



**Canadian Centre for
Christian Charities**

Supporting ministries in a complex world

Honourable Adrian Dix
Minister of Health

Ministry of Health
Room 337
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dr. Bonnie Henry
Provincial Health Officer

Ministry of Health
PO Box 9648, STN PROV GOVT
1515 Blanshard Street
Victoria, BC V8W 3C8

bonnie.henry@gov.bc.ca

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Dear Minister Dix and Dr. Henry,

We write to you as the largest association of Christian charities in Canada. The Canadian Centre for Christian Charities (CCCC) has over 3,300 members, including member organizations in British Columbia. With almost 50 years of leadership and service to Canadian Christian ministries, CCCC has become the preeminent national leader in providing expertise and support around all areas of operation for Christian charities, including tax and legislative compliance, fundraising, human resources, financial management, board governance and risk management.

We recognize the important role of government to protect the public in the context of temporary public health emergencies. We share your deep concern about the health and welfare of all Canadians and agree that it is appropriate for government policies to be shaped by a concern for public health.

In light of this [we have recommended](#) – and continue to recommend – our members abide by government protocols when holding religious services and operating vital community outreach programs, such as food banks, drop-in centres, counselling, and addictions recovery meetings, among other things. Through all of these efforts churches and religious organizations are meeting both the obvious and oft-hidden essential needs within our communities.

[Places of worship](#) are not just buildings; they function to increase civic engagement, economic output, and social infrastructure. This is known as the “[halo effect](#)” places of worship have on their surrounding communities. Places of worship are where caring behaviours are observed, modelled, and encouraged; needs are presented; opportunities to act in meeting those needs are created; the marginalized are reassured of their inherent dignity and self-worth; and these relational networks reinforce prosocial behaviour. In fact, the dollar value of having an operational place of worship is at or above 4.5 times its annual budget. Therefore, when places of worship close, research shows the neighbourhood suffers.

In an effort to mitigate that suffering, and continue meeting community needs in meaningful ways, we have seen our members use creativity to engage to the maximum potential and possibilities. Some congregations have moved to virtual, drive-in, or open-air services; others are holding multiple services

– with rigorous cleaning in-between – in order to respect capacity restrictions. Still others are delivering food to families in self-isolation, preparing and distributing grocery hampers and other necessities to people in their communities, and providing financial assistance (e.g. rent, utilities) for people who have lost their jobs.

At the same time, we know that these means are not feasible for all religious communities. Indeed, “[for many](#), worshipping as part of a community is essential to their mental and spiritual health and well-being.” And while a virtual connection may go some way to achieving that sense of community, it ignores those who may have limited access to the internet, including low-income individuals, recent immigrants or refugees, and seniors. This exacerbates the experience of already [vulnerable and marginalized persons](#), many of whom are experiencing disproportionate, detrimental impacts as a result of the pandemic.

We understand that there are many interests and concerns that need to be balanced and that you do not have an easy task in front of you. We appreciate the fact that you have allowed for individual personal prayer in places of worship, excepting religious services for occupants from the blanket prohibition against non-occupants being present at a residence, and allowing a gathering of 10 for baptisms.

As you move forward, we respectfully ask you to consider the fundamental role churches and religious communities play in a free and democratic society, particularly in times of challenge and to prioritize the work and worship of these communities alongside other essential services. Public health ought to consider spiritual and social dimensions of health along with physical well-being.

To that end we are willing to be a resource and would welcome the opportunity to consult with you through that process. We also encourage you to work closely with the religious communities in your local jurisdiction. This will help ensure that they are empowered to meet the spiritual and practical needs of their neighbourhoods while respecting necessary public health measures. Through this dialogue of mutual respect and good faith we will all be strengthened in our efforts to care for one another and effectively respond to COVID-19.

As people placed in positions of authority and influence, we are thankful for you and regularly pray for you. We pray for wisdom, for strength and for blessing. We pray that the work you accomplish will seek the welfare of British Columbia and prosper its people.

Yours truly,

Rev. John Pellowe, MBA, DMin
Chief Executive Officer