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**TO:** Clergy, wardens, and lay readers  
**FROM:** Bishop Bruce Myers  
**DATE:** Friday 17 December 2021  
**RE:** Updated COVID-19 protocols

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With the recent, rapid, and significant rise in COVID-19 cases in Quebec—and the virulence of the new Omicron variant—the provincial government has instituted new preventative measures that come into effect on **December 20**, and remain in effect until further notice. Some of these new guidelines directly affect places of worship. Below is a summary of the new and continuing public health guidelines with respect to churches.

**VACCINATION PASSPORT:** Everyone wishing to attend a service will need to present proof that they are adequately vaccinated or exempt from vaccination. This means that at least one person in each church will need to remain at the entrance of the church and use a smartphone or tablet to verify individuals' government-issued QR codes using the VaxiCode Verif application, which is freely available for download in the Apple Store or Google Play. Individuals between the ages of 14 and 75 need to provide photo identification matching the name on their vaccination passport.

**ATTENDANCE:** The number of people permitted to attend a service (other than funerals and weddings) is restricted to 50% of the building's usual capacity, to a maximum of 250 people. However, there are currently no church buildings in the diocese with a half-capacity of 250 people, and so the key figure for each congregation to calculate is what constitutes 50% of the worship space's capacity. (Separate attendance guidelines for funerals and weddings are below.)

**PHYSICAL DISTANCING:** Individuals from different households should maintain a distance of at least one metre, including when seated.

**MASKS:** Masks must be worn by everyone at all times, except when receiving the eucharist. Readers, preachers, and presiders may also remove their masks while speaking, so long as they are at least two metres from the congregation.

**SINGING:** Hymns may be sung by the congregation if they wear masks while singing. Choirs and soloists may sing unmasked if the members are two metres apart from one another and at least two metres away from the congregation.

**HOLY COMMUNION:** The eucharist will continue to be distributed in one kind (i.e. bread only). To reduce movement about the church, and when practical, the presider should bring communion to people at their seats.

**COFFEE/FELLOWSHIP HOUR:** It is recommended that such gatherings after a service be suspended until the overall situation improves. However, if such gatherings do take place, a maximum of 10 people may participate. As before, food and beverages may only be shared if they are served to individuals at their seat and/or they are prepared in a self-contained box or wrapper ahead of time.

**HALL RENTALS:** With the exception of receptions following funerals or weddings, a maximum of 10 people (or the occupants of three different residences) are permitted to rent a hall for a private function. For receptions following a funeral or wedding, a maximum of 25 people may attend. Food and beverages may only be shared if they are served to individuals at their seat and/or they are prepared in a self-contained box or wrapper ahead of time.

**FUNERALS & WEDDINGS:** When a maximum of 25 people wish to attend a funeral or wedding, vaccination passports are not required. If more than 25 people are expected to attend a funeral or wedding, vaccination passports are required, and the maximum attendance rises to 50% of the building's capacity. If condolences are received in the church building before a funeral, a maximum of 50 people should be in the building at any given time.



These added restrictions are unwelcome, I know, particularly as many of us are making final preparations for Christmas services. These new protocols, and the spike in COVID-19 cases that has prompted them, may cause some congregations to re-evaluate the prudence of holding in-person services in the coming days and weeks. As has been the case since the beginning of the pandemic, the Diocese of Quebec will continue to offer opportunities to pray and worship online and over the telephone.

I will not mask my significant unease with the Quebec government's imposition of vaccination passports on places of worship, a decision made without any consultation of religious groups in the province. Our churches seek to be places of welcome for all people, turning away no one. Having the state require worshippers to present government documentation before being admitted to a church, synagogue, mosque, or temple is problematic. This is even more so when the government imposing this measure has already passed a law restricting certain kinds of religious expression in the public square. It will also be a logistical challenge in many of our small communities.

At the same time, I am conscious that we remain in the grip of a global pandemic—one that continues to put many lives at risk, and one whose end will only likely come when enough of us are adequately vaccinated. I therefore ask that this requirement be respected in our churches, in the hope that it will be temporary and contribute to the common good of our local communities and beyond.

I also again encourage everyone to get fully vaccinated and to get the recommended booster shot when it becomes available to you—not simply to fulfil a government requirement or to protect yourself, but as an act of love to those around you.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to be in touch with me or Archdeacon Edward Simonton.