



# The United Church of Canada

## Living Skies Regional Council

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Dear leaders of our communities of faith,

Greetings to you as we enter in to this beautiful month of June! On June 1, the Government of Saskatchewan released details pertaining to the third step of the re-open Saskatchewan plan. As you know, we moved into Step One on May 30, and it is in the plans to move to Step Two (***which has no impact on places of worship***) on June 20. As it stands right now, three weeks after the goal of 70% of those 12 years and older have had their first vaccination the province will move to Step Three. As announced today, Step Three will see all of the Health Restrictions removed – including the mandatory indoor mask mandate and the physical distancing mandate. The expected date for this move to Step Three is July 11. This means we will be as close to pre-pandemic normal life as we will get. We have been navigating restrictions on congregational life for over 400 days, and while we are excited to think about gathering as we are used to, there are things to think about.

The government will be providing some very general, non-restrictive guidelines to keep in mind as we move back to “normal” as a province and as communities of faith. These will likely include reminders about the importance of hand washing/sanitizing, frequency of cleaning, among other things. Beyond that there will be no guidelines that we will be expected to implement. It is up to each community of faith to create re-opening or re-normalizing plans based on their knowledge of their people.

As we discern how this return to pre-pandemic restriction life affects how we function as a congregation and as a church, I would offer a word of caution. We are moving to a time when people will be eager to gather just like they used to but the reality is that COVID has not disappeared. Our congregations, in July, will have a mix of folk with varying vaccination doses, including those who are unable to be vaccinated and those who chose not to. Children under 12 will not be vaccinated (as far as we know). This means there will be vulnerable people in our midst. I would encourage you to think hard about how masks and physical distancing play a role in your gatherings. More than anything, we need to create a space that is safe for those who are vaccinated and not, and for those who choose to continue to mask in public gatherings and those who do not. Are there people who will not be back in public worship? How do we include these folks in our congregational life? How will we welcome renters and outside groups back into our space? There are things yet to ponder. Most of all, it will be imperative to ensure that your congregational members feel safe – physically, emotionally and mentally – when they walk through the church doors.

It has been a long, challenging journey – one we couldn't have prepared for or even have imagined a year and a half ago. The people of this region have shown deep faithfulness and resilience, confirming the reality of prairie tenacity. We aren't completely done with COVID yet, but we move ever closer to a time when COVID will not be the daily topic of conversation and the source of anxiety. Deep breaths, colleagues and friends, and remember we are not alone. We are companioned by God's deep presence, and surrounded by a larger circle of faithful ones.

Blessings and peace,  
Rev. Tricia Gerhard  
Chair, Living Skies Regional Council