



South Carolina Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

May 13, 2020

Dear SC Synod – ELCA Partners in Ministry,

Across the Synod we are all faced with challenging decisions right now about when we can open the sanctuaries of our churches for the people of God to gather together in worship. We recognize that each congregation has a unique setting and context, and that the information about COVID19 is changing on a daily basis. One list, regardless of how comprehensive, does not work for all of our churches and all leaders. What we have prepared is a basic list of recommendations for your consideration, for this time, in moving toward in-person gatherings. This is not a comprehensive listing, but we pray a helpful start to your thinking process.

We encourage each congregation to gather a transition team who can work on developing a plan of best practices for your congregation to move forward. We ask each Congregational team to review our recommendations, alongside the recommendations of our Government and our national & regional health officials. Soon you will also have guidance from the ELCA about various things to consider in moving into the phase of in-person worship. That should prove to be an additional resource that is helpful in making these decisions and plans. Please be on the lookout for that letter from the ELCA.

Attached to our recommendations we are including:

1. Interim Guidelines for Communities of Faith from the CDC
2. <https://cnaclasesnearnme.com/how-to-properly-wash-your-hands/> this is a link to proper handwashing for Certified Nurse's Training from Jenn Loughty

We continue to use as a guide, and to stress, that a downward trend for 14 days in the curve of cases is important and a litmus test for moving from one phase to the next. From what we have understood, Phase 1 is no in-person gathering, or no more than 10 gathering together in certain safe circumstances. Phase 2 is gathering of 50 persons or less. Phase 3 is gatherings of 50 persons or more.

As you plan to move forward we ask you to be especially mindful of people in your congregation who may be at risk to gathering, and we ask that Church Councils are mindful of the needs and concerns of their pastors and deacons. Some of our leaders may be at just as much risk as any church member and their needs and concerns need to be considered carefully too. This is a time when we all need to live and give Grace! There is no need to rush right now, but rather to make careful decisions that include all the people who will be involved.

While you work to move forward to a new phase please take some time with your leadership to reflect on all that has happened and what you might want to take forward with you. We know that some exhaustion and fatigue is setting in, but we do not want any of you to lose the creativity that has been part of this experience. At the very least make some notes about what has gone well, and what you might want to continue doing, so that you can go back to those ideas later.

We continue to hold each of you, and the communities you serve in our prayers. We have been leading weekly worship and daily devotions online which you are welcome to use should you need a Sunday break. Email or Call us anytime! We are all working from home at this time, but hope to have the Synod staff back in the office for the regular work hours beginning June 1. However, we do not plan to host any in-person meetings until mid-June, at the earliest, or until there is 14 days of declining cases of COVID19.

Recommendations:

1. **Allowing for at least 14 days of declining cases before gathering in groups, or moving to the next phase of opening spaces.**
2. **Wait until after June 1 to hold any in-person worship.**

3. Don't rush into a decision before your congregation is ready.
4. Remember that just because it is possible to return to the Sanctuary for in-person worship does not mean it is the best thing to do. Consider the age and make-up of your congregation to decide when it is right for your congregation to begin in-person worship again. Continue to offer online worship, or drive-in worship until you can safely get to or through Phase 3 (of 50 + allowed in attendance).
5. Create a simple document outlining your congregation's plan and be sure to publicize this before you begin worshipping in-person so everyone knows what to expect.
6. Ask everyone to wear face masks.
7. Mark off pews so that family groups can be at least 6 feet apart.
8. Plan for shorter worship services
9. Consider celebrating Holy communion once a month
10. Do not offer coffee hour or socialization before or after worship
11. Do not offer a nursery.
12. Do not offer in-person VBS this summer.
13. Do not offer fellowship meals at this time.
14. Postpone all in person meetings or small group gatherings such as Sunday School, committee meetings, etc. Use Zoom for meetings as much as possible.
15. Any in-person meetings should be designed to have people spread out significantly.
16. Insist that people stay at home if they are sick or immune-compromised.
17. Protect your staff who may be immune-compromised. They should not have to choose between their job and their health!
18. Follow CDC guidelines for disinfecting spaces, and for handwashing procedures. Consider posting the handwashing chart in your bathrooms and kitchens. These can be found on the Synod website www.scsynod.com
19. Remove all hymnals, books and bulletins to minimize things to touch.
20. Use a spoken liturgy rather than a sung liturgy to minimize the dangers that are inherent in transmitting this virus through aerosol methods. Consider instrumentalists as your special music rather than choir or hymns.
21. Prop open inside and outside doors (and if possible, bathroom doors), so no one touches a doorknob or handle.
22. Remind everyone during announcements not to shake hands or hug.
23. Adopt/encourage electronic giving. Share stories of why giving is an important part of worship. Offering plates should be placed on a table as people enter and exit.
24. Offering counters should use the same protocols as bank tellers, sanitizing frequently, and sitting at a distance.
25. Preparing for Communion
 - a. Altar Guild and Communion Assistants must think of their work in terms of food service preparation, like going through a drive-through restaurant.
 - b. Communion preparers wash hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds prior to preparing communion. Washing is twice as effective as hand sanitizer.
 - c. Gloves may be used to prepare, but can be deceiving. If a glove touches a contaminated space and then then a plate or tray, it still passes the contamination on. It is best to wash hands thoroughly and frequently.
 - d. Do not use either common cup or intinction.
 - e. Do not kneel at the altar.
 - f. Plastic and glass individual cups are both equally clean. Glass and reusable plastic cups should be soaked for a minute in soapy water after the service.
 - g. Those preparing communion wash their hands, then place glasses in trays sufficiently spaced so that communicants can take their cup without touching the others.
 - h. Plastic-wrapped wafers can be emptied onto patens without touching them. There should be separate patens for each communion assistant distributing bread.
 - i. The wafer is safer: We do not recommend using bread right now.
 - j. Pastor and communion assistants should wash hands during the offering. Washing is significantly more effective than hand sanitizer. (You've touched stuff during the service.)

- k. The pastor should consecrate the elements without touching them. The fraction and elevation are optional and should be omitted for the time being.
- l. Those distributing wafers should try to avoid touching communicants' hands as much as possible.
- m. Those distributing wine only touch the trays, holding them out for communicants to take a cup.
- n. Communion assistants should commune last.

Yours in Christ,



Bishop Herman Yoos



Pastor Ginny Aebischer



Pastor Rick Carter