



9/10/2021

Dear friends,

We met as synod leadership in a virtual Town Hall on Sep 8<sup>th</sup> with about 70 faith leaders, lay and rostered gathering together. Rev. Dr. Ali Tote and I facilitated a conversation. We gathered in Word and prayer, listened to Ali's presentation on the state of the pandemic in our province, and engaged in a conversation about navigating the Fourth wave of the pandemic in our faith communities.

Pastor Ali and I met following the meeting and, based on the state of the pandemic and on the consultation with synod leadership, present the following synod recommendations for our faith communities.

**Provincial Health Directives:** The Provincial Health Authority has somewhat surprisingly, not provided revised Health Directives for the province apart from urging continued vaccination. Organizations are obliged to manage COVID protocols for their own communities.

**Synod guidelines:** Based on Pastor Ali's expertise and our consultation in the Town Hall, the following are synod guidelines for our faith communities (assuming no change in Health Directives).

The consultation raised a number of factors

- Vaccination numbers across the synod are high. As faith communities we very likely have a high percentage of fully vaccinated members.
- All of our faith communities have those under 12 present who of course, are not vaccinated.
- Most of our faith communities have a small number of individuals who are not vaccinated for various reasons: some medical, some political, some philosophical.
- Our community has done well in sustaining community through virtual worship and education, phone care, etc. But the need to be face to face in community is powerful.

Given these and other factors discussed at the Town Hall:

1. Synod encourages our faith communities to continue to move forward with face to face community activity, including in-person worship, complete with Holy Communion, congregational singing, etc.

2. Synod recommends that faith leaders continue to encourage their people to be vaccinated for the safety of the whole community.
3. **To protect our children, and to protect those among us who have not been vaccinated, synod recommends that faith communities mandate masking at indoor events, including worship. Faith communities should provide masks at the door so no one is turned away.**
4. **Given that our children are not able to be vaccinated, synod recommends that faith communities do not hold in-person Sunday School gatherings this fall.**
5. Synod recommends the continued vigilant use of hand-sanitizer when we meet, especially for those who may be serving communion.
6. Synod recommends that worship attendees sign in for contact tracing purposes.
7. Synod recommends that we delay for a time:
  - a. the use of the Common Cup in worship
  - b. the practice of physically sharing the peace with hugs and handshakes.
  - c. the practice of the pastor shaking hands with the gathering following service.
  - d. pot-luck meals. If a shared meal is deemed as needed, a served meal or at least a served buffet is preferable.

**Remember that our church polity places the responsibility to decide how community life is conducted on the local congregational leadership—lay leadership and rostered ministers in consultation. On the one hand that requires that local leaders make difficult decisions. On the other, it allows local leaders to shape community guidelines for the very different contexts across the synod. Synod guidelines are provided as advice and encouragement to faith community leaders, based on the epidemiological expertise of Dr. Tote, and on synod’s consultation with synod faith leaders.**

Many of us were hoping that this fall would be less complicated than our experience in the 2020-2021 program year. While it is disappointing that we are still working out how to navigate yet another wave of the pandemic, vaccination levels certainly give us a better place to stand. Synod will gather faith leaders together in coming months as the world unfolds. As children we used to sing, “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.” That matters to us especially as we continue to walk this challenging road.

Please make contact with me or with Pastor Ali if you have any questions on Synod guidelines for your context at this time.

Pray for each other. Be kind to each other.

Peace,

Bishop Sid