



**Eastern Synod**  
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

**PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS FOR  
THE RESUMPTION OF IN-PERSON  
WORSHIP**

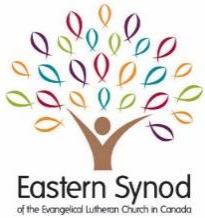
**A PRAYER FOR A TIME OF PREPARATION**

Eternal God, we give you thanks for your loving presence with us throughout this challenging season of pandemic. As we begin a time of planning and preparation to re-enter our church buildings and reunite with one another in worship, we pray for your continuing grace, guidance and comfort. Encourage and equip us, give us wisdom and insight, keep our hearts and minds peaceful and focused on creating safe and welcoming spaces and liturgies. As we once again physically gather in your name, however strange or unsettling our new practices may seem at first, help us remember our faithful worship will always be holy, always pleasing to you. All this, and whatever else you see that we need, we ask in the name of Jesus, Immanuel, 'God-with-us'. Amen.

**TASK FORCE MEMBERS**

Rev. Jason D. Ashby  
Rev. Susan Climo  
Rev. Hilla Lahtinen  
Laurie Knott

Rev. Dr. Michael Pryse, Bishop  
Rev. Adam Snook, Assistant to the Bishop



Grace and peace to you,

Since our appointment, the **Task Force on the Resumption of In-Person Worship** has been reviewing a wide range of resources prepared by other synods, our ecumenical siblings, as well as Public Health advisories from across the territory of the Eastern Synod. There is deep wisdom, as well as great variance, in the differing approaches adopted by each jurisdiction. We affirm our belief that physical distancing, for the health and safety of our neighbour, is an act of love. Likewise, we continue to uphold the importance of a carefully paced approach to resuming in-person gatherings.

We know that many members of our Eastern Synod family deeply yearn for the opportunity to gather in-person. We also know that each congregation and community faces its own unique contextual concerns. There is no one-size-fits-all model, and yet we are united in our desire to act carefully out of love and in service to others.

To that end, we will be providing two documents to help congregational leaders begin the process of preparing their buildings for a potential re-opening in Fall 2020.

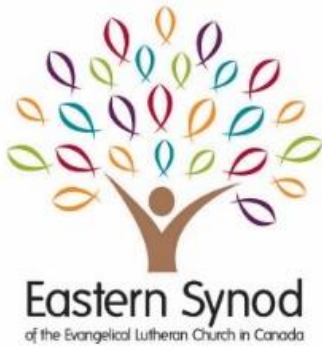
<b>Resource 1</b>	Staged Approach & Preliminary Considerations	<i>Available Now</i>
<b>Resource 2</b>	Comprehensive Checklist for the Resumption of In-Person Worship	<i>August 1, 2020</i>

In the pages which follow, you will find a series of preliminary questions for consideration. We encourage pastors and councils to engage deeply with these areas of concern as they relate to their own context. Consider consulting with the various leaders of your congregation, as well as the ministries that make regular use of your facilities. These considerations are meant to provoke a thoughtful conversation. In doing so, it is our hope that many of the practices and protocols needed for the resumption of in-person worship will begin to take shape over the summer months.

By August 1, a more comprehensive checklist based on the most current Public Health advisories will be provided to further equip congregations for a potential fall 2020 resumption of in-person worship. The August checklist will be used to gauge the readiness of a congregation to move from the **RED** stage to the **AMBER** stage. **The final decision to resume in-person worship must be shared between the Congregational Council and Rostered Ministers serving under call.**

As always, please do not hesitate to reach out to the chairperson of our Task Force, Laurie Knott ([lknot@elcic.ca](mailto:lknot@elcic.ca)) or Rev. Adam Snook ([asnook@elcic.ca](mailto:asnook@elcic.ca)), should you have any questions about the materials presented here.

May the Spirit guide us into the days ahead!



## A STAGED APPROACH FOR THE RESUMPTION OF IN-PERSON WORSHIP

It is the strong counsel of the Bishop that all Eastern Synod congregations remain in the **RED STAGE** until September 2020. It is the responsibility of each congregation to consult, and adhere to the directives of their provincial governments and local public health authorities. In all stages, the foundational pandemic hygiene practices of handwashing, self-isolating when ill, physical distancing, frequent sanitization of public spaces, and wearing a face covering when possible are recommended.

### RED STAGE

- We refrain from in-person worship, including wedding and funerals, within our buildings.
- Corporate worship continues to be livestreamed or pre-recorded and made available online.
- Small weddings and funerals permitted offsite or outdoors according to provincial guidelines.
- In-person essential pastoral care by clergy and pastoral visitors is permitted when physical distancing is possible.
- Offices may reopen for staff and lay leaders where physical distancing is possible.
- Small meetings may occur offsite where physical distancing is possible, online options are preferred whenever possible. Food and beverage should not be served or shared.
- Vital food security and community ministries to vulnerable populations are permitted to operate, with appropriate public health approval.
- Church buildings are closed to the public.

### AMBER STAGE

- Corporate worship may be conducted in-person; the wearing of face coverings is strongly encouraged:
  - The Eucharist may be celebrated, with distribution of the bread only.
  - Congregational ensemble and choir singing is discouraged. Singing by one soloist is permissible with augmented physical distancing.
  - The Peace will be shared using non-contact gestures while remaining in place.
- Online services continue to be offered in addition to in-person worship.
- Larger in-person meetings may resume where physical distancing is possible. Food and beverages should not be served or shared.
- Public Health sanitization protocols must be followed after each use of our buildings.

### GREEN STAGE

- Corporate worship continues to be conducted in-person:
  - The Eucharist may be celebrated, with communion in both kinds (no intinction).
  - Choir and congregational singing fully resumes.
  - The sharing of the Peace and other liturgical practices resume with modifications.
- Online services may continue as an extension of our worship life.
- Meetings, coffee hours, hall rentals, and social and fundraising events may resume.
- We encourage continued enhanced sanitization protocols.

## PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

### GATHERING

- How many people/family groups (bubbles) will your building accommodate?
  - How will you adjust seating, making provision for children to remain with guardians for the full duration of worship?
  - How will you indicate appropriate physical distancing?
  - How might alternative spaces, such as a parish hall, be utilized to better facilitate gathering?
- How will you communicate and facilitate safe arrival and departure practices?
  - How will you determine the access point to the building?
  - How will you accommodate accessibility needs?
  - How will you ensure safe physical distancing is maintained while entering and exiting the building?
- How will you ensure proper sanitization of all communal spaces?
- How will you restrict the use of washrooms?
  - How will you respond to emergency washroom needs?
  - How will you sanitize washrooms?
- How will you limit the number of people who gather?
  - How will these protocols change as restrictions are eased and the numbers can increase (10...25...50...)
  - How many seats of your maximum capacity will you set aside to accommodate unexpected visitors?
- How will you document those who have had access to your building for the purpose of contact tracing? (ex. members, volunteers, visitors)
- How will you prepare required signage? (Distancing Guidelines, COVID Symptoms, Hand-Washing Procedures)

### WORSHIP

- What aspects of worship will need to be modified?
  - How will you incorporate music without singing?
- How will you encourage smaller group activities?
- How will you modify and/or disband greeting members before and after worship?
- How will the roles of ushers be used to monitor adherence to gathering guidelines?
  - How will they also model masking and physical distancing?
- Have you ordered all necessary supplies to sanitize the worship space?
  - Will masks be available for those who arrive without their own?
  - Where will hand sanitizer be available?
  - Who is responsible for replenishing these supplies?
- Do you have a separate microphone for every worship leader?
  - How will you clean these items between uses?
- How will you provide training for leaders and volunteers in advance of resuming in-person worship?
  - How will you facilitate a rehearsal of all who assume roles of leadership: Altar Guild, Greeters/Ushers, Acolytes, Musicians, Lectors, and Counters; as well as guidance for seniors and other at-risk people?
  - How will you re-orient your congregation to an adjusted space and worship practices?
- How will you facilitate receiving offering without 'passing the plate'?
- How will you modify your current Eucharistic traditions to minimize people handling the bread and maintain safe physical distancing throughout distribution?

## COMMUNITY

- How will you connect with those who cannot or who choose not to gather in-person, even after restrictions are lifted?
- How will you nurture those who have newly connected or re-connected with your faith community during this time of physical distancing?
- How will you be invitational and open to people who are not already members of your community?
- Will you mark the 'first Sunday' with a special liturgy?
  - How will you ensure the inclusion of those who exceed the limit and/or who are otherwise unable to gather in-person?
- How will you continue to maintain an online presence?
  - Will you continue to offer online worship resources?
  - What additional equipment, skilled staffing and preparations may be required in advance of resuming in-person worship? (Live Streaming)

## GOVERNANCE

- How will you ensure and document that the decision to resume in-person worship will be shared by the congregational council and rostered ministers?
- How will your facility use agreements need to be modified?
- How will you maintain necessary stewardship and fund-raising activities to support operations?
- If someone contracts COVID-19, how will you communicate with your congregation and members who may have come into contact with that individual, while remembering privacy and pastoral care?
- If someone who has been in your building contracts COVID-19, how will you conduct an intensive cleaning prior to its next use?
- How will you communicate and explain your reopening and safety plan to the congregation?
- How will you advise your congregation about scheduling and programming changes?
- How will administrative personnel safely resume operations?
- How will you identify and recruit volunteers who will support implementation and ensure adherence to established protocols?
- What are the requirements of your insurance provider?

## Provincial Resources

### Nova Scotia

<https://novascotia.ca/coronavirus/>

### New Brunswick

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/corporate/promo/covid-19.html>

### Quebec

<https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/>

### Ontario

<https://covid-19.ontario.ca/>

## Acknowledgments

We are grateful for the work of the Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario, whose Staged Approach has been modified for use in the Eastern Synod.

We are grateful for the work of the people of the Diocese of New Westminster, whose Preliminary Considerations have been modified for use in the Eastern Synod.