



## SK Synod Re-opening Recommendations

### **Introduction:**

The synod recommendations are based on current knowledge, provincial guidelines, findings from the consultations with rostered and lay leaders, survey findings, and research.

#### **❖ Summary of findings from consultation meetings**

- The pandemic has been hard on congregations
  - No physical worship in all congregations at least initially
  - No physical fellowship
  - No sacraments in many cases
  - A few cases of non-adherence to pandemic protocols
  - There is a craving for physical worship
  - Rural congregations without a pastor are at a greater disadvantage
  - Some negative impact on giving
- Congregations are handling the pandemic very well
  - Provincial and synod guidelines are being followed
  - Safe in-person worship services are taking place
  - Holy Communion is being safely administered in some congregations
  - Pastors are showing a healthy concern about spreading the virus and are taking extra precautions
- Remote worship and other adjustments to ministry have been mostly positive
  - People have responded well to remote worship with increased and diversified attendance compared to regular in-person worship
  - Creative pastoral care is taking place
  - Innovative but carefully prepared remote Holy Communion celebration in some settings

#### **❖ Summary of findings from the survey**

- 56% of survey respondents believed that the majority of church members would be comfortable attending in-person worship immediately and right after schools have re-opened. Only 17% thought that members would wait for a vaccine or treatment before thy return to in-person worship.
- 57% of respondents said that remote worship has been well and very well attended while close to 19% said that no remote worship was offered.
- Close to 59% of respondents said that the reason some church members have not worshipped remotely was due to difficulty accessing remote worship.

- 39% of respondents chose YouTube as the medium used for remote worship, followed by Facebook (24%), Zoom (19%), and audio recorded services was chosen by 14% of survey respondents. The option “other” was chosen by 35% of people.
- Over 73% of respondents believed that the majority of their church membership was eager to resume with in-person worship, compared to close to 8% for “not at all eager”.
- With regards to the level of preparedness for in-person worship, 43% of respondents felt that their congregations were “somewhat prepared”, with 31% “well prepared”, 14% “very well prepared”, and close to 8% “not at all prepared”.
- Concerning the financial impact of the pandemic on their congregations, close to 45% said there has been slightly less giving compared to 30% for “significantly less giving”, 17% for “giving has remained the same”, and close to 3% for increase in giving.
- The leaders (rostered and lay) were overwhelmingly in favour of safely re-opening the church for in-person worship now following provincial and synod guidelines.
- The response rate was incredibly positive at 84% for a sample size of 76 respondents.

#### ❖ **Re-opening of churches around the world**

- Churches are re-opening around the world
- In Europe, church re-opening for in-person worship has been systematic and cautious
- England was the last place to allow in-person worship due to its pandemic toll being the highest in Europe
- There are no known outbreaks around the world in churches that have followed pandemic protocols
- The Church of England has the best and most comprehensive guidelines on church re-opening in the world.

#### ❖ **Observations**

- The pandemic is having an impact on society as a whole
  - On the church, our faith
  - On the role of the church and faith in challenging times
    - In England, Phase 1 of church re-opening was for prayer
- Long-term effects of church closures are unknown
  - Burden on pastors and lay leaders
  - Financial burden on churches
  - Church viability and sustainability becoming increasingly an issue

- Need to learn more about remote worship and its impact on the individual and the faith community
- Need for research

❖ **Recommendations**

- **Churches may safely resume in-person worship by following provincial and Synod guidelines**
- Where in-person worship has not started, delay by at least 14 days after school re-opening
- Encourage worshippers initially to go home directly after leaving worship
- Hold in-person services ideally every other week initially to allow for a 14-day period in-between services for monitoring purposes
- Keep in-person services short: 30-45 minutes max
- In-person worshippers must all wear a mask except for the following people
  - Children 5 and under (WHO & UNICEF recommendation)
  - Children, adults, and elderly with breathing difficulties
  - People who cannot wear a mask may consider alternatives such as face shields
- Involve church members in the decision-making process, welcome and respect opposing views
- All members of the church should abide by the decision made by the congregation

**Note:** These recommendations for administrating provincial directives will be updated on the synod website ([www.sasksynod.ca](http://www.sasksynod.ca)) as the government of Saskatchewan and Public Health officials roll out new measures.

*This document has been prepared for use in the Saskatchewan Synod by Bishop Sid Haugen and Pastor Ali Tote. For questions, please use the contact information below.*

Bishop Sid Haugen: [shaugen@sasksynod.ca](mailto:shaugen@sasksynod.ca)

Rev Dr Ali Tote, Pastor and Epidemiologist: [pastor@resurrectionlutheranchurch.ca](mailto:pastor@resurrectionlutheranchurch.ca)