

Epiphany - January 6, 2022

Dear People of the Diocese of Calgary

We enter the new year under the shadow of a new variant of the COVID-19 virus. The Omicron Variant is highly contagious and is working its way through the population at rates higher than anything we have witnessed to date with COVID-19. Hospital admissions in Alberta are on the rise again and the evidence from other jurisdictions that have been dealing with this variant longer suggests that we can expect a dramatic rise in hospitalization in the next two weeks.

While this variant generally causes less severe infections, by sheer numbers of infections alone it threatens to tax our health care resources. While many experts concede that most of us could become infected with this variant, we should do our part to slow the rate of infection so as to lessen the stress and strain, not only on healthcare resources, but on our family, friends, and neighbours who work in healthcare and live daily with the stress and fatigue that comes from shouldering an unimaginable burden for almost two years.

In an effort to do our part, the Archbishop, on the advice of the COVID-19 Task Force, is once again suspending in-person worship in the Diocese of Calgary and asking parishes to return to online services and other non-in-person ways of connecting, gathering, and caring for the people of our parish communities. For those parishes prepared to suspend services immediately, suspensions can begin this Sunday, January 9. The general suspension should begin no later than Sunday, January 16 and will last for at least three Sundays; January 16, 23, and 30. While we hope that this next wave of COVID-19 will rise and fall quickly, the Archbishop and Task Force will further advise during the week between January 23 and 30 as to whether the suspension should be extended past January 30.

As the season for annual Meetings of Parishioners approaches, thought should be given to how parishes can conduct their meetings in a non-in-person format. If need be, permission may be granted to delay these meetings past the normal deadline should delaying them be deemed the best course of action. Even if a later date in-person meeting is possible, consideration should be given as to how to include parishioners who are unable or not yet comfortable with attending in-person. Low attendance for Christmas services has been reported across the diocese and seems to be the result of people self-excluding themselves from in-person services. This phenomena could also affect in-person annual meetings.

Over this past 22 months, the people and clergy of the Diocese of Calgary have found innovative and creative ways to be pastoral and stay connected with parishioners in times of in-person worship suspensions. The Archbishop and COVID-19 Task force want to encourage the continued use of these good practices and commend the work that has been done as a basis for continued care in a time when we cannot gather together physically.

Faithfully Yours

Archbishop Greg and the COVID-19 Task Force