



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

April 29, 2020

Dear Gulf Coast Leaders,

Thank you for your continued ministry in these challenging times. I am confident that the Christ who walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus continues to walk with us today, challenging us to remain faithful, and setting hearts ablaze with hope.

For the safety of the most vulnerable, we are still not recommending in-person worship. We have not yet met the gating criteria of 14 days of declining cases as established by the White House.

Please review our *Guidelines for Coming Back Together as a Congregation* in [English](#) or in [Spanish](#) and our *Coming Back Together for Worship Resources* in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). When we do start coming together again in person, after 14 days of declining cases, it will involve strict social distancing, face masks, and sanctuaries at 25% capacity. People over 65 (half the congregation in some places) will need to stay home. For the next year or more, until there is a vaccine, crowded areas, and particularly large crowds, are going to be dangerous. It's not too early to look closely at the above guidelines and begin planning.

Below are some responses to questions we have received recently.

How are offerings?

Although offerings are down, congregations are reporting better giving than expected.

What about PPP?

While some congregations have received Payroll Protection Plan forgivable SBA loans, most have not. The ELCA Federal Credit Union is now approved to provide SBA PPP forgivable loans. They only work with ELCA organizations. While you do need to have an account with them, you can file both applications simultaneously. <https://www.elcafcu.org>

What about funerals?

Just say no for now. If they insist, then 10 people or less. Masks. 6 feet apart. No physical contact.

What about camp?

We still don't know. Below see links to reports Lutherhill Director Matt Kindsvatter shared.

- [Finding Direction for Camps Report](#)
- [Lutherhill Finding Direction Report](#)

Is there anything we need to know about liability insurance and coming back together?

A couple of non-ELCA congregations in Louisiana that continued to meet after the stay at home order was dropped by their insurance company. It might be worth a call to your

insurance company before you jump back into things.

What about masks?

Wearing masks in public is a way to love and care for your neighbor. There's a lot of good information out there about how masks protect those around us. It will be a kind gesture for some time to wear a mask when in any public space, including worship. Don't buy or borrow N-95 masks. Healthcare folks who work with COVID-19 desperately need them, and they are in short supply. [Make a mask](#), or use a bandana. Consider joining [Lutheran World Relief](#) in their 75,000 Face Mask Challenge.

Was there tornado damage to our congregation in Onalaska?

Lake Livingston Lutheran Church in Onalaska reported no damage to their building. Three church members had damage to their homes. Bishop's Associate Chris Markert reports the Disaster Team has made emergency grants to these families from the [Gulf Coast Synod Disaster Fund](#).

How are Synod Assembly registration refunds coming?

We recognize that this process has been slower than we had originally hoped. All refunds will be made via the original payment method. The synod has completed the required steps to allow Cvent to process the transactions. Due to the volume of cancelled events we anticipate refunds will be completed within the next few weeks. We will continue to update you as we receive additional information.

For further reading...

- [An article of First Galveston member and former ELCA VP Carlos Peña](#)
- [Christianity has been handling epidemics for 2,000 years.](#)
- [This article by Bill Gates](#) is a deep dive read, but solid information for those who want to understand what this is going to look like moving forward.
- [This article from the National Catholic Reporter](#) looks at Holy Communion and what worship life will look like this coming year.

Through Easter 7 (May 24), Synod Staff are continuing to record weekly sermons, making the texts and videos available. We are honored to come into your homes and congregations. You can find those sermons [HERE](#).

Our prayers are with you daily. Let us continue to ask, "What does love require in this time of pandemic?" How can we as individuals, congregations, and a whole church love our neighbors most fully at this time?

Yours in Christ,



Michael Rinehart, bishop
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