

November 28, 2020

Dear Alberta Leaders of Faith Communities:

Yesterday you received a letter from me with updates on additional measures being put in place to address the difficult situation we are in and the necessary next steps. I promptly heard back from many of you with words of hope and encouragement. Thank you. I can't tell you how much that meant to me.

You were also quick to let me know that further clarity is needed around in-person attendance and capacity. Therefore, we have amended the wording in the public health order, the details of which are below. I hope this further guidance helps address your questions and concerns, and I'll take the opportunity today to reiterate what I shared yesterday with further clarity.

As you know, the number of COVID-19 cases in Alberta has started to grow very rapidly. In less than a week, our daily case numbers climbed from 1,000 to over 1,500. Today we are reporting 1,731 new cases, 415 people in hospital, 88 of whom are in intensive care, and 5 new deaths. The situation is now urgent. If we don't slow the sharp rise of both hospitalizations and intensive care unit admissions from COVID-19, they will threaten our ability to continue delivering health care services we all rely on.

Just over a week ago, faith leaders were asked to voluntarily reduce the number of people who attended in-person faith-based activities to one-third of normal capacity, and to continue avoiding high-risk activities such as congregational singing. To all of you who were able to take steps to follow these recommendations, my deepest thanks. Your efforts are helping to save lives in your communities.

Unfortunately, with COVID-19 spreading rapidly in our province, voluntary measures are no longer enough. On November 24, Premier Kenney declared a State of Public Health Emergency, and announced new restrictions and increased enforcement to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in communities and protect our health care system. Specifically, for places of worship in "enhanced" zones (areas coloured purple on the [COVID-19 relaunch status map](#)), the following measures are now mandatory under new [Chief Medical Officer of Health Order 40-2020](#) (to replace order 38 and 39):

- Maximum in-person attendance is reduced to 1/3 of the total operational occupant load as determined by the Alberta Fire Code for all services, worship activities, and faith-based events.

- Everyone attending a place of worship, including worshippers, staff, and volunteers, must wear a facemask at all times.
- In-person faith group meetings (e.g. prayer groups) may continue but must follow physical distancing requirements and all other relevant public health measures.

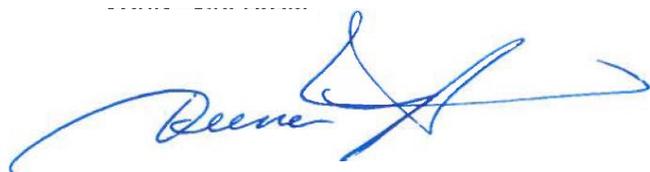
At this time, I must also strongly encourage you to stop all congregational singing. Singing in groups increases the risk of spreading COVID-19, and we must do everything we can to reduce this risk. Please consider alternatives such as recorded singing or instrumental music. If singing is essential to your worship, please limit the number of singers and ensure that they wear masks while singing.

In addition, all places of worship must continue to follow applicable [public health guidance](#) and [measures](#). Everyone attending a place of worship or a faith-based activity including worshippers, staff, and volunteers, must maintain 2 metres physical distance from anyone who is not part of their household. I also encourage you to have a process to request contact information of those who attend each service in person. This information will belong to the faith organization, can be securely disposed of after three weeks, and would only be requested by Alberta Health Services if an infectious person attended a service. These records are extremely helpful in notifying those who may have been exposed at a service. More information about the mandatory and voluntary measures can be found [online](#).

I know that many of you are preparing to host important religious festivals and gatherings in the upcoming months, and will want to know how these restrictions affect your plans. Although you must reduce the size of your worship events, please note there is no limit on the number of events allowed. Instead of a single large gathering, you could plan for multiple smaller services over a day or week or hold virtual services so that everyone can participate safely. This has been a very difficult year, and now more than ever, Albertans of faith will need your guidance, comfort and encouragement.

In closing, I want to thank you for everything you do to support, protect, and uplift your communities, and thank you for continuing to work with us to fight COVID-19. We can only get through this if we work together.

Yours sincerely,



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