason for people to meet together in secular places: rinks, libraries, restaurants. Similarly there is every reason for people of faith to meet in person for worship. Virtual worship has been manna in the wilderness for all of us. But we do better when we meet together.

Continue with virtual worship gatherings: We have learned during the pandemic that we have community members who have met with us virtually, who had rarely met with us in person. We have found a way of broadening our reach during the pandemic. Continue with that.

No capacity limits: With high vaccination numbers across the country, there are no capacity limitations imposed on worship gatherings. Nor is there any recommended by synod.

Offer communion frequently: We are starving for the sacrament. We have practiced communion safely in a variety of ways across the synod, following synod guidelines. We can do this.

Hymnbooks may be used providing there is a 24 hour period before they are used again.

Coffee after gathering: While having coffee after a large group has meant too many unmasked faces in the narthex, coffee for a small gathering of under 20 can be offered safely. Have one person sanitize and be designated as the 'server'. Outside groups (particularly AA, Alanon etc.) depend on sharing coffee together in their healing process. So do we. We can also meet outside (when the weather changes this spring) for coffee time no matter what size the group might be.

Restrictions

Strongly recommend masking: At least until the end of May, synod strongly recommends that masks be worn in our gatherings. The group felt that most of our people would feel much safer from the pandemic if masks are worn at indoor events. This strong recommendation does not go as far as a mandate. Faith communities rather are urged to strongly recommend masking, to put up signage to that effect, and to ask their leadership to model the practice.

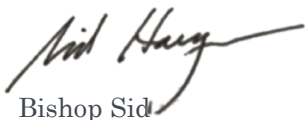
Delay scheduling community meals: While communion is a quite formal action, community meals are risky business. Potlucks and community meals involve eating and sitting together while unmasked and food handled by many hands—both an opportunity for pandemic spread.

Closing

Hopefully these guidelines will provide faith communities with direction for the weeks ahead. Remember that synod guidelines remain 'our best advice' at this time. Congregational leadership will need to prayerfully consider their own context to determine the best way forward.

Please make contact with me or with Pastor Ali if you have any questions on Synod guidelines for your particular context during this time.

Peace,



Bishop Sid

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