



Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

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Al Junker, president ▪ Tanya Varner, pastor
Jamie Courtney, parish administrator & minister of music ▪ Brian Racho, sexton
Leanne Darlington, interim visitation pastor ▪ Heidi Van Schaik, youth worker
Ron Leonard, honorary assistant pastor ▪ Gywin Murray, emerita director of music

November 18, 2021

Dear members and friends of Trinity,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the Triune God.

I am writing to you today to inform you of some changes that are coming to our worshipping community for the upcoming season.

At their meeting last evening, Trinity's **Church Council approved a proof-of-vaccination requirement** for attending in-person Advent and Christmas Eve worship services. This includes the four Sundays of Advent and two Christmas Eve worship services.

In late October, the provincial government allowed worshipping communities the option to loosen physical distancing requirements if they required proof-of-vaccination to attend. Since Council has chosen to implement this option, we will also pause the requirement for folks to RSVP before attending an in-person service, except for Christmas Eve. Under this different set of rules, while we are no longer required to physically distance, Trinity will aim to reduce COVID-19 risk by seating folks in every other pew. (Currently, we're seating in every third pew.) By choosing to proceed with a proof-of-vaccination requirement, we will simultaneously permit quiet singing. This will be a welcome addition to in-person worship, especially at Christmas services.

This proof-of-vaccination measure is in effect for Advent and Christmas Eve as a trial period. Church Council will review the effectiveness of this temporary policy at their December meeting.

To summarize these changes for in-person worship:

For the Sundays of Advent, November 28th to December 19th:

- No RSVP required – just come on Sunday for the 9:30 service.
- Facemasks are still required.
- Quiet singing is permitted; we'll keep a cantor on-duty, especially for online worshippers.
- Please enter through the glass doors on Church Street.
- Proof-of-vaccination and identification are required for everyone ages 12+.
- An usher will seat you in every other pew.

For Christmas Eve:

- There will be two services, at slightly different times than in past years: 5:00 pm and 7:30 pm. The services will be identical in format and content.

- Please take special note that **an RSVP will be required for Christmas Eve**. It is possible that we may see a spike in attendance and managing potential crowd sizes through assigned seating is still important, even with relaxed measures. **Please RSVP to the church office by December 15th**. (In addition to the names of who is coming, please also let us know which service you'd like to attend, and if you have any flexibility to attend the other service, should we need to rebalance the numbers.)
- Quiet singing, the proof-of-vaccination and facemask requirements, and seating by an usher, will all be in effect for Christmas Eve, just like the four Sundays of Advent.

As mentioned in other communications throughout the pandemic, it is our expectation that online worship is here to stay at Trinity. This avenue for participation in the life of our worshipping community is a vital link to many folks, and this need will continue after the pandemic has subsided. As such, the services for the four Sundays of Advent, plus the 7:30 pm Christmas Eve service, will be broadcast on Facebook. Also, our mid-week Advent services on Wednesdays at 6:30 pm will continue as exclusively online events this year. We owe a debt of gratitude to those folks who have been instrumental to implementing and continuing this important online worship presence.

Please know that the decision to implement a proof-of-vaccination requirement was given much thought and consideration by Church Council. We recognize that any decisions around COVID-19 protocols, in any organization, will not satisfy everyone all the time. Should you have questions or concerns around the process, or the implications of this decision for you, I am available for conversation. Please do not hesitate to contact me by phone or email.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tanya Varner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Tanya Varner, Pastor
Trinity Lutheran Church
New Hamburg, ON