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Southwestern Texas Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

From the Office of the Bishop

January 11, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ:

We pray that your Christmas season was healthy and joy-filled. Though 2021 is a new year, it has a lot of the same challenges. In many parts of our synod, we are experiencing a post-holiday surge in COVID-19 cases, including the recent death of one of our pastors.

Just before Thanksgiving, we strongly urged you to consider suspending indoor, in-person worship until at least the end of last year for two reasons: the safety of all and consideration for all of the first-line responders/health care workers overwhelmed by the caseload. We appreciate so many of you taking that advice to heart.

With vaccines now available and beginning to roll out, there is a glimmer of hope, but we want to encourage you to **not** let down your guard. According to most public health experts, we still have a good six months or more to go before there is widespread safety from the virus, assuming people continue to wear masks, wash hands, physically distance and get their vaccine shots.

A number of you had reopened your buildings or were about to do so when this current surge hit. I strongly recommend that, if you have not already done so, you put in place a longer-term plan for regathering, so that you don't have to constantly revisit decisions. While the criteria you use will be context-specific, here are some guidelines:

- 1. Form a Mitigation Team** Your Council is too busy doing its important work to stay on top of the numbers. Find some people with passion and expertise, let them follow the numbers, and make recommendations to your Council.
- 2. Set appropriate criteria:**
 - a. What will be your guiding principles? Love of God and neighbor are at the center for us as Christians
 - b. What are local public health officials/government leaders asking/recommending?
 - c. What data will drive your decisions (hospitalization rates? Case rates? etc.)
- 3. Publicize your criteria, and announce where you are on a regular basis** to reduce anxiety and the number of questions about regathering.

Some Helpful Websites:

- <https://covidactnow.org>
- <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/AdditionalData.aspx>

Examples of Good Plans

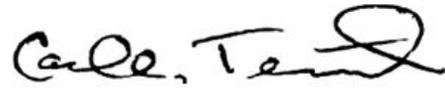
- Peace Lutheran Church, New Braunfels - [phasing guidelines](#)
- St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Marble Falls - [phasing guidelines](#) [guiding promises](#)
- Triumphant Love, Austin - [phasing guidelines](#)

Remember you can find resources on sample protocols, etc. for safely regathering on our website at http://swtsynod.org/better_together. Thank you for your faithful leadership in these trying times.

In Christ,



Bishop Sue Briner



Carl Teinert, Vice President

Guidance On Having a Regathering Plan- PDF

