

October 4, 2021 (Feast of St. Francis of Assisi)



My Dear Clergy and Faithful,

On Sunday from the Book of Genesis, we heard that God does not want us to be alone. From the beginning, faith is about relationship. It is about 'the we and the us' in our world together. It is about the 'me and we' with God. We have been challenged to maintain a relationship with our God and with one another through the COVID pandemic that still lingers on. A global tragedy such as the COVID-19 pandemic "momentarily revived the sense that we are a global community, all in the same boat, where one person's problems are the problems of all. Once more we realized that no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together" Fratelli tutti #32.

Like many, I am astounded by those who deny the pandemic and by those people, apart from medical reasons, who refuse to be vaccinated. Pope Francis has urged all to be vaccinated.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-08/pope-francis-appeal-covid-19-vaccines-act-of-love.html>

We have lived the consequences of a worldwide pandemic that has claimed the lives of five million people. We have lived with the consequences of a certain degree of isolation that up until now was unimaginable. This pandemic has tested us, but in some strange way, it has strengthened our relationships with one another. As we enter 'Phase Five' in our province, we search for new ways of being with one another. It is not good for us to be alone. We need to gather again with our faith communities. People who are not able to attend church for health reasons and those who care for them are dispensed from the obligation to attend Sunday Mass.

Premier Tim Houston and Doctor Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer of Health indicated that Phase 5 of the reopening plan would take effect today. As Bishop, I support these directives.

You can read the news release in English or French.

English: <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20210929005>

French: <https://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20210929006>

Most, but not all restrictions are lifted, although some remain in place:

- masks will continue to be mandatory for indoor public places
- the physical distancing requirement will be lifted
- the gathering limits for our church services will be lifted
- contact tracing will not be required, except for weddings and funerals since these faith gatherings may bring in people from outside our territory
- our Church services are deemed to be essential by the government
- proof of full vaccination will be required for non-essential events and activities
- Unfortunately, any activities held by our churches other than daily or weekly Mass will be subject to the POV, the proof of vaccine policy. For organized parish activities, the gathering limits will be lifted but the POV policy will apply.
- 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 this same group meets.

There are no restrictions on singing but congregations will be required to remain masked. We need to re-introduce all aspects of our Eucharistic Liturgy slowly and carefully. We want to welcome back our people and assure them that we are gradually and safely re-opening.

For example, it may be a good idea to continue to provide sanitizing stations for people. If you have some space, maybe in the short term consider providing an area where some people could maintain social distance from others. It may be a good idea to continue washing your hands prior to distributing Holy Communion.

Each parish will have to work with their own community to re-open gradually. All the various ministers need to be gradually re-introduced. Eucharistic ministers may be hesitant to resume their ministry. There will need to be some discussion about "phasing in the "sign of peace" and receiving from the chalice. Bringing forth the gifts at the preparation of the altar may be a starting point. Having ushers take up the offering may be another starting point. Members of the choir may want to sing but they may want to remain somewhat distant from one another.

The provincial COVID website: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/> will have a new banner on October 4th linking to healthy habits for living with COVID and preventing other common infections and perhaps we could adopt some of these practices. Stay safe and keep well.

Fraternally,

+Wayne Kirkpatrick

Bishop Wayne Kirkpatrick