The United Church of Canada
L'Eglise Unie du Canada

Regional Council 15
21 Wright Street, Sackville, NB E4L 4P8
Tel: (800) 268-3781 ext. 6142 • Email: info4rc15@united-church.ca

Covid-19 Update March 18, 2022 (Nova Scotia)

Dear Regional Council 15 Members (Nova Scotia),

Over the past two years, so many messages regarding Covid-19 guidance and memos, have been sent from my office to all pastoral charges. I remember two years ago when we all had to make the difficult decision to shut down for what we thought, at the time, would be two weeks. We have now turned the corner to a new reality; the lifting of the remaining restrictions on March 21 means Nova Scotians will no longer be required to wear masks in public spaces or limit gathering numbers. All businesses and organizations will be permitted to operate at full capacity without physical distancing requirements. Although restrictions are lifting, Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health recommends that *Nova Scotians need to stay cautious and maintain healthy habits to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Everyone should assume there is still virus circulating in their communities, no matter where they live in the province. Everyone needs to take precautions to help keep our communities safe and protect people who are more vulnerable.*

Please see the attached document *Living with COVID-19* from Public Health for your use and reference as we move forward.

In addition, I have reached out to our legal counsel, inquiring as to whether our churches can still require proof of vaccination if it is no longer mandated by our governments and health authorities. I was told my inquiry is quite timely, as this was the current topic of discussion amongst their legal colleagues. As we have never been in a pandemic before, we have no precedent as to whether congregations can require people to provide personal health information, i.e. proof of vaccination, when the government is no longer requiring such mandates.

Given that a proof of vaccination reveals personal health information, which is private, the understanding is that a congregation cannot legally compel anyone to provide such information and bar entry if they don't. While at this point there is not a definitive answer, and we are awaiting more information, I am inclined to advise that proof of vaccination no long be part of the process for access to church entry.

As we know that COVID is still very much a part of our lives, and we have members of our Communities of Faith and family members who are vulnerable it may be wise for our churches to proceed with a degree of caution.

…2

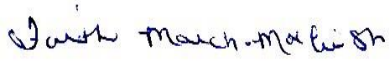
Therefore, I would suggest, that as you make your plans for reopening post public restrictions, that you do so slowly. You may wish to add some of the following to your reopening plans

1. Hand sanitizer be available throughout the building. There is no restriction on sharing items, such as pens for guest books or hymn books at worship services. It will be important to have Sanitizer readily available and encourage its use as well as hand washing.
2. As the mask mandates are lifted you may wish to encourage your congregations to continue to wear masks until you get a sense of how things are in the community. Another option would be to allow masks to be taken off while seated but worn when singing or moving around the building. After a few months with lower case counts you may then feel comfortable to allow masking to be discontinued.
3. You may wish to begin with physical distancing by separation between rows, but not between seats. Asking people to sit in their bubbles where possible. If people are nervous and wish to be distanced from others, have ushers available for help with seating.
4. For coffee times or times when food will be served you may consider requiring people to be seated while eating and drinking. It would be good to avoid buffet style for the time being, and have people serving food.
5. You may consider having your youth and children's programming with the requirement of masks.
6. Offering plates could continue to be placed in the church for offering and not passed around. You may also wish continue to highlight other giving options; Pre-Authorized Remittance, Postdated Cheques, etc.
7. Caution should continue to be taken with Baptism and Communion.
8. Caution should continue to be taken with visitation at institutions and personal homes of congregants.
9. Continue to clean frequently touched areas.

As these are the hoped-for next steps, let us move forward with great care for one another. Let us continue to be patient and kind, as everyone will not be in the same place when it comes to their comfort levels. Ministry & Personnel Committees, please remember to check in on your staff.

Let us, with grace and courage, walk into this next phase with love for one another foremost on our minds and in our hearts. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to be in contact,

Blessings,



Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister

March 18, 2022