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**The Diocese of Rupert’s Land**

The Right Reverend Geoffrey Woodcroft

Bishop of Rupert’s Land

*We acknowledge that we meet and work in Treaty 1, 2 and 3 Land, the traditional land of the Anishinaabe, Cree, Dakota, Sioux and Oji-Cree people and the homeland of the Metis Nation.  We are grateful for their stewardship of this land and their hospitality which allows us to live, work and service God the Creator here.*

**August 5, 2021**

**Parish Corporations of the Diocese of Rupert’s Land**

**COVID-19 restrictions upon in-person Worship and Gatherings**

Greetings in God, who is our hope and our salvation!

*How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life for evermore. Psalm 133*

The writer of ps. 133 knows the powerful experience of witnessing the power of God in action, in the choosing of leadership, and the practice of ministry. We are moving gradually toward in-person experiences where we shall be welcomed, affirmed and sent in mission. Our corporate worship is just that important to the mission we serve.

Reengaging in-person gathering means we must also consider the burdens placed upon our health-care system(s) by COVID, burdens that dramatically reduced treatments, surgeries and responses to non-COVID related health concerns. We are not yet clear of the effects of COVID 19, and as a responsible institution it is incumbent upon the Church to lead intelligently and compassionately.

We the leaders of our diocese and parishes, both lay and ordained, have a duty of care to the most vulnerable in our midst.  At this time those most on my mind are adults who for medical reasons cannot be vaccinated and children 12 and under who cannot yet be vaccinated.  The health and welfare of our children weighs particularly heavy on my heart and consumes my thoughts.  They are our future and they are relying on each of us to take whatever steps are necessary to ensure their safety so that they may live into that future.  I ask all of us to reach out to parents of young children and seek their opinions on how we may best protect their children.  By carefully listening we can help to reduce the stress that is very much a part of their daily lives during this pandemic. Please issue my email address should parents of children 12 and under, and the most vulnerable of our communities wish to address me personally regarding their safety in Church gatherings. Leaders working with the most vulnerable must be masked and fully vaccinated.

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Gradually Churches we are re-engaging in-person worship with numbers not to exceed public health directives. Now more than ever it is important for us to maintain our safe Church gathering practices:

**(1) wearing masks at all times,**

**(2) observing physical distancing (2 meters),**

**(3) refraining from the use of wine,**

**(4) keeping a record log of participants and contact information, and,**

**(5) Receptions including food and beverages may be catered by professional caterers, or administered only by those with food handler accreditation (no homemade food or beverages).**

**(6) Communities called upon to provide Baptism must contact me by email to setup a discussion for your unique situations. Baptism is a corporate act of the Church, and as such needs planning with this at the heart of the conversation.**

**(7) Parish meetings, study groups and Christian Education are permitted ensuring all protocols and directives are followed.**

**Manitoba** worship and music leaders now have the opportunity to be unmasked during their leadership duties. Leaders need to provide proof (photo or photocopy) of their MB immunization record to the parish corporation to keep on file until this pandemic is over. This is a bold step forward, and comes with the responsibility to respect physical distance from all participants and at least 4 meters separation from those 12 years and younger and anyone who is not fully protected by two vaccine doses. For myself, I am choosing to wear a mask as I lead worship, as it is not about me, but they whom I serve.

I expect all worship leaders to be fully vaccinated, with the exception of those who cannot receive the vaccinations for medical reasons. Please continue to encourage vaccination amongst your disciples.

May you find God’s blessing abounding in your heart, the face of Jesus in your neighbourhood, and the Spirit signalling refreshing rains and new hope.

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