

The Parishes of Waterford and St. Mark

Operational Plan: Green Level of Recovery (September 26, 2021)

Preamble

All parishes in the Diocese of Fredericton are required to have an operational plan that meets or exceeds the minimum requirements for operation according to the guidelines set out by the province of New Brunswick in “COVID-19 Operational Plan Guide: Keeping New Brunswickers Safer Together” (<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/covid-19/covid-op-plan-guide.pdf>).

The reason for this requirement is simple. Church gatherings, like other community gatherings, increase the risk of exposure to COVID-19. Even more, they increase the risk of serious infection for a common demographic in many of our parishes—in particular, children under 12 and the unvaccinated. As followers of Jesus and ambassadors of God’s kingdom in the world, devoted to love of neighbor and the welfare of our communities and province, we want to do our part in making our church buildings safe for public use. This is precisely what an operational plan based on the provincial guidelines helps us to do.

Below is our operational plan for the Green Level of recovery for the Parishes of Waterford and St. Mark. The plan covers five areas: 1) Leadership Roles and Responsibilities; 2) Guidelines for Indoor Gatherings; 3) Guidelines for Outdoor Gatherings; 4) Guidelines for the Office at St. Mark’s; 5) Communication and Follow Up.

Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

The parish Rector and Wardens will be responsible for the operational plan and its implementation, ensuring that parish policy conforms to the guidelines of the Province of New Brunswick and the Diocese of Fredericton. The rector will communicate the operational plan to both parishes, safeguard the worship space and organize a schedule of worship. The wardens will recruit, train and schedule volunteers for screening, monitoring, cleaning and disinfecting. They will also safeguard the building and appoint volunteers to supervise as people come and go for worship.

Guidelines for Indoor Gatherings

We will try to gather by Zoom as much as possible during this phase of recovery, whether for Sunday worship, prayers, small group study, or church meetings. Below are our guidelines for when we gather in person. Facemasks are mandatory and we will limit our worship gatherings to 50% capacity, distancing at 2 metres between individuals or steady 20 family bubbles.

Screening and Monitoring

Rector and parishioners will be screened and monitored at all church gatherings in accordance with the provincial and diocesan guidelines.

- The rector, wardens and volunteers will actively screen themselves by taking their own temperature before parish events and self-monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms; those who are exhibiting symptoms should stay at home
- All other parishioners will be passively screened by volunteers at the main entrance according to the provincial screening questions when they arrive for worship; those who are exhibiting symptoms will be asked to return home and urged to self-quarantine and see a doctor if condition worsens
- Those who are admitted to the building will be greeted by a volunteer at the monitoring station in the foyer leading to the worship space
- Attendance will be recorded; newcomers will be asked for their name and phone number and assurance given that this information will be used solely for public health contact tracing
- At least one warden or trained volunteer will be present to supervise as people come and go for worship
- Government screening posters will be placed at the main entrance of the church buildings

Facemasks and Physical Distancing

Facemasks will be worn for all indoor gatherings in accordance with provincial and diocesan guidelines.

- Facemasks are mandatory for everyone except leaders who are distanced more than 4 metres from each other and the rest of the congregation
- People will enter and exit the building in single file, observing the 2 metre rule
- Once inside the buildings, individuals and single home bubbled groups will be asked to keep 2 metres from each other at all times
- Every other pew will be roped off to encourage proper distancing

Hand Hygiene

Proper handwashing will be promoted and facilitated for parishioners and staff in accordance with the provincial and diocesan guidelines.

- Hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes will be made available throughout the church buildings, particularly at the main entrance, the entrance to the worship space, beside the washrooms, and at the chancel steps
- Instructional posters will be placed over hand sanitizers and bathroom sinks

Cleaning and Disinfection

Cleaning volunteers will ensure that frequently touched surfaces are disinfected properly after church gatherings in accordance with the provincial guidelines.

- Instructional posters will be placed in the sacristy and maintenance room
- Following each worship service, the church will be cleaned and disinfected with special attention given to bathrooms, switches, doorknobs, communion vessels, microphones, sound booth items, lecterns and pews.
- Cleaning volunteers will use face masks and gloves

Special Considerations for Worship and Small Groups

Communion

Celebrants and parishioners will practice communion safely, honoring the provincial and diocesan guidelines.

- Celebrant will use hand sanitizer prior to communion
- Communion wafers and wine will be covered during consecration, and celebrant will consume the priest's host and wine
- Communion will be administered in one kind only (bread) to communicants seated in their pews
- Celebrant will wear face mask and use the hand sanitizer repeatedly during administration

Baptism

Celebrants and parishioners will practice baptism safely, honoring the provincial and diocesan guidelines.

- Only one individual or single home bubbled group will be baptized in any given service
- Celebrant will use hand sanitizer at the beginning and end of the baptism
- Celebrant and candidates will wear a face mask
- Candidates will remain seated and come forward one at a time when invited by the celebrant; physical distancing at 2 metres will be observed around the font

Offering

Wardens will collect offerings in a safe manner, honoring the provincial and diocesan guidelines.

- Offerings will be collected in a locked box at the entrance to the worship space
- Wardens will oversee the offering and take the box to a safe location for counting; box will be disinfected

- Counters will wash hands before counting, wear a mask and disposable gloves while counting, and wash hands after counting

Congregational Singing

Given the high risk of transmission, congregational singing will be suspended during this phase of recovery.

Sunday School and Sunday Coffee Hour

Sunday School and coffee hour will be suspended for this phase of recovery

Parish hall at St. Mark's will be open to families as long as the 2 metre rule between families and single home bubbles can be observed

Leadership Meetings and Small Group Gatherings

At least one trained volunteer will be present to oversee leadership meetings and small group gatherings.

- All participants will be asked to provide proof of vaccination
- Parish halls may be used for these purposes outside of Sunday worship time
- No more than 8 people per gathering at this time
- All guidelines and restrictions above with respect to physical distancing, screening, monitoring, hand hygiene, respiratory health, cleaning and disinfecting will apply within the parish hall space
- No food or beverages will be shared during this phase of recovery

Guidelines for the Office at St. Mark's

Only one admin volunteer will be working in the office at any given time and will abide by all provincial and diocesan guidelines for work or business environments.

- Volunteers will actively screen themselves by taking their own temperature before beginning work and self-monitoring for COVID-19 symptoms; those who are exhibiting symptoms should stay at home
- Personal facemasks will not be required for volunteers when working alone
- The outside door will be open during office hours, but the inside office door will be locked. A sign will invite visitors to knock on the office door, and an admin volunteer will answer with facemask on to field questions, receive documents, etc.
- Wardens and incumbent will be permitted inside the office space with a face mask, but must distance at 2 metres and limit time spent

Communication and Follow Up

The operational plan will be communicated to both parishes.

- The rector will communicate the operational plan by email with an invitation to follow up by phone or email
- All parishioners will be encouraged to comply with hand hygiene guidelines and to wear a facemask in order to reduce the risk of infection to others
- Parents will be encouraged to closely monitor their children's physical distancing and hand hygiene
- Everyone will be encouraged to use automatic transfer or withdrawal for offering rather than cash