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To: To Clergy and People of the Diocese

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“He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”
Acts 1:3-9

Dear Friends,

This week we are in “Ascensiontide”, the ten days between Ascension Day and the Feast of Pentecost. It was a time of waiting for the apostles - waiting with expectation for the giving of the Holy Spirit. The theme of waiting with expectation rings strongly with our church in these days. Waiting with expectation for a return to “normal”.

The Covid 19 virus has not gone away - we are still in the midst of a pandemic, we have simply passed through one phase of the pandemic. The rate of infection has decreased that is all. There will be no return to the former ways of gathering until there is an effective and widely distributed vaccine. In the meantime the church and all sectors of our society are adapting the way we gather and the way we function to continuing to live with the pandemic.

The notes below are for consideration and direction for parish leadership. They reflect direct conversation with the Medical Officer of Health in Nova Scotia with the heads of churches and other faith groups. They will be adapted as the civil authorities change regulations and as we reflect on our experience in this new way of being together.

- We are not yet in a place to begin to open up church buildings to worship. We anticipate that gradual re-opening will begin in early June. The rate and details of re-opening are going to vary between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island.
- We need to move slowly. In all decisions we need to hold uppermost the care for those most vulnerable to the virus.
- Just because we can, doesn't mean we have to. Parishes may choose to wait longer before beginning to gather for worship. Parishes which have been using online formats for worship should consider continuing to do so, even after in-person worship begins again.
- At this time we are still restricted to gatherings of no more than 5 people in Nova Scotia and 15 people in Prince Edward Island. This is expected to change in early June. We do not know what the new regulations will be. It might be an increase in the number or it might be that we are allowed to use a percentage of our building's rated capacity.
- Even when we are permitted to gather in greater numbers, Physical distancing between individuals/households will need to be enforced; 6 ft in all directions - 36sq ft per person (or household). Seating should be clearly marked to comply with this requirement. Processions must allow for physical distancing.
- There has been significant debate about the use of masks. The medical officer of health in Nova Scotia has recommended that masks be worn in any situation where physical distancing cannot be maintained.

- Stay home if you are feeling ill or experiencing any of the symptoms of Covid 19. This applies to members and parish leadership.
- Personal hygiene is the best defense against the virus: frequent hand washing or using hand sanitizer (containing at least 60% alcohol). Do not touch your face. Do not shake hands or hug. Parishes must provide adequate facilities to support the requirements for personal hygiene.
- Church buildings or other places for worship will need to be cleaned/sanitized before and after worship, especially high touch surfaces. If there is more than one worship service in the same building on the same day, the building will need to be sanitized between worship services. It may be better (if the restrictions on numbers allow) to combine the usual separate morning services into one if the requirement for cleaning cannot be met between services. Alternately the services might be spaced out over a longer period of time. Buildings with washrooms will also need to have the washroom cleaned/sanitized during gatherings.
- Offering plates must not be passed from hand to hand. They can be left in one place in order to receive offerings.
- Greeters should inform worshippers, as they arrive, of the precautions being taken. Other jurisdictions in Canada are requiring a "sign in" list be maintained in order to facilitate contact tracing in the event that the virus is spread in a worship service. We have not (yet) been directed to do so but I feel it is a sensible request. Greeters could maintain this list. Avoid crowding at the entrance to buildings - maintain the physical distancing.
- No physical touch when "passing the peace"- use other means of greeting.
- There is evidence that singing has the potential to spread the virus more than simply talking. Therefore at this time there will be no congregational singing permitted in worship. A soloist, suitably distanced, may provide song in worship. Organ or other instrumental music may be used.
- It is recommended that prayer books and hymn books be removed from pew racks. Studies have shown that the virus does not survive on paper surfaces for more than three days, longer on hard surfaces like book covers. If there is no mid week use of prayer books, they may be employed as usual. Alternately single use bulletins could be used or Prayer books could be passed out to individuals and loaned to them to be brought back when they return to worship. Congregations may also consider video projecting of the liturgy.
- Congregations may consider offering the Office or other service of the Word. When Eucharist is offered it will be in one kind, with only the presider receiving in both kinds.
- The presider will wash/sanitize their hands before the Eucharistic prayer and again following the prayer, before distributing communion and after distributing communion. The presider must wear a mask during the distribution of communion as they would not be able to maintain the required physical distancing at that time. Those receiving communion should be suitably physically distanced as they move to receive communion and there will need to be hand sanitizer available for communicants.
- There will be no "receiving lines" at the end of worship. No encouragement to linger to chat. There needs to be a plan for the orderly dismissing of the congregation.
- No sharing of food (pot-lucks, coffee hours, etc.) There is no evidence of food being a means of transmitting the virus, but the close contact which is a part of sharing food could be a means of transmission.

Having reviewed this list frequently in the past week, it gives me no joy to insist on these restrictions as we begin to move forward, however the safety of worshippers and the public generally must be the thing we focus on above anything else. To do otherwise would make our efforts of the past two and a half months worthless.

I wish you a blessed celebration of the Feast of Pentecost. This year as we read of the way in which the new born church was compelled by the Holy Spirit to leave their locked room and go out to the streets of Jerusalem, we may crave a similar freedom. The Spirit is still at work among us, may we be attentive to its leading. *"Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church"*.



The Most Reverend Ron Cutler
Archbishop of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island