

It varies.

Some places of worship reopened in late July, once they were given the green light to do so by provincial health authorities. John Boyachek, the pastor of Fairview Baptist Church, reports that he had about 95 people between two Sunday services when the church reopened.

For three weeks prior, he had been “preaching to cars” at a weekly drive-in service. Still, Boyachek concedes that people are nervous and expects that a full “return to normal” is still some time away.

Roman Catholics have been permitted in their churches for over a month now, and the diocese of Peterborough has prepared a helpful video on how to worship safely. “For the most part, there is a slight feeling of relief that the church is open once more,” says Opke.

“I say slight because there are still a few uncomfortable reminders that we are not totally out of the woods yet.”

Anglicans are gearing up for a planned return on Sept. 13. For those who are accustomed to the rich musical and liturgical traditions of Anglican spirituality, things will look very different for a time. To limit the spread of germs, there will be no congregational singing, no processions, and no wine served during Holy Communion. Masks must be worn at all times and attendees will have to sign up ahead of time to attend services.

Other traditions, though, are waiting things out. United Community Ministry doesn’t expect to have in-person worship services

for some time to come. Nor is it likely that St. Andrew’s Presbyterian will reopen before Thanksgiving, not when the threat of a second wave looms over public discourse. Of particular disappointment is their having to cancel this year’s Living Christmas Tree event, which has ushered in the Christmas season for so many people over the last three decades.

What’s Next?

Over the past six months, meeting and worshipping through computer screens has become a fact of life for local faith communities. Many leaders expect that this will continue to be the case.

“We have long been urged to embrace internet evangelization,” says Opke. “I think it is clear now that it must be incorporated into our future programs and outreach.”

Still, it is impossible for technology to replace actual human contact – especially in places of worship.

“Everybody was looking forward” to the reopening in Lindsay’s Muslim community, says Abdul Sangrar. Lindsay’s local Masjid was opened after four months of closure.

During that time, members stayed in touch with one another through telephone calls and recited their Friday prayers from home. Although only 12 people can be accommodated in the local mosque with physical distancing rules in place, the ability to see one another again in person more than compensates, Sangrar reports.

The merits and shortcomings of technology

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