



5/14/2021

Dear friends,

With increasing vaccination numbers and declining COVID numbers and a new Provincial Government *Reopening Roadmap*—we are seeing positive signs for the coming months. The transition from now until the fall looks to present our faith communities with a number of questions. When is it wise to return to in-person worship? How do we gradually return to in-person worship, in-person meetings, in-person gatherings? When does communion become possible. . .or just less complicated? When or how will we be able to sing again? When or how can we share food again? How do we ‘step our way’ through summer into what looks like a far more open fall?

After consultation with just under 100 faith community leaders on May 12, Pastor Ali and I met to discuss what Synod Guidelines might look like over the summer. It seems likely that Health Directives will be changing throughout the summer, so rather than looking at ‘guidelines for summer’ we will need to be updating synod guidelines step by step. So, at this time, rather than giving specific guidance, synod is providing these guiding principles for the summer of 2021:

1. **Hope:** We encourage our synod faith communities to consider a return to in person worship following Health Directives beginning with Step one (scheduled to begin on May 30). While we are grateful for the ‘manna in the wilderness’ that virtual worship has been (and recognize that in some form we will likely continue to provide that virtual worship going forward); we also recognize that our people are struggling with a sense of distance from their faith communities—sometimes with faith itself. We need to make our way gradually to ‘doing what we do’, to ‘being who we are’.
2. **Vigilance:** We trust our faith communities to continue to follow Health Directives throughout the provinces “Reopening” plan. Synod’s approach to Directives at this time has moved somewhat. Over the past year, synod has recommended more restrictive guidelines than given by the Health Authorities. In this period of reopening, backed by the rising vaccination level, synod anticipates recommending that faith communities make full use of the gradual opening of Health Directives for faith communities over the summer.
3. **Adaptation:** With summer slowdown nearing, some faith leaders have made the case that it might be best to simply wait until fall to re-open in person worship when things are simpler. The advantage of adapting to the changes step by step though, should be considered. In the usually smaller numbers of summer worship services, there is an opportunity to adapt to a return to in person worship. If we ‘step their way’ through the summer, we have the opportunity to help our people gradually adapt step by step into a return to in-person worship--which, at least for the fall, might not look like a simple return to pre-COVID ways. .
4. **Vaccination:** Faith communities have been asked by Health Authorities to take the lead in encouraging their people to be vaccinated’. Upon consultation with faith leaders across the synod about a more directive word about vaccination, Synod is providing this simpler to administrate guideline: *Synod urges our faith community*

*members to access vaccination.* As we move through the summer, following Health Directives, and with a growing percentage of our faith community vaccinated, we can move forward!

Note again, that Synod guidelines always come as advice to the faith communities. Congregations/faith communities have a decision to make based on their sense of local context. We pray that synod guidelines will continue to assist faith communities in that process. Throughout the summer, Pastor Ali and I will post on the website specific changes to Guidelines and to the Checklist as together, we pivot our way into—hopefully—a new reality.

I commend faith communities and their leadership for the way they have worked their way through these past 14 months. No doubt, we have at times felt fearful about the future in this time, and we have been uncertain about how to handle the various ‘legs’ of this pandemic journey. But throughout the journey our faith communities have engaged a world we did not expect and had never seen before, and we are still standing—weary though we may be. Well done!

Pray for each other and love one another as we make our way through this next—hopefully last—leg of the pandemic journey.

Peace,

+Sid

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Link to Current **Guiding Principles and Checklist for Places of Worship (from March 19, 2021)**

<https://sasksynod.ca/wp-content/uploads/Guiding-Principles-and-Checklist-for-in-person-Worship-March-2021.pdf>