

I. Saskatchewan Health Authority Directives for Faith Communities:

Please follow this link for the most recent directives. Note that there have been several changes since the June version was presented.

[Saskatchewan Health Authority Directives for Faith Communities](#)

II. Guiding Principles for SK Synod faith communities

- Abide by the provincial guidelines.
- Create and maintain a safe worship environment.
- Promote safe worship practices.
- Care for the vulnerable.
- Minimize risk by using the most restrictive approach first and easing into the least restrictive
- Emphasize and contribute to the health of the community (Population/community health focus).
- Practice:
 - Physical Distancing
 - Wear face masks
 - Proper hygiene.
- Adopt a cautious approach in re-opening church spaces for worship.
- Ensure that the church's role of health promotion, health education, and leadership is fulfilled.
- Remember that churches are hubs of close relationships and continuing to find innovative ways to help build & foster close relationships.
- Be good stewards by caring for one another, the community, the environment, and the world.
- Remember that we are the people of God on whom we all depend.

III. SK Synod Guidelines to Administer Provincial Directives (Revised Nov 26, 2020 - *highlighted text identifies revisions since the August version was released*)

PART 1: WORSHIP SPACES

1. Synod now recommends that faith communities NOT meet in-person for worship

- a. Synod now considers that with increasing COVID numbers, the safest approach is to move to virtual online worship wherever possible.
- b. Faith communities continue to decide the best course for their context. While synod strongly recommends considering alternatives to in-person worship, if congregational council and the pastor decide to move toward in-person worship, synod urges the faith community to double-down on following Sask Health Directives and on the Synod guidelines and checklist for in-person worship.

2. In-person Worship

- a. Maximum size of gathering: Provincial directives as of November 26 limit gathering size to 1/3 of the capacity of the worship space or 30 people whichever is the lesser amount.
- b. To help ensure safety, individuals must be separated by 2 meters, unless they are part of the same extended household group.
- c. Initially, keep worship services to 30-45 minutes maximum in length.
 - i. This helps reduce time spent together and the potential for virus transmission.
 - ii. In addition, this helps limit washroom use by worshippers.
- d. In-person services should be done only if following the necessary physical distancing, mask wearing, and safe hygiene measures.
- e. Registration
 - i. Registration of worship participants is expected.
 - ii. Registration should be done ahead of time – E.g. Online/phone sign-up.
 - iii. Registration ahead of time helps minimize and reduce physical contact and the sharing of items such as pens and pencils to register in the building.
 - iv. Detailed worship attendance must be kept with worshippers' names and addresses for potential contact tracing.
 - v. Wherever possible, keep a map of seating arrangements (or a photo including names of participants) that will be used in the event of contact tracing.
- f. Encourage the medically vulnerable, anyone sick or symptomatic to stay home without excluding them. Wherever possible, they should access the service in printed, audio and/or video formats.
- g. Ensuring and maintaining physical distance
 - i. No physical contact is permitted.
 - ii. Physical distance of 2 meters between people at all times with everyone wearing a mask.
 - iii. No handshaking or passing objects between individuals.
 - iv. Ushers, greeters, etc. must maintain 2 meter physical distance with others.
 - v. Ensure no physical contact takes place except between members of the same household.
 - vi. The sharing of the peace is done without physical contact. Bowing, gesturing, nodding, etc. are examples of ways to share the peace.
- h. Wearing facemasks
 - i. Everyone including pastors, leaders, and all worshippers must wear a mask through worship with the following exceptions:
 - ii. Children 5 and under (WHO & UNICEF recommendation)
 - iii. Children, adults, and elderly with breathing difficulties

- iv. People who cannot wear a mask may consider alternatives such as face shields
 - v. people who cannot wear masks for health reasons should be accommodated and should be seated at least 20 ft away from other people.
 - vi. It is important that people with underlying health issues stay home initially.
 - vii. Congregations should consider purchasing masks to supply worshippers who do not have a mask.
- i. Offering
- i. Online and remote giving options should be considered. Use pre-authorized remittance, E-transfer, cheques, etc.
 - ii. During worship, there is to be no passing of offering baskets/plates. Consider using a depository located in the sanctuary where offering is safely deposited.
- j. Worship materials
- i. Wherever possible, use electronic means for worship. The liturgy and the readings can be projected on a screen.
 - ii. Paper bulletins must be single-use and properly discarded after use.
 - 1. Bulletins must be placed on designated seats before worship.
 - 2. Bulletins should be safely dropped in a depository after worship.
 - iii. Worship books can be used provided the following guidelines are observed.
 - 1. One person – one book policy is to be followed.
 - 2. After use, worship books must not be used again until after a 24-hour period has elapsed.
- k. Managing physical worship and worship space.
- i. Clear management of entry and exit for safe physical distancing.
 - ii. Marking should be done to indicate the directional flow of people (e.g. use of arrows on the floor).
 - iii. Seating
 - 1. Mark seating areas that respect the 2 meters physical distancing rule and post visual reminders to observe physical distancing.
 - 2. Members of the same household are encouraged to be seated together.
 - 3. There must be a minimum of 2 meter physical distancing between household groups or worshippers of different households.
 - 4. Once seated, worshippers should remain in place until the end of worship.
 - 5. Mark pew entry and exit and other seating areas wherever possible so that there is unidirectional flow of people between the pews.
 - iv. Same day multiple gatherings
 - 1. Start and end times of worship services must allow safe exit of the

first group of worshippers and safe entry of the second group of worshippers.

2. Allow for time to clean and disinfect common surfaces between services. A minimum of 45 minutes between the services is recommended

I. Singing and music

- i. No congregational singing is permitted
 1. Congregational singing is a high-risk activity.
 2. There is a high likelihood of projecting virus particles into the air.
- ii. The use of piano, guitar, organ and recorded music is recommended.
- iii. There is to be no use of woodwind or brass instruments at this time. These instruments store and disperse aerosolized respiratory fluids.

m. Sacrament protocol

i. Preamble

1. Holy Baptism and Holy Communion generally involve physical contact between individuals.
2. The procedure surrounding these sacraments should be modified to maintain safe physical distance.
3. Pastors and leaders must sanitize their hands before during and after the preparation and the administration of the sacraments.

ii. Holy Baptism

1. The baptismal font must be properly sanitized before use.
2. The pastor must not touch the water. The pastor should use a pouring vessel to pour the water unto the head of the person being baptized.
3. The person being baptized, and their family and sponsors must remain in their seats until the time of the actual baptism.
4. At the time of baptism, a family member or the sponsor comes to the baptismal font with the child being baptized.
5. The pastor conducts the baptism without touching the baptized.
6. In the case of an adult, the adult comes to the baptismal font alone.
7. The anointing with oil is done using a cotton ball.
8. The pastor and anyone around the baptismal font wear a mask.

iii. Holy Communion

1. Holy Communion is to be administered only when a faith community has determined and rehearsed a method of safe distribution.
2. If proceeding with Holy Communion, ensure proper hygiene.
 - a. Synod advises that Communion be served in one kind only: bread.
 - b. Only one person prepares the elements for communion.
 - c. The person preparing the elements must wear a mask at all times.
 - d. All vessels must be properly sanitized before use.

- e. The elements are prepared as sets of one or both kinds
 - These sets are placed in areas where communicants can partake while keeping a 2 meter physical distance from other communicants.
 - Ensure there is visible marking for directional flow of communicants.
 - Leaders are encouraged not to physically commune communicants.
 - Where this is not possible, leaders must sanitize their hands prior to the distribution of communion to each person.
- f. Communicants sanitize their hands before and after receiving Holy Communion.
- g. Communicants are encouraged to wear masks.
- h. Consider purchasing individually wrapped communion sets or having communicants bring own elements. The pastor presides over the elements and people commune themselves or each other within their household.
- n. End of worship and dismissal
 - i. Dismissal and exit to abide by physical distancing rules.
 - ii. Physical fellowship time and other social events are not allowed.
 - iii. Sharing of meal or drinks not allowed.
- o. Parking: Parking lots to be marked out to help maintain physical distancing.
- p. Groups using the church building
 - i. Church groups or outside groups meeting in the church building should abide by the general guidelines.
 - ii. They must maintain 2 meter safe physical distancing
 - iii. They must wear masks at all times.
 - iv. They must practice proper hygiene and sanitize their hands often.
 - v. At the end of their meeting, clean and sanitize all surfaces touched or used.

3. Remote, Virtual Worship Services Recommended

- a. The synod encourages remote, virtual, or drive-in services at this time.
- b. Zoom, YouTube, Facebook and other digital or remote services are encouraged.
- c. Drive-in services
 - i. Drive-in worship services must be approved by health authorities before proceeding.
 - ii. Worshippers at drive-in services are to remain in vehicles throughout the service.
 - iii. Vehicles are to be parked in designated spots separated by at least 2 meters.

PART 2: HYGIENE

1. Overall Hygiene/Cleaning

- a. Increase cleaning and disinfection of commonly contacted areas. This includes seating areas, doorknobs, handles, ceremonial objects, elevator buttons, railings and light switches.
- b. Use sanitizers with a minimum of 70% alcohol level.
- c. Encourage everyone to practice proper hand hygiene and proper etiquette when coughing or sneezing.
- d. Place an alcohol-based hand sanitizer in dispensers or provide hand washing stations near doors and other high-traffic areas.
- e. Frequently empty garbage bins

2. Washrooms

- a. People are to be encouraged to use washrooms at home before coming to worship.
- b. There should be limited access to washrooms.
- c. Access to washrooms should be done in a way that promotes physical distancing. Washroom entry and exit should provide adequate space for entry/exit.
- d. People should use washrooms only if absolutely necessary and the surfaces touched should be sanitized afterwards.
- e. Washrooms must be well stocked with liquid soap, paper towels, and warm running water.

PART 3: LOOKING AHEAD

1. Timeline

Churches are in this for the long haul. A year or more of adjusting to COVID-19 may be necessary.

2. Vaccine and treatment

- a. There are promising and ongoing clinical trials of potential vaccines around the world including at the Vido-Intervac at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.
- b. No effective treatment is confirmed as yet. However, a combination of antiviral drugs including Remdesivir for example have been positive.

3. The role of the church

- a. The church's pandemic response throughout history has been excellent
 - i. The Spanish Flu in the 1920s was another instance when the church had to close church building doors for worship. The decision was widespread among church leadership at the time. Although there were a few voices of dissent.
 - ii. Today, the church has also responded very well to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, just as was the case for the Spanish Flu, a minority of church leaders have opposed closing church buildings for worship.
- b. The church always bounces back from pandemics.

Note: These recommendations for administrating provincial directives will be updated on the synod website (www.sasksynod.ca) as the government of Saskatchewan and Public Health officials roll out new measures.

This document has been prepared for use in the Saskatchewan Synod by Bishop Sid Haugen and Pastor Ali Tote. For questions, please use the contact information below.

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