



Diocese of Toronto

Anglican Church of Canada

September 14, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

Love your neighbour as yourself.

Over the past 18 months, we have seen tremendous examples of loving one's neighbour. Our frontline workers have placed themselves in harm's way from the first day of this pandemic to keep their neighbours safe. In this Diocese, our outreach ministries have found new ways to keep serving the most vulnerable members of our communities. Separated by lockdowns and physical distancing, friends and neighbours have called, Zoomed and Facetimed to check on each other, reaching out across the street and around the world.

Love your neighbour. In reflecting on these words with the Galatians, Paul writes, "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." To the Corinthians he writes, "Let all that you do be done in love."

There is one crucial way we can love our neighbours, and that is to vaccinate ourselves against COVID-19. For the good of our whole community, we can choose to protect those who can't be vaccinated and those for whom this virus poses the greatest risk. We can protect those same front-line workers from a health care system overwhelmed by new cases.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are committed to loving our neighbours in word and deed, by our witness, and in the very structures that guide us as a Diocese. To that end, we are introducing a policy that requires clergy, diocesan employees and volunteers, and parish employees and volunteers to show proof of vaccination against COVID-19. The full policy will include more details about how we will implement this; we will make it available when it is finalized.

After much discussion, the bishops and diocesan leadership have decided not to require proof of vaccination to attend worship in an Anglican church in this Diocese. I've heard that some of you aren't comfortable returning to in-person worship alongside potentially unvaccinated people, and I know this may disappoint you. We believe we can preserve the health and safety of our communities without denying access to worship, prayer and sacrament. We want our

churches to be places where everyone can experience the breadth and length and depth and height of God's love, and we hesitate to bar our doors based on proof of vaccination.

We continue to strongly recommend vaccination for all who are able. Parishes will continue with screening questions, contact tracing and vaccine education, along with rigorous hygiene practices, masking and physical distancing. In the strongest terms possible, I dissuade anyone from knowingly putting others at risk. Before you decide to attend worship, consider how your decisions may affect the person sitting in the next pew.

We know that many parishes are continuing to provide online worship options even as they re-open their doors. If you don't yet feel safe coming to church in person, please know that you are a full and valued participant in our corporate worship if you choose to attend online, even if it is not your first preference.

I also want to mention singing. I know that many of us long to hear voices lifted together in song, and to sing our praises to God alongside friend and neighbour. I hear a yearning across the Diocese to reclaim this deep and holy expression of our faith. I must ask again for your patience. Until we know how the fourth wave of infections will materialize, with the Delta variant and students returning to school, we aren't prepared to make a change to our guidelines. This will be an ongoing conversation over the next month, and I commit to saying more on the subject in the week after Thanksgiving.

As we've seen time and again in the past 18 months, things can and will change. We will continue to follow all public health guidelines. We will tell you about any changes to our guidelines and policies as they're needed, and we will keep sending Q&A bulletins to answer your ongoing questions.

We don't make these decisions lightly, but we make them in the hope that our churches will continue to be places where we can join together safely to worship a God who calls us to love every neighbour, in every place, following the model set before us in Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Andrew Toronto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Rev. Andrew Asbil
Bishop of Toronto