



**SOUTHWESTERN
PENNSYLVANIA
SYNOD** EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH IN AMERICA

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April 4, 2022

Congregation Councils of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Served by
Interim Pastors

Interim Pastors Serving Congregations

SWPA Synod Lay Worship Leaders

Pastors Regularly Providing Pulpit Supply

RE: COVID Restrictions 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I'm writing to you as congregations regularly supplied with clergy and lay worship leaders by the Synod office and cared for by a local interim. Carol Ruckert continues to work hard to assign worship leadership to a growing number of congregations all over the synod and I thank her for that diligent work.

As we approach the Easter season, a number of congregations are wondering if they are required to maintain the kind of precautions we invited in the spring and summer of 2020 with regard to COVID.

As has been the case throughout the pandemic, Bishop Kusserow's advice to all our congregations has been to align their practices with the CDC's best current advice.

It is the congregation council that makes the determination as to what practices the congregation will follow regarding pandemic precautions. This is particularly true with regard to masking, cleaning, recording of individuals present and other pandemic protection activities. As has always been the

case, lay worship leaders and supply pastors are not required to serve in congregations whose safety practices make them uncomfortable. It will continue to be important for congregations to be in direct contact with lay and clergy supplies to communicate the congregation's practices so that everyone is comfortable on Sunday mornings.

At this point, all of Western Pennsylvania is in the "green" zone for community transmission of COVID-19. As such the PA Department of Health summary of CDC mask recommendations advises that masks are not required indoors for vaccinated individuals who are not high-risk. Individuals who have chosen not to be vaccinated should still mask indoors.

<https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Stop-the-Spread.aspx>

Questions have arisen regarding standard practices during 2020 and their continuation in 2022. Congregation councils are responsible for making reasonable determinations for the safety of congregations and worship leaders. The variety of decisions and precautions currently in place (4/4/2022) across the synod is wide. There are congregations that have returned to regular worship with pre-filled communion glasses or pouring chalices. There are congregations that continue to use only communion wafers with no wine, or drops of wine placed on the wafer. There are congregations continuing to use pre-packaged communion host-wine/juice for distribution. There are congregations that have no singing and there are congregations that are full-throatedly singing the liturgy and hymns.

Please make the best determination of what is appropriate for your congregation. Please communicate changes to those leaders who regularly supply at your congregations to be sure they are aware and gauge their level of comfort with the changes.

We are all relieved to be in a season of lower transmission rates for the COVID-19 virus, but, we also know that the pandemic has been unpredictable. I encourage congregation councils to regularly review the PA Department of Health and CDC guidelines for appropriate safety precautions.

God's blessings to all,



Pastor Asplin
Assistant to the Bishop