



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

# RESUMPTION OF IN-PERSON WORSHIP

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **INTRODUCTION**

The frequently asked questions presented in this resource were gathered during a series of virtual information sessions convened by the Task Force in August 2020.

### **TASK FORCE MEMBERS**

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## Location Preparation

### Insurance Liability

- Important to contact insurance provider to understand liability implications
- The use of waivers may be considered in consultation with your insurance provider

### What if we can't provide a separate entrance and exit?

- It is recognized that all buildings do not have multiple access doors that will be accessible and/or appropriate for members to easily enter or exit.
- Need to work within the limitations of the building (i.e. use the same door for entry and exit). Objective is to limit contact and direct traffic flow to avoid congestion.

### Bathroom Use and Sanitization

- If possible, it is recommended that bathroom access be limited to emergency use only
- Bathroom does not need to be cleaned after each use
  - A cleaning schedule (ex. every 30 minutes) and checklist should be established
  - Alternatively, wipes could be provided with a request that user clean space after use
  - Volunteer would be required to clean and monitor

### Removal of Items from Pews and Public Spaces

- It is recommended that all items, including hymnals, be removed from hymnal racks and public spaces to prevent the need to disinfect items

### Removal of Hymnals

- It is recommended that hymnals be removed from the worship space
- To facilitate using hymnals during worship, a suggestion would be to lend these items to individual members for their safekeeping during the pandemic. It could cause issues on following up to get the items returned post-pandemic

### Pew Cushions

- While it is suggested that they be removed, if they are attached (or congregation uses upholstered seating), spray sanitizers are available

### Use of Fans

- To reduce the movement of air, ceiling and other fans (even with filtration) should not be used
- Forced air heating will need to be used in the winter

### Forced air heating

- Use of overhead fans is discouraged and opening windows to facilitate air flow is recommended
- With the nature of the Canadian climate, forced air furnaces will need to be used
- When the building is vacant, fans can be used to reduce heating costs

### Use of Pens (for contact information)

- Members should be encouraged to use their own pens when providing contact information
- If pens are supplied, they must be sanitized after each use. (Have a separate container for clean pens and a separate container for used pens.)
- A preferred option is for the volunteer team to record contact information as worshippers arrive

### Should we be taking members' temperature as part of the screening process?

- Taking the temperature of members is not recommended by the task force
- Members should self-screen before showing up and use the posters (which identify key symptoms) when they arrive to screen

### **72 Hour Waiting Period** (to reduce sanitization requirements)

- While there has been some suggestion in the media around the time the virus can live on surfaces, there has been no official public health directive available
- Surfaces should be cleaned after use
- Sanitization is a good practice and space will be ready for other uses, if required (ex. funeral)
- Close off unused spaces to reduce amount of cleaning required

### **Surveying Congregation to understand willingness to return to worship in person.**

- A variety of formats – letter, email and Zoom townhall – have been used to gather information
- Anticipated that return will be a cautious trickling
- A “soft re-opening” was suggested (ex. inviting council, key leaders) to provide an opportunity to use new protocols

## **Worship Preparation**

### **Agreement for In-Person Worship**

- Need Rostered Leader and Church Council signoff (covenant agreement provided in checklist document package)

### **Health Concerns and Numbers of Members in High Risk Category**

- If possible, use people who work in health profession as volunteers
- Postpone in-person worship and/or stagger return

### **Contact Tracing Information Requirements**

- First and Last names and phone number or email address

### **3 Year Requirement for Maintaining Attendance Records**

- While some public health authorities suggest 30 days is sufficient, three years has been recommended to ensure records are available for Public Health, insurance enquiries and potential legal action

### **What happens if there is a COVID 19 Outbreak in the congregation? What are the next steps?**

- Parishioners should be encouraged to be tested if experiencing symptoms
- Congregations experiencing a COVID 19 outbreak should inform the Synod
- Congregation would need to heed the directives of the local public health authorities who are responsible for contact tracing protocols.
- Congregation would provide information to their local public health authority as directed

### **Escorting People into Church**

- Ushers will need training to manage traffic flow and designate seating

### **If a family member arrives late, can they join their family (which may mean passing others already seated)?**

- All members will need to be wearing masks
- Yes, members can join others already seated (assuming room is available within designated seating)
- Goal is to limit congestion and contact

### **Microphone Sanitation**

- Each worship leader should have their own microphone (which will require limiting the number of volunteers)

### **How to Deal with No Singing?**

- Pre-recorded music, virtual choirs and play alternative music (vs. hymn) are suggested
- Incorporate new hymns so people are less familiar with the words (and less likely to sing) and use as a way to learn new hymns

### **Is Humming an Option?**

- Public Health directives generally recommend no corporate responses and/or singing
- It is anticipated that a natural reflex may be to say “amen” or hum along to the music which should be relatively low risk if members are wearing masks. It is best to ensure that people understand that congregational singing and corporate prayer will not be included in the worship liturgy
- Taskforce recommendation is to discourage singing and humming to create a safe environment

### **Corporate Responses If Wearing a Mask?**

- Task force recommendation is to use no corporate responses in worship
- A designate eg. Lay Assistant may offer the corporate response on behalf of the assembly

### **Distributing Bulletins**

- To limit contact, it is suggested that bulletins be placed in designated spots in pews/seats before worship

### **What about singing if we are wearing a mask?**

- Ontario Public Health has put out a document outlining the risks of singing even when wearing masks

### **Is singing by a single cantor or soloist an option?**

- Having a soloist or musician is an option. Guidelines would recommend that physical distancing requirements be double the standard two metres
- It is also suggested that congregations considering using plexiglass/plastic screen barriers

### **What distance is required for soloists?**

- It is recommended that the physical distance be four metres, if unmasked
- Suggest using clear partitions (links in document) for lectern, pulpit and soloists

### **Use of Sign Language/Hand Gestures**

- Sign language and/or hand gestures to share the peace could be used (ex. instead of saying amen, hold your heart)

### **Using hymnals when a screen and/or bulletin is not available**

- Hymn books could be assigned to members who would retain them for the pandemic period;
  - It could be challenging having them returned

### **Continuing On-line Worship:**

- Maintaining on-line resources will be important to maintain new and existing relationships as some may not be able to return to in-person worship initially and/or some may prefer connecting on-line.
- Workshops planned for the fall with Pr. Ronnie Smith
- Refer to the ELCIC website, which lists the offerings of congregations across the country, for ideas

### **Outside Services:**

- Worshipping outside is an alternative. Physical distancing is still required and masks are still recommended

### **What about Sunday School?**

- We discourage the convening of Sunday School until the green phase
- Recommend that children can be included in the worship service (while ensuring that they remain with their family unit) and/or provide activities in a single use bag to take home

## **Holy Communion**

### **What about delaying the celebration of communion?**

- This is deemed to be perfectly acceptable knowing the anxiety around the safe return to in-person worship and concerns around the safe distribution of communion
- Recommended that Service of Word will help people (both worship leaders and members) get comfortable with the change
- If pastors or members are feeling anxiety about celebrating communion, it is best to not celebrate at this time

### Why communion in one kind only?

- Logistical issue as Pastor is solely responsible for preparing and distributing
- It limits the number of contact points
- The sealed "all in one" units are not environmentally friendly
- Refer to Allen Jorgenson's (Professor of Systematic Theology and Assistant Dean, Martin Luther University College) reflection "[Communion in Amber](#)"

### What about using wine using disposable cups?

- Recommendation is bread only with the pastor distributing and making preparations (vs. altar guild)
- Individual cups can create multiple points of contact as people pick them up from a tray
- Disposable cups have an environmental impact
- Recommend bread only to reduce number of contact points

### Alternative Suggestions around Communion Distribution

1. "Communion to Go"
  - a. Designed to provide a more intimate communion experience that mirrors communion with shut-ins
  - b. Ziploc bags have been prepared with juice boxes (small percentage is grape juice) and small soda crackers
  - c. Members will pick up and take home with them
2. Communion Liturgy and Benediction prior to distribution
  - a. Members receive the bread from the worship leader and immediately depart

## Volunteers

### What training is available?

- Key volunteers need to be trained
- A number of orientation minded videos are available from our Synodical ministry partners and congregations.
  - [Resurrection Lutheran Church, Halifax NS](#)
  - [St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Kitchener ON](#)
  - [Anglican Diocese of Toronto](#)
- Checklist document designed to outline guidelines and materials
- Activities are contextual to the building and the congregation
- Suggestions include:
  - A soft opening (ex. invite only) to prepare volunteers, identify pinch points, etc.
  - Asking those who work in the health professions to be usher and greeter volunteers for the first month

### Many of our volunteers are in the designated vulnerable sector category for COVID 19

- Some tasks (such as cleaning) may be better to be outsourced to outside providers
- Members who are in the health profession may be a good resource
- Volunteers could sign a waiver (however, does not necessarily limit the liability of the congregation)

### Cash Handling

- Use offering plates for collection and have only counter handle the cash. (The other counter would do the recordkeeping role.). Gloves should be available for handling the cash.

## Hospitality

### Masks

- Recommend everyone wears a mask, except those who cannot for medical reasons
- Communicate expectation that people are required to wear masks
- Accept at face value when someone says they cannot wear a mask due to medical reasons

### What to do if someone is unable to wear a face mask?

- Accept at face value when someone says they cannot wear a mask due to medical reasons

- Checklist recommends that more distanced space be reserved for those members who may have specific needs (this would include those who cannot wear a face mask due to medical reasons)

### **Mask vs. Shield**

- Based on public health guidance, mask use is recommended (required in some jurisdictions). Shields tend to protect wearer and should be worn in conjunction with a mask which primarily protects others

### **For congregations requiring pre-registration for worship, should they include a question around ability to wear a mask?**

- Task force recommends not including a question around a person's ability to wear a mask. Rather, set an expectation that everyone will wear a mask.

### **Creating a Welcoming Space when Areas are Closed Off**

- It is the people, not the building, who are welcoming
- Creating a safe space demonstrates loving our neighbour and hospitality
- It is suggested that social aspects of church community (coffee hours, small group gatherings) could continue through virtual means

### **Can washrooms be made accessible for groups meeting outside?**

- Yes, but suggest that washrooms should be primarily for emergency use only
- Suggest using a sign in sheet to document access to building

### **Weekly Access**

- All those who access the church building throughout the week should be documented for the purposes of contact tracing.

## **Rental Groups**

### **How do we prepare for rental groups?**

- Ensure that the congregation is named in the renter's insurance policy, including indemnification
- Rental groups should submit a plan for the usage of the church building to the congregational council for review and approval prior to their resumption of programming
- Renters must collect and retain their own documentation for the purpose of contact tracing

## **Other**

### **To what extent do Rostered Ministers have a corporate responsibility to the wider church if they become aware of congregations in breach of the Amber guidelines?**

- Contact your colleague in love, and ask if what is being heard is true and ask why it is happening
- If deeply concerned, contact the Bishop