



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

May 6, 2020 Updated Recommendations for Returning to In-person Worship

Phase 1: Once your region has had 14 days of declining cases and fatalities

1. Pastor and council decide when gating criteria have been met and it is safe to resume in-person worship, weddings and funerals with **strict** physical distancing protocols:
 - 25% occupancy, sitting every-other pew, six feet apart, unless you are from the same household
 - congregational singing only if everyone is masked [READ](#)
 - doors propped open
 - no handshaking, hugging or touching
 - bulletins are not recommended
 - pass the peace with a bow only
 - no passing offering plates, plates on a table at entrance
 - no choir, unless masked and six feet apart [WATCH](#)
 - no sharing microphones unless disinfected after each use
 - no nursery
 - no baptisms yet
2. Everyone should wear face masks. Face masks should be provided for those who have none. Cloth face masks should be washed every day when used, and disposable face masks should be thrown away after each use. Do not use N95 masks, which are needed for healthcare professionals. You may preach without a mask if you are at least 6 feet away from anyone. Decide what you will do with those who do not comply. ("I wear a face mask to protect you. You wear a face mask to protect me.") [READ](#)
3. No gloves. Gloved hands can pass germs. Instead, all worship leaders should wash hands before worship, and immediately if coming in contact with anyone else. [READ](#)
4. Hand sanitizer is available at the door, and in the pews.
5. Every other row is blocked off, and one household per pew. View the Louisiana Fire Marshall's diagram [HERE](#).
6. Ask anyone not feeling well and all vulnerable individuals (those 65+ years of age and those with pre-existing conditions) to stay home.
7. Children must stay with their family unit, and if this is not possible, they should stay home with adequate care.
8. No communion yet. Give your people a couple weeks to get used to physical distancing before adding this complexity.
9. No homebound communion, or visits to hospitals or senior care facilities. Stay in phone contact with seniors and homebound members of your congregation and community.
10. No schools, daycare, camps or youth activities.
11. Encourage church staff to work from home as much as possible.
12. Fellowship activities outdoors, no food, and with six feet of physical distancing.
13. Offering counters maintain six feet of distance and wear masks, using sanitizer frequently.
14. Pews, handles, toilet flush, toilet seats, doorknobs, faucet handles, soap dispenser pumps and all surfaces must be sanitized after each use.
15. Consider outdoor worship where practical.

Phase 2: Once your region has had 28 days of declining cases and fatalities without resurgence

1. Continue in-person worship, weddings and funerals with **moderate** physical distancing protocols. Increase to 50% occupancy, sitting every-other pew, six feet apart, unless you are from the same household. Nursery may resume if attendants wear masks.
2. Continue to wear face masks with the protocols above.
3. No gloves. See above.
4. Hand sanitizer is still available at the door, and in the pews.
5. Every other row is blocked off, and one family per row.
6. Anyone not feeling well and all vulnerable individuals (those 65+ years of age and those with pre-existing conditions) should continue to stay home.
7. Children must stay with their family unit, and if this is not possible they should stay home with adequate care.
8. Consider introducing communion.
 - Altar Guild and Communion Assistants must think of their work in terms of food service preparation, like going through a drive-through restaurant. Do any in your congregation work in the restaurant industry? Do any have food safety or food handling training? They could be a helpful resource. Communion preparers wash hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds prior to preparing communion. Washing is twice as effective as hand sanitizer.
 - Commune with wafers and individual cups. 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. Glasses are placed in trays sufficiently spaced so that communicants can take their cup without touching the others. After filling the cups with wine the trays are placed on the altar.
 - Plastic-wrapped wafers are emptied onto patens without touching them. There should be separate patens for each communion assistant distributing bread.
 - Pastor and communion assistants wash hands during the offering. Washing is significantly more effective than hand sanitizer.
 - The pastor consecrates the elements without touching them. The fraction and elevation are omitted for the time being.
 - Those distributing wafers avoid touching communicants' hands as much as possible. If you have touched a hand, stop and use hand sanitizer.
 - Trays of wine are on a table. The communion assistant 6 feet away says "The blood of Christ shed for you." Used cups are placed in a basket.
 - Communion assistants commune last. This keeps them attentive to hygiene during distribution, and also makes the congregation aware that communion assistants are confident.
 - Communing in one kind (wafer only) is acceptable and appropriate. The crucified and risen Christ is fully present for them in, with, and under one element. (UMG 44D)
9. No homebound communion still, or visits to hospitals or senior care facilities. Stay in phone contact with seniors and homebound members of your congregation and community.
10. Schools, daycare, camps and organized youth activities may resume with **moderate** physical distancing.
11. Continue to encourage church staff to work from home as much as possible.
12. Fellowship activities may move indoors with **strict** physical distancing (masks, six feet of separation, etc.). Food may be served with careful preparation.
13. Offering counters maintain six feet of distance and wear masks, using sanitizer frequently.
14. Pews, handles, toilet flush, toilet seats, door knobs, faucet handles, soap dispenser pumps and all surfaces must be sanitized after each service.

Phase 3: Once your region has had 42 days of declining cases and fatalities without resurgence

1. The same physical distancing protocols, only 75% occupancy.
2. Follow health officials' counsel regarding face masks.
3. No gloves. See phase 1, above.
4. Hand sanitizer is still available at the door, and in the pews.
5. Every other row is blocked off, and the middle of the row is blocked so that people are spaced out.
6. Vulnerable individuals (those 65+ years of age and those with pre-existing conditions) may return, with careful physical distancing. Crowds should be avoided.
7. Children may roam, with caution.
8. Updated communion recommendations will be provided as we learn.
9. Home bound communion, and visits to hospitals and senior care facilities may resume with great care.
10. Schools, daycare, camp and youth activities may continue with **limited** physical distancing.
11. Church staff may work without restrictions.
12. Fellowship may resume with **limited** physical distancing.

Worship resources are available on the synod webpage and also on the ELCA website: <https://www.elca.org/publichealth>. A litany of return and other worship suggestions may be found [HERE](#).

The fastest vaccine ever invented was for the mumps. Mumps appeared and was first diagnosed in 1963. A vaccine was ready in 1967. We've got the best minds working on this, but it will take time, and anyone who tells you otherwise isn't considering history. "We're going to have to learn to live with this for a while."

—Dr. Don Godbee, Medical Director, East Baton Rouge Parish & Emergency Medicine

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