



## Diocese of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island

The Right Reverend Sandra Fyfe, Diocesan Bishop - [bishopsoffice@nspeidiocese.ca](mailto:bishopsoffice@nspeidiocese.ca)

1340 Cathedral Lane, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 2Z1

Phone 902-420-0717 Fax 902-425-0717 Office Email - [office@nspeidiocese.ca](mailto:office@nspeidiocese.ca)

December 22nd, 2021

RE: *Suspension of in-person worship in Anglican parishes in Nova Scotia until at least January 12th, 2022 and recommendation to move to online worship in Prince Edward Island*

To the clergy and people of the Diocese,

As a result of information shared at the Covid-19 briefing held on December 21st by Dr. Robert Strang, Chief Medical Officer, and the Honourable Tim Houston, Premier, I am directing parishes in Nova Scotia to suspend all in-person worship, effective today, December 22nd. While the new restrictions announced yesterday did not force us to suspend worship, I am convinced that doing so is the safest and most loving thing we can do to help prevent the spread of the Omicron variant in our province.

Late yesterday, as I was trying to process the news from this briefing, I listened to an interview on CBC Radio's Mainstreet with Dr. Lisa Barrett, an Infectious Diseases Specialist at Dalhousie University and a member of Nova Scotia's expert vaccine panel. The information she shared was sobering. Dr. Barrett noted that Nova Scotia has some of the highest rates of infection per 100,000 people in Canada, and that for every positive case identified, there are likely five to ten additional unreported positive cases of Covid-19. She also stressed the importance of properly wearing tightly-fitting, non-medical masks, regular hand-washing/sanitizing, and strictly adhering to the 6' physical distancing protocol, to protect ourselves and others against this variant.

While I am fully aware of the disappointment, sadness, and perhaps even anger, that the decision to suspend in-person worship will cause for many, I also know that others, both clergy and parishioners, will be relieved that they will not have to make that decision for themselves. I've already spoken to clergy who, with their Parish leadership, have been wrestling with the possibility of cancelling in-person worship over the Christmas season. Like you and me, they recognize the spiritual, social and mental health benefits of being able to gather in community, in-person for worship. However, I believe at this time we must seriously weigh those benefits against the very real risks that gathering in-person poses to the safety and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, and ourselves.

It is important to note that while in-person worship has been suspended at this time, the recording or livestreaming of worship is still allowable. All enhanced Covid protocols (attached) must be in place for this to happen. This includes the directive that any singing is to be offered by one person only while wearing a mask, with no choirs and no congregational singing in-person for recording or livestreaming. Please limit numbers to those who are required to be present and remember that we have been strongly advised to keep our close contacts to a minimum. I encourage you, where possible, to consider ways you can engage parishioners in real-time, whether through drive-in services (following all protocols) or using Zoom, GoToMeeting, Facebook live or another platform so that they can sing along safely, join in the prayers, and actively engage in worship.

The directive to suspend in-person worship until January 12th (in keeping with the timeframe for enhanced restrictions in Nova Scotia) does not apply to parishes in Prince Edward Island. However, while the number of positive Covid cases is significantly lower there, I strongly recommend that parishes move to online worship only. As the Infectious Diseases experts tell us, and as we have seen with other variants of Covid-19, these numbers are likely to grow. I encourage you to do everything you can to limit the spread of the Omicron variant, recognizing the significant risk that gathering in-person poses.

I realize that for some of you, this may be the second Christmas in a row that you have not been able to gather for in-person worship. I cannot tell you how sorry I am that this is the case. I did not expect that we would be in this situation at this time. If you are upset by this news, I am asking you not to direct your frustration at your clergy or Parish leaders, but to me. Clergy and Parish leaders have borne tremendous stress over the past 20 months as they have worked to faithfully adhere to changing Covid protocols to keep us all safe.

In our Christmas liturgy we celebrate the coming of Christ into our world as Emmanuel, God-with-us. May the truth of Christ's enduring presence, the reminder that God is with us, fill us with fresh hope and the perseverance needed to face the challenges and uncertainties of this moment. Please be assured that you are in my prayers.

The opening words of this blessing were written by Henri-Frédéric Amiel and I have found them particularly appropriate as we have grappled with the impacts of the pandemic on our common life:

*Life is short,*

*and we do not have much time*

*to gladden the hearts of those who walk this way with us.*

*So, be swift to love and make haste to be kind.*

*And the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,*

*be upon you and remain with you always.*

Every blessing for Christmas,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sandra Fyfe".

The Right Reverend Sandra Fyfe

Diocesan Bishop