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September 16, 2021

Dear People of the Diocese of Calgary

As of Wednesday, September 15, 2021, the Province of Alberta has declared a State of Public Health Emergency because of the load on our public health system due to the fourth wave of COVID-19. Current numbers of hospitalizations and ICU admissions now exceed anything that we experienced in the first three waves. Alberta Health Services is looking to other provinces with available ICU capacity to take on excess cases from Alberta and is also seeking to bring in out-of-province front line health care workers to bolster our own. Elective surgeries are being cancelled throughout the province to create more space for COVID-19 patients, and many people are even unable to have medical tests for serious conditions because of the current lack of capacity in our healthcare system. The situation has moved beyond critical.

Although temporary restrictions announced yesterday do allow for continued in-person worship in places of worship, the rationale for this does not seem to be in line with other announced restrictions. We recognize that our gatherings do present a risk of adding to the burden on the healthcare system, and we believe it is wise to err on the side of caution and to do what we can to mitigate this risk to the fullest extent possible.

To this end, the Archbishop, on the advice of the Diocesan COVID-19 Taskforce, will be suspending in-person worship in the Diocese of Calgary after this coming Sunday, September 19. In-person worship will be suspended for four Sundays starting on September 26. The situation will be assessed in four weeks to determine if an extension of the suspension is warranted. Other church-related in-person activities should also be suspended during this period. The exception to this is AA, NA, and other 12 Step and recovery programs who regularly use our facilities for meetings.

For this coming Sunday, please continue to use, to the best of your ability, the protocols described in the last letter from the Archbishop and COVID-19 Taskforce dated September 9, 2021. However, because of provincial restrictions coming into force this morning, capacity for in-person services is now limited to 30% of the building's fire code capacity.

While in-person worship is suspended, this does not mean that the Church stops worshipping. Please use the innovative ways that you found to stay connected and worship together even though we were physically apart for so much of the past year and a half. Pastoral care continues. The sacraments continue. The life of the Church continues where its people are. We have done it before, and we will do it again as we do our part to keep people out of the hospital and tame the fourth wave.

In these difficult times of upheaval and uncertainty, it is even more important that we attend to being prayerful – holding up in prayer our world, especially those in countries who do not yet have vaccines widely available; for our governments, federal, provincial and municipal, as they attempt to steer a course through these troubled waters; for our brothers and sisters in the church, or work of ministry and mission in the midst of the human suffering, anxiety and uncertainty; and for ourselves that we will remain and

become even more open to the Spirit's leading as we seek to live out our Lord's commandment to love God and to love our neighbour.

Archbishop Greg & the COVID-19 Taskforce

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