



## OUR DUTY AND OUR JOY

PASTORAL GUIDANCE FOR WHEN YOUR CONGREGATION'S COUNTY  
MOVES INTO THE YELLOW PHASE OF PENNSYLVANIA'S PROCESS TO REOPEN.

---

Dear Synod,

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This week Governor Wolf will move 24 Pennsylvania counties from red to yellow in his plan for reopening the state. Governor Wolf's plan may be found here: <https://www.governor.pa.gov/newsroom/gov-wolf-announces-reopening-of-24-counties-beginning-may-8/>

The promise of re-opening brings with it the joyful anticipation of coming back together in church and the sober duty of being prepared to do so safely. Duty and joy are words we hold together in our celebration of the Eucharist. In the preface we declare that "it is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise ..." (ELW p. 108) These words can help us navigate the days we are just now beginning to move into together. I offer the following guidelines, recognizing that each congregation bears the responsibility to conduct its ministry in faithfulness to the joy of the Gospel and in care for the safety of its members and neighbors.

Each of our congregations has a distinct context in which to exercise the Church's mission. I will honor the local decisions you make and ask you to honor the decisions made in other congregations of our synod and across our church.

### **THE BISHOP'S COUNSEL FOR CONGREGATIONS:**

#### **1. PAY ATTENTION TO THE GOVERNOR'S THREE-PHASE PLAN TO RE-OPEN.**

Coordinate your opening with the Governor's guidelines and timing. Do not open for public worship before your county has been moved to yellow. Even when your county permits public gatherings up to 25 persons, remember that you have both the freedom and responsibility to wait until you are ready before opening.

## 2. CREATE A THOUGHTFUL PLAN FOR HOW TO OPEN YOUR CONGREGATION.

When your county moves to yellow, and before you announce that your congregation is open, have your council meet in person in your building to prepare your plan for how and when to open. If the suggestion to meet in person makes you feel uncomfortable, pay attention to that and use your own hesitancy to help guide your discernment. A thoughtful plan will address these important questions with clarity:

- **How will opening accomplish your primary mission as a congregation?**  
*Take into account the personal safety of your current staff and members who are most at risk as you discern your readiness to open.*
- **Are there neighboring congregations you should coordinate with?**  
*Collaboration among congregations can build trust in community.*
- **Do you have the capacity to clean the building thoroughly according to CDC guidelines between uses?** (<https://www.cdc.gov/>)  
*The virus has been found to remain active for three days on hard surfaces.*
- **How will you facilitate social distancing?**  
*Will you mark off 6' distances in your building to help people maintain appropriate spacing?  
Will you have hand-sanitizer in several locations around the building?  
How will you communicate expectations not to shake hands or to embrace when sharing the peace?*
- **What will be your face mask policy?**  
*Will they be required for attending?  
Will speakers, singers, even the pastor be required to wear a mask when leading the service?  
Will you have face masks to provide for those who come without them?*
- **Will you restrict singing as a further precaution?**
- **If you have communion, how you will administer the elements safely?**  
*Will you hold non-sacramental worship at first?  
Can you assure no transmission through distributing elements?*
- **How you will respond if people do not follow the practices you expect them to follow?**
- **What will you do if more than 25 people show up for worship?**  
*Remember that our services of worship are to be public events and not restricted only to our own members.  
Will you hold more frequent, briefer, smaller gatherings to accommodate more than 25 people safely over the course of a week?*

- **What will you do if a member contracts Covid-19?**  
*Will you take attendance each week to trace who may have been exposed?  
How will you communicate that to your congregation?*
- **Will you be ready to close again if you need to?**  
*What metrics will determine that need?  
How will you communicate the need to close again?*
- **Is your Council prepared to stand by this plan?**  
*Can you take responsibility for your own plan, change it as often as you need to,  
and refrain from speaking ill of the plans other congregations come up with?*
- **Have you checked with your insurance carrier to see if any of your choices have negative implications for your congregation's liability?**

### 3. MEET WEEKLY TO EVALUATE YOUR SITUATION.

These questions may help you do that:

- Did this advance your mission?
- Were your safety practices followed by those who came?
- Did you encounter unexpected challenges or joys?
- Do you see a problem that needs to be addressed before next week?
- How will you update the congregation with any changes to your safety practices based on your evaluation?

### 4. TAKE TRAVEL INTO CONSIDERATION.

Please help your congregation members be aware that traveling between counties with different phase colors defeats the purpose of a safe, rolling plan to open our state!

With you in Christ,



Kurt Kusserow, Bishop

If your congregation is in need of further assistance in crafting a reopening plan, please reach out to the Synod for support:

**Office of the Bishop:**  
[office@swpasynod.org](mailto:office@swpasynod.org)  
412-357-2092

**Resource Ministry:**  
[beth.caywood@swpasynod.org](mailto:beth.caywood@swpasynod.org)  
412-357-2092