

December 4, 2021: Living Skies Regional Council of the United Church of Canada

Dear friends,

By now, you are thoroughly tired of hearing from both Tracy and me. These past three days have been a flurry of anxiety and tension based on the changes in the Proof of Vaccination Public Health Order concerning Places of Worship. I want to extend my appreciation for the patience and diligence you all have shown as we have worked to understand this change and what it means for the life and work of our congregations in Living Skies. We have received important clarifications from our liaison about vaccine exemptions for faith communities. It helps to know that key terms like “worship”, “religious activity” and “essential service” are not defined in the public health order, hence the confusion.

**The following activities in a place of worship are EXEMPT from PoV:**

- Worship (including special services), including coffee time immediately after church.
- All 12 Step programs – they are considered essential due to the well-being of the individuals, so are exempt in any facility. The Spiritual aspect of the programs may be included under the exemption granted to places of worship
- Also includes but is not limited to: Mental Health and Addictions support; Victim services; Religiously affiliated charitable organizations (such as a food bank); At Risk Youth Groups etc.
- Christmas concerts and pageants are considered an extension of worship even if they happen separately from the usual worship time. The restriction in 2(c)(viii)(5) that applies to concert venues has been interpreted to only refer to large public venues.
- Meetings of the faith community for church governance, planning, etc. – however remote from the act of worship. All activities related to the maintenance and support of the faith community are deemed to be religious activity.
- If the church is being used as a banquet facility for an event that is open to the public, PoV is required. If the event is not open to the public (i.e. invitation only wedding reception), PoV is not required.

At the end of all of this, the most important work we can do is the work of keeping our communities safe and healthy. You are doing the sacred work of care for others when you wrestle with the guidelines and with the discerning of what is best for your community of faith.

Blessings and peace,  
Tricia Gerhard  
Chair, Regional Council Executive