

Looking Ahead Toward a New Future

# Thinking About Re- Entry

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# *Disastrous Arkansas COVID Cluster Spells Trouble for Church Openings*

| TEST OF FAITH |

Dozens of cases. Three deaths. And a pastor who seemed to follow the relevant guidance and reported symptoms right



Olivia Messer  
Reporter

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## *Two Church Examples*



📅 April 6, 2020 ⌚ 6:50 pm CDT 💬 43 Comments

**After Pastor Dies of COVID-19, Embattled Church Requires Staff to Sign Liability Waiver**

If you had said on Feb. 26<sup>th</sup> (Ash Wednesday), “We are cancelling in person Easter worship so we can reach more people online,” what would people have said to you?



Fact: Because worship was cancelled in person at churches all around the world, and because the PR about this was huge in the western world, more people heard a sermon about the resurrection on Easter this year than **ever before.**

People Have  
Discovered  
Resilience  
and  
Imagination  
They Had  
Long  
Forgotten



# The Easiest Part is Behind Us?



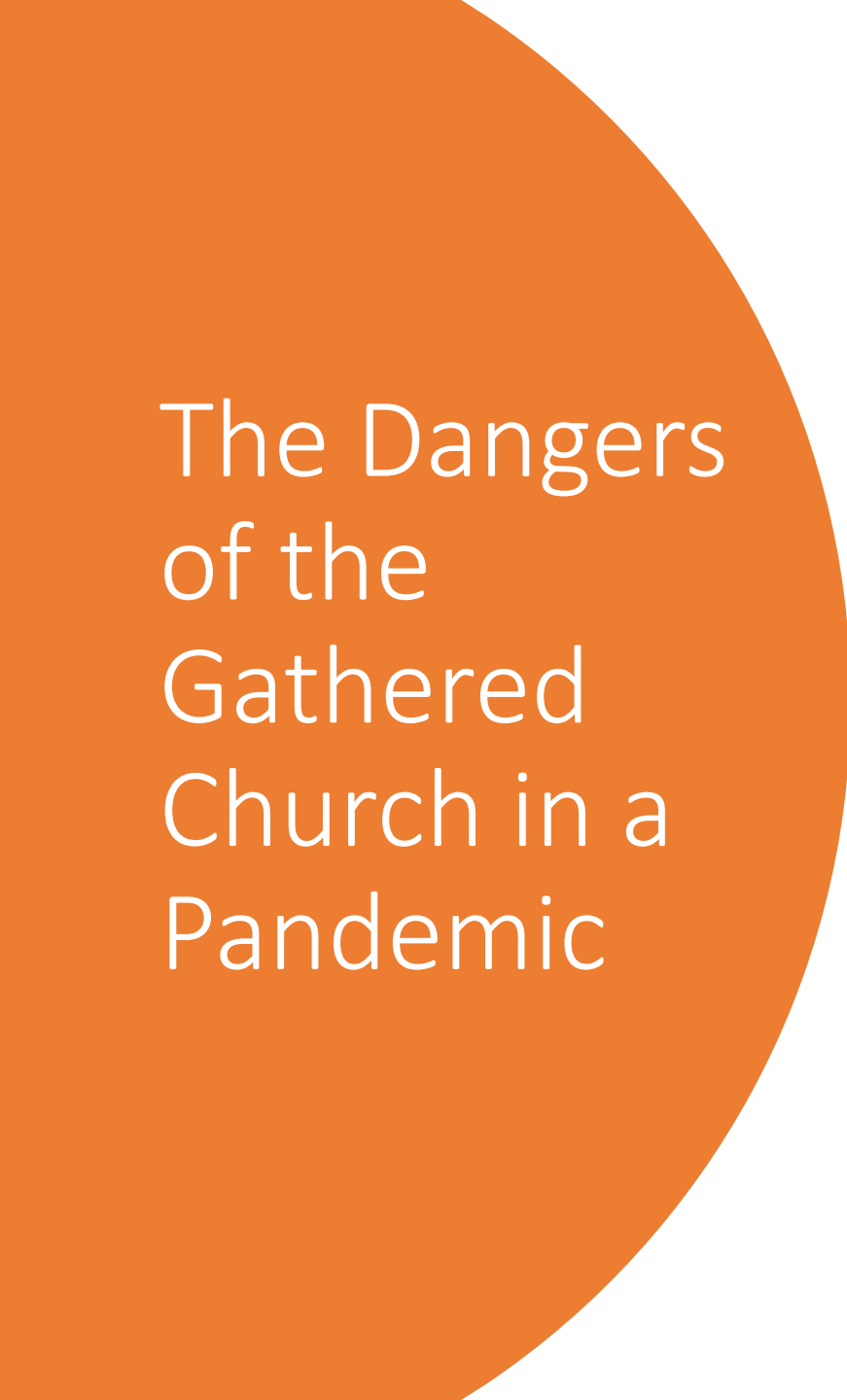
Not making light of what we've  
been through



But – when you only have one  
option there isn't a lot to decide  
(or argue about)



Moving forward – we have  
choices (and not all are equal)



# The Dangers of the Gathered Church in a Pandemic

One of the cruelest characteristics of the coronavirus epidemic is that it strikes fear in the hearts and minds of many causing them to ask for comfort and protection from the God they believe in. And at the same time this virus has made a church service one of the deadliest places to be in. The combination of singing in close quarters and decreased ventilation is nothing short of a petri dish (or cell plate) for viral growth.

Kevin Kavanaugh, MD



# Remember, Just Because You Can Doesn't Mean You Should!



- Depending where you are, as a church you may get permission to do things that other groups can't do because it isn't a good idea.
- So, if it isn't a good idea, you probably shouldn't do it – but invariably, you will have people who want to and/or neighboring churches who do it.

# What We Know: Back to Normal is Not an Option



- There will be an interim normal
- There will be a new normal
- The past will not return – more so this time than most!
- Don't assume physical worship means online can go away

# Going Forward – Conflict and Tension Will Increase

- Unlike Easter when things were new, and we were in a reactive mode
- Now things are taking a while – people are getting frazzled
- We are getting options presented (from multiple sources)
- Some options are mutually exclusive – if you like one then you may hate another



# Keys to Re-Entry Process



- Love people and be clear about it – show it (High “touch” – High tech) *but phone is often best!*
- Share information beyond just leaders (articles, checklists, etc.)
- Communicate often – be transparent
- Involve more people in setting steps and standards

# Two Resources to Help People Think Better



- “The Idiot’s Guide to ReOpening Your Church” by Carey Nieuwhof
- “So Your Church is Opening Up After COVID-19 Closures: It Won’t Be What You Are Looking For” by Erik Parker



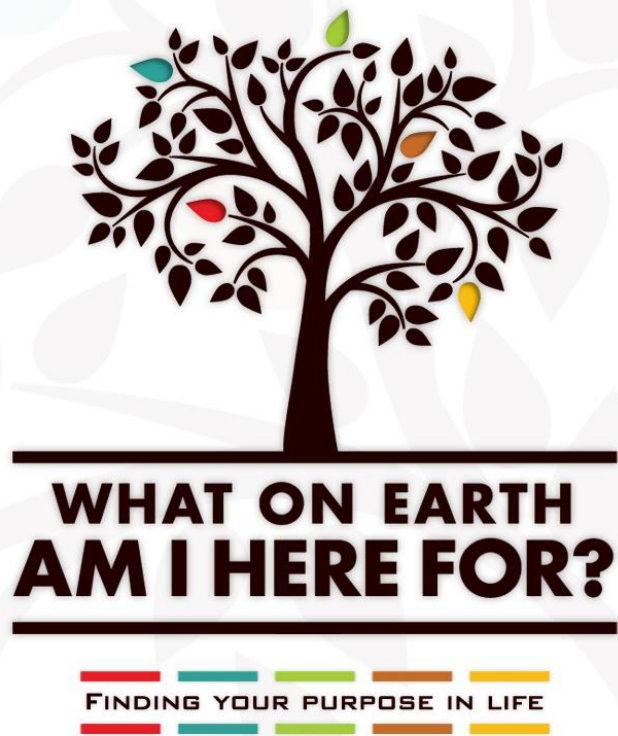
# You Get to Hit the Reset Button

## Help People See That BEFORE Resetting!



- You have stopped (almost) everything
- Most of what you do is (almost) totally new in some way
- When you return (to the new normal) you don't have to put it all back!

# Purpose and Principles – Remember Your Core



- As you move forward keep in mind:
  - God's mission is still the same
  - Your foundational purpose is still the same
  - Your guiding principles/core values are still in effect

# This is a Great Time to Refocus

- Are there any adjustments/additions to your guiding principles?
- For example: “We work together to provide a safe environment for all who participate.”



# How Have Vision or Priorities Changed?



- Pandemic Priority – Work to be sure that all ministries of our congregation are conducted in ways that promote healthy and safe practices.
- Our future vision may be 35% online and 65% on the ground.

There are ELCA resources available  
(and other denominations have them too)



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

**Considerations for Returning to In-person Worship**  
Being Church Together During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Updated May 12, 2020

## COVID-19 RESOURCES

By implementing safe practices and looking out for one another, WE ARE CHURCH TOGETHER!



[From Our Bishop & Leaders](#)



[MNYS Digital Services of the Word](#)



[Digital Worship & Communications Resources](#)



[Resources for Our Children](#)



[Resources Regarding the Reopening of Church Buildings](#)



[MNYS Congregations' Digital Service of the Word](#)



[Wellness Resources](#)



[Recursos en Español](#)



**MNYS**

[Synodical Resources & Efforts](#)



**ELCA**

[ELCA Provided Resources](#)



[Government Resources](#)



[Food Pantry Resources & Information](#)

Synods Have  
Their  
Resources  
and  
Connections

# Insurance Companies Have Assistance as Well



“We would also advise you to contact your insurance carrier to check on any liability issues that may be involved,” the document reads. “Just remember if you vote on or publish any protocols, you must adhere to them. Ignoring them once you’ve adopted them is a sure-fire way to create liability on behalf of the church.”

# Key Issues for Physically Gathered Worship

- Masks?
- Materials – bulletins, Bibles, hymnals are all issues
- Sanitizing – hand washing, hand sanitizer, etc.
- Facility
  - Worship space
  - Restrooms
  - Public spaces (like handrails, etc.)
- Liturgical: Sacraments? Singing? Offering? Passing the Peace?
- Social distancing guidance (what is “6 feet”?)
- Vulnerable People (aged, compromising conditions)
- Children?
- Is outdoors a better option?
- Enforcement?



# Be Collegial



- Pitting congregations against each other is not a good idea
- Work with neighboring parishes (both ELCA and ecumenically/interfaith)
- A shared witness helps the church witness to the world better and avoids creating competing platforms for members and others to engage

# Coaching Questions

- How has the pandemic impacted your current (interim) methods of doing mission and ministry?
- How are you communicating with and involving the larger congregation in awareness and decisions?
- How are you helping people see what “next” looks like BEFORE they are confronted by it?
- What resources do you have and what do you need to start making a plan to go forward?
- Is “in person” worship something you can do well in the foreseeable future?

