



The United Church of Canada

Living Skies Regional Council

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Dear Living Skies Regional Council

Summer greetings! This is very likely the last time I will write to you in the role of “COVID Restrictions Know-It-All” and I am sure that you, like me, are very okay with that. In less than a week, we will see the Government of Saskatchewan lifting ALL COVID restrictions in the province. For our communities of faith this means we will no longer have health mandates regarding gathering sizes, masking, physical distancing, among all the other things that have been restricted over the last year and a half. For some of you, this will be great news and for others there will be some worry still. The reality is that for most, if not all congregations, there will continue to be vulnerable people in our midst – children under 12, those who are unvaccinated due to ineligibility and choice. As we make our re-opening plans, we need to consider these members of our communities and find ways to ensure that all are welcome and safe in our worship space and church building.

Within my own congregation, and I use Sunset as an example not as a rule, we are continuing remote worship during the summer, with a plan to return to in person worship on September 12. As we return, we will put coffee time on hold for the first month, have offering plates at the sanctuary entrance instead of passing the plates, plan for Sunday school to resume in October, and offer alternatives to hand shaking and hugging during the passing of the peace and we will continue to offer live-streamed services so that those who stay home (by choice or because of illness) can still participate in worship, rental groups will be encouraged to clean after they meet. As minister, I will continue to mask when mingling among the congregational members before and after church as a way of normalizing mask wearing in non-mandated times. The Regional Council cannot mandate required masking rules, but individual congregations can recommend the use of masks within their space for congregational members.

The reality is that as of July 11, life returns to “normal” – but the pandemic is still in place. Yes, we will be able to sing, share meals, baptize, gather and worship without the need to incorporate health restrictions, but the reality is that we still need to be cautious and careful in how we do these things. Ease into this “new normal” by returning to worship in stages. Encourage people to be comfortable wearing their masks if they want, stating if they are or are not comfortable with shaking hands, hugging etc. Be gentle with yourself and your people as you navigate how the community will come together after a long time of living very differently. The province is still in a state of emergency, the pandemic status has not been lifted, and there are still variants of COVID out in the world that are extremely contagious. High levels of vaccination within the province will help to mitigate the effects of the virus, but there is still a chance of transmission. I tell you this so that we all know that we aren’t done with COVID, we are just learning how to live with it for right now.

Again and again, I am encouraged by the communities of faith in this province and your willingness to live into the restrictions of the last year and a half. As we move into this restriction-less time, look to the SHA website for guidelines that you might use, and feel free to continue to ask questions of me as I assume the title of “Guidelines Guru” in the coming months. Friends, surely God is in this place, and in this people! As you venture into summer, drink deeply of the beauty creation holds, and take moments for gratitude (big and little) so that joy becomes a daily practice.

Peace and joy,

Rev. Tricia Gerhard,
Chair, Living Skies Regional Council Executive
Former “Restrictions-Know-It-All”