

February 3rd, 2021

Update on Covid-19 Restrictions affecting Faith Communities

A few weeks ago it was noted that there would soon be an update on how Covid-19 restrictions might impact Annual General Meetings of churches and/or parishes in our Diocese. I apologize for the delay in providing that information.

AGM and meeting limits

Nova Scotia: To date the only official statement by the provincial government notes an attendance limit of ten people for meetings. When asked directly about this on a Zoom briefing with faith leaders, Dr. Strang noted that if a meeting is held immediately after worship and if all other restrictions are observed (i.e. physical distancing of 6', hand-sanitizing, up to 50% of the building's capacity as long as there are no more than 100 people in the space together, and wearing masks for the duration of the service and meeting), meetings can be held with more than ten people attending. There should be every effort to limit the amount of time people are in this space together, so shorter worship services and shorter meetings are recommended.

Prince Edward Island: "Organized gathering limit of 50 for activities including concerts, worship services, bingo halls, and movie theatres **with an operational plan**. Three additional multiples of 50 permitted with a prior approval of the operational plan (up to 200 total)...Organized gatherings cannot occur in personal dwellings." We are assuming that the same recommendations around duration of time people are spending together apply.

Both provinces: We've asked the Chancellor about Zoom AGMs and while permissible, every effort should be made to ensure that those who may not have access to needed technology can still attend the meeting. This may mean hosting a smaller gathering or gatherings in one or more of the church buildings for those who do not have access to the internet or Zoom, while others participate over Zoom from their homes or other locations. You can also livestream the meeting from a church building but it's important to try to ensure that those without access to technology have an opportunity to attend in-person.

Some questions to consider: Permission to gather as faith communities is a privilege afforded to us because it has been recognized that what we do contributes to the health and well-being of the people in our communities. Many other groups are not afforded that privilege. So before determining whether and how to meet, please consider:

- How essential is this meeting to the ongoing governance and/or life of the church/parish?
- How many people can we safely include in this meeting?
- Can everyone who might like to participate in this meeting be included? If not, what other way will we include them so that we build and not damage the life of our community?
- What are the other limitations we're facing and what will we do to address them?

Please remember that these guidelines could change at any time. I encourage you to keep checking with provincial authorities up to the dates of any meetings you are planning to ensure that further restrictions have not been put in place. From now on, we will provide a weekly update in the NetNews (even if it's to say that nothing has changed) so that you have one place to go to for accurate information. I am expecting a Zoom gathering with Dr. Strang and faith leaders in Nova Scotia in the coming week or so where we await further information on gathering limits and some possible changes regarding the restrictions around congregational singing. Stay tuned (pun intended!).

Thank you for all you are doing to support the spiritual well-being of those entrusted to your care.

Blessings,

Bishop Sandra