



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Ideas for adapting worship and congregational life to high risk of community transmission

In September 2021, 40 SEPA Synod congregations responded to our informational survey regarding changes to worship in the midst of the current Delta variant surge.

Most of the congregations report requiring or strongly suggesting the wearing of masks inside their buildings. Some have agreed to stop worship if attendees do not comply; others have ushers/greets enforce and hand out masks; others use honor system.

Some have returned to online-only or outdoors-only worship. Congregations are split on whether to shorten worship services to limit contact time, whether and how to allow singing, and whether to postpone or go ahead with children's programs.

Below we have excerpted ideas that congregations have implemented during this surge. (These suggestions will also be useful if we have a future surge.) They are presented for your discussion and discernment. We hope they will be helpful as you continue to navigate this dynamic situation.

If you have other suggestions, please send them to Pastor Bob Fisher at rfisher@sepa.org.

General principles:

- Every Sunday inform congregation of community, city and state COVID and variant statistics and recommended restrictions.
- Remind congregation of the commandment to love and serve the neighbors.
- Remind congregation: If you are feeling sick for any reason please stay home and join us for worship online
- Now that over-the-counter COVID tests are available, the preacher, music minister, and cantor have been taking weekly tests on Saturday evening
- This situation is fluid. Monitor numbers locally and regionally and adapt as needed.

Children's programs:

- Follow local school district protocols. All must wear masks, distance.
- Match return to indoor classes with indoor worship

- Hold classes outdoors
- We are tentatively planning to hold Sunday School outside for 30 minutes every other week and during the fall. We do not expect to be able to meet this winter.
- Masks for students and teachers
- Delay start of programs until community transmission goes down.
- We plan only monthly educational sessions for young children, holding smaller classes in the largest, best-ventilated rooms we have.
- Weekly classes for confirmands of vaccination age continue in the largest, best-ventilated rooms we have.

Facilities:

- Upgrade HVAC filtration
- Increase outside air circulation via HVAC
- Open windows
- Portable HEPA filters
- Masks required inside any area of building, all day every day
- We do not allow food or drink in the building, as we don't want people without their masks on.
- Social or faith formation ministries continue to either meet outdoors (we have a wonderful firepit!) or in large indoor spaces like our fellowship hall.
- Everyone involved in /attending any activity is required to sign a waiver stating that they attend at their own risk etc.

Worship services:

- Require masking, enforced by greeters
- Require masks for unvaccinated individuals
- Provide masks if needed
- Maintain records of individuals attending for contact tracing
- Check temperatures on arrival
- Provide hand sanitizer on entrance and exit
- Regularly sanitize high-touch areas
- Use UV sanitizing lights
- Max number of people allowed in the sanctuary. Unfortunately, when we reach the max, we will close the doors.
- Remain exclusively online
- Telephone call-in worship to expand reach
- Moving to two services to increase distancing
- Moving services outdoors
- If we have some who will not follow the mask guidelines we will immediately dismiss our service as to do no harm to those present.

- Strongly suggest that the unvaccinated watch the service at home
- We do not use hymnals or bulletin
- Encourage social distancing and seating by family units
- Pews marked with distanced seating areas
- Peace celebrated with a wave
- No passing of peace, or greeting
- No children's sermons
- No acolytes, crucifers, or torch bearers
- Reduce services to 45 or 30 minutes
- Set up separate area as "safe zone" with masks
- Eliminate or do not reintroduce singing
- Organist or small masked choir lead singing, congregation joins masked
- Sing only one hymn per service
- We do not sing the liturgy and we do not have an opening hymn. The first time the congregation sings is following the sermon and then we have a closing song. This limits the time in the sanctuary after singing has started to less than 30 minutes.
- We have a vaccinated cantor singing in the choir loft. This is most important for our online services, so they can hear strong vocal leadership. Vaccinated folk may sing while remaining masked.
- Require masks for singing
- If congregational singing it is limited and soft
- singing by soloists, masked and behind plexiglass barriers (separated by quite a distance from most of the attendees)
- We have asked for humming or "soft singing into your mask"
- Adult choirs are required to be vaccinated.
- Bell choir
- Maintain distance between pastor, lectors, and congregation
- At the conclusion of the service everyone will be asked to leave the building for conversation and fellowship in front of the church and in the parking lot

Offering:

- Offering plates in narthex, not passed
- Online offerings

Communion:

- Ambulatory continuous communion under one (1) species rather than kneeling at the altar rail under both species.

- People receive Holy Communion in their pews with the individual cups of bread and wine.
- Prefilled communion cups w/wafers
- Holy Communion is offered with prefilled plastic cups of grape juice or wine which the communicant disposes of immediately after use. The host is offered in an individual, small paper cup, also disposed of by the communicant. Pastor wears a mask and gloves throughout the Meal. After presenting the Host to the communicant, Pastor steps back, maintaining social distance.