

# Update from Bishop Sandra RE: In-Person Worship

January 13th, 2022

To the clergy and people of the Diocese,

On December 22nd I issued a directive to suspend all in-person worship in Nova Scotia and strongly recommended that parishes in Prince Edward Island (who follow their own Provincial/Medical directives) move to online worship only.

At this time, in light of the continued dominance of the Omicron variant, and in consultation with the Archdeacons of our Diocese, I am directing all parishes in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island to suspend in-person worship until at least **January 24th**. The situation will be reassessed at that time and an update will be offered on or before January 25th. Livestreaming or recording of services is still permitted, with only those required for worship leadership or technical assistance in attendance.

The only exception to this directive is to allow for funerals, which can be held with strict adherence to Public Health guidelines in each province regarding gathering limits, proof of vaccination requirements, contact tracing, physical distancing, the wearing of masks for all attending, and hand-sanitizing. While gathering limits allow for up to 50 people in attendance for funerals (or 25% of a building's capacity in Nova Scotia, whichever is the smaller number), I strongly urge you to consider limiting attendance even further, if at all possible. It should also be noted that only one singer is permitted at funerals; congregational singing and choirs are prohibited at this time. Government medical officials are now recommending the use of three-ply masks and I strongly recommend worship leaders and singers for funerals use these to further limit risk and keep themselves and others as safe as possible. Masks should be kept on at all times during the funeral liturgy.

The Omicron variant is spreading rapidly in both Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island and is infecting both vaccinated and unvaccinated people. The strain on our testing capacities and on the healthcare system in each of our provinces is a cause for great concern. The risk of in-person gatherings, in any setting, remains high and it is imperative that we do our best to limit opportunities for people to become infected, or unknowingly contribute to the spread of infections.

I realize these past few weeks have been difficult for many of us and, for some at least, this extended (or new) suspension of in-person worship will not be welcome news. The inability to gather in community for worship, especially over the Christmas season, has taken a toll. I also know that not every Parish has been able to find ways to offer worship in an alternative online or drive-in format. If you need assistance, please contact the Reverend Ann Turner, Executive Director, at 902-420-0717, ext. 1167, or [executivedirector@nspeidiocese.ca](mailto:executivedirector@nspeidiocese.ca)

I am deeply aware of the stress this pandemic has caused for all of us; our clergy, lay leaders and parishioners, and our families. Please continue to care for one another, and to exercise compassion, patience and kindness towards each other. I pray for you and your communities as we weather what we hope will be the tail end of this pandemic. I continue to trust in the grace of God and the prayers of the people across the Diocese as I offer leadership during this anxious and uncertain time. May you be upheld by my prayers, as I am by yours.

Every blessing as we journey through the season of Epiphany. May the light of Christ continue to guide us onwards in the weeks ahead.

+Sandra

*The Right Reverend Sandra Fyfe*