



St Hilda's By the Sea Anglican Church

Open Doors ♦ Open Hearts ♦ Open Minds

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Pastoral Letter Reopening our Church Building for Worship

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." ~ Psalm 122:1

Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord! I pray that you and your loved ones remain safe, sheltered in place and being mindful of others.

When COVID-19 prompted the closure of our church building on **March 18, 2020**, we did not know how long this pandemic and its consequences would last. As we near the end of the summer season, there still remains many unknowns about the coronavirus and the potentially deadly disease it causes.

Dear friends, the questions of "when and how" do we re-open worship in our physical presence are being asked. Yes, as we hope for the lessening of death, sickness, depression, and fear caused by COVID-19, some people are ready to re-open and some not yet. It will be challenging to follow guidance on re-entering. For this reason, we have formed a Church Re-opening Team. Our Re-opening Team provides information and guidance.

Overall, we will be mindful of the Federal and Provincial guidelines, and align with public health directives as well as of our Diocesan guidelines. Our concern and caution center on keeping people safe, which may consist of slow, methodical steps needing to be in place to ensure proper distancing, cleaning of buildings, protocols for masks, screening, etc.

As result, on **Sunday August 30, 2020**, the church of St. Hilda's will re-open its doors for public worship after the longest closure in its history. The global pandemic has paradoxically kept Christians apart from communal gathering and strengthened both the mission and the discipleship of God's Church. St. Hilda's has a crucial role in lifting up the wider community with prayer, support, and hope during this time.

If you wish to attend in person on August 30 or subsequently, you need to reserve in advance with the office, as space is limited due to social distancing requirements. When you return to the church building, you will notice changes because of health and safety protocols:

- Observing safe personal behaviors like sanitizing, wearing mask and physical distancing.
- A stripped down worship area to reduce touch points and enhance cleaning.
- Please follow greeter/usher guidelines, and only select seats marked at end of pews with green tape, leaving the middle of pews empty, unless it is one family bubble in the pew.
- No washrooms are open except the washroom in the narthex for emergency use only.
- No coffee hour after the service.
- No congregational singing.
- The service will be Morning Prayer and Eucharist. (Sharing the communion is prohibited.)

You can help make all of this easier by doing the following:

- Do a self-health check before you come. Stay home if you feel at all unwell
- Bring your own mask if possible.
- Arrive early in time to sanitize your hands and be checked in (we need to keep a record for the health authorities)
- Maintain physical distancing even when you see a beloved friend before or after service

If you are not able to come to an in-person service for any reason, you can still join the community for worship on Sunday mornings at 10 am by joining us by video conference through Zoom application.

God works in pandemics! We are seeing missional opportunities, such as continuing online worship even when we reopen the church for people who cannot be present physically.

God willing, we will have just enough time to get familiar with these protocols when we will move to Phase III, which allows for more opportunities for groups and fellowship. The date for this is up to the Diocesan Synod Office upon best advice from the provincial health authorities. When we have word from the Archbishop, the Wardens' approval will be obtained and then St. Hilda's will extend its activities.

Before I close, I want to take a moment to commend you for honoring Jesus Christ through your giving, online attendance, and ongoing ministry. I look forward to the day when I can see you face to face, but until then, count on my prayers for you and your families.

The full text of our parish re-opening application is available through the Parish website. If you have any questions, one of the Re-opening team, the wardens and I would be happy to speak with you.

Remember, if you wish to attend in person on Sundays, please email admin@sthilda.ca or phone 604.885.5019 no later than 11:00 am each Friday to reserve your spot.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Ayoob Adwar