

**West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod
COVID-19: Congregational Reopening Checklist
18 May 2020**

This checklist should be taken as a tool to assist congregational leadership in making a determination with respect to reopening and in instituting local protocols. Given the rapidly changing landscape (in terms of knowledge about the virus and in terms of government response), regular review of those external sources is necessary.

Note well, this document is not to be taken as a recommendation to reopen. Reopening is a congregational decision. Nor should this document be taken as an exhaustive list of things to consider when making a decision on reopening.

Feel free to add spaces after any or all of these questions, filling in that space with information relevant to your congregation. That information can be references to outside resources, explanations of protocols your congregation is putting into place, identification of people responsible, etc.. The first section of this document is the checklist. The second section provides a general introduction followed by more detailed discussion of most of the items on the checklist.

Congregation: _____

Checklist last reviewed (by/when): _____

Decision Authority

A congregation's governing documents, call documents, and policies outline who makes the decision about reopening. The following should be reviewed.

- Federal, state, county, municipal: Whichever is the most restrictive legally binding order applies to the congregation. Is your congregation allowed to reopen, according to the government, and under what conditions? Who is responsible for tracking the latest government orders?
- Does the letter of call, a standing rule or continuing resolution, a bylaw, or a constitutional provision invest the pastor or some other person(s) or body with authority to cancel worship or close the congregation and under what conditions? If so, who makes the decision?
- If council is the decision making authority with respect to the preceding (i.e., if no one else has the authority to cancel worship or close the congregation), how will the council make the decision? Will it consider the question weekly, fortnightly, monthly, or call special meetings?
- What mechanism will be put in place to review changes in government orders and/or the local situation, and how will the decision making individual or body reconsider being closed/open? Will it review the situation weekly, fortnightly, monthly, or call special meetings? Will automatic triggers be used (e.g., government reimposing limits on public gatherings of a certain number etc.)?

Who's Who?

- Who is checking with your insurer?
- Who is checking with your attorney (or someone in your congregation with legal or risk management expertise)?
- Who is consulting with members in your congregation with medical or public health expertise?
- Who is checking the latest government orders?
- Who is working on the flow of people traffic in and out of the church building and their flow once inside for worship or other activities?
- Who is working on questions related to worship (e.g., singing, peace, communion, worship resources)?
- Who is working on questions related to hygiene (e.g., facility seating and capacity, masks, gloves, cleaning of restrooms and public areas)?
- Who is working on questions related to contact tracing?
- Who communicates with the congregation?

Insurer

- Does your insurance policy cover your congregation adequately for reopening and under what conditions?
- How can your congregation meet those conditions if any?
- Are the conditions, if any, too difficult to satisfy?

Legal

- Does your attorney think there are any risks to reopening (other than those risks we face on a regular basis)?
- How might the congregation mitigate those risks if any?
- Are the risks, if any, acceptable?

Medical

- Who are the medical/public health in your congregation?
- Have the medical/public health people in your congregation reviewed current CDC, state health department, county health department, and local health department guidelines?
- Do the medical/public health people in your congregation have general advice about closing/reopening?
- Do the medical/public health people in your congregation have specific advice regarding worship, flow of people, hygiene, etc.?

Attendance

- What is the seating capacity of your space given prevailing recommendations on social distancing?
- Have you surveyed your congregation or made an educated assessment of likely attendance?
- Can your capacity handle the expected attendance (if unregulated)?
- If not, how will you regulate attendance so as not to exceed capacity?
 - Will you assign services/events to parishioners?
 - Will you make your services/events ticketed events?
 - Will you leave a certain number of slots open for unexpected visitors?
- How will social distancing seating be maintained?
 - Will pews be roped off?
 - Will ushers seat people?
 - Will people have the choice of where they sit?
- Will masks be required of attendees?
 - If someone does not have a mask, will one be provided?
 - If someone refuses to wear a mask, will they be turned away or ejected?
 - If so, by whom and how?
- Who will monitor and regulate attendance and how?
- Will that person have authority to turn away people once the space has reached capacity? And how will they do that?
- Will screening be employed with respect to people who are ill or have been in contact with people who are ill?
 - If so, who will perform the screening?
 - Who will have the authority to turn someone away and how?
- Will nursery be kept closed for the time being?
- For purposes of contact tracing, who will take attendance and how?

Hygiene

- Exclusionary Criteria
 - Will those who are ill (or who have been exposed to those who are ill) be told not to attend and how?
 - Will those classed as vulnerable (or who care for the vulnerable) be told not to attend and how?
- Personal Hygiene
 - Will attendees be told that masks are required and how?
 - Will attendees be told that gloves are required and how?
 - Will attendees be told that hand washing and/or sanitizing is required and how?
 - What provisions for hand washing and/or sanitizing will your congregation make?
- Corporate Hygiene
 - How will members be told to refrain from shaking hands, hugging, etc.?

- How will members be told to maintain social distance in seating and movement throughout church building before/during/after worship/event?
- Institutional Hygiene
 - Will restrooms be open or closed?
 - If open, what cleaning protocols will be used?
 - Will signage, if any, be placed in or outside restrooms instructing users on hand washing/sanitizing?
 - Will water fountains and dispensers be blocked from usage?
 - Will kitchens be blocked from usage?
 - What cleaning protocols will be used for high traffic areas and high contact surfaces?
 - If your church has an elevator, if not temporarily closed, how will its use be regulated and how will it be cleaned?
 - If nurseries are reopened, what hygiene and cleaning protocols will be used?
 - If there is more than one service/event within a five-day time span, will the space be cleaned and how?

Worship

- Synod advice on worship has been reviewed.
- Should the pastor lead worship, or should the pastor continue to shelter in place?
- How will ushers/greeters etc. be retrained for worship under the current conditions?
- How will cleaning personnel be retrained for the current conditions?
- How will counters be retrained for the current conditions?
- Will a shorter worship format be used?
- Will singing be eliminated for the time being?
- Will the physical exchange of the peace be eliminated?
- Will the passing of the offering plate be replaced with an offering box/plate(s) be placed in the narthex or some other place?
- How will furnishings and other items be rearranged or removed to reduce potential for cross-contamination?
 - If there are services within a five-day time span, will worship resources (e.g., hymnals) be removed and replaced with bulletins or projection?
 - If there are services within a five-day time span, what cleaning protocols will be used?
 - Will the baptismal font be removed or emptied of water?
- Will hospitality (e.g., coffee and snacks) be suspended?
- If communion is being offered...
 - What hygiene protocols will be employed in the preparation, service, and cleaning up of communion?
 - How will the altar guild and the Eucharistic administrators be trained for these protocols?
 - Will wafers be used?
 - How will the bread be distributed?
 - Will communion be offered in one kind?
 - How will the wine be distributed?
 - Will individual glasses be used?
 - Will kneeling be eliminated?
 - How will appropriate distancing be maintained as people come to and from the place of distribution?
- For those who cannot attend (or will not attend) because of COVID-19, how will the congregation [continue] to minister to them?

Church Meetings Other than Worship

- Synod advice on meetings other than worship has been reviewed.
- Will an usher/greeter be assigned to this event/activity?
- What cleaning protocol will be used in connection with this event/activity?

Use of Facility by Outside Groups

- Synod advice on meetings other than worship has been reviewed.
- Will an usher/greeter be assigned to this event/activity?
- What cleaning protocol will be used in connection with this event/activity?

Synod Guidance on Reopening

General Introduction

Ultimately, it is a congregation's decision whether to reopen, and, if reopening, to what extent. Synod does not have the authority, except under very rare conditions, to order congregations to close or to open.¹ Synod offers guidance, recognizing a diversity of congregations and settings.

Remember, reopening is an option, not a requirement. Reopening well is more important than merely reopening. If a congregation cannot reopen well, it would probably be better off remaining closed under the current circumstances. Reopening well, however, is a matter of balance, taking into account not only the general guidance provided by government, medical authorities, and the Synod, but also the local conditions and congregational capacities.

Keep in mind that medical authorities have, to this point, conceded that some aspects related to the pandemic remain unknown. Often we must make our best guess as to what to do, but it is better to make an educated guess than an uneducated one.

Reopening involves risk. There is always risk. We usually don't think about it, but there is always risk with everything we do and everywhere we go. The question is: How much risk is a person (or organization) willing to assume? The second question is: Are there ways to mitigate risk so that the risk assumed is within the realm of acceptable risk. The third question is a little trickier: Who is accepting the risk and who is having the risk thrust upon them (directly or indirectly). In all of this, is the risk assumed knowingly, willingly, and with proper understanding.

At the same time, the broader ethical dimensions of the decision to reopen or remain closed should not be ignored. We use the term "ethical" intentionally. There are, in fact, competing moral demands in this situation. We have moral duties to

- Worship God (First, Second, and Third Commandments)
- Obey those in authority (Fourth Commandment)
- Do no harm to your neighbor but help him/her in every need (Fifth Commandment)

When moral duties compete, we are thrust into the realm of ethics, a place where we seek to weigh the competing moral demands and take a course of action which, while not perfect, can be deemed better than other possible courses of action. With this in mind, we should consider the following:

- What is demanded by the First, Second, and Third Commandments? How do the *Small and Large Catechisms* teach us to fulfill these commandments? Is there a difference between what is minimal, good, better, and best? Are there differences between what is necessary and what is preferred?
- Is it possible to obey the civil authorities in the legitimate exercise of their offices without violating the Laws of God?
- What does it look like to practice neighbor-love? How does neighbor-love reorient the individual's primary concern from self to neighbor?

None of this should be an easy decision. If you think it is an easy decision, you probably haven't considered the ethical complexity involved here, or you may be so driven by your loves and fears that you are blinded to that complexity. It is this latter possibility that is most worrisome as fear and love when brought into contact with another's fears and loves different from our own often results in hate and vilification. In all this, think theologically and think ethically, being mindful that ethics is not always cut and dry, and people of good conscience and sound judgment can arrive at differing conclusions as a result of local contingencies and differing hierarchies of values.

¹ Unlike our Roman Catholic and Episcopalian counterparts which do have authority over each congregation to a much greater extent than the Synod does under ELCA polity.

Discussion of Checklist Items

Decision Authority

A congregation's governing documents, call documents, and policies outline who makes the decision about reopening. The following should be reviewed.

- Federal, state, county, municipal: Whichever is the most restrictive legally binding order applies to the congregation. Is your congregation allowed to reopen, according to the government, and under what conditions? Who is responsible for tracking the latest government orders?**

Government orders can change and have changed rapidly. What is true today may not be true in a week or even tomorrow. Of particular concern is the possibility that the government may reimpose stricter measures should a resurgence in cases take place. Knowing the official government orders applicable to your congregation takes research and periodic checking. Having someone competent to check official Federal, state, county, and municipal orders (and recommendations) is recommended.

- Does the letter of call, a standing rule or continuing resolution, a bylaw, or a constitutional provision invest the pastor or some other person(s) or body with authority to cancel worship or close the congregation and under what conditions? If so, who makes the decision?**

Different congregations have different rules with respect to who can cancel worship. In some congregations, the pastor alone makes the call. In others, it is done with the concurrence of the [vice] president or ExComm. Still others require a certain number of council members. Many have no rule at all. Review your local documents (and past practice), checking to see where the authority for ordering the cancellation of worship resides and under what conditions. In the absence of anything spelled out in the governing documents, the decision-making authority rests with council (in the absence of the congregational meeting acting on the matter).

- If council is the decision making authority with respect to the preceding (i.e., if no one else has the authority to cancel worship or close the congregation), how will the council make the decision? Will it consider the question weekly, fortnightly, monthly, or call special meetings?**

- What mechanism will be put in place to review changes in government orders and/or the local situation, and how will the decision making individual or body reconsider being closed/open? Will it review the situation weekly, fortnightly, monthly, or call special meetings? Will automatic triggers be used (e.g., government reimposing limits on public gatherings of a certain number etc.)?**

A congregation should have a mechanism that allows rapid response to a deterioration of the situation. For example, a council might adopt a rule that stipulates that in-person worship (and other in-person church activities) will be suspended if the applicable government orders (or recommendations) limit gatherings to ___ or less people. Or, a council might grant authority to the pastor or [vice] president or a "congregational pandemic czar" etc. to order a temporary shutdown until the council can meet to discuss the situation.

Who's Who?

- Who is checking with your insurer?**

There have been reports of congregations losing insurance because of violation of state orders (not in our states) with respect to holding worship services. Remember, insurance companies might not be overly concerned about your religious practice or legal rights. Check with your insurer and review your policy.

- Who is checking with your attorney (or someone in your congregation with legal or risk management expertise)?**

It is always wise to examine your risks and legal exposures. The pandemic is no exception, but it may raise extra concerns. If there are new risks, what can your congregation do to reasonably mitigate legal exposure? This is a balancing act.

Who is consulting with members in your congregation with medical or public health expertise?

Nearly every congregation in the synod has at least one member who is in the medical or public health field. Take advantage of their expertise in assessing whether it is wise to open/close and how best to do it.

Who is checking the latest government orders?

As we like to say, if everybody is responsible, then no one is responsible. Pick one or two people who can be trusted to do it and who know the difference between rumor and actual official statements.

Who is working on the flow of people traffic in and out of the church building and their flow once inside for worship or other activities?

Social distancing only works if you can, in fact, socially distance. Some physical spaces make this very difficult. Think through your total floor plan from front porch through the sanctuary. Where will people walk? Where will they stand? Are there bottle necks? How will you regulate their flow in, and, where you probably really need to regulate it, out? Some congregations are putting tape on the floor to mark distances for reception of communion or leaving the church. You might have to tell the pastor that he/she can't greet people in the narthex if there is not room for it. Walking through the physical space and imagining how people will move is a good way to think through this. No matter what you come up with, you will need to communicate it to the people.

Who is working on questions related to worship (e.g., singing, peace, communion, worship resources)?

There are lots of questions to ask and answer. You will probably need a team to work on this.

Who is working on questions related to hygiene (e.g., facility seating and capacity, masks, gloves, cleaning of restrooms and public areas)?

Again, lots of questions here too. Who would be the best people to assign to this task?

Who is working on questions related to contact tracing?

Until we have good treatments or a vaccine, contact tracing couple with testing is very important for general welfare. Who is going to figure out the best way to provide information to public health officials in case someone in your gathered community becomes ill or tests positive?

Who communicates with the congregation?

If there are too many voices, there is greater chance of confusion (and even disinformation). Who speaks to the congregation and on what issues? It should be made clear to the congregation that there are only certain official outlets of information.

Insurer

Does your insurance policy cover your congregation adequately for reopening and under what conditions?

How can your congregation meet those conditions if any?

Are the conditions, if any, too difficult to satisfy?

Though limited, there have been reports, not in our area, of pastors and churches losing their insurance for defying government orders and/or engaging in activities outside the bounds of their policies. A quick call to your insurer to make sure your coverage stays in place (and under what conditions) is not a bad idea.

Legal

- Does your attorney think there are any risks to reopening (other than those risks we face on a regular basis)?**
- How might the congregation mitigate those risks if any?**
- Are the risks, if any, acceptable?**

A common question is: “Can we be sued for _____?” You can be sued for pretty much anything, even things for which the plaintiff has no real grounds to sue. A better question is: “Can we afford to be sued?” This ties back into the insurance question. We shouldn’t be paralyzed by fear, nor should we act imprudently. Assess your risks and mitigate them.

Medical

- Who are the medical/public health in your congregation?**

Nearly every congregation has members tied into the medical and/or public health community. Ask their advice and counsel.

- Have the medical/public health people in your congregation reviewed current CDC, state health department, county health department, and local health department guidelines?**
- Do the medical/public health people in your congregation have general advice about closing/reopening?**
- Do the medical/public health people in your congregation have specific advice regarding worship, flow of people, hygiene, etc.?**

Attendance

- What is the seating capacity of your space given prevailing recommendations on social distancing?**

Seating capacity should be calculated on the basis of current social distancing guidelines. Some congregations may find that capacity determined on the basis of every other pew and six feet laterally is less than 25 people. Walk through your sanctuary and measure things, applying the prevailing guidelines. While, e.g., the WV executive orders exempt churches, it makes little sense to assume the virus considers churches exempt. Safe practice for the rest of society is safe practice for churches.

- Have you surveyed your congregation or made an educated assessment of likely attendance?**

Many congregations have a high percentage of attendees who fall within the current guidelines for vulnerable persons. Is it likely that they will attend or remain sheltered at home? Even among those not classed as vulnerable, how many are likely to attend and with what frequency? It may be that we will not see people beating a path to church upon reopening, or we may be inundated with people who have been cooped up for too long (even if it is just for the first few Sundays). One way to assist in planning is to survey your congregation.

- Can your capacity handle the expected attendance (if unregulated)?**
- If not, how will you regulate attendance so as not to exceed capacity?**

Some might immediately object that a church should never regulate attendance. You might want to ask your local fire marshal if he/she agrees. Believe it or not, we’ve always had limits on attendance. The bishop did a wedding once where 200 guests were invited, but the sanctuary only seated 100. People were turned away because of the laws of physics. If the fire marshal sets a limit that might be a human law, but we would generally think it is a good law because it is for our safety. Let’s think about the social distancing recommendations of public gatherings in this light: measures

recommended for our safety. As it was wisely put by one wag, “Our goal is not to outsmart the law. Our goal is to outsmart the virus.”

Will you assign services/events to parishioners?

It is not impossible to simply assign people to specific service times. This might mean that some people will be told that they worship on the odd Sundays and others on the even Sundays. Or it might be a matter of early service vs. late service if more than one service is offered on a day. One might allow parishioners to swap slots. Also, when assigning people, one must be scrupulous not to indulge favoritism. No one should be left out of the assignment process, but you may include a mechanism to allow people to voluntarily not participate (thus opening up more slots for those who do want to attend).

Will you make your services/events ticketed events?

Not something we have had to do here, but there are very large membership churches that have for years ticketed their Christmas Eve services. This can be done through some social media platforms or by calling/emailing the church and requesting a ticket. No, we are not talking about selling tickets (though it wouldn't be much different from pew rent). If ticketing, how does one make sure that it is fair, i.e., that everyone has an opportunity to get to worship at some point?

Will you leave a certain number of slots open for unexpected visitors?

The bishop made a plea about evangelism during Easter Octave. Will your congregation build in a buffer for those who are not members of your congregation to attend should they show up unannounced? If ticketing or assigning, will slots be available to non-members should they request it, and on what basis? How will you connect with visitors even if you cannot accept them at a given service? You might want to talk to the Synod DEM about this.

How will social distancing seating be maintained?

Will pews be roped off?

Will ushers seat people?

Will people have the choice of where they sit?

Few things have more stories associated with them than someone mistakenly sitting in someone else's pew. So, the question isn't just, “How do you indicate where people may and may not sit?” but also, “How will you handle this perennial question of preferred seating?” It could be stated that we are in an unusual but temporary situation, implying that people are just going to have to put up with maybe not getting their favorite seat. Of course, some have good reason for preferring certain seating (easier to hear, or see, etc.). Others have deeply emotional reasons. How far does one accommodate, and can alternatives be offered that are acceptable? It would probably be wise to let people know before church reopens that seating preferences might not be honored. Ushers may have to seat people to ensure that the protocols put in place by the congregation are followed. It is much harder to get people to move once they have seated themselves than it is to direct them in the first place.

Will masks be required of attendees?

If someone does not have a mask, will one be provided?

If someone refuses to wear a mask, will they be turned away or ejected?

If so, by whom and how?

The congregation has the absolute prerogative to impose standards for attendance. This idea may run against our sensibilities, but, if we were honest, we assume this even if we do not right it out. We would eject someone (assuming that person were in the right mind) who intentionally sought to disturb or otherwise interrupt the worship service, and, if not in his/her right mind, we would call the ambulance. Those of us who have been to the Holy Land know that there are dress codes for certain holy sites. Depending upon your governmental jurisdiction, the church may or may not be officially exempted from government orders recurring masks in public places, but, much like the maximum

capacity set by the fire marshal, do you have a theological necessity for not adopting safety recommendations? After reviewing the applicable orders and recommendations of both government and health agencies, what should your policy be? If it is to mask, which is the current dominant order/recommendation, how will you communicate that to your congregation and others who might attend? Will you have a stockpile of masks to giveaway or loan? If loaned, how will you get them back and clean them? If someone refuses to mask, will you turn them away? How will you turn them away--the bishop often quotes one of the earlier scenes in *Road House* (1989) with Patrick Swayze---and who will exercise this responsibility? How will that person be authorized, and how will you communicate that authorization to others? Are you prepared to accept the consequences (social, political, epidemiological) that come with either adopting or not adopting this policy?

- Who will monitor and regulate attendance and how?**
- Will that person have authority to turn away people once the space has reached capacity? And how will they do that?**

It is one thing to say that a certain number of people will be allowed in the sanctuary, it is another thing to enforce it. One cannot enforce what one does not observe, meaning someone will need to count heads and, if ticketing or assignment is used, check names. One cannot enforce if one does not intervene, meaning someone will have to be empowered to turn people away. This, like many other things on this list, should not be a matter of self-appointment. Council should give clear authorization. Again, how a person turns someone away is important. Are you prepared to accept the consequences (social, political, epidemiological) that come with either adopting or not adopting this policy?

- Will screening be employed with respect to people who are ill or have been in contact with people who are ill?**
 - If so, who will perform the screening?**
 - Who will have the authority to turn someone away and how?**

This is another place where consulting your health professionals in the congregation is a good idea. They should be asked about the best way to screen with respect to effectiveness and safety in the screening process. Again, who authorizes a person to screen and how is that communicated? Again, how will a person be turned away and under what conditions?

- Will a special service be offered for those in vulnerable populations?**

Some churches plan to offer a separate service for those who fall into a vulnerable population. If this service follows another service within five days, cleaning protocols should be followed prior to the vulnerable persons' service. If possible, this service should be the first service after a five-day break in services. Those most likely to be vectors should not attend the vulnerable persons' service.

- Will nursery be kept closed for the time being?**

We do not recommend opening nurseries at this time? Maintaining social distance in church nurseries and disinfecting them would be daunting tasks. If children attend worship with their families, please seat them with the family unit in which they live and ensure adequate social distancing for the other attendees.

- For purposes of contact tracing, who will take attendance and how?**

Until a vaccine or better treatments are developed, testing (which is still in its infancy) and contact tracing are important tools. Attendance should be taken at each service (or event). It is not recommended that a sign-in sheet be used as that is more hands touching the same thing. Some congregations have thought of snapping a pic of the sanctuary, but, if everyone is masked, this seems a little unusable in terms of identify people (especially from the likely distances involved). Two methods make the most sense. An usher/greeter records attendance as people enter, being sure to ask names if uncertain (and contact info of those not in the directory). This may be facilitated by having a members list printed that the usher/greeter can simply check off names. The other method

would be to have parishioners fill out cards (similar to communion cards) and drop them in the box on the way out---of course, that asks for a level of compliance that we have not always seen in the church. Keeping an individual contact tracing list for each service or event will do not good if it is not filed properly and in a place where it can be retrieved should county or state health officials need it assist in tracing contacts in the event of a positive diagnosis.

Hygiene

Exclusionary Criteria

- Will those who are ill (or who have been exposed to those who are ill) be told not to attend and how?**
- Will those classed as vulnerable (or who care for the vulnerable) be told not to attend and how?**

See previous discussion.

Personal Hygiene

- Will attendees be told that masks are required and how?**
- Will attendees be told to that gloves are required and how?**
- Will attendees be told that hand washing and/or sanitizing is required and how?**
- What provisions for hand washing and/or sanitizing will your congregation make?**

See previous discussion on masks. Gloves may also be considered. Can your facility accommodate a hand washing station, or would that just create another place for increased chance of transmission if it cannot be set up properly. Will hand sanitizer be available, and will it be required upon entry? Will signage be included to advise people on hand washing and proper technique.

Corporate Hygiene

- How will members be told to refrain from shaking hands, hugging, etc.?**
- How will members be told to maintain social distance in seating and movement throughout church building before/during/after worship/event?**

This may prove challenging as shaking hands is habitual and, for some, so is hugging. It will be important to communicate to people new standards related to physical contact and social distancing. Instruction and periodic reminders will necessary even on things like movement throughout the sanctuary and narthex.

Institutional Hygiene

- Will restrooms be open or closed?**
 - If open, what cleaning protocols will be used?**
 - Will signage, if any, be placed in or outside restrooms instructing users on hand washing/sanitizing?**

Some congregations are opting to keep rest rooms closed. If this is the case, the length of service should be shortened and people should be advised of this in advance. If restrooms are open, it will be important to have cleaning protocols in place that frequently address the space. Signage inside and/or outside the restroom should instruct people in hand washing and related hygiene practices.

- Will water fountains and dispensers be blocked from usage?**
- Will kitchens be blocked from usage?**

Some areas should be considered as higher risk than others. Water fountains, e.g., would seem to be a problem. If food preparation is taking place, are those involved using appropriate hygiene procedures, and are they the only ones in the food preparation area? An accessible supply of bottled water might be kept for heat and dehydration emergencies.

- What cleaning protocols will be used for high traffic areas and high contact surfaces?**

Certain high traffic areas, especially where surfaces are likely to be touched (e.g., hand rails on stair cases and door knobs) require extra cleaning attention in terms of frequency. Of course, if the weather is good, a door may be propped open.

❑ If your church has an elevator, if not temporarily closed, how will its use be regulated and how will it be cleaned?

Not much thought has been given to elevators, but confined spaces with less air circulation pose a problem. Some churches will decide to close them. Others will want to restrict use to only those who need the elevator. Communicating your decision in advance to those who use the elevator is important. Cleaning elevator control surfaces should not be forgotten.

❑ If nurseries are reopened, what hygiene and cleaning protocols will be used?

As mentioned above, synod does not recommend the opening of nurseries at this time. If, however, you nursery is open, what hygiene and cleaning practices will be used.

❑ If there is more than one service/event within a five-day time span, will the space be cleaned and how?

Current research indicates that retrieval times of viral RNA varies depending upon the surface and other environmental conditions. The longest span is five days (metal, glass, ceramic, sometimes paper). This suggests that spacing services with a five day interval reduces chances of transmission from surfaces typical encountered in churches. If services are held more frequently, what cleaning protocols will be used. See CDC guidance for cleaning.

Worship

❑ Synod advice on worship has been reviewed.

❑ Should the pastor lead worship, or should the pastor continue to shelter in place?

In some cases the pastor is a member of a vulnerable population. What should a congregation and the pastor do if this is the case? The Synod recommends that all those who should shelter in place per CDC guidelines do so. This applies to both congregants and pastors. Should this be the case, the congregation and pastor may want to contact the Bishop for advice and counsel that takes into consideration the local conditions.

❑ How will ushers/greeters etc. be retrained for worship under the current conditions?

Much has been said above about the various people involved in monitoring and regulating entry and practice, and much has been said about authorization and method. Many congregations will find that a number of their ushers/greeters will not be attending services because they are shelter in place. Still other congregations will have to make changes in ushering/greeter details because not everyone can execute some of the things required under these circumstances. Changes to the ushering/greeter team need only be temporary. Still, these are important roles, and congregational leadership should take seriously what is involved in selecting the right people for the job.

❑ How will cleaning personnel be retrained for the current conditions?

Frequently, the importance of cleaning has been mentioned. Clarifying cleaning protocols is important, but, without someone to do the cleaning, protocols do little good. Some churches employ cleaning personnel or contract services. Will these be adequate for the cleaning needs connected to worship? Volunteers can be used, but proper training should be given prior to someone assuming the duties.

❑ How will counters be retrained for the current conditions?

If you have someone working in the local bank, ask them what hygiene protocols have been put in place with respect to handling cash and coin. Similar protocols may be a good idea for the counters.

AMTRAK has gone cashless to reduce risk to employees and riders. Not passing the plate is one thing, but the money still needs to be counted. Locking it up for five days is an option, but most congregations will want to get it counted and deposited as usual (meaning Sunday or Monday).

❑ Will a shorter worship format be used?

Synod recommends shortening the length of the worship service, especially if bathrooms are not provided. Germany has limited services to 30 minutes on the assumption that shorter exposure reduces risk.

❑ Will singing be eliminated for the time being?

Current advice from the medical community suggests that unmasked singing may increase the risk of spreading the virus. While signing is good, and we would want to encourage it under normal circumstances, it does not appear to be a good thing at this time. The Synod recommends the elimination of singing. In the same vein, woodwind and brass instruments should be eliminated.

❑ Will the physical exchange of the peace be eliminated?

Practice prior to the 1978 introduction of the LBW was to have the pastor say, “The peace of the Lord be with you always,” with the congregation responding to the pastor, “And with thy spirit,” followed immediately with the next item in the order of worship. We recommend that the pastor and people do this with the current wording. Various suggestions to replace the shaking hands with this or that gesture or action seem forced and silly.

❑ Will the passing of the offering plate be replaced with an offering box/plate(s) be placed in the narthex or some other place?

One congregation is planning to use a small moving box. This is sufficient. The purpose of a drop box or plate is to reduce handling. If there is still a desire to bring it forward during the offertory, this can be done. It should be noted, however, that there will be those folks who forget to leave their offering upon entry. Having a box in the narthex at the end of the service is not a bad idea. Whatever is done, be mindful of security. A box left unattended in the narthex during the service is an easy target for theft.

❑ How will furnishings and other items be rearranged or removed to reduce potential for cross-contamination?

We don't often think of furnishings being obstacles, but they can be. In this case, however, every furnishing is a surface that can be touched. If there are furnishings that do not need to be there, consider removing them. One less thing to clean. Additionally, figuring out the best way to move people from one point to another, while maintaining social distancing, is made easier by removing clutter. On the other hand, do not remove surfaces that are important for safety (e.g., hand rails).

❑ If there are services within a five-day time span, will worship resources (e.g., hymnals) be removed and replaced with bulletins or projection?

Several published recommendations talk about removing hymnals, pew cards, etc.. Like all national level recommendations, the attempt is to address a wide range of possibilities, including churches that will have multiple services. If this describes your congregation, then, yes, it is a good idea. If, however, your congregation will only have one service per week, there is little reason to do this. Indeed, it is arguably better, when there is a five-day interval, to use hymnals and have no bulletin. Bulletins should be prepared with good hygiene in mind. If one cannot let the bulletin sit for five days from printing to use, then masking and gloving by the office staff producing the bulletin would be required to provide the same protection that removing the hymnals would provide. Likewise, if bulletins are used, it would be safer to have a masked and gloved usher distributing them than to place them on a table for people to pick up their own.

❑ If there are services within a five-day time span, what cleaning protocols will be used?

This has been previously discussed.

❑ Will the baptismal font be removed or emptied of water?

The practice of leaving water in the font for people to dip their fingers in and make the sign of the cross should be suspended. It may be best to relocate the font to the baptistery or the chancel, the common place for the font until recent decades. While it may be good (for pedagogical reasons) to have the font at the entrance of the sanctuary, it is not a necessity. If a baptism is being performed, wash the font in advance and use fresh water, cleaning the font after the service.

❑ Will hospitality (e.g., coffee and snacks be suspended)?

All joking about coffee being the third sacrament aside, is it wise to offer coffee, juice, snacks after or before worship under the current conditions. Review current guidance from ecclesiastical and government sources. *N.B.*, buffet lines, self-serve drinks, etc. have been eliminated from most dining establishments. Church hospitality and socials are food service. We should be practicing as much care as the professionals. With that in mind, and understanding that those who most need it should really stay at home but might not, an accessible supply of bottled water to keep with heat and dehydration and/or juice for diabetic emergencies might be maintained and controlled by the ushers and/or congregational medical providers.

❑ If communion is being offered...

The Synod recommends a go slow approach. A few services without the Eucharist will allow the congregation to work out the kinks in COVID-19 related protocols. In other words, test run what you are doing to be sure that you are doing it well before you add the complexities of Eucharistic administration. Alternatives to the antecommunion service (the first half of the communion liturgy) include Morning Prayer (Matins) and Service of the Word.

❑ What hygiene protocols will be employed in the preparation, service, and cleaning up of communion?

From start to finish, good hygiene practices should be employed. This will require reviewing recommendations on hygiene and thinking about those involved in preparing, serving, and cleaning up communion. Masks should be worn during distribution.

❑ How will the altar guild and the Eucharistic administrators be trained for these protocols?

If we think of the material side of communion as food service, we might well take our cues from the instructions given by our local health departments to those in food service. Retraining altar guild members, those who serve at altar (including administration assistants and acolytes), and those who assist the people to come to the rail should not be neglected.

❑ Will wafers be used?

Wafers are recommended because they require less manipulation than bread.

❑ How will the bread be distributed?

Wafers should not be intincted (dipped) or placed directly in the mouth (or on the tongue) of the recipient. No hand to hand contact should be made. Even if the pastor is gloved, he/she may pass the virus from one recipient to another. It would be best to drop the bread into the cupped hand of the recipient. The pastor may be gloved while presiding and administering.

❑ Will communion be offered in one kind?

This is not a preferred option, but, in some places, it may be the remaining option after elimination of others for practical reasons. A congregation considering communion in one kind should contact the Bishop for liturgical guidelines.

- How will the wine be distributed?**
 - Will individual glasses be used?**

Common cup and intinction should be suspended. Pouring chalice may still be used, but care should be taken not to contaminate the chalice or take the parishioner's hand. Prefilling individual glasses, as was common prior to introduction of the pouring chalice (but after the discontinuation of the common cup), is reasonable. It may not be preferred for pedagogical reasons, but this should be understood as a temporary measure. Whether pouring chalice or pre-filling is employed, the individual cups should be so spaced in the tray that accidentally touch one other than the one being taken is unlikely. Another method of administering the wine is the neutral field. A small credence table is placed at the point of distribution. The worship assistant places the individual glass on the credence top, and the recipient takes it without touching the surface of the credence. If it is touched, an acolyte can wipe it down immediately.

- Will kneeling be eliminated?**

Kneeling, inevitably, means touching the communion rail when getting down and/or up. Standing is an acceptable way to receive the sacrament.

- How will appropriate distancing be maintained as people come to and from the place of distribution?**

When people come forward for the Sacrament, will there be tape marks or other cues to indicate appropriate distance? Will ushers remind people? Will the traffic flow, distancing, and details of communing be explained to attendees?

- For those who cannot attend (or will not attend) because of COVID-19, how will the congregation [continue] to minister to them?**

It is likely that a good many parishioners will stay home for several weeks. How will the congregation continue to minister to them? Will digital services be provided? Telephone calls made? Written resources sent? If so, how will the congregation balance expectations on the pastor's and other staff members' time?

Church Meetings Other than Worship

- Synod advice on meetings other than worship has been reviewed.**
- Will an usher/greeter be assigned to this event/activity?**
- What cleaning protocol will be used in connection with this event/activity?**

Use of Facility by Outside Groups

- Synod advice on meetings other than worship has been reviewed.**
- Will an usher/greeter be assigned to this event/activity?**
- What cleaning protocol will be used in connection with this event/activity?**