



6/10/2022

To the faith communities of the Saskatchewan Synod,

### Opening

On Tuesday May 31, about 60 rostered ministers and congregational leaders met in a Synod Town Hall. Our agenda included an opening prayer, welcoming pastor Ali Tote in his new role as Assistant to the Bishop, having a conversation about the pandemic led by Dr Tote, and having Cheryl Bauer Hyde share some updates pertaining to the national convention as synod secretary.

I would like to thank all of you who were able to be present for the Town Hall. It has been good to gather this way to support one another in these pandemic times. Our conversation gave us all a better understanding of how to move forward over the next few months this summer.

I promised to put out 'synod guidelines' based on this consultation. We continue to operate based on the following principles.

1. Faith communities need to be encouraged to meet in person. Based on research, mental health issues are on the rise as direct result of the pandemic. Isolation has contributed significantly to the rise in mental health challenges as in-person interactions and gatherings have been limited. This is impacting the older demographic more so than other age groups. As the church safely gathers, we play a positive role in responding to the growing mental health epidemic. As a result, our faith communities are encouraged to continue to find safe ways of being together in person.
2. The pandemic is not over, in spite of the current decrease in the number of cases. In order for faith community members to continue to confidently meet together, churches will need to provide protection from the risks of the pandemic.

Based on those two principles synod recommends the following Encouragements and Restrictions.

### Encouragements:

**Meet in person:** To meet in person safely, we recommend continued use of facemasks when meeting indoors as well as the use of hand sanitizers.

**Continue with online worship gatherings:** Even as we strive to meet in person, many are still not able or ready to meet in-person. Continue to provide online worship options as you are able for those who cannot attend in-person.

**No capacity limits:** With high vaccination numbers across the country, there are no capacity limitations imposed on worship gatherings. Nor is there any recommended by synod.

**Offer communion frequently:** We are starving for the sacrament. We have practiced communion safely in a variety of ways across the synod, following synod guidelines. We can do this.

**Hymnbooks may be used** providing there is a 24 hour period before they are used again.

**Coffee after gathering:** While having coffee after a large group has meant too many unmasked faces in the narthex, coffee for a small gathering of under 20 can be offered safely. Have one person sanitize and be designated as the 'server'. Outside groups (particularly AA, Alanon etc.) depend on sharing coffee together in their healing process. So do we. In the summer, we can also meet outside for coffee time no matter what size the group might be.

### Restrictions

**Strongly recommend masking:** At least until the end of August, synod strongly recommends that masks be worn in our indoor gatherings. Faith communities are urged to strongly recommend masking, to put up signage to that effect, and to ask their leadership to model the practice.

**Delay scheduling community meals:** While communion is a quite formal action, community meals are risky business. Potlucks and community meals involve eating and sitting together while unmasked and food handled by many hands—both an opportunity for pandemic spread.

### Closing

Hopefully these guidelines will provide faith communities with direction for the weeks ahead. Remember that synod guidelines remain 'our best advice' at this time. Congregational leadership will need to prayerfully consider their own context to determine the best way forward.

Please make contact with me or with Pastor Ali if you have any questions on Synod guidelines for your particular context during this time.

Peace,



Bishop Sid

Sid Haugen  
Saskatchewan Synod ELCIC