



November 20, 2020

Greetings, people of the Diocese of New Westminster

On behalf of the Safety Team (The Rev. Tellison Glover, The Rev. Philippa Segrave-Pride and myself), I write to inform you of the new Provincial Health Orders shared with the Province today and to describe what this means for the churches and ministries of the Diocese of New Westminster. Those who wish to view the press briefing may go [here](#) to do so.

The new orders began November 19, 2020, and are in effect through Thursday December 7, 2020, with the possibility of modifying or extending them beyond that date.

Overall, the intent of the new orders is to stop or slow the exponential spread of the virus in our Province during what is a second wave of the coronavirus across the Province. As a part of this, Dr. Henry has suspended in-person gatherings of all kinds with some exceptions related to essential services and related to crucial life events (weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc.).

Based on what Dr. Henry and other officials are trying to accomplish, the following are the updated practices we will follow for this next period. You will note that these do not represent our churches returning to the protocols of a specific Phase in our Re-opening plan. Rather what we are doing for the next period is tailored both to the intent and to the specifics of the Provincial Health Orders delivered November 19.

1. **In-person, indoor and outdoor worship services:** All in-person worship services of any size or in any location are to be suspended. Livestreaming and other forms of recorded virtual worship are permitted (both Services of the Word and Holy Eucharist) as long as safety protocols from Phase I related to livestreaming and recorded worship are stringently followed.

2. **Weddings, Funerals, Baptisms, and Ordinations:** As we understand it, these important life events are permissible for this next period. All of these services are limited to 10 people including the Officiant. For this time period, these may *only* be Services of the Word.
3. **Formation Groups, Bible Studies, Classes, Social Times:** Any in-person meetings of this kind must be suspended during this period. We encourage these gatherings to meet online.
4. **Food Programs, Food Banks, Outreach Programs:** Food Programs and other programs/ministries that serve those on the margins of our society are permissible if the safety plans of those programs/ministries have been approved. With this said, the increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases means that within those programs, all safety protocols (health screening, hand sanitizing, physical distancing, the wearing of masks and, where possible, increased ventilation) need to be *stringently* adhered to. For this next period, outreach programs that consist of meals or other activities in which people *gather together* to have the meal or *gather together* to engage in some other activity are not permitted.
5. **Advent/Christmas Fairs:** As we understand these new orders, events that gather people together indoors are not permitted to occur during this period. Therefore, any scheduled Advent or Christmas fairs, benefits, sales during this time are not permitted.
6. **User Groups to include AA Groups:** All user groups that can go online for their meetings, should go online for their meetings. When asked about AA/NA/12-Step groups of all kinds that are currently meeting, the Provincial Health Officer said that they were an exception and can be treated as medical appointments. As with any gathering of any size during this time, all safety protocols (health screening, hand sanitizing, physical distancing, the wearing of masks and, where possible, increased ventilation) need to be *stringently* adhered to.
7. **Rentals:** All rentals need to verify that they will be adhering to this latest Provincial Health Order.
8. **Pastoral Visits:** One-on-one pastoral meetings are permitted during this period as long as a) all the safety protocols (screening, hand sanitizing, physical distancing, the wearing of masks and increased ventilation) are followed and b) the visits do NOT occur in someone's homes. Hospital pastoral visits are permitted as long as the visitor is following hospital protocols.
9. **Offices:** The Provincial Health Officer was clear that for this period she is *not* closing offices; she is suspending gatherings and urging us all to decrease social interactions outside of immediate family or household "bubbles." Church and

ministry offices are permitted to continue to remain open but, where possible and practical, employees who can do their jobs from home should be allowed to do so. During this time it will be important to continue to sanitize any spaces that are used and to continue stringently observing safety protocols related to health screening, hand sanitizing, physical distancing, the wearing of masks in all common areas and, where possible, increasing ventilation.

To note, the Provincial Health Officer has told us that she will keep us updated about whether these new restrictions will go beyond December 7, 2020. **My advice to all clergy and lay leaders is that we plan for the possibility that these orders will continue for an additional two weeks or even until the end of 2020.**

I realize how frustrating change after change may be for all of you. I also realize how weary many of you are with this pandemic and its effects on our communities and on our churches. Please know that the members of the Re-opening/Safety Team and the entire Synod Office staff are here to assist you with any questions you may have or to serve as a sounding board as you try to think through how to plan for Advent and Christmas under these circumstances.

I am praying for you and your parishes daily.

With love and respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Melesse". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.