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DIOCESAN PRESS RELEASE ON COVID-19

New Brunswick is currently facing its largest wave of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. "The Delta variant of the fourth wave of the pandemic has hit our province much harder than previous waves, and we are feeling the full impact," said Health Minister Dorothy Shephard. Fortunately, over the past five days, the number of active cases has decreased by about 30%, which is an encouraging sign.

It is normal for some people to feel some anxiety about returning to public places. It is important to note that New Brunswick Public Health has been a leader in prevention since the beginning of this pandemic. Religious leaders continue to work closely with them to ensure a safe environment for parishioners in all New Brunswick churches.

To reduce the impact of the fourth wave, the government issued a mandatory COVID-19 order on September 24, 2021. Measures put in place for churches included:

1. Activities where people gather (bingo, card games, etc.) , including weddings and funerals, must ensure that participants in these events must always be fully vaccinated.
2. No proof of vaccination is required for Sunday Masses, weekday Masses, baptisms, prayer groups and any other religious celebrations. Places of worship must put in place the following measures:
 - Operate at 50% or less of their occupancy capacity
 - Ensure compliance with physical distancing instructions
 - Ensure that masks are always worn
 - Record the names of all participants in a register
 - Eliminate singing by the faithful
 - Prohibit entry to anyone with symptoms of COVID-19 or who has been instructed to self-isolate.

The Church is a benevolent Mother who cares for the good of all her children. Therefore, a non-discriminatory atmosphere must be fostered where parishioners feel comfortable taking additional individual protective measures if they so wish. There will also be people who will not be fully vaccinated, for whatever reason. It is

important to ensure that they are not stigmatized. The health measures mentioned above ensure a balance between the protection of all people and the inclusion of unvaccinated people during our religious services.

At this point in the pandemic, it is important to remind parishioners that these sanitary measures ensure that churches are safe environments for gatherings. All diocesan clergy who carry out a ministry (masses, sacraments, funerals, etc.) are fully vaccinated.

In its statement of October 12, 2021, public health confirmed that the inspected churches were deemed fully compliant. This should offer confidence for our parishioners that churches are safe for them to gather. "I am very pleased that New Brunswick's religious leaders are doing the right thing for their community and their province," said Minister Shephard. "These are difficult but necessary decisions, and I am grateful for the leadership they are showing."