



June 12, 2020

Dear friends,

The COVID pandemic has radically changed the way we do church. Since mid-March we have closed down our worship spaces following the guidelines of the provincial health authority and have widely engaged in remote and virtual worship. Phase 3 of the government's reopen Saskatchewan plan has now specifically provided directives for churches should they choose to gradually reopen their worship spaces. The directives are necessarily quite broad to address the various sizes and shapes of faith communities in the province. Our churches need to administer the directives for their own context. That is a daunting task.

Synod has set out to assist its congregations in administering the provincial directives by providing detailed advice in this document. On the one hand, congregations are free to adopt or adapt synod's specific advice to their own context. On the other, the advice is drawn from the significant epidemiological expertise of one of our pastors, Rev. Dr. Ali Tote.

The **Guiding principles** below have shaped the synod's recommendations and I would commend them for your use even as you adapt the recommendations to your context. The second section, **Administering Provincial Directives for Phase 3** walks you through decisions about reopening. The third section, the **Checklist for churches Reopening**, provides detailed steps needed to prepare the worship space for reopening during COVID-19.

Peace,

Bishop Sid

Sask Synod guidelines regarding the reopening of our worship spaces in response to the provincial government's Phase 3 decision to allow the reopening of worship spaces during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Guiding Principles

- 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 reopening 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.

Administering Provincial Directives for Phase 3 (Effective June 8, 2020)

PART 1: WORSHIP SPACES

1. First Option: Remote, Virtual or Drive-in services

- a. The synod encourages continued remote, virtual, or drive-in services as the first option. Remote and virtual is preferred over drive-in services.
- b. Zoom, YouTube, Facebook and other digital or remote services are encouraged with no more than 10 people in the place of worship.
 - i. This means 10 people either in the sanctuary or in any given home where people may be gathered, unless they are all members of the same household.
 - ii. This is not to be confused with the maximum number of people for physical worship.
- 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 2m (6 ft).

2. Second Option: In-Person services

- a. The overall guidelines initially allowed for indoor gathering of a maximum of 15 people and outdoor gathering of a maximum of 30 people. However, as of June 11, the provincial guidelines specific to worship spaces moved to 30% capacity or up to 150 people whichever is less.
 - i. These guidelines state that in a church space that can accommodate up to 150 people as less than 30% of its capacity, people should be in groups of 30 for a maximum of five groups.
 - ii. There should be a minimum of 2 m physical distance between people within a group of 30.
 - iii. There should be a minimum of 5 m physical distance between groups
 - iv. These groups of 30 people can be in different areas (e.g. balcony or adjacent room) within the worship space.
 - v. Synod recommends abiding by a maximum of 30 people for indoor and outdoor gathering at this point.
 - vi. Initially, keep worship services to about 30 minutes in length.
 - 1. This helps reduce time spent together and the potential for virus transmission.
 - 2. In addition, this helps limit washroom use by worshippers.
- b. In-person services should be done only if following the necessary physical distancing, mask wearing, and safe hygiene measures.
- c. 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 that will be used in the event of contact tracing.
- d. 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.
- e. Ensuring and maintaining physical distance
 - i. No physical contact is permitted.
 - ii. Physical distance of 2m between people at all times. Where that is not possible ensure everyone is wearing a mask.
 - iii. No handshaking or passing objects between individuals.
 - iv. Ushers, greeters, etc. must maintain 2m 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.
- f. Wearing facemasks
- i. Pastors, leaders, and all worshippers should be wearing a mask through worship.
 - ii. Congregations should consider purchasing masks to supply worshippers who do not have a mask.
 - iii. People who cannot wear masks for health reasons should be accommodated and should be seated at least 20 ft away from other people.
 - iv. It is important that people with underlying health issues stay home initially.
- g. 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.
- h. 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. Avoid using worship books wherever possible. When used, worship books should be used and removed after each use.
 - 1. One person – one book policy is to be followed.
 - 2. After use, worship books must be removed for at least 72 hours prior to being used again.
- i. 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 2m 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 2m 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

j. Singing and music

- i. No congregational singing
 1. Congregational singing is a high-risk activity.
 2. There is a high likelihood of projecting virus particles into the air.
- ii. If necessary, only the Pastor or leader should sing.
 1. A mask must be worn, **AND** significant physical distance maintained.
 2. Normally, the singing leader must be at least 20 ft away from the rest of the congregation
- iii. The use of piano, guitar, organ is recommended.
- iv. There is to be no use of woodwind or brass instruments. These instruments store and disperse aerosolized respiratory fluids

k. 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. It is advisable that Holy Communion be postponed until a time when it is safe.
 2. If proceeding with Holy Communion, ensure proper hygiene.

- a. 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 2m 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 having communicants bring own elements. The pastor presides over the elements and people commune themselves or each other within their household.
- l. 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.
 - m. Parking: Parking lots to be marked out to help maintain physical distancing.
 - n. Groups using the church building
 - i. Church groups or outside groups meeting in the church building should abide by the general guidelines of 15 people indoor and 30 people outdoors.
 - ii. They must maintain 2m 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.

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

- a. Churches are in this for the long haul. A year or more of adjusting to COVID-19 may be necessary.
- b. Fall/Winter 2020 will provide an important clue in the cycle of the Coronavirus.

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.
 - ii. The decision was widespread among church leadership at the time. Although there were a few voices of dissent.
 - iii. 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.

4. Summary of Synod guidelines for Phase 3 reopening of Worship spaces

- a. Remote/virtual worship
 - i. Continue with remote/virtual worship. Remote/virtual worship remains the safest way forward for our congregations and for our communities at this point in the pandemic.
 - ii. Churches who have not been able to 'meet virtually' over these months, may see the need to reopen physical worship earlier.

- b. Physical worship
 - i. If a congregation decides to proceed with physical worship, synod advises a delay in physical worship for at least two weeks from the government's directive on start date (until June 28, 2020). This gives congregations time to properly address the lengthy requirements for preparation.
 - ii. If it is possible, start with outdoor worship at the start date on June 28. (Indoor worship could then resume July 26).
 - iii. Given the complexity of preparation for sacraments, delay Holy Communion after start up for two additional weeks (until July 12).
 - iv. Broadly, it would be preferable to delay physical worship until late August or early September. This will allow enough time to see the trend in new COVID-19 cases.
 - v. Size of gathering:
 - 1. Synod is recommending at this point, a more restrictive number than the recent provincial edit to Phase three. We recommend limiting the physical gathering at this point to 30 people or 30% of worship area capacity, whichever is less.
 - 2. If COVID numbers continue to decline, Phase 4 will increase gathering size and could happen as early as June 22, 2020.
 - vi. Before resuming physical worship.
 - 1. Consider doing a practice run with a few people prior to the first physical worship to ensure the congregation is ready.
 - 2. Thoroughly complete the checklist provided below.

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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Checklist for churches reopening worship spaces during COVID-19
(Adapted from the Checklist from the Synod of Alberta and the Territories)

	Person Responsible	Done
Preparing the facility		
Clean and disinfect high-touch/shared surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, toilet handles, faucets and taps, elevator buttons, railings.		
Designate separate entrance and exit with signage.		
Place hand sanitizer containing at least 70% alcohol content at the entrance and exit and throughout the facility. If Holy Communion will be celebrated, have hand sanitizer available for worshipers as they proceed to the table.		
Put up posters educating worshipers about COVID-19 and distancing protocols.		
Determine whether your usual worship space is the best place for worship at this time. Perhaps you have a fellowship hall that is larger and more suitable just now. Consider worshipping outdoors first.		
Clearly indicate the route worshipers are to use from the entry to the worship space and indicate proper physical distancing, perhaps with markers on the floor.		
Close common areas.		
Close rooms that will not be in use.		
Remove all shared items such as brochures and hymnals, and any soft surfaces such as children’s busy bags and stuffed animals.		
To indicate proper physical distancing, rearrange chairs or rope off every second pew.		
Ensure that worship leaders will have appropriate physical distance from each other and will have their own microphones.		
Place floor indicators to show physical distance for those who are waiting to receive Holy Communion.		
Designate how many people will be allowed in a washroom at one time; post a sign with floor indicators in the hallway to show physical distance for those who are waiting.		
Preparing worshipers		
Communicate that staff, volunteers and worshipers who are ill or who have been exposed to COVID-19 must stay home.		

	Person Responsible	Done
Communicate that those with underlying medical conditions and those over 65 years old are at a higher risk of experiencing worse symptoms than others if they contract the virus.		
Communicate changes to worship space.		
Communicate that worshipers are asked to keep a 6 ft physical distance at all times, practice good hand hygiene and sneeze into their elbows. It is recommended that worshipers wear non-medical masks when in the church.		
Children are to remain with their parents at all times.		
Communicate changes to the worship service in advance (e.g., no congregational singing, reception of Holy Communion, no greeting or coffee hour before or after service).		
Preparing to Worship		
The number of people allowed in the worship space is determined as per provincial guidelines according to phase, and a plan is in place to determine how many services will be offered in order to accommodate those who would wish to worship.		
A plan is in place to determine who will worship when.		
A plan is in place to continue to include in worship those who will not attend in-person worship.		
A list is kept of worshipers, staff and volunteers at all services in case someone later tests positive for COVID-19 and their movements must be traced. This list will be kept for two weeks before it will be destroyed or deleted.		
Worship is planned in accordance with Public Health guidelines.		
Congregants are reminded to clean their hands on entry and exit.		
A plan is in place to help worshipers participate in the service. A single-use bulletin is left on chairs or pews AND/OR the bulletin is projected on a screen or available online.		
No congregational singing is permitted. Recorded or streamed music may be played. Soloists and instrumentalists may provide music following recommendations for safe distancing and/or barriers.		

	Person Responsible	Done
Children will remain with their parents, even if a children's time is offered.		
The Peace is shared without physical contact.		
The offering plate is neither circulated nor presented at the altar. There is a plan to receive gifts safely. Encourage worshipers to make contributions through electronic means.		
A plan is in place to offer the sacraments safely.		
People are designated to clean and disinfect the worship space between services.		
Holy Communion		
Those preparing the elements and vessels for Holy Communion wear masks and use excellent hygiene procedures.		
Pastors and assistants wash and sanitize their hands before blessing the elements and distributing Holy Communion. In phase three, physical communion distribution is not encouraged. Communicants serve themselves from individually prepared communion safely placed one apart from another.		
If the presiding minister has underlying health conditions (although not sick) or is otherwise vulnerable, they may have an assistant distribute Holy Communion.		
Pastors and assistants wear a mask when distributing Holy Communion. Communicants are advised to also wear a mask.		
Worshipers are directed to servers in an organized fashion, leaving physical distance between family groups.		
Communicants sanitize their hands as they proceed to the table.		
It is recommended that to minimize close contact, the communicant pauses 2 metres away from the minister, who says, "The body of Christ," to which the response "Amen" is given. The minister should take special care not to touch the communicant, or should pause to wash hands again, if necessary.		
Communion in one kind is recognized as a full experience of the Sacrament. Consider offering bread only.		
Wafers or gluten-free crackers require less handling than bread.		
Common cup and intinction are not permitted.		
If wine or grape juice is offered, it must be distributed in individual glasses, with enough room around each that worshipers touch only their own glass.		

	Person Responsible	Done
Worshippers are directed back to their seats in an organized fashion, leaving physical distance between family groups.		
Pastors and assistants wash and sanitize their hands after distribution.		
Holy Baptism		
The font is sanitized and filled with clean water.		
The person to be baptized, if an infant, remains in the arms of their family.		
Family groups at the font maintain physical distance and each person wears a mask.		
The pastor wears a mask at the font.		
Water is poured on the baptized with a shell.		
The baptized is anointed with oil in a cotton ball.		
A member of the baptismal party lights the baptismal candle from the paschal candle as the words of presentation are said.		
Weddings and Funerals		
Outdoor gatherings of up to 30 people practicing physical distancing are permissible at phase three.		
Weddings, funerals, and other types of services held within the church building must follow the same guidelines as other worship services.		
General		
Staff and volunteers receive information and training about new processes.		
Staff and volunteers have access to masks and hand sanitizer.		
Offering counters have access to gloves.		
People are designated to clean and sanitize high traffic areas, including washrooms, between services.		
Leaders remain aware of new Public Health guidelines. Be prepared to discontinue in-person worship if levels of infection rise.		
Renters/Outside Groups		
Congregations may permit outside groups to use the facility providing they follow all health guidelines regarding physical distancing, etc., and the congregation/rental groups have resources to handle the cleaning requirements between each use. Facility rentals should be suspended if groups cannot or will not adhere to gathering restrictions.		
Consider requesting written details as to how the rental group will meet health guidelines, prior to their use of the facility.		