

Protocols for the Re-opening of our Churches for Worship

• Section 1 •

Preamble

As our province begins to loosen restrictions on public gatherings, including gatherings of faith communities, we are offering the following protocols to parishes of our diocese of islands and inlets. They are designed to help us cover the bases and to protect us from unwitting errors or omissions that could cost us dearly. At the same time, our buildings and circumstances vary considerably, and so the attempt here is to outline basic non-negotiables, and to encourage parishes to determine for themselves how best to implement them in their own context.

In order to give time for adequate preparation, the **earliest** date parishes may re-open for in-person worship in the Diocese of British Columbia is **Sunday, July 12, 2020**.

We recognize that other faith communities and dioceses may be moving more quickly than this. Our objective is to act with an abundance of caution.

In this regard, for some parishes this timeline would be inadvisable or impossible: please note that **no parish is required** to reopen for public worship on July 12.

The Process for Re-opening

The materials provided to assist your parish are in three sections.

Section 1 is a series of general protocols and recommendations related to (1) the opening of our spaces, (2) liturgical considerations, and (3) the expected conduct of different user groups.

Section 2 is a fillable questionnaire / safety plan which is to be completed and returned to the territorial archdeacon for approval prior to re-opening. Parishes in Nimpkish region are to return their materials to the executive archdeacon, Barry Foster.

The safety plan is to be submitted by the incumbent and wardens. To allow for a thoughtful response to each parish's submission—and time for the parish to make needed modifications—the deadline for submission is a minimum of 10 days prior to the proposed date for re-opening. Thus, parishes wishing to re-open July 12 must submit their responses no later than July 2.

Section 3 is a series of posters from the BC Center for Disease Control that must be posted in your buildings. As listed in Section 1, the parish will also have to create several parish-specific posters and signage.

To Open or Not to Open

Each parish will want to take into account several issues in making its decisions about when and how to re-open for worship. These include:

- its capacity to comply with the protocols set out below
- the vulnerability of its parishioners, due to such factors as age or underlying health conditions
- the vulnerability of its staff—please note that no staff member who is unwilling to lead in-person worship on account of personal vulnerability to COVID-19 can be required to do so
- the general views and feelings of parishioners concerning their own safety
- whether people will actually want to attend a service that complies with the required restrictions
- attentiveness to inclusion—how we will continue to meet the needs of those who are uncomfortable attending in person.

Contingencies

The information in this document has been gathered on the basis of current knowledge and direction from our public health authorities. Parishes must be prepared to respond quickly to new public health orders or diocesan directives, in the event of changing circumstances or spikes in infection.

Basic Approach

Gatherings of any kind increase the risk of transmission of COVID-19. The Diocese of British Columbia wants to minimize this risk and create safe environments for all our space users. The most important components in this endeavor include:

- creating lots of space between people
- practicing good hygiene
- staying home when feeling unwell
- instituting cleaning protocols for our spaces

When done together, these things will help keep us safe.

Resources

WorkSafeBC, the BCCDC and Health Canada have excellent resources for groups wanting to think through the safe use of spaces and we recommend consulting these resources:

[WorkSafe BC Protocols for Offices](#)

[BCCDC Protocols for Faith Groups](#)

[List of Approved Surface and Hand Products from Health Canada](#)

Reopening Our Facilities

Please begin by creating a safety plan by filling out **Section 2: Parish Safety Plan Form** and submitting to your regional archdeacon.

Once created, the facility safety plan must be communicated to all users and opening procedures must be fully implemented before opening. It is vital to take the time necessary to do this well and to think through all the steps in the process for your space. Go slow, as Dr. Henry often reminds us. After re-opening, monitor progress and effectiveness. Staff, volunteers and facility users must regularly assess the effectiveness of the facility safety plan and make recommendations to improve it, if necessary.

Re-Opening the Buildings – General Protocols

1. Risk Assessment

Assess risks by walking around common areas and taking note of commonly touched surfaces (i.e. doorknobs, countertops, light switches, etc.). Assess whether common areas are suitable for sufficient personal distancing.

2. Implement administrative measures:

- create a health self-assessment for staff / office volunteers
- review the diocesan sick leave policy with staff and ensure staff understand that those who are feeling unwell should remain at home
- determine as a team who will work in the office space at what time
- implement mandatory hygiene measures for staff and office volunteers, including: regular hand washing/sanitizing, sanitizing shared surfaces, regular washroom cleaning, washroom-use protocols (one person at a time), limiting traffic in the building, monitoring spaces for cleanliness, and having sufficient sanitizing / cleaning supplies stocked to permit safely re-opening
- consider implementing appointment-only visits

3. Install environmental measures such as a plexiglass barrier to protect office staff.

4. Post clear signage at all entries regarding:

- Social-distancing (2 metres minimum) (BC-CDC Poster)
- Hand sanitizing / washing requirement (BC-CDC Poster)
- Requirement to stay home if feeling unwell (BC-CDC Poster)
- Requirement to sign in (template provided)
- Occupancy limits on exterior and interior doors (by parish)
- Directional management of traffic flow, where necessary (by parish)
- Contact information in the event of queries or concerns (by parish)

5. **Entrance and exit**
 - A single point of entry and separate point of exit are to be maintained.
 - Where this is not possible, implement a plan for ensuring that outgoing and incoming groups do not encounter each other.
6. **Registration**
 - All who enter the buildings are to provide their name and contact information for possible contact-tracing by the province. A sample template has been provided.
 - The information collected is to be retained for 30 days and then destroyed.
7. **Hand sanitization / washing**
 - Provision for, and assurance of, effective hand sanitization as people enter and leave the buildings. Sanitizers must have a minimum 60% alcohol content. See link to approved list of hand and surface sanitizers under Resources.
8. **Washrooms**
 - There must be a plan for the use and sanitization of washroom (e.g. a key or hall monitor).

Re-Opening the Buildings – The Worship Space

1. **Physical Distancing**
 - Seating should be arranged, or in the case of pews, designated and marked, to ensure that there is at least 2 metres distance in all directions between households / individuals in attendance.
 - Attendance is limited to the number that can gather within the 2 metre distancing regulation, to a maximum of 50.
 - Physical distancing regulations apply equally to parking lots and grounds.
2. **Removal of high-touch items / Sanitation of high-touch surfaces**
 - All literature, including hymn books, prayer books and brochures are to be removed from pew racks or other surfaces.
 - Following each service, all high-touch areas must be sanitized. These include pew backs/chair arms; light switches; lecterns; banisters; elevator buttons; door handles; toilet handles; faucets and taps; body-pack microphones and electronics, etc.
3. **Personal Protective Equipment**
 - Masks and/or gloves are not required for members of the congregation but are permitted. Non-medical masks are required for clergy who administer communion.
4. **Children** who are present must stay with their parents at all times.
5. **Coffee Hour** continues to be suspended.
6. **Outdoor Gatherings**
 - All provisions outlined here apply equally to outdoor gatherings.

Gathering Safely Again

As you welcome parishioners and community members back into the buildings, it's our responsibility to ensure that they understand the safety protocols they must practice to continue to be permitted to use the space. The following pages should be provided in print or digital to each user group: liturgical participants / congregation, parish life and community users.

"Protocols related to Liturgical Practices" should be distributed to liturgical participants and the entire congregation PRIOR to the first in-person worship gathering. Printed copies of the protocols must be posted and available for pick-up upon entry into the church for newcomers or those not on the parish distribution lists. Greeters posted at the entry should check-in with new faces to ensure they receive a copy of the protocols.

"Protocols related to Parish Life" should be distributed to all parish groups or ministries (Bible study groups, prayer-shawl knitters, prayer meetings, outreach groups, etc.) that are choosing to meet in-person again PRIOR to meeting for the first time. At the beginning of the first meeting, the group leader should go over the new protocols in the building and ensure everyone understands and agrees to abide by the protocols.

"Protocols related to Community Users" must be distributed to all users that plan to hold non-parish-related activities whether the group pays a rental fee or not. This includes:

- businesses that rent spaces from the church
- community outreach groups (i.e. emotional support groups, AA meetings, etc.)
- recreational groups (sports, exercise, meditation, etc.)
- performance groups (choirs, dance, theatre, etc.)
- activity groups (Girl Guides, Scouts, art clubs, etc.)
- one-time users (local fund raising, wedding receptions, etc.)

All community users must provide a safety plan that pertains to how they will follow safety protocols in relation to their activities in the buildings BEFORE being permitted to re-enter the space. This safety plan should be provided to the parish's incumbent and wardens at least ten days before the users re-enter the buildings. The incumbent and wardens can approve the plan but should feel welcome to consult with their regional archdeacon or with the diocesan insurance officer, Zena McCreary, via insurance@bc.anglican.ca.

Please note: any community user that practices singing (choirs, choruses, consorts, etc.) must have their safety plan ALSO approved by the regional archdeacon, as this activity is associated with a higher risk.

Gathering Safely Again
Protocols related to Liturgical Practice

1. **Registration**
 - All those entering for worship must provide their names and contact information (email, phone, or other) to assist in contact-tracing, if required by the Province of BC. All collected information will be held for 30 days and then destroyed.
2. **Processional and Recessional**
 - To be undertaken only if it is possible to protect social distancing requirements.
3. **Order of Service**
 - Single use bulletins (to be picked up, not handed out) may be used.
 - Parishes may wish to consider projecting the service or making it available digitally to be viewed on cell phones, tablets, etc.
4. **Music**
 - Congregational singing is not permitted at this time.
 - A small choral ensemble generously distanced from each other (i.e. more than 2 metres) may provide musical leadership.
 - Instrumental music is encouraged; brass or wind instruments are discouraged.
5. **Readings**
 - Only one reader will be assigned, to prevent surface contact at the lectern.
6. **The Peace**
 - The Peace may be exchanged, but without touch.
7. **The Offering**
 - Almsbasins are not to be passed hand to hand.
8. **Eucharistic elements & distribution**
 - Wafers only are to be used for bread.
 - During the eucharistic prayer, the ciborium is to be covered, even during the words of institution.
 - The eucharist is to be celebrated in both kinds, but only the presider will receive from the chalice.
 - The presider, deacon or other assisting clergy will distribute the sacrament.
 - Prior to administering the sacrament, clergy will don disposable, non-medical face masks and sanitize their hands.
 - The sacrament is to be administered under the form of bread only.
 - The sacrament is to be administered at physically distanced standing stations, not at the communion rail.
 - Clergy will take care not to touch the hands of communicants, and to re-sanitize their hands if they do.
 - Following the administration of the sacrament, clergy will (in this order) remove their face masks, dispose of them appropriately, and re-sanitize their hands before proceeding to the post-communion prayer.
9. **Farewell queuing**
 - Queuing to greet the presider after the service is discouraged.

Gathering Safely Again Protocols related to Parish Life

1. Participants should administer their own wellness check and stay home if feeling unwell.
2. Physical distancing must be maintained. Groups must adhere to occupancy limits for the room they are meeting in.
3. Hand sanitizer and/or washing facilities will be available to participants, and upon entry, all participants must sanitize or wash their hands.
4. All participants must sign-in with contact information.
5. Participants must cover coughs or sneezes, preferably by directing it into the elbow crease of their arm.
6. Touching between participants is NOT permitted.
7. Following use of the room, a member of the group must sanitize high-touch surfaces, including doorknobs, light switches, tables, chair arms, countertops, etc.
8. For washroom use, the group must maintain one person per use and must sanitize washroom after each use.
9. There will be NO use of facility kitchens permitted for any reason.
10. Participants must bring their own beverages or snacks. There must be NO sharing of food or beverages. There must be NO preparation of food or beverages (including tea, coffee, cookies, etc.).

Gathering Safely Again Protocols related to Community Users

All community user groups must submit a safety plan to the parish at least TEN days before resuming activity. This plan will address social distancing, personal hygiene measures and facility sanitizing measures and comply with the following:

1. Hygiene protocols must be communicated to participants and ensured by organizer.
2. Participants should be instructed to administer their own wellness check and stay home if feeling unwell.
3. If possible, the entrance and exit doors should be different.
4. The user will provide hand sanitizer or direct participants to the nearest washing station. Upon entry, all participants must sanitize or wash their hands.
5. The user must provide a sign-in sheet to collect all contact information to assist with possible contact-tracing if requested by the province. Contact information must be kept for 30 days by the user and then destroyed.
6. User groups should have a participant assigned to be a "safety monitor" to ensure compliance with all facility protocols.
7. The occupancy limit for each room in the building will be posted on the doors. Social distancing must be maintained. Groups must adhere to occupancy limits for the room in which they are meeting.
8. Non-medical masks must be worn if social distancing cannot be maintained.
9. Washroom use must be consistent with parish protocol, as follows: the group must maintain one person per use and must sanitize washroom after each use.
10. Users must sanitize common surfaces before and after gathering, and other necessary cleaning must be done before leaving.
11. If there is more than one user group in the facility at the same time, it must be ensured that there is no cross contact between groups.
12. There will be NO use of facility kitchens permitted for any reason.
13. Participants must bring their own beverages or snacks. There must be NO sharing of food or beverages. There must be NO preparation of food or beverages (including tea, coffee, cookies, etc.).