

# Coming Back Together for Worship Resources

*From the South Dakota Synod  
adapted from the three Texas Louisiana Synods*

There will be great excitement when we are able to come together for worship again. Because we are months away from an effective regimen of treatment, and a year from a vaccine, we will still need to practice excessive hygiene and physical distancing. Here are some recommendations for congregations to follow:

## General

- **First, COVID-19 is still a very real threat to the health and well-being of our society.**
- **Follow CDC guidelines. [You may find them here.](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html)**  
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- **Create two important policies before opening:**
  - Prevention: How will your congregation take precautions to mitigate spread?
  - Response: If someone who has been to worship or another event tests positive, what do we do?
- **Discuss the following two questions and make sure everyone around the table is heard:**
  - What is the risk for our community?
  - What is essential for our community?
- **Decide as a Congregation Council when you come back to congregational worship.** Just because you can, does not mean you should. Consider the age and composition of your congregation to decide when it is right for you to begin in-person worship again.
- **Publish your service times and let people know what new practices of physical distancing and hygiene to expect when they return.**
- **Insist that people stay at home if they're immunocompromised.** Many of our seniors are lonely, bored, and yearning for community in this crisis. They will probably not listen to you.
- **Disinfect the public spaces before people arrive, and between each service/gathering.**
- **Ushers and Greeters**
  - Train ushers and greeters to not shake hands or pass out bulletins. If you project, don't use bulletins at all. If bulletins are necessary, place them spaced out every other pew by Tuesday or Wednesday, as viruses don't live on the paper for more than 4-5 days. Some live only minutes on paper. We aren't sure about COVID-19 yet; there is still more to learn about this disease.
  - Greeters stand at the tables as people leave to thank them for coming and answering questions.
  - Encourage greeters to check in with people, listening for needs.
- **Prop open inside and outside doors** (and if possible, bathroom doors), so no one touches a door knob or handle.
- **Pass the peace with a simple bow to those on your right and left.**
- **During announcements thank people for coming, and politely remind them not to shake hands or hug yet.**
- **We recommend against offering a fellowship/coffee hour.** Continue encouraging people to leave the building rather than mingling.
- **Singing is among the riskier behaviors when it comes to spreading droplets/aerosols which can carry the virus a significant distance and remain suspended in the air.** A cloth mask is unlikely to be enough to protect you or your neighbor. We recommend against singing in the sanctuary when the congregation is gathered.
- **Offering**
  - Offering plates are placed on a table as people enter and exit. Greeters stand behind the table warmly welcoming worshippers from a distance.

- o Offering at the doors as people enter and exit as mentioned above. Use the offering time to talk about the church's vital ongoing ministries. Let people write checks. What's still happening? Why does it matter? How are lives being impacted? How is your church serving people during this crisis physically and spiritually?
- o Offering counters should use the same protocols as bank tellers, sanitizing frequently, and sitting at a distance.
- o Continue to adopt/encourage electronic giving.

## Preparing for Communion

- **First, ask if communion is absolutely necessary for worship life?**
- **Altar Guild and Communion Assistants must think of their work in terms of food service preparation**, like going through a drive-through restaurant. Does anyone in your congregation work in the restaurant industry? Have any had food handling training? They could be a helpful resource.
- Communion preparers **wash hands with soap thoroughly for at least 20 seconds** prior to preparing communion. Washing is twice as effective as hand sanitizer.
- Gloves can be used to prepare, but can be deceiving. If a glove touches a contaminated space and then a plate or tray, it still passes the contamination on. It is best to wash hands thoroughly and frequently.
- Common cup is usually the most sanitary means of communion since most germs are on the hands. This virus, however, is passed on by airborne droplets, and so we recommend not using either common cup or intinction at this time. 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. Consider using a diluted chlorine soak after washing.
- Those preparing communion wash their hands, then place glasses in trays sufficiently spaced so that communicants can take their cup without touching the others. After filling the cups with wine/juice the trays are placed on the altar.
- Plastic-wrapped wafers can be emptied onto patens without touching them. There should be separate patens for each communion assistant distributing bread.
- **The wafer is safer:** We do not recommend using bread for a while, whether home-made or from the store. Bread requires more handling than wafers.
- **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.)
- **The pastor should consecrate the elements without touching them.** The fraction and elevation are optional and should be omitted for the time being.
- Those distributing wafers should try to avoid touching communicants' hands as much as possible.
- Those distributing wine/juice only touch the trays, holding them out for communicants to take a cup.
- It is best, for a number of reasons, for communion assistants to commune last. This keeps them attentive to hygiene during distribution, and also makes the congregation aware that communion assistants are confident.
- **Communing with one element is acceptable and appropriate. The crucified and risen Christ is fully present in the bread or the wine/juice.**

## Worship Resources

Worship resources are available on the ELCA website: <https://www.elca.org/publichealth>. Below are a litany of return, prayers and so forth you may use or adapt.

## Litany of Return

Based on Psalm 122

Let us give thanks to our God!

**I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”**

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

**May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.”**

For the sake of my relatives and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.” **For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.**

A reading from Hebrews 10:

19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Let us pray...

O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, you are our refuge and strength, a present help in time of trouble. Though the mountains quake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, we will not fear. For many weeks we have not been able to meet, now as we come back together may our songs of joy and our prayers for thanksgiving rise to you. Hear our grief for all who mourn and our hope for deliverance from this pestilence. Give us grace to grow and learn from these difficult days, for you are our hope and salvation, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Processional Hymn**

A Mighty Fortress

O God Our Help in Ages Past

My Hope is Built on Nothing Less

Now All the Vault of Heav'n Resounds

### **Prayers of the People**

For your church in every time and place, that we might carry on Jesus' ministry of healing. God of mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

For Bishop Eaton, Bishop Hagmaier and for Pastor/Deacon \_\_\_\_\_.

God of mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

For the world, recovering from this global pandemic. God of mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

For all who bear office in our land, especially Donald Trump, our President and Kristi Noem, our Governor, that they might make good decisions that benefit all people. God of mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

For all who are sick in body, mind or spirit. God of mercy,

**Hear our prayer.**

For all doctors, nurses and hospitals workers. For all who are working to eradicate this pandemic. God of mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

For farmers, packing plant employees, grocery store workers, truckers and all who keep supply chains open. God of mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

For all those who are in need of any kind today, especially those we name before you now... God of mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

For all who have died during this time of pandemic, and for all who are grieving the loss of loved ones in this time of crisis, especially those we name before you now... God of mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

In thanksgiving for all your saints. God of mercy,  
**Hear our prayer.**

God of the ages, keep all your beloved children safe from disease. Draw near to us, for only in you can we live in safety. Into your hands we commend ourselves and all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**