



The Archdiocese of Regina

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Two weeks ago the Saskatchewan government announced its "Re-open Saskatchewan Plan" - a five phase plan that seeks to move in gradual, methodical ways towards a more normalized level of economic and social activity in the province. Phase one of the plan, which involves the reopening of various medical services including dentists, optometrists, and various physical therapy outlets, makes no mention of plans for a return to traditional worship services for religious organizations.

Identifying a need for further clarification and dialogue, Archbishop Don approached other bishops in Saskatchewan and collectively invited faith leaders in the province to a virtual conversation, with the prospect of a delegation of faith leaders writing to and meeting with Premier Scott Moe and health officials in the near future. They will be presenting proposals for various stages of reopening faith communities and asking for a contact for faith communities so that questions and proposals can be answered in a consistent and expedient way. The larger group includes Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, United Church, Presbyterian, Baptist, Mennonite, Alliance, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Unitarian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Mormon representatives.

Although Catholic Masses have continued throughout the Archdiocese, they have done so with only the priest present. A small number of those Masses are livestreamed with a few people present to help the priest. Catholics throughout the Archdiocese of Regina are anxious to see their churches open after being away from them for the past 7 weeks. As the Re-Open Saskatchewan Plan moves forward, Archbishop Don, following discussions with the Council of Priests and keeping the importance of both the spiritual and physical health of everyone in southern Saskatchewan in mind, has established a working group in this regard. The working group will discern how and when the opening of churches, including the celebration of Mass, will happen. This group will make recommendations to the Council of Priests at their meeting on May 13th and we hope to be able to follow in a timely matter with some public announcements on moving forward.

The working group is made up of clergy and Archdiocesan pastoral staff who will be providing suggested guidelines for how parishes will be able to open in appropriate ways as the Re-Open Saskatchewan phases progress. They will consult with other dioceses and the Archdiocese Pastoral Council.

Guidelines will follow current and future provincial health directives in consultation with health officials. Re-opening plans will proceed with the approval of the Saskatchewan Government and Health officials.

We recognize that this is a deeply complex issue requiring serious discernment and contemplation. In a recent video message, Archbishop Don recognized that "The way we celebrate the Eucharist in our churches is conducive to the spread of the virus, (and) our yearning to provide the Eucharist clashes with the profound desire not to put people at risk."

At the same time, as of May 8th, there are only 3 active cases in the whole of the Archdiocese which gives us encouragement and allows a space to begin these conversations.

With this in mind we will be weighing risk and deliberating on the following areas:

- Protecting vulnerable persons from contracting the Covid-19 virus, including older clergy;
- Communion - how to respect both the liturgy and the health directives;
- Appropriate cleaning and sanitization of churches and the many areas where contact is made throughout a gathering of people, especially for a Mass;
- Detailed instructions for clergy and staff about what to do to organize and facilitate a gathering; and
- Clear instructions for parishioners and guests attending a gathering.

If, at any time, the number of cases begins to rise in southern Saskatchewan, and the risk of contracting the virus increases, plans will be re-assessed and may change direction on short notice.

Please pray for the work of the group and the adherence to guidelines, once produced, in a kind and merciful way.