



New England Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

May 19, 2020

Dear People of the New England Synod,

As I have said from the very beginning of this pandemic, I have confidence and trust in your leadership. You continue to make wise, thoughtful and faithful decisions, and I appreciate the maturity with which you are handling extremely challenging forces.

Re-Opening

Our New England States have initiated various phases of so-called “*re-opening*”. In a few states, governors have provided guidance which pertain to Houses of Worship. The guidance may have given the impression or may be interpreted as license to “open as usual”. That is not the case!

In light of that, I want to offer here a path forward for the New England Synod:

1. If you have not seen the *ELCA Guidance Regarding In-Person Worship*, here is the link ([click here](#)). It's quite helpful, and I encourage you to use it as a foundational document in decision making.
2. I encourage you, if you have not already, to begin thinking about a phased re-opening of your ministry. I wrote about that to you previously. ([Click here](#))
3. I believe there is wisdom in proceeding slowly, watching and learning from others as they manage their own re-opening.
4. I strongly recommend that all of our congregations not hold any form of in-person indoor worship until at least July 1.

In the coming weeks, I will provide additional guidance about moving forward. The timeline at the bottom of this letter will provide you assistance in your own planning. In the meantime, I suggest you engage your congregation council in discussions around the following:

- If you have not already established shepherd or care groups, I would encourage you to put that in place. I interviewed Pastor John Polk about this for a podcast. ([Listen here](#)) John's paper describing this can be found [here](#).
- Now is a good time to contact your insurance carrier. Consult with them as to their recommendations regarding re-opening. It's also good to ensure your premiums have been paid and your account is up to date.
- If your congregation has outside organizations that use your facility. This is a good time to review contracts and up to date proof-of-insurance documents are in order. You may wish to inform them of the above July 1 date as well.

Tomorrow (Wednesday, May 20), I will release a video where I discuss in more depth my thinking around re-opening. That video will be sent to your email address and posted on our various Social Media platforms.

Holy Communion

As you may recall, I have also encouraged a synod-wide conversation around Holy Communion. What follows is a timeline for those conversations as a general timeline for re-opening plans.

Currently – Everyone is invited to view and read a variety of resources on this topic ([Click Here](#)).

Week of May 25- I will be releasing a video on the topic of *Holy Communion*. This will be a resource that congregations can use for educational purposes. You will receive a link to that video.

May 28th – By this time I expect all of our Conferences will have had meetings with the Pastors and Deacons to discuss five questions related to this topic. On May 28, my staff and I will be meeting with the Deans to listen to feedback. You can view the discussion questions by [clicking here](#).

June 6th – Meeting of the New England Synod Council on this date. Among several items of business will be a discussion of a draft of recommendations on Communion practices along with a review of recommendations for re-opening plans

June 10th – I will be sending out my letter of recommendations regarding the next steps in planning for re-opening as well as guidance around Holy Communion.

I hope this outline provides you with a clear path forward. Please know that we are not in normal times. Therefore, we need to anticipate the need to adjust our plans. Flexibility is no longer an option in the church, it is a requirement.

With that in mind, let me be clear about the July 1 date.....

I have indicated not reopening until at least July 1. Please do not interpret this as a date when you will re-open. There is much we do not know about this virus still, and there are many considerations before that is an option.

I appreciate your dedication to your work, your congregations, the well-being of all your members and the ongoing proclamation of the Gospel.

Sincerely In Christ,

Bishop James Hazelwood