



Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese -  
Dear Friends in Christ:

I am writing to thank you for the diligent care you have been exhibiting in following the liturgical protocols regarding Covid-19, and for your proactive leadership in examining the practices of your parishes and adapting them as necessary to be especially conscious of health and safety in these anxious times. As you know, the situation continues to evolve and change by the day. The World Health Organisation has now named the Covid-19 outbreak as a global pandemic. The need for prayer is more urgent than ever, and our vigilance in caring for each other must remain intentional and strong.

As the Church, we are the family of God, the body of Christ and the community of the faithful. The very last action we want to take is the cancellation of our worship services. We are determined to continue to gather for worship, as safely as possible, until such time that we are advised or directed by health authorities or the government that it is necessary to suspend public worship. If that time comes, all of us must, of course, immediately follow that direction. We will contact you immediately of new developments.

In the meantime, **we are immediately ceasing the practice of coffee hours and all other purely social non-essential gatherings, especially those that involve the serving and sharing of food for social reasons (e.g., potlucks, teas).** Ministries where food is served to hungry and disadvantaged people can, and should, continue, using the most current health and safety guidelines available from public health. All other meetings, study groups and gatherings need to be assessed by parish leaders for their necessity and safety. Many of you continue to have questions about situations specific to your contexts. We trust you and your leadership team to make intelligent, safe decisions based on the information readily available to us all through the health authorities. **All directives as they are given from public health and government must be followed immediately.** Please confirm with your licensees, tenants and external groups that they will also do the same. In all activities, please continue to practice extreme measures in hygiene. There is no harm in exercising excessive caution, even if that means changing how we do things. People can, and do, understand that these are extraordinary times.

Even without cancelling our worship services, it is becoming increasingly clear that some people will not be able to join us at church, due to personal risk factors, illness or fear. We want to make it possible to continue to connect pastorally with all of our people, whether they are in our pews or at home. As a Diocese, we will be live streaming the Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday liturgies from St James Cathedral, and we will make that link widely available. It is also relatively easy to offer live streaming of your own services if you wish; [tips have been provided here.](#)



**Diocese of Toronto**  
Anglican Church of Canada

For those who wish to receive, and if clergy feel comfortable providing them and are well, home communions may continue. Reserved sacrament (bread only) from the parish is a wonderful way to keep housebound parishioners connected to their church family. Please practice rigorous hygiene both before and after visiting the sick. Please consume all the consecrated bread that you bring into people's homes and do not return any of it to the church for redistribution. Similarly, visits to hospitals, nursing homes and residences may continue as long as the facility is willing to welcome you. Please respect whatever protocols they need to put into place.

Having said that, some parishioners will not wish a visit, and some cannot safely be visited. Clergy need to exercise good and safe judgement, as well as practice self-care in accordance with their own health and comfort level. Extreme caution is advised. But please maintain contact with all of your parishioners through telephone calls, emails and mailed notes. This is a time when people are feeling particularly isolated and vulnerable. It is vital that the Church continue a pastoral ministry for everyone, even if it is necessarily done from a distance.

Some of you have been concerned about the Diocesan Centre. Rob Saffrey, our Executive Director, has created a plan for staff, and it is our hope that should anyone need to work from home we have the capacity to carry on essential functions for some time. Continue to email or telephone the Synod Office for resourcing as you normally would. You may also want to consider with your own staff and volunteers how duties in the parish can be continued remotely, as best as possible, if it becomes necessary to do so. It is important that we carry on, as much as we are able, during tumultuous times.

Lastly, I want to express my concern for my fellow clergy of the Diocese. Ministry is front-line work, and risk is a part of that. We recognise that it is likely that some of us will fall ill. I urge you to monitor your own health and err on the side of caution. When you feel in the least bit unwell, practice self-care. Stay home. Ask for help. Call on your colleagues and your capable lay leaders to cover for you, as best as they are able. It is imperative that you keep your Area Bishop and Area Office informed as to your own well-being and the state of your parish. We care for you and are praying for you.

This is a challenging time. We ask that you keep us in your prayers also.

Yours in Christ,

The Right Reverend Andrew J. Asbil  
Bishop of Toronto