

The Most Reverend Anne Germond



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Monday 21st December, 2020

Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Anne Germond to the faithful in the Dioceses of Algoma and Moosonee.

Dear people of God,

Grace and peace be with you as we enter the final week of Advent and approach Christmas Eve. This is the week that the church is mindful in particular of Mary, the mother of our Lord, and Joseph her husband and our Lord's earthly father. Whenever I think of Mary and Joseph the words *obedience* and *faithfulness* come to mind. In the midst of great uncertainty and an upheaval in their lives they both trusted in God's unfailing goodness and love, holding onto the promises of God.

Obedience and faithfulness speak to me now as I think of the way in which you have responded to the pandemic of the past nine months, following all the guidelines and protocols during the lockdown early on and in preparation for the safe reopening of our churches in September. Thank you for all you did, in some cases *more* than was asked of you, so that we could gather again for worship, albeit for a short time.

This afternoon Premier Doug Ford announced a Province wide lockdown in Ontario beginning at 12.01 am on December 26th. There will be a two week lockdown in Northern Ontario and a four week lockdown in Southern Ontario. These measures have been put in place because the cases of Covid-19 in Ontario are rising at an alarming rate and we have reached the 'tipping point' (Health Minister Christine Elliot) in being able to manage cases. In the last few weeks there has been a 70% increase in hospitalizations and an 80% increase in ICU admissions. When I met with the incumbents on November 20th there were 1418 new cases of Covid and on December 18th 2123 new cases – an increase of 50%.

During this lockdown only essential services will be open – grocery stores and pharmacies, and a few other businesses. We are being asked to stay home, travel as little as possible, and continue to distance, wear masks and wash hands.

As Christians we need to think globally but to act locally in regard to Covid-19. We stand in prayerful solidarity with our siblings in Canada and other places around the globe whose health care systems are also at a tipping point.

In response to the Premier's announcement and in order that we may reduce contacts within our churches, I am placing the Dioceses of Algoma and Moosonee back into the **RED STAGE** when the provincial wide lockdown begins on December 26th, at 12.01 am.

A number of incumbents have already changed their Christmas Eve plans and are going online. Based on what I heard on the Premier's call today, the sooner the Province locks down for a time, the better it will be to contain the spread of the virus. Therefore, if it is possible to shift away from in person worship to another format such as online, I encourage you to do so before the 26th December. I realize this is not possible for many of our smaller congregations so adjust according to your context and region.

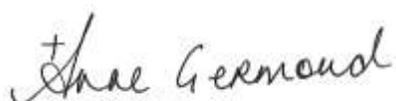
The return to the **RED STAGE** will continue for a four week period similar to Southern Ontario. If it is safe to do so you may reopen for worship on 24th January 2021 (3rd Sunday after the Epiphany). You may only enter your church buildings to record or livestream services or for outreach purposes. There will be no further in person gatherings for food preparation to fundraise.

The only exception to in person gatherings will be for St. Paul's South Porcupine and St. Peter's Sault Ste. Marie whose buildings will be closing at the end of the year. They may have their final service on December 27th, limiting the total number of people present to ten.

During our time in the **RED STAGE**, I appeal to you to continue making financial contributions to your parish, and to be as generous as possible in your offerings. Most congregations have been negatively impacted by Covid-19 and some will not survive it. In the same way that it is up to all of us to reduce the spread of the virus, it is up to us to ensure the continuation of our churches into the future. Give generously.

While the new Government restrictions will limit our ability to gather in the usual way for worship and home festivities Christmas is not 'cancelled' nor ever will be. As Christ is born anew in our lives in the year of our Lord 2020 we continue to share the chorus of heavenly Angels singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those he favours." (Luke 1.14)

May His peace and joy dwell in your hearts this Christmas and always,



The Most Reverend Anne Germond
Archbishop of Algoma and Moosonee