



Eastern Synod of ELCIC
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June, 12, 2020

Resumption of In-Person Worship

Eastern Synod, ELCIC

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Grace and peace be with you!

In a recent letter to the clergy, members and partners of our synod, Bishop Michael Pryse wrote,

“For almost three months now we have been physically distancing from one another for the love of our neighbour. That same motivation needs to be paramount as we plan for the future. I encourage you to use these coming months as an opportunity to plan and put in place comprehensive plans for what in-person worship will look like once we have decided that it is both prudent and safe to physically gather in our church buildings once again. It is my intention to provide our rostered and congregational leaders with resources to help in that process in the coming weeks.”

To that end, and out of that same love for our neighbour, the Officers of the Eastern Synod have appointed a **Task Force on the Resumption of In-Person Worship**.

These are uncertain and rapidly changing times. The mandate of the Task Force will be to develop guidelines for congregations to support both their preparations to re-open for in-person worship and their ability to protect the safety and wellbeing of all those who gather.

Particular attention will be given to the following areas:

- Who is responsible for the decision to reconvene in-person worship?
- What considerations need to be reviewed when making the decision to re-open?
- What procedures need to be implemented to protect employees/volunteers, members/visitors?
- What congregational activities may/will need to be excluded?
- What worship components will need to be done differently?

- How do we live and serve together while adhering to legislative and public health directives?
- How do these decisions impact our facility usage and rental commitments?
- How will we provide adequate training to volunteers?
- Has COVID-19 impacted our insurance coverage?

We appreciate that our congregations and communities represent a wide range of contexts and realities. As jurisdictions across the territory of the Eastern Synod begin the process of loosening physical distancing restrictions, please know that this Task Force is dedicated to supporting the very critical work that will be required by congregations as they move into the months ahead. We commit to providing a preparatory checklist by **July 1, 2020**; with a more comprehensive resource available by **August 1, 2020**.

The strong recommendation of the Bishop remains that congregations not resume in-person worship experiences within their church buildings until the beginning of September at the earliest. Likewise, it is our hope that congregational leaders will use these summer months to consider forthcoming recommendations and procedures from the Task Force. During the interim period, it may be helpful to ask your congregational council and/or other congregational leaders to begin the process of reviewing worship practices and making preliminary plans for the fall. The focus areas of the Task Force listed above would act as great conversation starters!

We value your input. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the chairperson of the Task Force, Laurie Knott (lknot@elcic.ca) or Rev. Adam Snook (asnook@elcic.ca). We are here to support you.

As we navigate the months ahead, may we give thanks to God for the vibrant and varied expressions of worship that have, do, and will continue to sustain God's people.

Rev. Jason D. Ashby

Rev. Susan Climo

Rev. Hilla Lahtinen, Director of Worship Ministries, Eastern Synod

Laurie Knott, Vice Chairperson, Eastern Synod

Rev. Dr. Michael Pryse, Bishop

Rev. Adam Snook, Assistant to the Bishop