



On March 10, Dr. Bonnie Henry removed more restrictions related to living with this ongoing pandemic. Clearly there has been a shift to fewer mandated directives as we move to a different phase of response to COVID-19. Some are celebrating this, and some have become more anxious. Throughout our diocese this range will also be seen. In response to these changes from the PHO there will also be some changes in the protocols within our diocese, therefore I ask that you read them carefully and determine the best steps forward for your parish or other place of ministry and plan accordingly.

Once again, my sincerest gratitude to all of you for your efforts during the last two years as you diligently worked to keep people safe but continued to offer opportunities to gather as a worshipping community. Thank-you for your dedication during these unprecedented times. God has walked with us throughout this pandemic, but when we are not able to worship in person, the Holy Spirit can feel distant from us. I thank God and the work of many people that we have been able to hold firm in these times with vaccinations, wearing masks, distancing, and washing our hands. All of this and several other endeavours have brought us to this time of changing the protocols.

In the Diocese of New Westminster effective immediately for worship services ONLY:

- **There are no longer any capacity limits for worship services in the diocese.** This applies for vaccinated or unvaccinated people. This means that for **worship only** it is not mandatory to check vaccination records.
- **Masks are no longer mandatory for worship.**
- **Distancing is no longer required.**
It is advised that you continue to encourage people to keep a distance between themselves, but it is not mandatory.
- **Offertory Plates.**
Once again, we may return to passing the Offertory Plates amongst the congregation prior to these gifts being presented for the Prayer Over the Gifts.
- **Congregational and Choral Singing.**
Singing may take place without the wearing of masks. This applies for both the congregation and choirs.

Please note that it will be important for all parishes and worshipping communities to determine the best ways to phase in these changes. It will be important to communicate clearly to your parishioners as to when and how you plan to do this. You may start immediately or decide to wait until after April 8, or possibly later.

For events aside from worship, face coverings do not have to be worn, but the restrictions related to proof of vaccination (for those eligible to be vaccinated) are still in place until April 8 (unless this date is changed by the PHO). April 8 is the Friday before Holy Week. **Therefore, until April 8 proof of vaccination must be shown for:**

- **Coffee or lunch after services.**
- **Bible Studies, Lent Series, Christian Formation events.**
- **Youth Groups.**
- **All other parish meetings and gatherings**

On April 8 (unless the PHO mandates otherwise) there will also be changes to the protocols in our diocese related to gatherings, Communion in both kinds and sharing the peace in ways which were customary prior to March of 2020.

In the Diocese of New Westminster effective April 8:

- **Proof of vaccination.**

This will not need to be shown for gatherings (social, Christian formation or other events) in the parish

- **Communion in two kinds.**

Parishes are once again able to move to offer Communion in both kinds (the consecrated bread and the consecrated wine). This change may be a challenge for many people and for a number of parishes. The reintroduction will need to take place gradually with plenty of communication. You must plan for this and prepare people for the return of offering the chalice to communicants. Many will be anxious about it and clear communication will be helpful. Not all will want to participate in this. Appendix A, below, describes best practices, but to be clear, the common cup and the bread can once again be our practice for Communion. Intinction (dipping the bread into the wine) or small glasses for the consecrated wine are not practices of our diocese.

- **Sharing the Peace.**

We can return to sharing the peace as part of our liturgies. Again, this should be phased in, and it will be important to educate people on how to respect those who would prefer not to greet others with more than a nod or a bow.

Rental groups using space in parish buildings must follow the PHO protocols: no masks are required but proof of vaccination must be shown until April 8 (unless it is worship). The parish leadership is not responsible for ensuring compliance but must receive confirmation that the rental group will be complying.

I understand all of this brings about a great shift, once again, to the practices in each parish and worshipping community. It will be very important to plan, prepare, and communicate very carefully these changes. Give an allowance for good change management and collaboration to reach the end goals. Each parish will probably move at their own pace on this, but I encourage all to keep moving forward to reduce the pandemic protocols in place.

Soon I will be working to develop a Diocesan Communicable Disease Protocol so that if the need arises we can move into this protocol quickly and easily.

I am so grateful that we are now in this place that some restrictions are being lifted and that more will be lifted in the early part of April. I thank God for the new advancements in science that helped bring this about, but also for the care and concern of all health care workers and the people of this diocese who have worked so hard to protect all people. I know that this will be difficult for some, pastoral care and consideration will be very important as we move to incorporate these changes. Thank you so very much for your care and attention to how you do this in your parish or other worshipping community.

Holy One, this pandemic has been a terrible weight on our shoulders as we have seen loved ones become ill and some have even died as a result of this virus. This has been a time of loneliness and fear; not knowing what the future might bring to each of us and our loved ones. We pray for all who still live in fear, the immunocompromised in particular, that they will be protected and that their fears might be alleviated. We pray for this province and this country that as we move into a lessening of restrictions we might grow together in community and compassion for one another. We pray for all the people of this diocese, that they may know your loving care and eternal presence blessing them each and every day. We pray too for the people of Ukraine that war may end and peace might reign. In this time of Lent, fill us with the courage and love of Jesus, that this world might be transformed by your love and grace. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

BLESSINGS & PEACE

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Appendix A

Returning to the use of the Common Cup at Communion.

It will be so important to introduce the use of the common cup for all communicants at worship gradually and carefully. No one should feel pressure to receive Communion in both kinds (the consecrated bread and wine). Not all will want to receive from the common cup, and no one must. Not all will be comfortable returning to this practice, and all must be given room and time to prepare themselves. Not all will be ready yet but might be in time.

This guidance is offered as a preferred way to reintroduce the common cup, but you will need to adapt for each parish situation.

Please make it very clear in your worship bulletin that individuals should not feel pressure or coerced to receive in both kinds. Please emphasize that this is being offered to all who would like to participate, and that receiving in one kind is sufficient. **Intinction (dipping the bread into the wine) is strictly prohibited. The use of individual Communion cups for the wine is prohibited.**

Two standing stations, one for bread and one for wine, are recommended and should be sufficiently separated to allow for movement from one to the other.

Communicants who wish to receive wine, having received the bread, move to the Eucharistic Ministrant administering the chalice. The communicant stops directly in front of the ministrant, waits until the words of administration have been spoken, (if they are wearing a mask, they remove it now) receives the wine, and returns to their pew.

An alternative for those more hesitant to receive from the common cup is for the communicant to stop in front of the ministrant, hear the words of administration and the communicant simply bows or touches the chalice but does not consume the wine.

It cannot be emphasized enough that this change to administering the common cup could be very stressful and worrisome for communicants. Please proceed carefully and kindly to help individuals move into this new change. It may take a while to have this fully implemented in many parishes. It also may help to have administrators masked for the foreseeable future, but this is not mandatory.