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Best Practices for the Safe Resumption of In-Person Worship

Dear Colleagues,

Grace and peace be with you!

Attached, please find a document outlining my office's recommended Best Practices for the Safe Resumption of In-Person Worship. We have created this document in response to the many inquiries we have received these past few weeks from rostered ministers and congregational leaders who are contemplating a resumption of in-person worship.

I recognize that some will receive these recommendations as being unduly restrictive or not restrictive enough. This is understandable given the broad geographical expanse of our synod. I do believe, however, that they are appropriate and responsible.

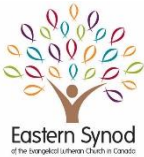
If you have not already done so, please carefully review and examine whatever public health directives are in place for your particular community. Those directives mark the bare minimum of what you must do to help safeguard and protect the health and well-being of those who are physically attendant within our churches.

Finally, I would encourage all of you to actively and enthusiastically promote the use of vaccinations as the best means of ensuring a safe return to the activities that so many of us have missed over the past 17 months.

Thank-you, again, for your faithful efforts to bless, safeguard and preserve the health and well-being of our communities and neighbours.

Blessings and peace

+ Michael



Best Practices for the Safe Resumption Of In-Person Worship

Fall 2021

Location Preparation

The Eastern Synod encourages all persons who are medically able to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

- Congregational leaders can support this effort by encouraging members to get vaccinated and assisting with booking appointments and necessary transportation.

Capacity of the worship space to be determined by the most current regional public health directives.

- Minimum of 2m physical distance between individuals or households should be maintained.

Increase ventilation system air intake or introduce fresh air by opening windows and doors.

- Avoid central air recirculation and limit the use of fans.
- Explore the use of alternative spaces for worship (eg. church halls) that enable increased ventilation.

Masks should be worn by all persons over 2 years of age who are capable of removing their own face coverings and who do not have a health condition that would inhibit the wearing of a face covering.

- Worship leaders may remove their masks while speaking during worship, except during Holy Communion.

Passive Screening is recommended for all activities within the church building.

- A [Screening Poster](#) should be posted at each entrance.
- A record of attendees should be kept for 30 days.

High-touch areas (eg. doorknobs, railings, elevator buttons) should be sanitized in-between services and at the end of each day.

- Intense deep cleaning (eg. fogging, sanitization of pews) is not necessary.

Hand sanitizer (70% alcohol content) should be visibly available at each entrance and throughout the building.

Offices may reopen to visitors by appointment where physical distancing and masking protocols are followed.

A clear outline of tasks and responsibilities should be developed and communicated prior to the resumption of in-person worship.

Worship, Christian Education & Pastoral Care

Opportunities for continued Mediated or Hybrid Worship should be explored prior to the resumption of in-person worship.

- Opportunities for Mediated Worship should be clearly communicated.
- [ELCIC Mediated Worship Opportunities](#)

Consider shortening the length of services (eg. 45 min) to limit the risk of exposure.

Worship books and other shared materials may be returned to the pews and used during worship.

Spoken corporate responses (eg. responsive readings, Lord's Prayer) may be reintroduced where physical distancing and masking protocols are followed.

Congregational singing remains discouraged while indoors.

- Increased physical distance (min. 4 meters) should be allowed to accommodate a soloist or small musical ensemble.
- Temporary partitions (screens) are encouraged for use by soloists/cantors.
- Large choirs are discouraged.

A separate microphone (stationary or portable) should be allocated for each worship leader.

- When necessary, shared microphones should be sanitized between users.

The peace should be shared by non-physical expressions only.
Offering should be received using a centralized basket/offering plate or online giving (eg. PAR). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offering may be presented during the preparation of the gifts.
Holy Communion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased sanitization and care should be taken in the preparation and cleaning up of Holy Communion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The preparation and cleaning up of Holy Communion should be designated to a trained person or group of volunteers (eg. Altar Guild). Communion in one kind (bread only) remains the preferred method. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communion should be distributed using the safe practices previously established by your congregation. Suggested Guidelines If wine is re-introduced, it should be distributed via individual glasses only. Glasses should be well spaced to limit contact. Reusable glasses must be properly sanitized. The use of the Common Cup and Intinction are strongly discouraged.
Holy Baptism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water should only be added to the font for use during Holy Baptism. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The font should be sanitized between each baptism. Only the Rostered Minister and family members within the same household should gather at the font. Contact with the person being baptized (eg. anointing) should be limited to members of the same household when possible.
Funerals and Weddings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please consult your most current regional public health directive for guidance pertaining to funerals and weddings.
Fellowship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gatherings for the purpose of fellowship should be limited to outdoor spaces. Physical distancing must be maintained when gathering outdoors. The sharing of food and drink is discouraged.
Christian Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christian Education (eg. Sunday School, Bible Study, Confirmation Classes, Youth Group) may resume where physical distancing and masking protocols are followed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor gatherings are strongly encouraged.
Pastoral Care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A visitation log should be retained for a period of 30 days. Arrange pastoral visitation outdoors, on patios, or in well-ventilated spaces when possible. When gathering indoors for the purpose of pastoral visitation, physical distancing and masking protocols must be followed. Please consult your most current regional public health directive for guidance pertaining to hospital and Long Term Care visitation. Efforts should be made to maintain connection (eg. phone, online, mail) with those who feel uncomfortable visiting in-person.
Exceptions for Outdoor Worship
Capacity for outdoor worship to be determined by the most current regional public health directives. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum of 2m physical distance between individuals or households should be maintained.
Masks are not required when gathering outdoors except for those who are medically susceptible to easily contracting viruses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EXCEPTIONS: Masks should be worn by all present when singing, and by the Rostered Minister during Holy Communion.
Congregational Singing is permitted outdoors while physically distanced and wearing a mask.

Leadership

Congregational plans for the safe resumption of in-person worship should be clearly communicated to members of the congregation.

Consideration should be given to those who may choose not to return to in-person worship, and a plan in place to continue to provide pastoral support to these persons.

A designated team (eg. Congregational Council) should be responsible for monitoring new Public Health guidelines.

- Update your contact list.
- A plan should be in place to discontinue in-person worship if levels of infection rise.

Congregational Council, Board and Committee meetings are permitted where physical distancing and masking protocols are followed.

Counters should wash their hands before and after counting the offering and avoid touching their face while counting.

Fundraising and Community Events (eg. Yard Sales, Bazaars, and Facility Rentals) are permitted at the discretion of current regional Public Health guidelines, and only when physical distancing and masking protocols are followed.

- Rental Groups must adhere to congregational COVID-19 protocols.

Self Care

Rostered Leaders should self-screen daily using their regional COVID-19 Self Screening Tool:

- [Nova Scotia](#)
- [New Brunswick](#)
- [Quebec](#)
- [Ontario](#)

Leadership teams should consider pooling resources by exploring opportunities for collaboration and shared ministry.

Mental Health supports are available to all Rostered Leaders via [ELCIC Group Services](#).