

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters (New Brunswick)

Relaunching Guidelines: In Person Ministry

The thought of returning to in person worship in our churches, is both exciting and scary. We are all doing our best to navigate these uncharted waters with guidance from our health and government officials. We need to celebrate how resilient we have all been through this Pandemic. The slow and gentle reopening of our communities, businesses and churches will be more difficult than the closing down. We will all need to be super diligent about keeping one another safe. This time can also cause stress, anxiety and conflict, as there will be many voices with many opinions with what needs to happen and what should not happen in our attempts to relaunch our in person ministries. Some will wish to move quickly; others will be cautious. Some are confident in their good health and others are at risk because of age and/or medical conditions. We are tired and these next steps will take much energy. Let us remember to be caring and generous in spirit with one another, to hang together and make adaptive decisions for the good of all.

In March, we were called out of our churches to service God's people in a different way. As we begin to wonder about, and plan for, our return to our spiritual homes, we know that it cannot be church as usual, but must be church in the new normal. As we begin to develop our plans for reopening let us remember, as followers of Christ we are called to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. It is in that spirit that we must develop our plan to return to in person worship and open our buildings once again as symbols of Faith, Hope, Justice and Love.

Trauma Informed

Some churches/families will have had members die during the lockdown phase. Some will have had funerals take place that were far from normal others may have been prevented from attending the funeral. Many will still be waiting for arrangements to be made. Be aware that some people will have become vulnerable during the weeks of physical distancing, because of physical and mental health issues, financial hardships, strained relationships, abuse and some may have had triggers of past traumatic experiences.

Be cautious about expressing thanksgiving when you can return to your buildings, because some will be acutely aware of loss or may be fearful about returning. Give attention to this and seek healing for all who are hurting, and reconciliation wherever that is possible. Be conscious that different people will need different approaches and take different amounts of time to begin to recover from the trauma they have experienced.

Looking Forward in Faith

In New Brunswick, our churches are permitted to resume operations with restrictions at the Yellow level Phase. It is understood that we will move into the yellow phase within the next few days. The provincial guidelines say that we are permitted to have larger religious gatherings to a maximum of 50 people. We must remember this is a maximum and we should only go to the maximum if we are able to mitigate risk and have a plan in place to adhere to the physical distancing regulations (2 meters) apart and we are able to ensure cleaning practices happen after each gathering. We also have guidelines from our United Church of Canada and Region to guide us. It has been said, "just because you can does not mean you should". Each church is to have a reopening committee. If you have a small Community of Faith, your governing body can be your committee. It is likely that this virus will continue to affect our behaviour and activities for a long time to come. Having a committee that can seek guidance, create a plan and make recommendations to the governing body will be a vital part of our reopening.

Each community of faith will need to have an operational plan that outlines how you will manage the safe opening and operation of your church. Please remember to take into consideration the activities you have and the demographic of your community. We offer the following to help you develop a unique plan for your community of faith. Each plan will be different and may need to change depending on the directions from our health care

authorities. We should also remember we may be required to shut down operations again if we experience a second wave and have to limit activities.

Faithful Discernment and Suggestion of a Plan

The safety of staff, volunteers, church members, and all those we serve needs to be at the center of our decision making. Some questions to help you engage in discussion about the faith, principles and values that underlay your decision:

- What is the need we are trying to respond to, if we reopen?
- Does our decision to meet in person serve that need in a way that is faithful? Is a fear of losing members, money or conflict factoring into decision-making?
- Does the risk of illness outweigh the benefit of gathering?
- What is the impact of our decision on vulnerable members? (gathering in a way that leaves our vulnerable members out might be just as harmful as not gathering)
- What will we not be able to have for some time: gatherings with food, coffee hour? Potlucks?
- What shall we do differently, and how shall we live differently as we work through the pandemic and emerge in this new season?
- Where are the signs of hope?

Orange Level Phase (Government of NB)

Orange Level Phase, we are beginning to relax public health measures to allow more social and business activities, while minimizing the risk of outbreaks. We are currently in this Orange Level.

- Gatherings at funerals, burials and weddings are restricted to 10 people or fewer, as long as physical distancing can be maintained.
- *While we are told, we can move into the yellow phase (May 22nd, 2020) you may want to say with the orange phase a little longer so you can get your plan for reopening in place and provide a slower reopening.*

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Guidelines (NB)

- Worship is being held online only, ideally recording or streaming from separate homes. Where it can be done safely and in accordance with local law/public health directions, a small number of people may go into the church to record or stream services. In those situations, everyone should stay at least two meters apart. Singing is known to be more dangerous than talking, and therefore you will need to ensure that any soloist needs to be at least 15ft away from others. Aerosol droplets can remain in the air for some hours and may be dangerous. If you are using microphones, only one person per mic and each mic must be disinfected after use.
- Once the service is recorded, all areas used by the recording team needs to be cleaned. (for example, the church's pulpit, lectern, musical equipment used, door handles).
- Bible study, small groups, and other activities should all be online.
- Community ministries operate within local guidelines and as safely as possible, adapting the services provided as necessary, recognizing that their inherent risks involved in providing these frontline services.
- Burials and weddings need to adhere to the public health directives (10 people or less). It would be wise to defer funerals and weddings, or have the small gathering with others brought into the service with online technology. Baptisms need to be postponed until it is safe to do so.

- Reminder as Ministry Personnel, you will need to make sure you protect your bubble and not cross contaminate when part of the liturgy. (For example wedding, blessings of the rings and signing of the documents, do not pass the rings back and forth, and make sure you use your own pen for signing documents. Funerals, no hugging or touch the hand of family members etc)
- Pastoral care is provided by phone or videoconference, or if (rarely) in person, respecting social distancing requirements and with all appropriate precautions.
- Funeral (10 people or less) should take place at the funeral homes where possible, or at the graveside.

Maintenance and administration activities in the church building are limited to what can be done safely and within local restrictions.

Yellow Level Phase (Government of NB May 22nd, 2020)

- Public Gatherings with social (physical) distancing of 50 or fewer are now allowed.
- This makes possible larger religious services, weddings and funerals to take place.
- The limit on gatherings will be reviewed on a regular basis according to risk based on the evolution of the situation.

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Guidelines (NB)

- The ability to resume activities will depend on the size of your congregations and your ability to physically distance. Churches could continue offering online worship services, along with bible studies and other groups. In person worship could resume in the church buildings where space allows for physical distancing, adhering to public health directives and allowable numbers. You may ask attendants to wear masks.
- ***Singing by the congregation and the choir must be avoided.***
Communal singing poses serious risks! Scientific evidence shows that the forceful breathing action of singing disperses the plume of aerosolized droplets from a singer's mouth much further than six feet. Public health officials have said that masks can't completely contain such forcefully expelled mist. Tests have proven that microscopic 'droplet nuclei' that can contain the virus remain suspended in the air for up to 3 hours.
- Funerals need to adhere to public health directives, keeping the restricted number of people with attendees maintaining social distancing, and you could consider asking people to wear masks. In order to ensure that numbers remain within the limits, the time and place should not be shared with any but those invited. It is within Ministry Personnel's authority (and responsibility) to refuse to participate in funerals where numbers go over the limits, or participants are refusing to socially (physical) distance.
- If weddings are planned during this time, they need to adhere to public health directives keeping the restricted number of people. In order to ensure that the numbers remain within the limits, the time and place should not be shared with any but those invited, physical distancing must be maintained. It is within Ministry Personnel's authority (and responsibility) to refuse to participate in weddings where numbers go over the limits.
- Some building tenants might resume activities where these can be done respecting local restrictions.
- Church offices may consider opening, especially where there are small staff components.
- Church boards, committees, or staff groups may meet in person in small numbers, respecting local restrictions, and with physical distancing. You may also consider asking people to wear masks
- Small funerals, weddings, and baptisms may be held within local restrictions about number (50 or less) with physical distancing.
- Even with the resumption of in person worship, online versions could continue to be available especially if numbers do not allow your full congregations to gather or for those in high risk categories who need to continue to avoid group activities.

- Maintenance and administration functions resume more fully, with provisions for physical distancing which might include such measures as alternating times for staff to be present in the office (if necessary).
- Tenant use of church buildings may be staged back in, depending on the types of activities and the ability to implement appropriate safety protocols.
- Cleaning with a disinfectant will need to be done after every gathering.

Green Level Phase (Government of NB)

- **After a vaccine is available or more is learned about how to protect from the virus.**
- This transition to a new normal includes the reopening of all businesses and activities, with increased health and safety practices remaining part of daily life.
- All conditions are lifted with the exception of community facemask (facial coverings), which remain required to wear in public when ill.

Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Guidelines (NB)

- Full “return” to in person worship, in person small groups, in person gatherings of all kinds may not be possible until a vaccine is developed and generally available. The health authorities will confirm if/when we are able to have full return.
- Ability to participate online may continue to be important for persons in vulnerable categories. Many church members and regular participants may be from vulnerable categories.
- Gatherings/fundraisers with food preparation can resume and will need to consider all of the health and safety regulations for the Province.

In Person Worship and Gatherings (Orange and Yellow Level Phase)

Staffing, Volunteers and the Ministry & Personnel Committee

Ministry and Personnel Committees have a vital role in the reopening of the churches. It is important to have a conversation with each employee. For some of your staff there will be a level of mental fatigue, especially for those who have worked to keep the Pastoral Charge operational, through worship and Pastoral Care.

With that in mind:

- Meet with all staff – virtually right now
- Ask how they are doing and how their family is doing
- Ask how this time has been for them
- Ask how they are feeling about returning to the office (if applicable) and in person worship
- Where possible, staff members should adhere to physical distancing
- What learnings have they gained, what went well and what was difficult
- Ministry Personnel and Lay Employees who are vulnerable (over 60 or have compromised health) should work with their Ministry and Personnel Committee to develop an alternate option to limit exposure to groups and high-risk activities
- Ministry and Personnel Committees should contact the Regional Minister to come up with a plan for return in person ministry.

Caring for the Church Building and Hall

- You should, in your announcement and in you plan, advise any staff or congregants who are symptomatic or have been advised by public health 8-1-1 to report their symptoms, to self-isolate and stay at home.

- It would be wise to post the symptoms so people can see what they are and know how to assess when to stay home. (Fever above 38C, a new cough or worsening cough, headache, sore throat, runny nose, fatigue, muscle pain, diarrhea, loss of sense of taste, loss of smell, and in children, purple markings on the fingers and toes)
- 2 meters will need to be observed where people sit. Churches may need to measure and rope off areas where people cannot sit to maintain physical distancing. Those who are from the same bubble may sit together but those who are not must be physically distanced from one another.

For contact tracing (if/when required) for each use of the building, there needs to be a record of:

- Name and phone number of the people who were in the building
- Date and time that the gathering took place
- Purpose for the gathering

After each use of the building cleaning with a disinfectant (like Lysol) will need to happen. Churches are encouraged to make a check list of the places and items to clean for your worship and meeting space and who is to do the cleaning. There should be a sheet, which is signed after the area is cleaned.

Some things to consider:

- Regular household cleaners, disinfectant wipes or a diluted bleach solution can be used according to the label directions.
- Use disposable gloves when cleaning surfaces.
- Make sure congregants and staff are removed from the area during cleaning.
- Thoroughly clean bathrooms with disinfectant – toilets (inside, outside and around the basin) - counters - sinks - taps - paper towel dispensers - door handles
- Hymnbooks – pew Bibles
- Backs of pews
- Microphones
- Musical instruments
- Chairs
- Tables
- All door handles
- All other highly used areas
- Light switches
- People need to be aware of the hand sanitizer stations and places where they can wash their hands.
- Public washrooms need to be equipped with hot and cold running water under pressure, liquid soap, paper towels, and garbage containers. Handwashing signs must be posted.
- You may wish to assess whether you will ask people, staff and congregants to wear a mask when coming to church for any activity.

Worship Guidelines

Communion

If communion is offered:

- The officiant and servers must use hand sanitizer before offering communion
- Individual pieces of bread and individual cups are offered
- Servers offer the bread and cup to each person rather than each person taking them from a communal plate or tray
- Each communicant places their empty cup into a separate receptacle
- Disposable cups should be used

Passing the Peace and the Offering Plate

- Physical distancing must be maintained.
- Offering a phrase or pressing hands together in a prayerful bow, a wave, a nod or some non-contact gesture can convey the message of peace.
- Encourage people to contribute through online giving, PAR, E-Transfer or posted dated cheques. Passing the offering plate should be avoided. Place the plate in the church for people to drop their offering into, and have gloves available for volunteers handling cash or cheques.
- If you volunteers must handle money, always ensure regular handwashing and have a minimum 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer available, (remember do not touch your face)

Singing

- There should be no congregational or choir singing.
- Soloists must be at safe distances from each other and from the congregation.

***Communal singing poses serious risks!** Scientific evidence shows that the forceful breathing action of singing disperses the plume of aerosolized droplets from a singer's mouth much further than six feet. Public health officials have said that masks can't completely contain such forcefully expelled mist. Tests have proven that microscopic 'droplet nuclei' that can contain the virus remain suspended in the air for up to 3 hours.*

Special Services

Baptisms

- For infant baptism, the parents should be the only ones to hold the baby. The officiant will sanitize hands before the baptism. For infant, child and adult baptism, water should come from individual cups or a bottle for each person, not the common font. If possible, have a separate bowl that sits in the font for each individual who will be baptized.

Weddings and Funerals

- We will need to follow our government restrictions. If weddings and funerals happen in the church, physical distancing will need to be maintained and thorough cleaning right after will need to be followed.

Bishop Karen P. Oliveto of the United Methodist Church:

"I do not want one single case of COVID-19 traced to one of our churches because we did not care for those whom Jesus loves."

As we begin to reopen our churches, let us do our best to care for one another. Your Regional Council staff are available for consultation and support.