



The United Church of Canada L'Église Unie du Canada

Regional Council 15
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October 27, 2020

Dear Members of Regional Council 15 and Church Boards/Church Councils:

Thank you for your patience and for your continued care and due diligence for yourselves and your communities of faith. As you already know, it is important that we all do our part to keep one another safe. Please know your work in these challenging times is both honoured and appreciated.

Thank you to the clergy who have been in contact to make me aware that there is confusion with respect to singing in church. I have been in conversation with Dr. Strang's office to clarify the situation.

Singing in Faith-Based Gatherings:

Dr. Strang has confirmed that the document on the website: [novascotia.ca/coronavirus/Guidance for Faith Based Gatherings](https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/Guidance%20for%20Faith%20Based%20Gatherings) is still the current guidance. The written information for faith based gatherings from September 23rd is the latest update, and is located using the following link: <https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/Faith-based-gatherings-guidelines.pdf>

It states:

Singing and playing wind or brass instruments are higher risk activities because the virus can be transmitted through saliva and respiratory droplets. Choirs are not recommended at this time;

- Discourage congregational singing and chanting. Alternatively, suggest congregants hum along to the vocalist, instrumentalist or pre-recorded music.

From Dr. Strang:

"As you referenced in the Sept. 23rd guidance document (which is the current version of our guidance to faith communities) we recommend against congregational singing but do not prohibit it. I have communicated that churches can make the choice to have congregational singing, and if they do make that choice people should be masked"

We have suggested for our United Church, that a soloist or small group of people lead the singing and invite the congregation to hum along.

Please also see *Guidance for Musicians* document.

Group Singing (Choirs, Ensembles, Musical Theatre)

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/COVID-19-Guidance-for-Vocalists-and-Instrumentalists.pdf>

- Group singing is considered higher risk at this time and is not recommended.
- If singing groups choose to practice they should consider virtual or small group practice; any time spent in group singing should be kept to a minimum.
- For indoor studios there should be a 30-minute time followed by cleaning of common surfaces.

As singing is not recommended, yet not prohibited, if you are considering introducing singing to your Faith Based Gathering please consider the following:

- That you inform the congregation before you begin, so they can make an informed decision of their comfort level being in a setting where there is singing.
- That you consider the demographic of the congregation and whether the majority of the congregation is in the risk category.
- Given the restrictions for indoor studios (see above). You may wish to allow the congregation to sing the last hymn, or sing hymns in the second half of the service. As congregants will then leave the building (keeping with the 30- minute allowable time) and allow for the cleaning following the service.

Bulletins:

I have been ask about the production of bulletins. Here are some suggestions to help you:

If you have the capability of having your church service projected, that is the safest way to have congregational engagement. I realize that this is not possible for many congregations and there are passages of life in which a bulletin is important and becomes a family heirloom/keepsake/memory. In such situations, I would recommend:

- that one person who has worn a mask and has sanitized hands, produce and fold the bulletins.
- that the same person distribute the bulletins by placing them on the marked spots where seating is allowed with the distancing regulations.
- that congregational members be asked not to share bulletins unless they are in the same family bubble.
- that the congregational member be asked to take their bulletin with them or place them in the recycling bin on the way out of the church. (This will help protect your volunteers or caretakers)

Site Visitors: Church Office and Drop-ins. It is recommended:

- that congregations limit the number of visitors to the workplace (office) to only those essential.
- if people need to meet with a staff person, suggest people make an appointment and make sure masks are worn.
- have extra disposable masks available in case people come without.

Sunday School, Children and Youth Programs:

The instructions for our Region 15 (NS) says:

- Instructional settings for children (e.g. Sunday School) should follow the applicable guidelines for day camps. Please see the link:
<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/docs/COVID-19-Return-to-Day-Camp-Guidelines.pdf>

We recommended that Sunday school happen at a different time than during church. We encourage you to find creative ways to have your Sunday school programs and at the same time following the guidelines of the Health Authorities. Please use the guidelines for day camps as your guide, and we ask that you follow those protocols for children and youth ministries. If you are able to adhere to the guidelines for day camps and still have Sunday school at the same time as church then we support you in that endeavour.

Please see the recorded webinar from Rev. Catherine Stuart on the Regional Council website for ideas for children and youth programs.

Spiritual Care in Hospitals and Long-Term Care facilities:

From Dr. Strang:

"I have reached out to colleagues in the health care system to discuss opportunities to ensure the necessary access for pastoral care for patients/residents."

Therefore, we ask that you follow the protocols that are in place for each institution.

Spiritual Care in people's homes:

I share everyone's concern about visiting, and would love to be able to say its fine to visit people in their homes. We have been asked to limit our exposures to multiple groups of people, so that makes it hard to visit from family to family.

The Nova Scotia requirements are as follows:

5.3 Notwithstanding section 5.1 and section 5.2:

(b) individuals may gather together in social groups of up to 10 persons per group without adhering to the physical distancing requirements of two metres or six feet.

5.4 Effective July 3, 2020, persons may engage in the following events or activities indoors or outdoors, while adhering to a maximum of 50 persons in attendance:

(a) social events;

(b) arts and culture events;

(c) sports and physical activity; or

(d) weddings and funerals, and other faith gatherings,

all persons in attendance must practice physical distancing, except persons residing in the same household or social groups of up to 10 persons adhering to section 5.3(b).

If the understanding of a social group is that it has to consist of the same people all the time, then I would recommend that visiting people in their homes only be done on an urgent basis, with the adherence to the social distancing regulations and masked.

In visiting people's homes you are exposing yourself and the family to other social groups.

I will be part of a meeting with Dr. Strang on November 2, 2020 for denominational leaders and will ask the question about visiting people in their homes so we can gain more clarity.

If you have other questions you wish me to ask at that time please email them to me at fmaccuish@united-church.ca by October 30, 2020 at 4:00pm (Atlantic time) and I will endeavour to get the answers.

Sincerely,

Faith

Faith March-MacCuish
Executive Minister