The United Church of Canada
L'Eglise Unie du Canada

Regional Council 15
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Covid-19 Update October 6, 2021 (Nova Scotia)

Dear members of Regional Council 15 (Nova Scotia):

Since the Covid-19 update, dated October 4, 2021, I have been asked questions about the Vaccination Policies for our churches in Nova Scotia, and for clarification of some of the recommendations for congregational gatherings.

I have been in touch with our General Council Office legal counsel, with the following question, and offer the following opinion:

***Q**: If the government does not make it mandatory to show proof of vaccination for worship, can the governing body (Board/Council) make it policy for their Community of Faith? If they do [make it mandatory to show proof of vaccination], will they be going against the law?*

A: According to the Government of Nova Scotia website, "Business and organizations can set their own vaccination policies if proof of vaccination isn't required under the proof of full vaccination protocol and for their employees. People who are not fully vaccinated need to be able to access essential services. Policies should take legal and ethical implications into consideration." [We] understand that to mean a policy is acceptable as long as there are accommodation/alternatives for those who cannot be vaccinated e.g. on-line United Church services are available.

The risk of legal ramifications for a community of faith instituting a proof of vaccination policy for worship services is deemed to be very low. However, governing bodies need to know there's a slight risk that their policies would be held to be illegal. Nobody can say for certain the policies would be legal until there is legislation or civil court decisions confirming that. It is recommended that the governing body should consider all the pros and cons and do what they think is best for their faith community.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again remind you that, as of October 4, 2021, Nova Scotia moved into phase 5 (five). This Phase is being described as the new normal, living with COVID. As of October 4, 2021, ***there will be no gathering limits*** for events hosted by a business or organization, which include: weddings, funerals, and faith gatherings.

As outlined in the October 4, 2021 memo:

- Wearing a non-medical **mask is required** in most indoor public places, which includes **places of worship and faith gatherings.**

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- You need proof of full vaccination to go to, or participate in, discretionary, non-essential events, activities and services that gather people together, including:
    - indoor and outdoor events and activities like receptions, social events, conferences and training that are hosted by a business or organization
    - indoor and outdoor wedding ceremonies and funerals (including receptions and visitations) that are hosted by a business or organization
    - community meetings in rental spaces, or where the public may be present (like annual general meetings of businesses or organizations)
    - training hosted by a business or organization (like driver training or courses offered by a business that provides training) and any training using a rental space.

Proof of full vaccination isn't required at faith services, but all other activities require proof of vaccination.

For further understanding of this policy for our churches:
"Any activities held by a faith organization other than a regular faith service (such as daily/weekly service) is subject to the proof of vaccine policy. If it is a regular group with the same people then proof of vaccination can be obtained once and does not need to be done each time the group meets."

- Church groups that gather outside of the church property, such as home-hosted Bible study, would be an "informal gathering" so no proof of vaccination is required but the maximum number of people allowed in a private home gathering is 25.
- The rules for "faith services" apply to children's ministry that happens at church on Sunday morning.

We have also had some questions regarding the need for records for contact tracing. Under the *Covid-19 Protocols for Workplaces*, it is recommended that:

1. Use a daily sign in sheet (legible) or similar tracking method for employees and visitors to allow contact tracing in the event of an exposure.
2. Include name, contact information, and time/duration on site.

If there are additional questions, or you require further clarification, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

Sincerely,

Faith

Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister