



# Diocese of Kootenay

## ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

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**December 21, 2021**

**To: Clergy and Wardens, Diocese of Kootenay**

**Re: Pastoral Letter about the Omicron Variant and a shift to on-line worship**

Dear Colleagues in Ministry,

After consultation with senior leadership in the Diocese, and with a heavy heart knowing the disappointment this will cause, I have made the difficult decision to cancel all in-person worship services in the Diocese and move to on-line worship only, effective immediately. This is a preventative measure in the face of the threat to our public health system created by the shocking speed of the spread of the Omicron variant. We need to be part of a cooperative effort to once again “flatten the curve.”

This is very painful, especially as we have been longing for Christmas worship together. Once again, we are needing to bear this disappointment as a way to protect the most vulnerable, to see these constraints as a way of caring for our neighbours.

I am going above the restrictions the government currently has in place, because I believe an abundance of caution is called for at this time. The rise in cases has not yet become as alarming in British Columbia as elsewhere, as we are a week behind Quebec and Ontario, but we need to be ahead of the next wave as early as we can. The Provincial Health Ministry has said we need to be doing everything we can to avoid the spread of the variant. They are already cancelling non-emergency surgeries. We need to buy time for booster vaccinations to be ramped up in the province.

We know now that we can provide, or have access to, good on-line worship. We can do this. We have done this. We know that this is not forever but for a season. I will review this decision when conditions justify re-opening.

I know we are tired. I know this is hard. However, we realize that our health care workers are exhausted, and we do not want them to bear more stress. We are being called to draw on the grace and strength of God, to find reserves of compassion for our unseen neighbours, to find the patience to deal with our own frustrations at this situation, to be generous and energetic as we continue to minister to those in need.

Tomorrow I will review on-line worship protocols (video crews, etc.) and pastoral care concerns, such as home communions. For now, I wanted to give you as much time as possible to change your plans for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

I write this on the shortest day of the year, the longest night. We are about to welcome with joy the coming of the Light of the World, the Christ who shows us the self-sacrificing love of God. We will hear in the Christmas readings that "The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." May we still, even in these times, re-discover the Good News that God is with us, Emmanuel. Joy is not dependent on the outward circumstances but on resting in the faithfulness of God.

Please know you are in my prayers. I pray for each of you in your ministry and the communities we serve, and I thank God for your faithfulness in living out the Love of Christ.

Yours in Christ,

+Lynne