



Returning to the Sanctuary: Worship Resources

*From the bishops and staffs of the Eastern and Western North Dakota Synods of the ELCA
as of April 29, 2020*

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 likely a year away from a vaccine, we will still need to practice rigorous hygiene and social distancing. Here are some recommendations.

- **Decide as a Congregation Council when you should begin worshipping in your sanctuary again.** Just because you can does not mean you should. Consider the average age and make-up of your congregation to decide when it is right for you to begin in-person worship again. Councils should also take into consideration the health of their worship leaders and measures that need to be in place to help protect them if they have any underlying health issues that would put them at increased risk.
- Publish your service times and let people know what new practices of physical distancing and hygiene to expect when they return. Recommend that people stay at home if they are immunocompromised or at high risk due to other health factors.
- Remind your community to refrain from attending in-person worship if they have any symptoms of being ill.
- Consider continuing to offer online or other electronic delivery of worship opportunities alongside in-person worship opportunities.
- Disinfect the public spaces before people arrive, and between each service/gathering.
- Post ND Smart Restart Signage in the entry of your building. (Download [Signage here.](#))
- Encourage adults and children over the age of 2 to wear face masks to protect others should they be asymptomatic. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children age 2 years old and under do not wear masks. Please keep this in mind in your planning.
- Maintain 6 feet of distance between family groups. This may mean sitting every other pew or spacing chairs prior to worship. Consider the flow of entering and exiting the worship space to abide by social distancing. Children should likely remain seated with their family during the children's sermon.
- Train ushers/greeters to not shake hands or pass out bulletins. If possible, project your worship on screens, don't use bulletins at all. If bulletins are necessary, place them, spaced out every-other-pew.
- Offering plates are placed on a table as people enter and exit. Greeters stand behind the table warmly welcoming worshippers from a distance.
- Prop open inside and outside doors (and if possible, bathroom doors), so no one touches a doorknob 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.
- See communion instructions on the next page.

- Offering at the doors as people enter and exit as mentioned above. Use the offering time during worship to talk about the church's vital ongoing ministries. What is still happening? Why does it matter? How are lives being impacted? How is your church serving people during this crisis physically and spiritually? Let people write checks and encourage electronic giving through a smartphone app or direct bill pay from their bank account.
- Greeters stand at the tables as people leave to thank them for coming and answer questions. Encourage greeters to check in with people, listening for needs.
- Those who count the offering should use the same protocols as bank tellers, sanitizing frequently, and sitting at a distance.

Preparing for Communion

- Altar Guild and Communion Assistants must think of their work in terms of food service preparation. Does anyone in your congregation work in the restaurant industry? Have any had food handling training? They could be helpful resource persons.
- Anyone preparing, presiding over, or serving the elements should wear a mask.
- Communion preparers wash hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds prior to preparing communion. Good hand washing is more effective than hand sanitizer.
- Gloves may be used, but also can be deceiving. If a glove touches a contaminated space and then a plate or tray, it still passes on the contamination. It is best to wash hands thoroughly and frequently.
- This virus is passed on by airborne droplets, so we recommend not using either common cup or intinction until Phase 3. 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. Consider purchasing a pouring chalice to fill cups during distribution to minimize the touching of glasses. Reasonably priced ceramic pouring chalices are available. Prefilled glasses placed in trays must be sufficiently spaced so that the glasses can be removed without touching the others. After filling the cups with wine, 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 homemade 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* (breaking a large communion wafer) and *elevation* (lifting up the bread and wine) are optional and should be omitted for the time being.
- Those distributing the elements should put on a mask and gloves. Servers should avoid touching communicants' hands as much as possible.
- 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 that their distribution of the communion elements is safe for all worshippers.
- Communing "in one kind" (i.e. the bread alone or the wine alone) is acceptable and appropriate. As the ELCA document *Use of the Means of Grace* (p. 48) states: "The crucified and risen Christ is fully present for them in, with, and under one element."
- Maintain 6 feet of distance between family groups in the communion line.

Worship Resources

Worship resources are available on the synod websites and also on the ELCA website:

<https://www.elca.org/publichealth>. What follows is a “Litany of Return,” along with some prayers that you may use (or adapt) for when your congregation returns to offering in-person worship.

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 10:19-25

“Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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.

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 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. For many weeks we have not been able to meet, now as we come back together may our songs of joy and our prayers of 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 all ministers of the gospel, including our bishops_____ and our pastor(s) _____. 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, our President and Douglas, our Governor, that they might make wise 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 other healthcare professionals, and for all who are working to eradicate this pandemic. God of mercy,
Hear our prayer.

For grocery store workers, truckers and all who keep food supply chains open. God of mercy,
Hear our prayer.

For all 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 pandemic, and for all who grieve their deaths, 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.