



The United Church of Canada

Living Skies Regional Council

60A Athabasca St. E.
Moose Jaw, SK S6H 0L2
Phone: 306-704-0181

27 November 2020

Dear Members of Living Skies Regional Council

Advent greetings. I am reaching out to you as we live into the reality of the growing number of COVID infections in our province and as we move into the Advent waiting season. Before we talk restrictions and mandates, I would like to offer some encouragement and support.

These are challenging days that not only hold hurdles to ministry and community, but also offer opportunities of hope and joy. We've shifted the ways we've done ministry and how we have supported community, and we are needing to shift again. It is hard, and its harder still as we move into Advent, a time of ritual and gatherings.

It's a time of grief, anxiety and disappointment. While we acknowledge these feelings, we also need to look for the moments when sacred hope peeks into the change. While nothing was "normal" about the first Christmas, there were the feelings of fear, anxiety, and grief. And there was also the mysterious movement of the Holy.

Right now, hope and joy make their way into our communities in Advent boxes distributed to families, in coffee times shared over zoom, in small gathering of people doing their best to stay safe and be community. You've made hard decisions, but you have done so with compassion and love.

Thank you for that.

As many of you will know, the Provincial Government and the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) have released new restrictions which affect the way our communities of faith function. I would like to remind you that while these restrictions may feel like recommendations, they are indeed mandates with which we must be in compliance.

The Government has made it clear that organizations who are found non-compliant will be fined, which can total in the thousands of dollars. Yes, this puts us in a hard position where we move from being welcoming people of faith to enforcers of health mandates. These restrictions have been put in place to facilitate the safety of our communities.

While the government and the health authority are not mandating places of worship to close – the suspension of in-person worship is the community of faith's decision – they are asking faith leaders and leaders in the churches to make sure that the guidelines, restrictions and health mandates are strictly followed.

Here are the current mandates that we are obligated to uphold:

- **The maximum allowable number of people participating in indoor public gatherings is 30.** This is a change that goes into effect November 27. This includes worship, funerals, weddings, baptisms and building users. For worship situation, clergy/worship leadership (musicians, lay reader) and volunteers are not included in the 30. That being said, please do your best to limit the number of volunteers/staff that are present beyond the maximum 30.

- **All people inside the building MUST wear a face mask – this includes all employees and visitors in common areas, even in those areas where public access is not usual.** Masks are still required in areas that have acrylic barriers and under plastic face shields. **The only exemption to this mandate is the worship leader – if the worship leader (minister/lay worship leader/lay preacher) is standing at a pulpit/lectern/music stand at least 3 meters or more from the congregation, they may speak without a mask.** If possible, my recommendation is that you remove your mask only for preaching. All others involved in the service must be masked.

- As before, **no food or drink is allowed.** This does not extend to communion. If your congregation plans to have communion safety protocols need to be in place (no common cup, no shared plates, no passing plates, no dipping in juice etc).

- All other guidelines pertaining to physical distancing, singing (not recommended, but if singing does happen masks MUST be worn), sanitizing, movement, contact tracing etc are in place.

- If rental groups are still using your space, please be aware that team/group sports, activities, games, competitions, recitals, practices etc are suspended, including amateur and recreational leagues for all ages. Athletes/dancers under 18 years of age may continue practicing in groups of eight or less, as long as all are wearing masks and maintain 3 meters distance..

The newest restrictions are found here:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2020/november/25/covid-19-update-new-measures-in-effect-november-27>

It is my hope that each community of faith in our Region commits to meeting or exceeding the SHA guidelines. It is imperative that we keep the health of our communities at the forefront of our decisions. Compliance is essential if we are going to keep COVID numbers from growing. At this point in the pandemic, it is important to remember that the virus is in all areas of the province, which means it is likely in our communities, and could be brought into our church buildings. Our choices need to reflect this. Please consider moving to remote worship if possible. If remote worship isn't feasible, when you gather in person make sure everyone is



The United Church of Canada

Living Skies Regional Council

60A Athabasca St. E.
Moose Jaw, SK S6H 0L2
Phone: 306-704-0181

masked, singing is restricted, and physical distancing is maintained. Places of worship are low on the possible transmission places, and if we want to remain that way, we will need to maintain our diligence and hard work.

Faith communities are obliged to enforce public health orders for all people on your property. As followers of Christ, living into our call to living lives of justice and love we are obliged to ensure the health and safety of our community. While it is hard to do this while Advent and Christmas are looming, please know that this is one Advent and Christmas that we need to do differently so that we might move back into a more “normal” Advent and Christmas next year. We’ve missed Holy Week, Easter, and other important dates in our Liturgical calendar, but they are merely dates. They do not lessen the dedication, faith and love of you, the people of the United Church. Be strong, be safe, be resilient, and know that you don’t move through this time alone.

Blessings and peace,

Rev. Tricia Gerhard, Executive Chairperson; Rev. Rob Reed, Convenor, Regional Council Gathering; Members: Yugene Oh, Linda Gunningham, Cameron Fraser, Tim Ellis, Dave Whalley, Brian Maitland, Donna Brown, Ron Brandow