

# FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

MINISTRY RESOURCES FOR  
CHURCHES & SCHOOLS DURING COVID-19



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# FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

## A novel situation

Novel (nävəl): from the Latin novellus, meaning “new.”

The “novel” in novel coronavirus stresses that COVID-19 is a strain of virus that has never been identified before. However, we really do not need the adjective “novel” to tell us that, do we? We see the truth— that we do not really understand this virus—in the breathtaking vacillations in predictions and guidance.

Forecasts for deaths in America have ranged from a high of 2.4 million to a low of 20,000. Some have claimed the virus can live on a hard surface for three days; others say it is closer to three hours. At one point, it was reported that wearing a mask might increase your chances of getting sick. Now, in some states, masks will be mandatory when you are in public. Predictions of secondary spikes vary widely, some believing there will not be another spike, others saying there will be many spikes over the next year.

It can be hard for us to accept. Each year virologists predict with decent accuracy the number of deaths that will result from seasonal influenza. Why are we all over the place with COVID-19? Well, we have observed how influenza A and B act for decades. They are known agents. But this coronavirus is novel. Thus, you have smart people expressing antithetical views on how the virus will act and how we should respond.

It is humbling. So that he might rule over all creation, God gave mankind a heightened intellect. We have powers of observation and an ability to reason that are far beyond any other creature, except the angels. Yet, along comes this entity only one-millionth of an inch in diameter, and the smartest of men and women are clearly not certain how to deal with it. We are all grasping our way in the dark, because this is a novel situation.

## Moving forward cautiously

The novel nature of COVID-19 presents a challenge for WELS churches. WELS members tend to be fairly monolithic in their thinking. Throw out any ethical issue, and the majority of our members will view that issue very similarly. I do not believe that is true with this virus.

In discussing “the Rona” with family, friends, and coworkers . . . in observing social media posts of WELS people . . . in the hundreds of e-mails received by WELS Congregational Services in recent weeks . . . it has become apparent that WELS people, both called workers and laity, have widely divergent views about COVID-19. (Again, not surprising with a novel coronavirus.) This includes having very different ideas about how churches should operate at this time.

At the one end of the spectrum, there are some who think it was unwise for churches to halt services. At the other end, there are some who think it would not just be unwise, but even immoral, for churches to start back up too soon.

Most of your members have a personal list of what they think should be “the new normal” when worship resumes, at least for a while. In addition to social distancing measures, WELS members have suggested masks required by all, including the pastor; no passing of the collection plate or pew register; no handshakes or hugs to greet fellow members; no common cup.

There are some who want every possible precaution taken. However, I have heard others claim that taking any of those precautions is, at minimum, unnecessary. A few have suggested taking such steps demonstrates a lack of trust in God’s providence. There are some who are implying that by not fully opening churches, pastors are neglecting the Biblical imperative to obey God rather than men.

Do you see the potential challenges? I’m sure, because he is pure evil, Satan takes glee in watching an elderly adult with COVID-19 slowly suffocate to death. However, Satan is also an extremely strategic thinker. He is aware that COVID-19 can do more than cause physical ailment. Satan would love to use this pandemic and the ensuing fear to divide people, especially to divide Christians.

The decisions made by churches moving forward will almost inevitably put church leaders in the crosshairs. Just look at what is happening to governors. On the news we see large groups gather at state capitals to protest lockdown measures. However, there have also been protests (typically online, yet vehement in tone) against governmental leaders who are reopening their states, arguing it is too soon. Surveys show that Americans are highly divided on when the country should reopen. They are even more divided as to what that reopening should look like, what precautions should be taken. It is impossible to make everyone happy.

How do we mitigate that in our congregations? How do we reopen our churches in a way that minimizes Satan’s opportunity to tempt people to think either, “Our church leaders don’t care about our safety” or “Our church leaders don’t trust in God’s protection”? I believe moving forward cautiously will require four things.

### **Humility, communication, flexibility, respect**

*Moving forward will require humility.*

That means, first of all, admitting how much we still do not know about COVID-19. Fully understanding it will simply take time. In humility, we are very careful to distinguish between what we want to be true and what we know to be true. I want to believe that by this fall, all our schools will be back to business as normal. I don’t know for certain that will be the case.

Moving forward with humility also means not demonizing or belittling those who have different opinions than us. You have probably seen examples of Old Adam’s arrogance during this crisis. (I’ve seen him in myself too frequently.) Someone has a view of how this virus will play out. Anyone whose view is different is either uniformed, unintelligent, lacking in compassion, or “pushing an agenda.” This not only

demonstrates a lack of humility. It can also be the death of critical thinking. As church leaders discuss how to carefully move forward, they need to respect one another enough to carefully listen to the ideas and concerns of others and then properly weight them. If Jim suggests the pastor wear a mask for distribution and Mark then thinks, “Jim’s a cowering wimp,” Satan smiles.

Finally, “in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Philippians 2:3,4). Moving forward with humility means putting the interests and desires of others above your own. You might think that it is not necessary to (fill in whatever mitigation step you want) to mitigate the risk of COVID-19. Are there some in the church that do think that step would be beneficial? A humble leader weighs that view heavily.

*Moving forward will require communication.*

Communication will be vital for two reasons. First, “plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed” (Proverbs 15:22). Scripture says it is wise to seek collective wisdom when planning. Different people have different perspectives. That will be true with this virus. Your young members might have different views about how to proceed with ministry than your older members. Women might raise concerns or ask questions that men don’t even think about. Wise church leaders will want to talk with a large cross-section of the congregation when producing a re-opening plan. (In many WELS churches, it would be possible to talk to/survey every member without much difficulty.)

The second reason communication will be vital is that it helps avoid the dissention we said Satan wants to sow. In my state (Wisconsin) some citizens are frustrated and even angry by what they perceive to be a lack of communication. Various business leaders claim they requested to speak with Governor Tony Evers to discuss possible approaches for virus mitigation, and he refused. According to them, his attitude was more, “You just have to trust us.” That can be a bitter pill to swallow when the decisions that are being made have substantial life impacts. Where there is a broader communication and fuller discussion, when leaders announce a decision, they can say more than, “Just trust us.” They can say, “We talked to everyone. We weighed all the concerns. There’s no solution that will make everyone happy. Here’s what we thought would make the most people happy moving forward.”

I cannot stress this strongly enough. This is too important an issue to rely on anecdotal evidence. “I heard Mary say she can’t wait to get back to church. Bill said the same.” Not good enough. Talk to a broad swath of your members, as many of them as possible.

*Moving forward will require flexibility.*

St. James writes, “You ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will ... do this or that.’” (James 4:15). The pronouns translated “this” and “that” designate a priority or preference. The force of what James is saying is: “As we plan to move forward, we want to do this. However, if Option A is not the Lord’s will, then we will do that instead.” James is encouraging us to plan, but also have a backup plan. He is encouraging flexibility.

Having a backup plan can be helpful in preventing tension. People can handle challenging situations. It is when those challenging situations are entirely unexpected that tensions arise. People become

emotional and subsequently make snap decisions. It is a reactive way of dealing with a challenge. Contingency planning is proactive. It anticipates challenges, so they aren't entirely unexpected. It lets people know there is appropriate flexibility built into the plan. "Here is the direction we are hoping to go. However, if things change, we have an Option B."

You probably have plans for how worship will transition back to normal. You have plans for how your school will operate this fall. You have budgetary plans for how to fund ministry. That's good! However, what if the situation changes? What if there's a secondary outbreak this fall? What if there are state regulations mandating social distancing in classrooms? (Can you keep kids six feet apart?) What if offerings remain at a lower level? "We will cross that bridge when and if we come to it." Snap decisions made under pressure are typically not the best possible decisions. It is wise to begin thinking through various possibilities and at least have a skeleton of a plan for each scenario.

*Moving forward will require respect.*

Where God has not spoken, Christians may disagree. God has spoken about the importance of regular contact with the Means of Grace. God has also spoken about his desire that we show selfless, sacrificial love in the way we care for our neighbor, and especially for our fellow believers. So, how, exactly, do we do all these things?

There, God has said precious little. He has said that as we apply his principles, our primary concern is to be his glory. Our secondary concern is to be the well-being of our fellow man. Our own personal preferences are our final concern, close to a non-issue. However, even as Christians hold those priorities, they still may disagree about the best course of action. Church A decides to open soon. Church B decides to continue with only online services for the time being. As long as both churches approached their decision with humility, careful discussion, and prayer, both are God-pleasing decisions. For Scripture has nothing to say about how churches reopen after a pandemic.

It will be vital for leaders to encourage and inculcate that attitude in members. There may be members of your church who don't come back for a while. They prefer to continue with online services (providing you continue to offer them) and private communion. They are not despising preaching or the Word. It would be problematic if they were made to feel they were, when they are more likely following their conscience, trying to do what they've been told is helpful in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

### **The purpose of "For such a time as this"**

*Humility, communication, flexibility, respect.*

Humility and respect can only be produced by the Spirit working through his means. They are outside our control. We simply place ourselves into God's Word and then pray, "Create in me a pure heart, O God" (Psalm 51:10).

Communication and planning flexibility are things that are within our control. They are aims achievable through our efforts. As I mentioned earlier, we have received hundreds of e-mails and phone calls, from both called workers and lay leaders, asking questions and soliciting advice. "For Such a Time as This" is

not intended to provide all the answers. How could it? No circumstances are exactly alike. Therefore, our prayer is simply that it helps with those aims: communication and flexibility. We hope that it facilitates discussion and communication: pastor to pastor, church leaders to members. We hope that some of the articles help church leaders begin to anticipate some possible scenarios and make contingency plans.

Finally, on behalf of everyone who serves on the commissions within Congregational Services, let me thank you for the leadership and encouragement you have been providing to God's people within WELS. It has been breathtaking watching churches navigate this crisis well: finding ways to bring the Bread of Life to starving souls and finding ways to serve their communities with compassion.

May God bless you and yours.

*Rev. Jonathan Hein is the director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling and the coordinator for Congregational Services.*

# PASTORAL CARE

## COVID-19 PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES

Just about every week now, I think of that blessing at the end of 3 John that I must admit, I hadn't really given much play in my ministry until these last days: "I hope to see you soon and speak face to face. Peace to you. The friends here send you greetings. Greet each of our friends there by name." Lately I identify with those words as I never anticipated I would.

During this COVID-19 pandemic, we're encountering that sometimes-hard-for-us reality: "The Lord works out everything to its proper end" (Proverbs 16:4) and, most often, he does not share with us the details about what's coming. We probably struggle with what to do, maybe even with what to pray. Of course, we know and trust in that Romans way, "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him," (Romans 8:28)—even in this, even now. And, as churches and pastors, we do know what God's will is, "[God] wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Even now, in the midst of a pandemic, it is our duty and our joy to get the gospel out to God's people and to our communities.

At the moment, most of our efforts as churches are limited to either very small gatherings or online-only scenarios. And, like it or not, this situation will continue in some form for some time. Even when churches are permitted to gather, it will likely be with restrictions and many people will probably remain quarantined because of compromised health or even fear. In most places, pastors and churches will have to figure out how to navigate these new rules for gathering and also how to continue serving members and the community online. So, here are a few perspectives to consider as you figure out how to best get the gospel out to your people and your communities via online media.

### **Be filled with a gospel spirit.**

I put this first because I need it myself. I'll admit I don't agree with all of the responses to COVID-19 myself. Frankly, I think many other choices could have been made. But, that doesn't matter much, does it?

In fact, God's people don't need to hear what I think about coronavirus narratives or protestors or vaccines. They need to hear about Jesus from you and me. As pastors and church leaders, our goal is to get the gospel out, to share the good news through the Means of Grace. Attendant to that goal is this: we don't want to be a hindrance to the gospel personally.

Remember those trustworthy words from Paul to Timothy? "Now the overseer is to be above reproach ... temperate, self-controlled, respectable ... not quarrelsome. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap." Or the ones to deacons?

"Deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience" (1 Timothy 3). Be careful what you post online. Be cognizant of the deep divide that prevails in our communities about this issue. Have your own opinions. Have kind and gentle discussions



with people. But be about the gospel! Hold to the deep truths of the faith that you were taught and are called to share. Be in the Word and filled with Christ's forgiveness and peace so that these overflow to those you serve.

### **Let all God's best gifts be used.**

At our church, we have a fairly decent online setup going. I wish I could say it was all my idea. But it wasn't. Talented people stepped up to use their technological gifts. They brought equipment, offered up solutions and alternatives, had discussions with the pastors about the worship priorities and sensitivities. And there we were: two cameras, a switcher, a computer, a mixer, and worship online. I'm very blessed. There was a lot of work to get this done in our place, but I didn't do most of it. I still don't.

Pastors, delegate this good work if you can. Take a moment and think through your membership list. If you are blessed with someone who has the technical chops to manage online media, set them free to do it! If you aren't immediately aware of anyone, put out a request. Check and see. Does someone have a great digital camera? Would they lend it to the church in this time of crisis? Does someone run a YouTube channel (you'd be surprised how many do)? Could a member walk you through Livestream or YouTube or Facebook Live? Check it out. God put these gifts in place to be used. Don't forget to look for what he's left you.

### **Be best.**

The First Lady of the U.S. has a running campaign for children called "Be Best." It encourages kids to make the best choices they can along their life journeys. It applies in this online situation, too. I know, we can't be best in everything. Most of us can't be *Time of Grace* quality; some are working with just a smart phone; others have technology that's decades old. We may not be the best, but we can make the best choices we can with what we have. Consider how church online works, what it means, how it's different than normal. Here are some things to consider:

- Are you limited to just you and a smartphone? Buy a cheap stand and ring light on Amazon and better your lighting. Make sure you're using your "good" camera—not the selfie-side but the other one.
- Will you go live or pre-record and edit? At our church we decided to do what we could live at the regular worship time and not worry about too much post-editing. It seemed best with the various people involved. But if you pre-record, even with a smartphone, someone savvy with a computer can edit and add in pre-recorded music, text overlays, opening and closing screens, etc.
- Consider the shift in congregation location and what it means. I know it's obvious, but maybe we're not always thinking about the most obvious things like:
  - *How long will people worship on a couch?* Consider shortening your online presentation. We've limited our hymns to three and have whittled away stanzas if they're too long. We've also tried to keep the hymns simple, as singable-as-possible from a couch with the kids.

- *But they want to worship too.* If you're able to present music and hymnody, do it in a way that invites people to sing along and assumes they will. Use hymns they know. Give them the words on the screen if you can. If not, e-mail your pdf order of worship each week. Don't just present a worship concert. Assume God's people *want* to worship. And help them to worship the best you can. At our church, we stuck with livestream, Sunday morning worship. And we've brought in musicians to play music, a soloist to lead a psalm or sing an anthem, a husband/wife couple come to help out with the singing of hymns, and the pastors and those gathered have all joined in speaking the responses to the liturgy. It's helped to give a boost to those at home.
- *Where are your people?* Well, they're at home, generally. That's obvious, right? Still, I had a recent conversation with a friend who said, "I worship online at my church, but it's like I'm just watching worship happening over there." He meant that the pastor was preaching to the empty pews and conducting worship as though everything were normal. It's not normal. This is an exceptional time and strange. When we shifted into online only worship at our church, we started with a basic assumption—that the gathered body of believers are "gathered" mostly through that camera, so we would present worship to them. If your setup will allow it, preach to the camera. Speak to the congregation on the other side of the lens. Do church with the online body of believers and don't just let them observe you doing church where they can't be.

Surely there are a thousand other encouragements and great ideas. These are just a few. Perhaps you have them all down already. Maybe you have some other, better perspectives to share. Do it. Share them. Help one another to bring the gospel in the best possible way to as many as we can. It's a challenging time, but we are the body of Christ who rules the world. With his blessing and his gospel, we can do great things. May God bless you as you share his Word in new and innovative ways.

*Pastor Phil Casmer preaches through the lens to God's people at Christ the Lord Lutheran Church in Brookfield, Wis.*

## **YES, YOU CAN DO "SHUT-IN" MINISTRY DURING COVID-19!**

To say that ministry has changed during the coronavirus pandemic is a major understatement.

With access to hospitals, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and similar facilities being limited to only end-of-life matters, you might wonder how to minister to those whom you normally would visit face-to-face. With "safer at home" restrictions, you likely cannot go and visit those who are homebound. Here are some suggestions.

First, determine what type of communication is best for the individual. Do they have access to technology (smart phone, tablet, TV) or do they prefer to have written material they can read or have someone read to them? Before you quickly discount technology, consider if they have someone who can help them gain access to being served via technology. The church that my wife and I attend is streaming their services, like most churches are. There are some homebound members who have family bringing over a computer or tablet, allowing these individuals to watch the church service. Our pastor told me that several of these people have commented how they feel more connected to their church now than they have in years.

Thinking more along the lines of utilizing technology, could the staff in the facility where your members reside help them watch your streamed service on a TV in the facility or on a tablet? Oftentimes it is “you have not because you ask not.” A simple request to the facility to assist with connecting their residents to spiritual services is often a welcome request and will be fulfilled in ways that might surprise you.

If using technology is truly not an option, those whom you desire to serve are often “just a call away.” While they may not be able to see you face-to-face, a familiar voice on the other end of the line might be just the boost they need. This would allow you to not only stay connected, but also share encouragement from God’s Word and pray with them.

One thing that can’t be forgotten is the use of printed material. Check with the facilities where these individuals live and ask them the best way to get printed devotions and sermons to their residents. Is it mail or dropping them off? While the facility may want to let the material sit for a brief time to let any possible contamination pass, they are likely willing to share the material with those whom you desire to get it to if you work through their current procedures.

So, yes, with a little work and ingenuity, you can certainly do “shut-in” ministry during COVID-19. God bless you as you work diligently in this and every area of your ministry!

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# CONGREGATIONAL COUNSELING

## AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A MINISTRY DEEP CLEAN

Every spring, the same routine makes its way through every room in our house. It's the annual deep clean. First the dresser drawers. Where did all these clothes come from? Then the kids' clothes, and after that the toys are sorted. Do toys procreate? Next the kitchen gets a deep clean, cupboard by cupboard. Every infomercial blender, whatever is old and tired, whatever hasn't been used in ages gets tossed in the garage before it's donated. That's after the garage is cleaned. Outgrown bicycles, broken down drones, and half used paint cans are put in the "goes" pile.

Have you ever given your church a deep clean? Better yet, have you ever given your ministry a deep clean? It's *really* healthy. Since virus fears have forced us to scale back ministry and shutter the stained glass, it's the perfect time to give your ministry a deep clean. Evaluate the ministry you do, why you do it, whether you've outgrown it, whether it has broken down and doesn't function, whether it has been put in the closet and forgotten (or should be), or whether it no longer serves the mission of the church.

### Remember your mission

Just like your dresser drawers and garages, church ministry has a way of accumulating "extras" over time. Before you go digging around in your ministry closets looking for things to throw out, it's important to review the reason the church exists. When you do that, what you decide to save or what eventually goes will be based on God's will for the Church rather than personal preference, opinion, or "because we've always done it that way."

Begin your deep clean process with a thorough Biblical review of Jesus' mission for the Church. Patiently teach that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. It's essential that your council and key leaders attend, but you'll get much further if the entire parish is involved. Carefully reviewing Jesus' mission will save you hours of arguing over whether the Trunk'or'Treat actually serves the church. Planning a carnival with a bounce house might welcome hundreds of people and make people feel involved and successful. You will still need to ask the missional question: is it leading people to Jesus?

In my parish, we began a fall carnival complete with dunk tanks and bounce houses for the kids. The stated ministry purpose was to invite back our straying members, befriend them, and welcome them warmly in hopes to eventually lead them back to worship. One year, parents went to Goodwill and gathered garbage bags full of odd-looking clothes. Pastors, teachers, and lay leaders volunteered to have school children dress them in these odd-looking clothes as a carnival gag. It was a big hit! Pictures were posted on Facebook. Later, the same pictures were re-posted on an internet blog suggesting the pastor of this Lutheran Church dressed in drag. We cancelled the carnival - but not because of the slanderous blog post. We cancelled the carnival because after aggressive invitations to our straying members, not one of them attended!

There are many reasons to reset your ministry by eliminating something you've done in the past. Every congregation should have a "goes" pile, for a lot of reasons. Sometimes the event has run its course. Sometimes the personnel are no longer there to carry out the ministry. Sometimes the event serves an ego or scratches a nostalgic itch but misses the mark on mission. Evaluating ministry is an ongoing necessity so that your parish can continually focus its efforts on connecting the gospel to souls.

## Equip the saints

Most congregations have a pastor who is impossibly busy. No doubt there is more work in a week than a pastor can reasonably handle in two. There are souls to touch, sermons to write, counseling to do, shut-ins to visit, prospects to follow up, catechism to prep, Bible classes to teach, meetings to plan - and that's just Monday. Before long, the list of "I'll get to that later" is impossibly long. To many parishioners that translates as, "I don't have time for you" or "don't bother me." Souls are neglected. Opportunities are lost. The congregation stagnates at the natural abilities of one man. How can an adaptive congregation reset its thinking about the real work of ministry?

The pastor is a called servant. His authority in a congregation is governed by the Word of God. God has connected the pastor to the body of Christ and instructs him that it is his calling and privilege to train the rest of the body to function. *"It was he who gave some to be... pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"* (Ephesians 4:11-12). The Bible is full of examples of pastoral delegation to lay leaders. Paul told Titus, *"The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you"* (Titus 1:5). The Lord of the Church is telling pastors to equip the laity to serve. Are we doing it?

A pastor's preaching and teaching work on Sunday morning is certainly included in equipping. A careful look at Jesus ministry, though, reveals that Jesus essentially spent his whole ministry training and equipping his disciples. He gave them things to do. They distributed bread at the feeding of the 5,000; they traveled to Bethany to gather the colt for his Palm Sunday procession; they prepared the upper room. The disciples, though, were not just errand boys doing busy work. Jesus gave them meaningful ministry to do. He also trained the laity. In Luke 10, Jesus sent out 72 canvassers to carry out door to door evangelism. These men were not equipped with a seminary degree or waving a certificate of ordination. They were laypeople. Just think, Jesus equipped and sent out 72 laypeople to do door to door canvassing only 18 months into his public ministry! After his own redemptive mission was through, Jesus left on the day of his ascension and instructed his disciples to go build the Church - empowered by the Holy Spirit.

If your congregation is served by a pastor who is hopelessly busy, it is likely self-inflicted. It's also correctable - and God has already taught us how. We all know two heads are better than one. But they're still not as good as 100 - or however many souls there are in your parish. Train the people for works of service! That's not just practical advice to spread the work around, it is God's will. If you're taking a long hard look at resetting the way you do things at your parish, sit down with your pastor. Work with him to let go of work and equip others to do it. Map out what he will do and what is reasonable for the laity to do. It may be a bumpy ride short term, but in the long run it will transform your parish.

## Focus on family

Mormons have a reputation for “family” and “family values.” That emphasis is prominent in their marketing and advertising. In their case it’s more than scratching a societal itch. Family values is a legitimate emphasis in their religious practice and has played a significant role in their recruitment of and retention of young people with kids.

Why don’t we do that? We agree, don’t we, that God established the family as the basic building block of society? We agree, don’t we, that fathers are the head of their house and responsible for training their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord? We agree, don’t we, that marriage is instituted by God and that children are a blessing from the Lord? Now look at your parishes. Look at our world. It has all been devastated by sin! What are we doing to address it? Where is our Lutheran voice?

As you carry out a ministerial deep clean, this topic deserves heavy emphasis. The Bible’s answer to youth ministry is “parents.” Parents are the trainers and equippers of children, and the Church is the trainers and equippers of parents. In many of our Lutheran parishes, the church is training children, and no one is training the parents. Should we be surprised that our families are broken and we’re losing our children?

Consider our heritage. Luther’s inscription in the Small Catechism is, “As the head of the family should teach them in the simplest way to those in his household.” Like Jesus who equipped his disciples and then gave them work to do, Luther gave fathers a tool and charged them to carry out the work. Why then, does this typically fall on the called pastor? Is catechesis something pastors could safely hand off? Could pastors employ a flipped classroom or video lessons and work with fathers to carry out their responsibility? The goal is noble.

Many of our parishes have institutions, preschools and Lutheran Elementary Schools, where children are trained. Although the studies vary somewhat over time, numbers generally suggest that two-thirds of the children we educate will be lost to the devil. Is that a commentary on the quality of our schools? Far more likely it’s a commentary on the quality of our homes. The good work that is happening in our classrooms, I fear, is being undermined in the home. Parents are assaulted with temptations to worldliness that is crippling our families and shattering marriages. If we want to stem the tide of losing our children, the answer is not more preschools and schools. It’s marriage enrichment, parenting classes, home devotions and family ministry. Without a heavy ministerial investment in the parents and adults, our directed youth ministry will likely continue to languish.

The current pandemic and lock-down orders that have gone with it is providing us with the opportunity to think carefully about our ministries and to consider why we do what we do the way that we do it. May the Lord richly bless your considerations. And may his blessing result in a more focused, vigorous, and fruitful ministry as a result.

*Pastor Adam Mueller serves at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Tuscon, Ariz., and as a member of the WELS Commission on Congregational Counseling.*

# PLANNING FOR THE VARIOUS SEASONS OF THE PANDEMIC

The rhythm of the church year is helpful when planning worship, and really all other ministry efforts. There are certain things you have to do to get ready for the season Lent that you don't have to do to prepare for the season of Epiphany. There are different things to focus on in the season Advent than in the Sundays after Pentecost.

I have talked to dozens of people about "best practices" planning for COVID-19. Perhaps the best advice I've heard (offered by multiple planning gurus) is to divide the coming months up into "seasons." For each of those seasons, congregational leaders can walk through a list of key considerations.

## The seasons of COVID-19

### *June and July: Resuming in-person gatherings*

In some states, WELS churches have resumed worship under local guidelines. As of this writing, June is when the vast majority of states will loosen the restrictions on in-person worship. Most likely some restrictions will remain in some states; e.g. 50 or less. They may be eased as summer progresses.

The big issue of this season is that it is quite possible many members will have concerns or even fears about returning to in-person gatherings. They will have vastly different opinions about what precautions should be taken and which ministries should (and shouldn't) resume.

Another issue of this season is that the Payroll Protection Program is scheduled to end on June 30. It is predicted that will have a large impact. Businesses that cannot survive without that assistance may go under, affecting employment rates. Businesses that survive may, with government aid no longer in place, have to cut wages.

### *August and September: Back to school*

It seems clear that most states are hoping to have schools open as normal this Fall. That probably is contingent upon whether or not there are secondary outbreaks and, if so, their severity. Speaking to leaders in public education at all levels, most are producing at least two plans. Three is not uncommon. They typically look like this:

- Plan A is something close to "normal." Students return at normal numbers. Appropriate safety measures are taken.
- Plan B is for if schools are required to accommodate social distancing rules. For example, half of students attend classes in the morning, the other half in the afternoon. This would allow for fewer people in a room.
- Plan C is to continue with online learning, if necessary.

We would hope by this time, if there is no secondary outbreak, most of our members (at least those who don't have high risk factors) would be comfortable returning to in-person worship. Again, this probably is contingent on COVID-19 dying off somewhat over summer. However, the next season is right around the corner.

### *October through February: Second peak?*

It seems almost inevitable that people will enter the next cold and flu season with some trepidation. The man one pew up coughs. Is it simply a cold-weather nasal drip or is it coronavirus?

However, the biggest issue of this season is not that anxiety may be high. Some experts have claimed the current trending down of coronavirus is due to it responding to warmer weather similar to influenza. They suggest that, without a vaccine, it is possible that when the weather turns colder again, there could be a second peak of strong outbreaks. We pray the experts' forecast for Fall is inaccurate. However, if there is indeed a second outbreak (paralleling the 1918 influenza outbreak), will government try and shut everything down again? How would churches respond?

### *March 2021 and beyond: Good riddance*

Conventional wisdom seems to be that by March of next year, while COVID-19 may be around, it will be controlled. We will be coming out of the cold and flu season. We should be closer to "herd immunity." And it is possible a vaccine might be developed.

That said, it seems unlikely that at this time, everything will return to the way it was January 2020. What will be the long-range impact on things like hugging or shaking hands as a greeting? Will our members have grown sick of being so cautious and say, "What will be will be. Be with me, Lord Jesus"? Or will COVID-19 linger in the back of their memory, leading them to take extreme precautions in the future? How will that affect ministry?

## **Key Considerations**

For each of these four seasons, leaders might work through key considerations. Here is the process I would use if I was serving as a parish pastor.

- A. I would gather my leaders (observing social distancing of course) somewhere with a whiteboard. I would create a grid with four columns. On the top of the grid would be the four seasons of the pandemic.
- B. I would ask my leaders to brainstorm a list of key considerations for reopening the church and ministry efforts: issues and efforts we needed to think through. I would write those key considerations down on the left side of the grid. So, say my leaders came up with eight key considerations. Multiply that by the four seasons of the pandemic. That results in a grid with thirty-two boxes.
- C. In each of those boxes, I would write "BC" for "best case scenario" and "WC" for "worst case scenario." My leaders and I would then brainstorm that. E.g. "*When it comes to worship services, what is the worst-case scenario for this season? What is the best-case scenario for worship in July?*"
- D. For each of those key considerations, my leaders and I would produce a plan outlining our path forward and ministry efforts under both the best-case and worst-case scenarios. For example, in that first season of June and July, the best-case scenario for worship might that we hold six different services on the weekend, using only disposable worship folders, staying under fifty, with comprehensive cleaning in between services. The worst-case scenario might be that we continue with only online services and devotional communion services for ten or fewer offered throughout the week. With these plans, my leaders and I would make sure the plan for the first season was extremely detailed. We would set metrics that we could communicate with



members: *“If A, we will do B. But if C, we will then do D.”* For the later seasons, the plans would be more of an outline. We would reassemble three to four weeks before the beginning of that new season of the pandemic to flesh that plan out. That allows for us to adjust to the fluidity of this pandemic situation.

For many of the key considerations, your approach will probably be the same in each season. For example, precautions against lawsuits probably will require the same steps each season. However, for other key considerations, your direction will probably be different season to season. The way you worship in June might be more cautious than in February of next year.

This is not a comprehensive list, but here are some things you might include in your key considerations.

### *Legal issues and liability*

I put this first, because it affects all the other key considerations.

WELS pastors and lay leaders are going to take different approaches to governmental decrees, orders, and recommendations. I have talked to leaders who are going to be extremely cautious, maybe even more so than local recommendations require. However, there are other church leaders who are going to take a “spirit of the law” approach. For example, I know of a church that is planning on opening worship with fifty or fewer people both in the nave and in the balcony, claiming those are separate rooms.

Some church leaders have the attitude, *“Our religious liberties are being infringed. Enough is enough. We are willing to be fined or face jail.”* OK. There’s a discussion to be had there about the two Kingdoms, but for now, let me simply point this out. A \$1000 fine for violating a governor’s order is one thing. A two-million-dollar lawsuit against your church because someone claims their mother caught COVID-19 taking Communion at your church is another. You would like to think WELS members would not engage in such behavior, but everyone has a sinful nature. Then, there are guests. Then, there are warnings of ill-intentioned individuals looking to exploit coronavirus for financial gain. Imagine there is a minor outbreak at your church while you are, by choice, *not* complying to recommendations. Have you checked whether or not you are liable if someone gets sick?

In talking to a number of insurance agents, the answer seems to be, *“It depends.”* It depends on your policy/insurer. It depends on your state. Some states put greater onus on the individual to determine for themselves if participation in an activity is safe. Others place the majority of the responsibility on the institution or individual operating that activity. It would be wise at minimum for a church leader to contact their insurance agent. Be totally transparent, listing absolutely everything you are hoping to do in the upcoming seasons of the pandemic. Ask the agent to confirm those activities are covered by your policy. (Some companies are even working on pandemic policies.)

Another important legal consideration is compliance to the CARES act. If your church applied for and received Payment Protection Plan funds, it is important you understand what documentation and reporting requirements exist in each season. It has been reported that every business that received more than two-million dollars from the PPP will be automatically audited. Others will be selected for audit, but it is not clear what the parameters for that selection would be. It is probably prudent, if you are a religious institution, to make certain you are in perfect compliance with PPP requirements. They are not onerous but do require some documentation.

### *Worship*

It is the high point of the week. We gather as a family around the gospel. But there are a zillion factors. How many people will be allowed? Will masks be recommended? The Center for Disease Control *recommends not* singing in worship. Do you follow the recommendation or not, and if not, are any members bothered or conscience bound by that? (You could ask if they would be conscience bound to *not* sing too, obviously!) What about passing the plate? What about using hymnals? Will people want those sterilized after each service? Do you switch to disposable worship folders or pivot to using screens, at least temporarily?

There are practical issues surrounding how to conduct the Lord's Supper. There is the issue of many people entering and exiting through a narrow gateway. There are issues surrounding welcoming and greeting people. Frankly, there are so many issues connected to what happens on Sunday morning, you may need to break them up into different rows on that grid.

### *Finances*

It is interesting to note the differing impacts of COVID-19 on church offerings. In one study, about twenty percent of American Christian churches report offerings going *up*. Typically, this is due to two factors. First, those churches have used this time to get their members set up for electronic giving, which tends to be more regular than giving by envelope. Second, those churches often have a benevolent giver(s) who have given one-time large gifts. However, that same study showed another twenty percent of churches have had their offerings go down drastically, between forty and fifty percent.

If I were guiding this brainstorming session, I would ask my leaders to attempt and estimate the worst case and best-case scenarios for offerings for each season. We would then plan accordingly. Say, for example, my church was hit hard. Our best-case scenario said that in all four of the seasons, we would be at eighty percent of offerings pre-COVID. We would produce a plan to communicate to members what exactly that means, i.e. how it would impact ministry. We would plan a stewardship effort to attempt to meet the challenge evangelically.

### *Youth ministry*

I already gave the example of difference scenarios public schools are planning for. If I was at a church with a school, I'd work with the school leaders to do the same. But this planning would have to encompass all aspects of youth ministry. Consider: children don't social distance. If you have a crying child in Sunday school, parents might consider it unacceptable, at least in the early seasons, for the Sunday school teacher to hug the child to attempt in an effort comfort him or her.

This particular virus seems to have little impact on most children. That does not mean their parents are apathetic or unconcerned about precautions. If they are not concerned about the children getting sick, they are perhaps concerned about children getting the virus, being asymptomatic, and transmitting it to family members who are at risk. Think through youth ministry practices, best case and worst case, in each of the seasons.

### *Elder ministry*

While our understanding of this virus remains fluid, what is totally clear is that, on average, it hits the elderly and people with underlying medical conditions much harder than others. Some have made the case that instead of isolating everyone, we should have quarantined the elderly and those who are immunocompromised. Bottom line, it would probably be wise to approach ministry to the elderly differently than ministry to everyone else.

There are worship considerations. In the first season, do you urge everyone to come back? Do you provide the elderly with recommendations?

There are also visitation considerations. Pastoral hearts have ached at *not* being able to visit homebound elderly members in recent months. When those visits resume, what steps would the pastor take in each season to safeguard against himself becoming a transmitter of COVID-19 to the members for whom that virus brings a 1 in 12 chance of death? For example, I know of one pastor who hopes to get tested for COVID the evening before he makes visits. When he is confirmed negative, the next day the only thing he does is make elderly homebound visits. He will wear a mask and gloves for the entirety of every visit. Is that overkill in the first season, or prudent? That probably depends on the prevalence of the virus in your area and the health conditions of the people you are visiting.

### *Volunteer training*

I have noted in recent weeks the differences in how employees have been trained. At the home improvement store I patronize, it is clear that every employee has been *thoroughly* instructed how to operate during this pandemic. They all stay six feet away from customers, stepping back if customers are trying to get at something. They all wear masks. You see them constantly wiping down handles and railings and other touch points. You perhaps think this is overkill. My point is that the uniform behavior of the employees demonstrates a) an organizational plan and b) conscientious training for compliance with that plan.

Contrast that with the grocery store I frequent. It seems employees have been allowed to take whatever approach makes them feel comfortable. I have witnessed unmasked workers standing very close to customers when talking to them. I saw one employee organizing unpackaged produce without gloves.

As you might expect, I have witnessed customers at the grocery store get upset with the workers there. *"Why aren't you...?"* While I am certain there are some customers at the home improvement store who think the store and its employees are taking unnecessary precautions, those customers *aren't* visibly upset. *"How dare you stay six feet away from me!"*

Churches rely on volunteerism from members: ushers, greeters, church cleaners, elders assisting with distribution, counters, etc. It is important that they understand well how the expectations for their service has changed. They probably need to be retrained. It might be necessary to offer that retraining in every one of the seasons of the virus. How an usher operates in July is may be different than how he will operate in October.

Personally, I would *not* do this training only by writing; e.g. sending an e-mail to greeters outlying the new rules. This is important. (See the example of angry grocery store customers above.) I would want to offer that training face-to-face. Several online meeting options are available. The face-to-face training allows church leaders to drive home how important this is, not just to prevent transmission, but for positive public perception of your church.

## The Spirit of Wisdom

I could go on with examples of key considerations, but you get the point of the process. You know your church. Again, it is a fairly common process for crisis management planning. There are a number of consultant companies that can walk you through the process (for a fee, of course). However, it is not overly difficult. It is simply a matter of breaking up all the issues of the upcoming seasons into their individual components and thinking your response through carefully.

May the Spirit, who grants true wisdom, be with you as you do.

*Rev. Jonathan Hein is the director of the Commission on Congregational Counseling and the coordinator for Congregational Services.*

## ONLINE COVID-19 RESOURCES

There are a plethora of consultation companies producing COVID-19 related planning resources for churches and other non-profits. Here are some WELS Congregational Services has examined and believe to be among the better free resources available.

### Vanderbloemen: Comprehensive church resources for navigating COVID-19

The Vanderbloemen Group does consulting for churches and other religious organizations. They have produced dozens of videos on virtually every COVID-19 related topic. Included: how churches can make use of government programs such as the Payroll Protection Program, how to prepare to reopen the church, how to approach school as COVID-19 lingers on, how to conduct more ministry online, how to best practice electronic giving, etc. CEO and founder William Vanderbloemen served for some time as a Presbyterian pastor. The Vanderbloemen Group does, at times, come at topics from a theological basis. Read and view with discernment. However, most of their videos and resources are purely practical in nature.

[www.vanderbloemen.com/reopening-church](http://www.vanderbloemen.com/reopening-church)

### Barna/Gloo: A variety of digital pulse surveys

The Barna Group has studied American Christianity since the mid 1980s. They also disseminate communication and leadership tools to faith-based organizations. Recently Barna partnered with Gloo, a computer software company that specializes in demographic and ethnographic research. Together they developed free resources to help churches navigate COVID-19. The link below takes you to a pastor's survey. You have to register your church and fill out the survey. When you do, you gain access to a number of resources. Perhaps most helpful is a number of online, customizable surveys. You are able to configure a survey, including adding customizable questions. The survey can be shared by SMS, URL, or QR code. The surveys are diverse. The "Congregants" survey would help you understand how your

members are doing spiritually, emotionally, and financially at this time. The “Returning to Church Check-in” would be helpful in enabling you to better understand your member’s expectations about how and when to resume various types of ministries. You can set your surveys to be entirely anonymous, or to require people to provide their contact info, or giving them the option. The link below contains an organization ID tied to WELS. As WELS congregations survey their members, Gloop will produce an anonymous, aggregate summary, allowing you to see how your congregation’s views compares to that of other WELS members.

<https://accounts.gloop.us/register/organization?membershipOrgId=292296c6-679f-11ea-920b-97316d743a7b&source=sotc>

### **LifeWay Research: Sample congregational survey**

If you prefer to produce your own survey, here is a sample produced by LifeWay Research. Even if a member would not agree with the reopening plan, they will appreciate that they were shown the respect of being asked about their concerns and preferences. This is a MSWord document that could be modified and distributed any number of ways. One option would be to turn it into a Google Form survey and e-mail it to members.

[factsandtrends.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LifeWay-Research-COVID19-Congregational-Survey.docx](https://factsand Trends.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LifeWay-Research-COVID19-Congregational-Survey.docx)

### **Smart Church Solutions: Post-Coronavirus facility reopening checklist**

Preparing your church facilities to reopen requires more than a deep cleaning. After being relatively unused for weeks, there are certain things that must be done to make sure your facility is fully operational. This three-page document from Smart Church Solutions breaks your facility up into various components: exterior, plumbing and water, electric, HVAC, interior, parking lot, etc. For each component, it has a list of tasks.

[try.espace.cool/post-coronavirus-facility-reopening-checklist/](https://try.espace.cool/post-coronavirus-facility-reopening-checklist/)

### **Ministry Grid: COVID-19 planning resources**

Ministry Grid is an online volunteer training resource used widely in Evangelical churches. They have produced free resources that help churches navigate this summer, with restrictions slowly easing, and using this time for strategic realignment. Obviously, Ministry Grid will not come at theological principles from a Confessional Lutheran perspective. However, most of their free COVID-19 resources are purely practical in nature: how to develop a financial contingency plan, how to produce a phased restart plan, etc.

[ministrygrid.com/coronavirus](https://ministrygrid.com/coronavirus)

### **Wheaton College: Faith-based planning manual for COVID-19**

This downloadable, editable PDF leads churches, step-by-step, through the process of producing a congregational COVID-19 response team. It could be used by churches to help them establish an *ad hoc* group that would think through all the various issues and produce an action plan to meet those issues.

Wheaton College is Evangelical, so read with discernment. The step-by-step approach, however, makes this document practical.

[www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/Preparing-Your-Church-for-Coronavirus.pdf](http://www.wheaton.edu/media/humanitarian-disaster-institute/Preparing-Your-Church-for-Coronavirus.pdf)

# WORSHIP

## LIVE STREAM TECH

Amazing fact: Today's iPhone has over 100,000 times the processing power of the Apollo Guidance Computer used to help land man on the moon over 50 years ago.

If you're like me, you could spend a lot of time talking about the incredible advances in technology that have taken place in the last 50 years. We'll narrow our discussion to the game-changing technology, coupled with broadband Internet, that allows average people to produce and stream live video.

At this very moment you and I can pull out our smart phones and stream to Facebook Live. We can shoot video and immediately edit it on the same tablet. Twenty years ago, when I began working in video, thousands of dollars (even tens of thousands) were required to get into the video production game. The ability to distribute your finished product to a world-wide audience was just a dream. In my humble opinion, the Internet is a game changer that can only be compared to the invention of the printing press. You and I can get our stories out to the world at the click of a mouse. We can get Jesus' story out to the world!

This article focuses on tips that may help your congregation as you share God's plan of salvation using these digital tools. To keep things simple, we will cover three topics: audio, video, and live streaming. Your church may not be live streaming right now. Maybe you're just producing the video and then sharing it on YouTube. These tips will still be helpful for you.

### Audio

Audio is probably the most important aspect of your production. Think about it. You could be watching a nature documentary with beautiful cinematography. But if the soundtrack is noisy and unintelligible, you'll eventually switch to a different channel. You could be the next Roger Deakins (a famous cinematographer), but no one will spend much time watching if listening gives them a headache.

Does your church have a good sound system with professional microphones connected to a professional soundboard? Be sure to take advantage of this. Take the audio for your video production directly from your soundboard. The soundboard will have some auxiliary output channels. You can use these to run a line out to your camera or production switcher. Avoid using the built-in mic on your camcorder. You will hear profound improvement when you change to a direct audio feed from the soundboard. It's the difference between a muddy sounding sermon and one that sounds clear and intelligible.

You may need to learn about soundboards if you're a novice. The soundboard should have pre-fader and post-fader auxiliary channels. Use the pre-fader channels so that you can adjust your sound independently of the main output. You will be able to create the optimal audio mix for your production without affecting the sound in the sanctuary. Your camera needs to have XLR audio inputs to receive the direct feed. The XLR cable has a three-pin connector and is the professional standard for audio. Most professional camcorders have XLR inputs. You can get a good pro camera for as little as \$1,500. Whether

your audio goes to the camcorder or directly to a production switcher, make sure you're getting the best sound possible.

## Video

Good video requires adequate lighting. This may seem like a no-brainer but it's worth talking about. Low light will result in a grainy and noisy image. Hopefully your church has a well-lit chancel area. If your lighting needs improvement, it may be as easy as relamping your fixtures with brighter bulbs. If the entire fixture needs changing it can be a costly proposition. You may be able to bring in temporary lights while public gathering for worship remains restricted. The lights don't have to be professional video lighting. A good solution could be the type of portable floodlights that painters use.

Another key to good video lies in how you frame the image. First, look at the background. Does one of the candles on the altar look like it's coming out of your pastor's head? Does the flower arrangement seem to be perched on his shoulder? If possible, adjust your angle to avoid these things. Videographers use the rule of thirds when framing someone. Mentally place an elongated tic-tac-toe grid over your viewfinder. Instead of placing your subject in the center of the frame, place him off to one side using your imaginary tic-tac-toe grid as a guide.

For example, if your camera angle has the preacher mostly facing towards his left (your right), keep him in the left portion of the frame with his head about where the upper horizontal tic-tac-toe line and the left vertical line intersect. This is something you can experiment with.

Now forget about everything I just said and make it easy on yourself. Or perhaps more appropriately, be willing to compromise. We're not shooting a feature film, and a live production doesn't provide any second chances. It's one thing to come up with an artful shot when a preacher remains stationary behind a pulpit. It's an entirely different proposition when a preacher moves around a lot. It will be better to frame him in a way that gives him room to move and keeps you from swinging the camera back and forth. Keeping things simple, especially when you're working with only one camera, goes a long way when your goal is to turn out the highest quality production possible. Speaking of just one camera, zooming and panning are unavoidable when you don't have a second camera to cut to. Remember to keep zooms and pans to a minimum and go slow with those camera movements.

At this point it would be good to acknowledge that you will receive constructive criticism from your viewers. Don't take it personally. Receive it graciously. Some of the comments you receive may end up being very helpful.

## Live streaming

Finally, we come to the live stream itself. I could say a lot here, but I won't. I couldn't cover all the possible platforms and gear that one can utilize to execute a live video webcast. And I don't have experience with every possible scenario. Below are some key things to remember.

Make sure you have an adequate Internet connection. Your upload speed should be 6 Mbps for 720p video and 13 Mbps for 1080p (full HD). Whenever possible connect to the Internet with a Cat 5e or Cat 6



ethernet cable. Yes, it's possible to successfully stream over Wi-Fi, but the hard-wired connection will always be more reliable.

Now you're live streaming for the first time. Your upload speed is good and you're connected with an ethernet cable. In spite of all that the stream isn't working. It could be a Firewall issue. Check on your Firewall configuration or ask your church's IT team to check for you.

Finally, whether you stream your worship services live or record them and post them to Internet after the fact is a decision you will need to make. Either way the most important thing is that your congregation is taking advantage of readily available and powerful tools to proclaim a crucified and risen Savior to the world. God's blessings as you share the Good News!

The services from Christ the Lord, Brookfield, Wis., can be seen here:

<https://livestream.com/christthelord/events/9098453>

*Mr. Tim Snyder serves as media services coordinator at Wisconsin Lutheran College and videographer at Christ the Lord Lutheran Church in Brookfield, Wis.*

## **COVID-19: LICENSING CONSIDERATIONS**

In recent weeks, congregations across the nation have been abruptly thrust into the world of online streaming. Both called workers and lay leaders alike are now investing significant time and effort in order to offer quality virtual worship opportunities for their members. For some, this effort has involved navigating a steep learning curve to create even just brief devotions or pre-recorded sermons, with minimal (or no) worship music. Yet, with the possibility of extended or recurring gathering restrictions, many congregations are now considering how to enrich and enhance their current online worship.

Pastors, worship planners, musicians, and audio-visual teams from congregations of all sizes have been charting new territory in order to conduct worship services exclusively via online platforms.

As a result, we who are responsible for planning, conducting, and streaming worship online must be mindful of the legal responsibility we bear, specifically in adherence to copyright laws. This article will offer a few, brief, yet important points for worship leaders to consider as they strive to create quality virtual worship opportunities for their members.

All copyrighted music being used in worship and shared in livestreamed or pre-recorded services in an online platform (YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo) requires a congregation to obtain permission for streaming.

Christian Copyright Licensing International ([ccli.com](http://ccli.com)) and One License ([onelicense.net](http://onelicense.net)) both offer licenses for streaming worship music, with rates based on the average attendance. Even if a congregation has purchased a standard annual Copyright License, which covers the reproduction of texts by participating member publishers (One License) or specific song titles (CCLI), it is still required to

purchase the additional streaming license in order to post live or prerecorded worship services on the church's website or other streaming platforms. *It may be worthwhile to clarify that not all music is covered by just one of these licenses; a church will want to investigate which license best meets the musical needs of the congregation or whether both are needed.*

Streaming licenses are required for displaying any copyrighted song lyrics, as well as for any live music or musical recordings used in the service. It may surprise some to learn that this includes keyboard or instrumental preludes used as preservice or postlude selections, not just vocal/choral music. Some might wonder if the simplest solution is to just remove these musical elements from the online service. For our livestream purposes at my church, we discovered early on that it was rather helpful to maintain these musical "bookends" for several reasons.

First, including a brief preservice selection allows the use of introductory slides that 1) clearly display our church name and logo for any potential visitors, 2) alert worshipers that the service is about to begin, thereby providing a brief moment to prepare one's heart amidst the potential distractions of worshipping from home, and 3) maintain the comforting "normalcy" of the corporate worship experience to which our members are accustomed. Similarly, incorporating a brief postlude at the conclusion of the service allows us to display slides listing the individual copyrights for each musical selection and our church's copyright license numbers, as well as the service participants. Including a postlude selection can also serve to minimize the feeling that the service has come to an abrupt or awkward halt, which we felt to be the case even when the pastor concluded with announcements.

But what about churches with a limited budget, limited resources, and no music coordinator? How might a church with limited funds and personnel go about streaming musical content outside of these licenses? First, some individual publishers or artists are waiving their copyrights during the COVID-19 crisis. It may require some quick research to make that determination, but this could provide additional musical content not otherwise available. (Note: the gratis licenses offered by CCLI and One License when COVID-19 began have since expired.) Or use only hymns, songs, and service music that lie within the public domain.

Of course, this option is certainly limiting and likely will require much more planning time in order to find well-coordinated material. In the end, it's likely that most churches are already using copyrighted material in the orders of service found in *Christian Worship* and *Christian Worship Supplement*. Therefore, at the very least, this would require a license from [www.onelicense.net](http://www.onelicense.net).

Despite the uncertainty and challenges facing our congregations at this time, it is encouraging to see the creative measures being taken to ensure that the Word continues to reach God's people. As the saying goes, the building is not the Church; weeks of empty sanctuaries have reiterated that truth for many of us. Therefore, until the time that we may once again gather face-to-face in joyful, corporate worship, let us make responsible use of the resources at our disposal so that God's name may continue to be praised and God's people may be uplifted and encouraged.

*Lisa Uttech is director of parish music at Christ the Lord Lutheran Church in Brookfield, Wis.*

# A GOD-PLEASING ATTITUDE: PROPER WAYS TO THINK ABOUT A RETURN TO WORSHIP

You have probably heard something along the lines of “If you ask a room of 10 pastors which donuts to buy, you’ll get 11 different opinions.” That sentiment could not be more accurate than during this COVID-19 pandemic. I was a little nervous even to write this because of the breadth of opinions on this topic. There are smart people who vehemently believe that staying shut down will ruin the economy, and there are intelligent people who are flabbergasted that we would even think about opening things back up. The same is true for returning to worship. Some WELSers will think it is too soon, and some will think we are not moving fast enough. How will we approach things like masks in worship, common cup communion, phasing in certain numbers of worshipers, and the dozens of other decisions that need to be made in pursuit of serving people with the gospel?

The one thing we cannot do is to speak in a way that says, “This is the only way to do this” or “This is the only way to think about this area of adiaphora.” The truth is that the answers to many of the questions pertaining to getting back to normal are going to be as different and varied as the congregations and cities we serve. To fail to recognize that truth could lead to divisions in our church body. David was right when he wrote, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity” (Psalm 133:1). We will want to approach this topic with humility and seek Scripture’s guiding principles as we wrestle with how best to get back to “normal.”

## In keeping with God’s other kingdom

As we make decisions, we will do so in keeping with God’s other kingdom. “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men” (1 Peter 2:13a). Notice why we will submit to the governing authorities God has placed over us. It is not because we agree with everything they say, but rather “for the Lord’s sake.” We submit because it is what the Lord wants us to do. That means if your state has mandated that you stay at home, you ought to stay at home. We do not have to agree with the government’s decision. Frankly, that is a moot point. We do so for the Lord’s sake.

This means that we will not defy a stay-at-home order and make national news. Why? First, because the Lord wants us to submit ourselves to the governing authorities. This is not a “We must obey God rather than men” scenario. The government is not asking us to sin by asking us to stay at home. What a blessing that we can still “meet together” virtually. Second, because we set a bad example for the unbelievers watching us. Peter said, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (1 Peter 2:12). We must show others how to live for Christ in a world that is dying without him. The way we do that is to submit to the authorities. Disobeying a law or even trying to stretch the spirit of a law is not God-pleasing (Romans 13:2), nor is it a good witness to outsiders.

## In keeping with Christian love

I have heard more than one person suggest that we should not care about our health and well-being because God is in control, and “if it’s my time, then it’s my time. If God is going to protect me anywhere,

it's going to be when I'm at worship." Could that ever become testing God under the guise of trusting his promises? When Satan told Jesus to throw himself down from the highest point of the temple because the Bible says God promises to send his angels, Jesus rightly retorted with Scripture, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." Colloquially, "Trust God, but don't be reckless!" When David wrote, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4), he did not "let go and let God." He did not foolishly run into harm's way. When he was in danger, he trusted the Lord, but that does not mean he refused to fight the bear and the lion! (1 Samuel 17:34-37)

In his explanation to the fifth commandment, Luther wrote, "We should fear and love God that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body but help and befriend him in every bodily need." When making decisions about getting back to worship as usual, the health and well-being of our neighbor need to be at the forefront of our minds. In his letter, *Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague*, Luther wrote: "I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance infect and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely." Note, Luther balances keeping his neighbor healthy and being willing to risk his own health if there is a genuine need. A good question in making decisions is this: How can I fulfill my neighbor's need in the safest possible way to protect my health and that of my neighbor?

### **In keeping with the Church's mission**

As the Church, we have the mission to make disciples, and if the gates of hell will not prevail against us, then the Coronavirus certainly will not either! In fact, this experience has been a special blessing for families to gather as two or three (or 8!) through a livestreamed worship service and be assured that Jesus is still with us! We can still carry out the mission Christ has given to us as his Church.

What about in the coming months when restrictions start to loosen up? We will want to keep in mind the principles and recognize that applications may vary among good Christians. We will also want to be sensitive that opinions will differ among members inside of each congregation as we "make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification" (Romans 14:19). Consider also looking at what the local restaurants and churches in your community are doing to help guide your decisions moving forward.

Here are some thoughts on a few "hot button" issues. What about common cup communion? If the government is encouraging the use of facemasks to keep our neighbors safe, it might be safe to assume that the doctors would also encourage you not to share cups at this time. Some have spoken about the antibacterial and anti-viral properties of the silver chalice, and that alcohol kills germs. However, there is much we don't know about COVID-19, and I do not know of any scientist that would say silver and alcohol will kill COVID-19. Science is human knowledge, but science is still what we "know" of how God operates. We do not put our faith in science, but we still use it to make the best decisions we can for our neighbor. The use of individual cups and wafers will still allow us to carry out our mission while at the same time limiting person-to-person contact as well as show others we care for them.

What about if the government allows groups of 50? Some have said we can have five or six groups of 50 in different rooms at one time if the church building has the space. I would ask them to consider whether that is a solution in keeping with the spirit of the law. If all but one of the groups is watching it on a screen, wouldn't it make sense for the other groups to watch from home? If you have 250 or 300 people all touching common surfaces and entry points in the facility, wouldn't there be a higher risk for infection? Perhaps a solution could be to offer multiple service times and have a Google sign up. Even if everyone can't have their ideal time, it might be a good reminder that we are there as worshipers, not consumers. It's service, not "serve us." The government may allow gatherings as long as social distancing can be practiced, meaning we can use about 25% of capacity. With each step, we get closer to "normal." What about face masks in worship? To require them might seem legalistic, and not to require them may come off as dangerous. These are going to be decisions each congregation will need to make as they consider the principles above for their setting.

How does each congregation individually make these decisions for their setting? Proverbs 11:14 says, "For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure." In other words, ask your people. Ask neighboring churches how they are handling these issues in your area. Use those surveys to communicate to your members that you want their input, that you are taking their health and safety seriously, and that you wish to continue to serve them with the Means of Grace. You can remind them that we are united even if we do not get what each of us prefers individually.

Finally, it would be good for churches to start to plan for what happens when churches are allowed to gather fully. Just because the government says it is okay does not mean that everyone will be comfortable going back to the way it was right away. That's okay. We may need to continue to serve some in the ways we have during this pandemic for a time after everything is "back to normal." Romans 15:1-2 says, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up." Would you call a three-year-old a chicken if he were afraid to jump into the pool to you? No, you would reassure the child until he is ready to jump into your arms. God isn't ashamed to stoop down and reassure us in our fears, either. He continues to come to us in his Word, in water, in bread and wine, his body and blood, to remind us, "I love you. I forgive you. I am with you." God bless you as you make decisions in the coming months to his glory and for the benefit of your neighbor.

*Professor David Scharf teaches theology at Martin Luther College and serves as the chairman of the Commission on Congregational Counseling.*

## **PRECAUTIONS FOR SAFELY REOPENING CHURCH**

We have been waiting for months to gather for normal worship at our churches, but now that stay-at-home orders are starting to be lifted, will worship return to normal? The truth is, it probably should not.

As we break out of our home quarantines, there is an increased risk that the deadly COVID-19 virus will once again spread in the community. The last thing we want to see is our church become a hot spot for the virus to spread. The virus can spread by droplets in the air or by touching contaminated surfaces. It will be important for churches to minimize the risk of transmission from member to member. What measures can be taken to prevent a breakout at church? Here are some ideas to consider.

- *Members at high risk for infection should consider continuing to worship from home.* Members who are age 65 or older, have chronic lung diseases such as COPD or asthma, serious heart conditions, diabetes, obesity, kidney disease, and/or are immune-compromised should seriously consider continuing to worship from home. Churches will want to continue to provide virtual worship to encourage these members to stay healthy and safe.
- *Have members screen for symptoms at home.* If anyone in the family unit has a temperature of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, shortness of breath, sore throat, cough, diarrhea, headache, or has lost their sense of taste or smell, the whole family unit should stay home.
- *As members enter and leave church, encourage them to use hand sanitizer.* Have hand sanitizer just inside the church doors to prevent members from bringing germs into church. Also instruct members sanitize hands prior to leaving and to wash their hands with soap and water as soon as they arrive at home.
- *Practice social distancing.* While there will be a natural urge to hug or shake hands, require members to wave and say hello rather than have physical contact. Encourage members to sit in their own pew if possible and to evenly spread out throughout the church. If space allows, have members sit in every other pew and avoid sitting directly in front of or directly behind other members.
- *Keep mouths covered and absolutely cover any coughing or sneezing.* Encourage the use of cloth or surgical masks and make sure to cover any coughing or sneezing. The mask should cover both the nose and mouth at all times.
- *Prevent members from touching and sharing objects.* Project the liturgy and hymns onto screens or print them in the bulletins to prevent the handling of hymnals. Rather than passing the offering plate, have it located in the narthex for people to leave their offering when exiting the sanctuary. Provide the option of giving online. Offer individual cups of wine for communion and refrain from using a common cup. Keep inside doors propped open to prevent excessive touching of door handles and have ushers or greeters hold outside doors open when members arrive and leave.
- *Train volunteers to clean and disinfect between services.* If your church has more than one service, wipe all commonly used surfaces with soap and water and an EPA-approved disinfectant. This includes surfaces such as pews and chairs, tables, door handles, light switches, counters, hymnals, and bathrooms. Keep in mind that more time between services may be required to properly clean and prepare for the next service.
- *Continue to practice social distancing after the service.* Members commonly enjoy fellowship after the church service resulting in a cramped narthex. If outdoor space is available, encourage members to socialize outside. Remind them that as they talk, it is very important to stay at least six feet apart and to keep their masks on with both the mouth and the nose covered. Resist the temptation to pull the mask down to speak as it negates the purpose of the mask.

How long should these practices be in place? Only time will tell. Please continue to visit the Center for Disease Control (CDC) website as they are the best source for information on the virus and have the most up-to-date information on preventing the virus from spreading.

*Allison Spaude (BSN, RN) serves as the communications coordinator for the WELS Nurses Association.*

# EVANGELISM

## CARING FOR YOUR COMMUNITY DURING A PANDEMIC

Ministry is exciting because everyone has a story, and like fingerprints, no two stories are alike. Everyone has past experiences, challenges, struggles, and blessings that shaped them into the person they are. The unknown elderly man who walks by your house at 4:00 p.m. each day never cracks a smile because his wife died of cancer a decade ago, but the pain is fresh and feels like it was yesterday. They walked together every day. Now he walks alone. The homecoming queen everyone looks up to inwardly struggles with insecurity and the pressure of never wanting to let anyone down, which inevitably means that she will. The middle-aged mom wipes tears from her eyes as she questions if she is good enough because she can't live up to the perfect families her friends portray on Facebook and Instagram. I recently met a person in my community, and when she heard I was a pastor she replied, "I've had a lot of life challenges, I've been through, and I need to talk to someone about it. I need to sit down and talk with you sometime." These people are eager to tell their story if someone is willing to take the time to listen.

There are rare moments in ministry when most people in your community are facing the same circumstances and challenges. We are currently living in such a circumstance with the COVID-19 virus and the restrictions in place because of it. My congregation's community is dealing with the effects not directly related to the sickness of the virus, but the effects of the social and economic impact. Our community has a thriving and active downtown area that is bustling with activity whether it's Friday night or Tuesday afternoon. The first day restaurants and non-essential businesses were ordered closed felt eerie as I drove through an empty downtown. There are locally owned shops and restaurants with owners and employees suddenly out of work and income. The stories of those effects grew as the restrictions turned from days to weeks and months. Nursing homes allowed no visitors and some residents couldn't leave their rooms to mitigate the spread of the virus. Residents struggled with loneliness and isolation.

It didn't take long for our church family and our outreach team to respond with, "How can we help?" both for those within our church family in need and those in the community. It is key to ask, "How can we help?" and not to have a preconceived idea of needs and decide, "This is how we are going to help." Reach out to organizations and community leaders and ask them, "What are the needs that you see and are hearing from people?" and respond accordingly. Here are some ways we identified to help our community:

- *Each one reach five*: a grassroots initiative for each of our members to reach out to five people they know (friend, neighbor, relative, co-worker, associates, etc.) and ask how they are doing and if there are any needs we can meet.
- *Food drive*: The local food pantry has seen a 50 percent increase in demand. We organized a food drive for two Saturdays and advertised in the community.



- *Monetary donations:* We collected donations for the food pantry and a local free medical and dental clinic for needs now and in the future.
- *Police department donations:* We collected donations of hand sanitizer, gloves, and masks for the local police department. (After speaking with them we learned these are all items in short supply.)
- *Artwork for local nursing home:* Students in our school, childcare, and the entire congregation were invited to participate and made artwork with Bible passages to be given to residents to hang in their rooms to let them know they are not forgotten and we are thinking of them and praying for them.

These were some of the needs in our community. Your community and its needs may be different. Take the time to get to know your community and its needs. Let those lessons apply not just now but as we move forward and transition to whatever life will look like from this point forward. Serve people with no expectation of receiving a return. Serve out of love for Christ and love for their souls.

Finally, and most importantly, why do we do this? First, because the love of Jesus compels us to no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died for us. “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-17). What opportunity do we have to do that? By loving our neighbor as Christ has loved us. Reflect the love of Christ in your community. We have a great opportunity to hear people’s stories and meet their needs with the love of Christ. Build bridges in your community to share the story of Jesus with souls.

We can use this opportunity as a springboard to continue to meet the needs of our communities and to meet their greatest need: sharing their Savior with them. Everyone has a story. Everyone has challenges and needs. Listen to your community. Be involved in your community to understand those needs and meet their ultimate need of a Savior from sin in Jesus. And may the Lord richly bless you as you do!

*Rev. Phil Bigelow serves at St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church in Oconomowoc, Wis.*

## **FOLLOWING UP ON VIRTUAL VISITORS**

It was always my favorite part of the week. As worship began, I turned to greet the people who had come together in God’s house. It was always awesome to see God’s people gathered to be fed by Word and Sacrament! I introduced the service and identified the main theme for people to focus on. At the same time, I kept an eye out for new faces—people I did not recognize who I wanted to be sure to connect with after the service.

That was before COVID-19. Now, I turn to introduce the service and there is nobody there. Empty pews are the only thing staring back at me. I still greet the people who are joining us for worship on Facebook and YouTube, but I cannot see any new faces.

That is frustrating! I know those new faces are out there, perhaps even more so now that there are so many worship opportunities online. But if we cannot see them, how do we connect with them? How do we identify prospects when our worship is 100 percent digital?

At our congregation, we decided to use online friendship registers. We borrowed a form and modified it for our purposes.

As you might expect, it was not a perfect solution. Much like physical friendship registers, not everyone filled out the digital friendship register. We had to coach, encourage, and remind people to fill it out. But here's the thing: some did! That first Sunday, as we looked at the completed forms, we discovered that three non-members had filled out our online friendship register. One even noted that he was unchurched and looking for more information!

But, now that some visitors had shared their information, what were we going to do with it? Fortunately, we had a plan in place. A member of our team went through the forms and recorded the information. That information was immediately given to the person who manages our prospect list. From there, the information was shared with our evangelism team.

The plan worked well. By that Sunday evening, I already had an e-mail detailing for me the three non-members who had filled out the register.

Monday morning, I e-mailed each of those individuals. Two responded right away, and I have had continuing communication with both. One individual has indicated a desire to take our membership class and is eager to learn more about our congregation and what we teach. God is good! I do not imagine that those three are the only unchurched people who have tuned in for portions of our online worship, but I do know we would not have connected with them without some sort of plan.

Now, perhaps more than ever, prospects may be checking out our worship services. It is important to have a plan in place to reach the unchurched individuals whom the Lord sends our way. Just like before the pandemic, follow-up is key. God bless your efforts to connect with your virtual visitors!

The link to the online register is always listed as part of the caption of the video post, along with the worship folder and copyright info. This keeps it visible and accessible to the viewers. We also share the link as a comment real-time during the offering. It's also a good idea to have pastor remind everyone to fill out the register as part of the greeting and/or closing announcements.

*Pastor Collin Vanderhoof serves at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Menomonee Falls, Wis.*

# PREACH THE WORD – BIBLE INFORMATION CLASS DURING COVID-19

“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season,” wrote St. Paul to his protégé, Timothy. He would say the same to pastors today as they find themselves decidedly “out of season” during the current crisis. Most have found ways to preach the Word when it comes to worship and even Bible class. But what about preaching the Word to the unchurched? Specifically, how can pastors continue to instruct prospects when they aren’t able to meet face to face for Bible Information Classes?

Thankfully, technology allows pastors to do so. Not only is it possible, but in some ways it may even be a better time than ever to teach BIC. Pastor Nate Scharf shares his recent experiences leading an online BIC:

It was the last night of Bible Information Class, and she had two lessons to make up. The Stay at Home Orders were going into effect, and she was in the at-risk category. I sent the two lessons home with her and said, "I hope we can get together soon." Then news came that it would be a month. It was pretty deflating. But then I remembered that she mentioned how she talked to her grandkids on Messenger on her phone. I called her and asked if she would like to meet on Messenger too. She agreed. Face to face over the internet, we met for the last two lessons (actually had to stretch it into three). I am pretty un-savvy when it comes to technology and microphones and webcams, but Messenger I could do—the click of a button. As I watched my kids go online for school and set up Google Classroom (I did not help at all), as meetings for many workers and groups went online on Google Hangout, Zoom, or Skype, I realized there were ways to take my BIC online. Plus, I figured there might be some people whose schedules had previously made attending a BIC challenging, if not impossible, but who now had time to do so. I sent a snail mail note to the prospects I had addresses for and e-mailed the ones I had e-mail addresses for, inviting them to let me know if they'd like to start class online. I set a date a couple weeks out—Monday night at 6 p.m. I had to Google how to set up a Google Hangout and watched a video on how to invite people in case anyone responded.

To my surprise, I got two responses from people who wanted to try it. One was from a couple who had visited worship and had expressed interest in BIC but had difficulty this past year committing to the same time each week (one worked from home and one was in the Reserves, and they had kids at home). This online platform worked better for them. The other response was from a person who said they'd invite their mom and aunt to join. By God's grace five people joined our class. I learned to send out an invite, and they logged on—and I did too. It worked! I e-mailed the class notes to them a couple days in advance, and we just talked face to face over the internet. We hope to have class in person in the near future. I'm thankful that the time God has given has caused people to be willing to hear the message, and I'm thankful for the technology to be able to reach them. God be praised. To him be the glory!

Like Pastor Scharf, you may have prospects for whom attending a BIC was a challenge before the COVID crisis but whose schedules would now allow them to attend an online class. Ask them! And then see how the Lord chooses to bless.

Here are some things to consider as you prepare to teach virtual BIC:

- If possible, teach the class synchronously “face to face” online. This allows you to create a relationship with those who attend. It also allows them to ask questions and get answers in real time.
- If you need help figuring out which platform to use, read [this helpful NPH article](#) by Pastor Dan Schroeder regarding online Bible classes.
- Spend some time learning how to show slides and graphics while you are presenting. Most platforms will also allow you to use a “white board” just as you would in a normal classroom setting.
- Consider video recording every lesson so that students who miss a lesson can catch up asynchronously. Video lessons can easily be uploaded to services like Vimeo or YouTube.

For some pastors, teaching BIC in this new way will be challenging and uncomfortable. But our good Lord never promised that preaching the gospel would be comfortable. No doubt, Paul and Silas would not have chosen to preach the gospel while sitting in stocks in a Philippian prison. It had to have been decidedly uncomfortable. Yet there they were. And so, there they preached. Wherever you are, brother, preach the Word! Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were souls who could one day say the COVID crisis was used to bring them to Christ!

*Pastor Eric Roecker serves as the director for the WELS Commission on Evangelism.*

# SCHOOLS

## A TIME FOR OUR SCHOOLS TO SHINE IN OUR SERVICE TO THE SAVIOR

When you add up called and hired workers and support staff in our Lutheran Schools, the number easily exceeds 5,000. Over the years those servants of God's Word have worked hard at building Christ-centered relationships with students and families. They've developed curriculums, services, and programs to provide students entrusted to their care with opportunities to grow academically, spiritually, socially, physically, and emotionally. They have introduced technology tools for use in the classroom, and many schools have been one-to-one device schools for several years. That focus on relationships, curriculum, programs, and technology have proven to be tremendous blessings for this unprecedented time for our Lutheran Schools.

We've heard of and witnessed many examples of how our schools have shined like beacons during the past two months. Though no schools planned for this ending to the school year, the reaction, the collaboration, and the delivery of instruction by our school ministry teams has been outstanding. Most importantly, our churches and schools have worked hard together to share the precious gospel message in consistent and sometimes new and innovative ways. Yes, in this time of crisis, the Lord has blessed us with servants who have continued to serve, learning and adapting on the fly. They are a marvelous blessing from our Lord.

As we come to an end of this school year and look ahead to next school year, ministry teams will reflect on what was and what was not effective this school year. They'll collaborate with their local public school districts and their area Lutheran high school federations or WELS district teammates. They'll keep their eyes and ears open for announcements and opportunities from state and federal officials. They'll work with their local boards and committees to provide plans for a potential school year of interruption again next year. And, as we're reminded in Hebrews 13, the Lord will walk with them.

I encourage you to continue to lean on those resources I've mentioned above, and the resources we'll continue to provide at [www.cls.welsrc.net](http://www.cls.welsrc.net). We're here to support our schools, so send us an e-mail at [lutheranschools@wels.net](mailto:lutheranschools@wels.net) or call us 414-256-3241.

May God continue to bless our efforts to share Jesus with the next generation.

*Mr. Jim Rademan serves as the director of the Commission on Lutheran Schools.*

# SCHOOL PROMOTION AND RECRUITMENT DURING COVID-19

In a typical year, many schools would be hosting open houses, giving tours, and enrolling prospective students right now. This is not a typical year. At the same time, however, these are opportunities for our schools to be creative in how they provide information to parents considering a Lutheran education for their children. Perhaps we cannot hold an open house the way “we’ve always done it.” Perhaps the face-to-face school tours will be less regular or non-existent this year. So, what can we do?

- Be intentional about connecting with prospects.
  - How we interact with parents over the phone and how we talk about the school is as important as it ever was.
  - The relationships schools make with parents are key.
  - Consider asking classroom teachers to do follow-up phone calls with prospects.
  - Communicate about the work your teachers are doing to meet the needs of students during the current pandemic.
  - Share how the Lord is continuing to bless the learning process.
  - Assure parents by sharing how your school is doing everything it can to clean and sanitize the school.
  - Let them know you look forward to the day when you can meet them face to face and walk through the school together.
  
- Devise a way to provide virtual tours of your campus.
  - Have a walk-through video tour prepared and narrated by the principal, director, or teacher.
  - Post the virtual tour to your website, YouTube, and Facebook.
  - You may even want to include video footage of the property with a drone flying over the campus.

The current restrictions will not last forever. However, we need to be prepared to carry out school functions a little bit differently—at least for the foreseeable future. This is also true as schools seek to retain current students and recruit new students. Remember:

- Positive communication is key.
  - Share the blessings your school provides.
  - Be open and honest about the mission of the school.
  - Be a beacon of light for our Savior and share his love for your students and families.

The Lord will bless your faithful efforts!

*Mr. Tom Plitzuweit serves as associate director for the Commission on Lutheran Schools and as executive director for WELS School Accreditation.*

# WHAT'S NEXT: PROTOCOLS AND POLICIES TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING TO RE-OPEN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD MINISTRY

“We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord” Psalm 78:4.

This is the heart and soul of our early childhood ministries throughout WELS. The mission of each early childhood ministry is to reflect and share Christ’s love for us with the children and families we serve. When it became necessary that schools and early childhood ministries close or limit their capacity due to COVID-19, we were all left wondering how we can continue to serve the children and families, especially with the gospel. It’s been amazing to see the multitude of creative ways that teachers have responded to this challenge.

Many states are developing plans for a gradual reopening of parts of their communities. As we look toward that day, early childhood ministries are considering what protocols and policies need to be in place. The goals include providing a safe and quality program for the children and families served. We’ve reached out to a number of centers for their input on suggested topics they are weighing.

As always, whether a center/preschool is required to be licensed or not, the state regulations and guidelines should be considered. The CDC guidelines are also important to take into consideration.

Every state and every early childhood ministry is different. This list is not intended to be inclusive and applicable to each setting. The items are provided for your consideration as plans are developed.

- What protocols should be in place for drop-off and pick-up?
  - Some are making arrangements for all drop-off and pick-up to take place outside the entrance door of the center, limiting parents from entering the building.
  - How will parent sign-in/out be handled?
  - Who will escort the children to and from their classroom?
- Depending on the state requirements, will the ratio for children and teachers/caregivers need to be amended?
  - Will smaller class sizes be needed in order to limit the number of individuals in a room and in the center/preschool?
- How can staffing and schedules be arranged to avoid mixing children from one classroom to another?
  - Staggered time outside or in the gym/large motor room for each class (No more than one class at a time?)
  - Can teachers be asked to stay longer so that children have consistent caregivers? Might the day need to be shortened to allow for this?
  - What is the safest way to cover staff breaks?
  - Depending on the size and make-up of your program, can classrooms be regrouped to limit exposure (Ex. Siblings are kept together rather than split.)

- How will meals and snacks be handled?
- Will adults in the building be required or encouraged to wear masks? How would this work when working with very young children?
- What cleaning procedures need to be in place over and above the current practices? In the common areas? In the classroom? In the restrooms? Door handles and high-touch surfaces?
- Will staff be required to record their temperature or complete a wellness check form when entering the building? Will children also need to have a wellness check before entering? (Refer to your state licensure organization for sample forms.)
- Do the current policies for sick children going home or staying at home still apply or will they need to be amended?
- What policies in the staff and parent handbooks may need to be amended? Who needs to approve these and how will they be communicated to the staff and families?
- How can changes be communicated to staff and families in a way that reassures them that every effort is being made to keep them safe while maintaining the quality and care that are important to all?

Out of care and concern for the children and families we serve and each other, we take every precaution to assure a safe, caring environment during this time and at all times. Even with every possible protocol in place, we cannot prevent everything. We strive to plan faithfully and responsibly. As the information about COVID-19 continues to evolve, we remain informed, flexible, and responsive. Above all, we can be confident in our ever-faithful God who, in love, promises to be with us in all things. And we continue to share that precious message of the gospel with the young children and families we serve.

May the Lord bless you as you serve him in all you do for the children and families in your care.

Additional Resources:

- Each district has a WELS Early Childhood district coordinator. They are eager to support the ministries in their districts and often have state and local resources to share. [cls.welsrc.net/download-cls/general-documents](https://cls.welsrc.net/download-cls/general-documents) (Click on District Coordinators Contact)
- WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools has been collecting and sharing a significant list of resources as this has all unfolded. These can be found at: [cls.welsrc.net](https://cls.welsrc.net).
- Website for Childhood Preparedness: [www.childhoodpreparedness.org](http://www.childhoodpreparedness.org)
- Julianna Kiecker, director of Precious Lambs Early Learning Center in Raleigh, N.C., has shared her *Childcare Handbook Pandemic Addendum*. This document is based on CDC and state guidelines from their Department of Health. This resource could be a sample to consider as childcare centers develop plans for reopening. Centers would need to refer to their own state/local guidelines. A copy can be found at: [cls.welsrc.net/download-cls/covid-19schoolresources](https://cls.welsrc.net/download-cls/covid-19schoolresources).

*Cindi Holman serves as the Coordinator of Early Childhood Ministries for the Commission on Lutheran Schools.*



# SPECIAL MINISTRIES

## UNDERSTANDING AND MINISTERING TO PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS DURING COVID-19

“I’m running away. This is not easy with a person with special needs depending on you. Their world is messed up! Plus, with no help like we used to have; it is very hard!”

Those are the exact words of a mother who has a child with special needs from one of our Jesus Cares Ministries programs.

Her son with special needs shared, “I am fed up with it all. I miss my life the way it was. I want to see my friends and hang out. This is not healthy mentally. Nothing seems exciting and fun; it is the same thing day after day. People have to realize we all have a breaking point and I’m broke.”

As hard as the last couple months have been for all of us, it is harder on individuals with special needs. Routine and familiarity are key. Not only having their routine disrupted, like the rest of us have, but also having their support system ripped away from them can be difficult and challenging for the individuals and the caregivers.

While we cannot give them back their “normal” and routine, we can continue to engage them with their spiritual programming using something they are familiar with and depend on. Jesus Cares Ministries (JCM) and many of our Jesus Cares Ministries programs are working to do just that.

A growing number of JCM programs are using Zoom to hold their Worship at the Cross services or JCM Bible Classes. This not only gives spiritual support to our friends with special needs, but also gives them social interaction with those whom they cannot physically be with right now.

Below are some resources available:

- Join a local congregation offering online services.
- Participate in a live Worship at the Cross service on the JCM Facebook — [facebook.com/jesuscaresministries](https://www.facebook.com/jesuscaresministries) — page. JCM hosts the service on the second Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m.
- Watch videos on-demand. Here you will find archived WATC services at [tlha.org/jesus-cares-ministries](https://tlha.org/jesus-cares-ministries).

Like every ministry adjusting to share Jesus in new ways, we need to adapt to help individuals with special needs and their caregivers.

*Pastor Joel Gaertner serves as vice president of ministry at The Lutheran Home Association and National Director for Jesus Cares Ministries.*

# CHANGING UP THE MINISTRY MODEL – AGAIN

Online worship and video conference Bible classes have been a great blessing. But what about the people who can't be served by computer? People with disabilities, those who struggle with depression, or live in senior care communities are extremely isolated. We need a ministry model—as radical as the online church—that can serve people with disabilities and barriers to personal contact.

A little over a decade ago, we were forced to change our ministry model. The Great Recession delivered a blow to our funding of missions. Missionaries returned to the U.S. as foreign mission teams were downsized or eliminated. It was a painful time.

Little did we appreciate that God would use that economic crisis to lead us to change our model for outreach. We no longer rely on highly trained Americans to move overseas and carry out cross cultural outreach. Today we provide training and guidance to our mission field partners so they can reach out to their neighbors. Our world mission efforts serve more people than ever!

We are in another painful time. As this is being written, beautiful Christian churches stand unoccupied. God's messengers are scrambling to share the gospel online. And we are seeing blessings again!

But the crisis is not over. For some people, it is much worse. How do we serve people with disabilities or living situations that prevent them from benefiting from online ministry?

We do not have enough pastors and teachers to specialize in access to local care communities or to provide company for the homebound and individualized solutions for every challenge. Yet, we cannot abandon the members of our families and limit our ministry in the world to those who are online.

We can no longer depend on our pastors to organize and carry out all the ministry of a congregation. God is pushing us to change our ministry model. But with this crisis the Lord is not compelling us to adopt a "new" model. God has given the members of the church different gifts for the common good. Christian love fills God's people with mercy for the neighbor for whom online spiritual resources are not enough. This is the time for members of the church to "serve one another in love" literally!

Our current model of ministry fails us when we confuse the called worker role of "equipping for service" with organizing, running, networking, and communicating. Not every pastor is good at organizing people. Few Christians in the church family have gifts for networking or recruiting. Communicating the gospel is not the same thing as gathering and disseminating information to keep the members informed. And called workers can never be specialists that meet all the needs of their people.

Where do you turn if you are a called worker who is not particularly good at one of the skills so needed in this era of obstacles and disconnectedness? General announcements are not very effective in recruiting partners for ministry. Here's a short list of suggestions for finding allies who have strengths you seek to partner with you:

- Pray for partners—and cultivate the skills of people the Lord brings to serve in the body of Christ with you! Sometimes called workers sacrifice large chunks of gospel ministry time because we would rather do a task ourselves than equip a member to assume responsibility. Equipping requires teaching, working together, providing what is needed, but it ultimately saves hours each week and involves the church family in service. Don't turn someone away who has the gifts

but doesn't meet your standard because they have not been equipped. They are an answer to prayer!

- Turn to your spouse for help. You might recruit your marriage partner for personal involvement, but you can also ask for suggestions of someone else who can help. Our marriage partners often have gifts that we need, and they understand how they can help us. These extraordinary times offer opportunities to collaborate in a new way. Your teens and other family members also can help organize or do certain tasks.
- Ask the elders of the church, leaders among the women's ministry, and youth leaders to suggest someone who has specific gifts that will help you serve right now. Sometimes it's hard to humble yourself and ask for help. Trust that the Lord has given gifts to his church—and let that conviction make you persistent in looking for them. When you ask other leaders for suggestions, even when they can't offer any, they realize that you welcome teamwork and may help in other ways.
- Ask your active members to find information for you. You know the saying, "If you want to get something done, give it to a busy person." Recruit empty nesters, singles, retirees, college students to talk to people who are not served and find out how to help them. Once they know the need, they may find solutions by contacting Special Ministries.

The members of the Commission on Special Ministries committees have experience and insight into the best practices for serving someone with a disability, a struggle, or limiting circumstances. If you don't know where to begin with someone who is deaf or depressed, isolated or incarcerated, connect with Special Ministries. See the Special Ministries booklet *Love in Action* ([wels.net/special-ministries](https://wels.net/special-ministries)) for a directory of ideas and resources. You can also e-mail specific questions to [specialministries@wels.net](mailto:specialministries@wels.net) or call our office at (414) 256-3241.

*Pastor Jim Behringer serves as the director of the WELS Commission on Special Ministries.*

## **I CAN'T HEAR YOU - SERVING THOSE WITH HEARING LOSS**

Hearing loss isolates people even more than quarantine. If your church has deaf members or members with hearing loss so severe they can't speak on the phone, here are a few tips on ministering to them in this time of social distancing.

Two WELS churches offer weekly online services in sign language. Invite your deaf members and friends in the community to view signed serves at Bloomington Living Hope Lutheran Church ([bllh.org](https://bllh.org)) or St. Paul Lutheran, Lake Mills ([stpaullakemills.org](https://stpaullakemills.org)).

Many hard of hearing members depend on reading messages. At minimum, send sermons and devotional materials to those who cannot hear well. Find out from friends and family about communication preferences and involve members in making sure they are included in church

communication. If your church offers recorded sermons, Rev.com offers quick response time to provide inexpensive captioning. YouTube has a captioning feature as well. Help members understand how to access captioning and how to enlarge it. A list of congregations with captioned services online as well as ASL can be found on the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing resources page for congregations: [csm.welsrc.net/mdhh-resources-for-congregations](http://csm.welsrc.net/mdhh-resources-for-congregations).

Hard of hearing and deaf members will welcome the wealth of devotional material available in print, e-mail, and audio at [wels.net/devotions](http://wels.net/devotions). Interesting and encouraging Christian articles and Bible studies are available from *Forward in Christ* magazine at [forwardinchrist.net](http://forwardinchrist.net) (this website also includes the articles in audio, a feature that WELS blind members are excited about).

Remember that hearing loss isolates, but Christian love includes. Find ways to connect with your members and involve them in caring for others too! Practical suggestions for ministry to the deaf and hard of hearing can also be found as a compassion ministry training module at [welscongregationalservices.net/c011](http://welscongregationalservices.net/c011). Find out more by e-mailing [mdhh@wels.net](mailto:mdhh@wels.net).

*Rev. Jim Behringer serves as director of the WELS Commission on Special Ministries.*

## **SUPPORTING THOSE STRUGGLING WITH ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION RELATED TO COVID-19**

To say that COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down and inside out isn't much of an exaggeration. It's not hard to understand why rates of stress and feeling overwhelmed have risen significantly since social distancing policies were announced. For many, there are simultaneous losses—of health, of contact with family, of time spent with friends, of gainful employment, of school activities, and perhaps of the life of a loved one—that lead to a sense of grief and sorrow. Even for people who enjoyed positive mental health prior to COVID-19, this is a very challenging time unlike any other. Many children and teens are experiencing situational anxiety and depression, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

For those with a history of an anxiety disorder, symptoms such as excessive worry, racing thoughts, nervousness, insomnia, and even panic attacks have likely increased and intensified. Very often, at the core of anxiety is a desire for control over one's environment. At this time, many believe that they have little to no control over their environment, and this breeds more anxiety and worry.

Imagine struggling with persistent sadness, hopelessness, and pessimism for weeks or months or even years. When a pre-existing depressive disorder is combined with the sorrow, losses, and grief associated with COVID-19, it is easy to appreciate how some feel overwhelmed by a sense of doom and gloom.

Coping with anxiety and depression during COVID-19 is even more challenging due to social distancing guidelines. At a time when social support is needed more than ever before, for many, it is in short

supply. Isolation and loneliness only serve to increase vulnerability to mental health and substance abuse issues. Knowing someone cares can provide an emotional buffer to those at risk.

Congregation and school leaders have a unique opportunity to provide support, encouragement, and love to those dealing with anxiety and depression during this challenging time. Reaching out to congregation members and to school students can be critically important, especially if those individuals reside in an unsafe or highly dysfunctional environment.

What a blessing to share the message of Romans 15:13, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Exactly how social support is delivered may vary from low tech to high tech. At a time like this, it’s hard to beat the benefits of a good old-fashioned phone call. A text can send the same personalized message—“I am thinking about you, and praying for you, during this challenging time.” Home visits, even if conducted with individuals standing many feet apart, or perhaps with waves and smiles through a closed window or door, let people know that they are not alone.

Positive messages about coping with anxiety and depression could be incorporated into a sermon that is live streamed, posted as a video to a congregation’s website or Facebook page, or be the topic of a podcast or blog. Perhaps a leader could create a video for YouTube. E-mailed messages with inspirational Scriptures could be sent to all church and school families. A Bible study that meets using a video conferencing service could incorporate the topic of positive self-care. Perhaps a principal or teacher could send messages of encouragement as part of a school newsletter.

When a pastor, principal, or teacher senses that a student or member might benefit from additional care, they can turn to Christian Family Solutions for professional Christian counseling services. The Member Assistance Program (MAP), Outpatient, Intensive Outpatient Programming and Day Treatment services are all available for children, adolescents, and adults struggling with mental health and/or substance abuse issues. During this COVID-19 emergency, some of our in-person programming has been paused, but all of our services are available through telehealth. For more information, visit [ChristianFamilySolutions.org](https://www.ChristianFamilySolutions.org) or call 1-800-438-1772.

*Sheryl Cowling (LCSW, BCPC, BCETS) is a counselor with Christian Family Solutions, with 25 years’ experience, specializing in children, adolescents, and trauma.*

# DISCIPLESHIP

## SO WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE YOUTH DURING A PANDEMIC?

The Coronavirus has reared its ugly head in our country and affected just about every phase of American life. Churches aren't immune to the challenges this pandemic presents, and churches have adapted ministry to keep reaching out with Christ's gospel amidst a very new reality.

How have you fared adapting to this crisis as a pastor or church leader? If you're like most, you've pushed forward with God-given strength, you've asked "Is this working?" or "How can we make it better?" over and over again, you've made phone calls, visited those in need, and gone to sleep at night wishing you could have done even more.

The title of this article is not intended to cause you additional angst as you navigate ministry at this challenging time. It is, though, an opportunity to ask yourself how to better minister to this age group which is the fastest declining demographic in WELS. Like our elderly and sick, like our leaders and children, these 14 to 25-year-olds have spent months now away from God's house and are just as vulnerable as others to the temptations of struggling with their faith or falling away all together.

Ministering to the youth of our churches is a challenge in the best of times. How easy it could be, then, to leave our young people to spiritually fend for themselves during this crisis. If your answer to the question, "So what do we do with the youth during a pandemic?" is "not enough" or "almost nothing at all," the following is an encouragement to help get started, remembering that our youth are not merely the future of our churches, but rather the very real here and now in WELS.

So how do we reach them? How do we partner with families to assure our youth that Jesus loves them, that he has plans for them, that he will be with them through this ordeal and beyond?

### Locally

- Call the youth of your congregation. If you haven't already, now is a great time to get their cell phone numbers and start a text thread. Check in. Find out how they are weathering this time of isolation (emotionally, physically, spiritually). Hearing the loving voice of their pastor or church leader asking, "How are you holding up?" is something they will cherish and remember.
- Share a weekly encouragement from Scripture. Help them see they are an important part of God's family and the church that they hopefully see as "home."
- Meet virtually to include them in planning for upcoming ministry opportunities—not just to gather for fun, but for opportunities to worship, to connect with one another, to serve their God, and to find ways to serve others around them.

## Planning for this summer and fall

- When the WELS International Youth Rally (scheduled for June 23-26 at the University of Tennessee) had to be cancelled in March, WELS Discipleship pivoted from planning a massive youth event into a plan to provide “plug and provide” youth ministry resources at the congregational level.
- Resources to be shared with congregations this summer and fall will include Bible studies, group discussion topics, and training for youth leaders to both plan and implement youth ministry in their local congregations.
- These resources intended for teens, youth groups, families, and youth leaders will help as congregations adapt their ministry plans in order to move forward together with our young people at this critical time in their lives and in your congregation’s ministry.
- Inform your families (with youth both young and older) about the WELS Family Devotions currently being made available three times each week through WELS Discipleship. These easy-to-follow devotions can be adapted in a myriad of ways for use in any family dynamic.

Every church in our synod is unique. There are churches with large groups of youth, those with only a handful, and many somewhere in between. It’s important, then, to remember that it’s not how many youth you have in your church that determines the value or the healthiness of your youth ministry. Rather, if you have young people, you have the desperate need for youth ministry and the wonderful opportunities it presents. That truth allows us to not only ask the question “So what do we do with the youth during a pandemic?” but to seriously look for answers.

It is our gracious God alone who assures us here, now and always, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isaiah 43:1-3). That’s a promise for adults. It’s a promise for our young people. It’s a promise kept always by a God who will indeed lead us forward in his most holy name.

*Pastor John Boggs serves at Divine Savior Lutheran Church in West Palm Beach, FL and as the chairman of the WELS Commission on Discipleship.*

## HOW COVID-19 CAN BE A BLESSING FOR CONGREGATIONAL GIVING

In a recent podcast, Patrick Lencioni, founder and president of The Table Group, discussed how COVID-19 has helped drive change in his own consulting organization (The Table Group, 2020). Difficult situations, like COVID-19, can eliminate barriers and speed up the change process where before those barriers seemed insurmountable.

Online giving has been an option for churches for a long time but circumstances enabled most church members to get by without considering the option. However, COVID-19 has kept members from gathering for worship and the weekly opportunity to respond to God's love in Christ Jesus by giving their offerings in the plate. Online giving allows congregations to offer an opportunity for God's people to give to their ministries in a way that provides regular support, and it has become increasingly normal to a greater number of people. Online giving also allows God's people to give directly in response to a plea for specific ministries.

Faithlife, the developer of Logos Bible Software and other digital ministry tools, released their State of the Church COVID-19 Report in April 2020. Their sampling of churches aligns fairly well with WELS congregations. Of the approximately 300 churches they sampled, only 12 percent were larger than 350 members (less than 19 percent of WELS congregations are larger than 350 members).

Faithlife's report outlines the shift to online giving that has been accelerating with the outbreak of COVID-19. Before March 8 most congregations received most of their offerings from offline sources, but by Easter (April 12) that ratio had flipped with the majority of congregations now receiving their weekly offering from online sources. This sudden and pronounced change has pushed many congregations to rely on their existing online giving opportunities while others investigate offering online giving for the first time.

If you haven't done so before, you may want to start offering online giving as an option. It does not need to replace your existing programs (e.g., weekly envelopes), but it can allow members to give in a way that is easy and secure. This is a trend not just with the younger generations but some older members have become more comfortable with electronic transactions as well. This trend is only going to accelerate in the face of COVID-19 and continue going forward. Thus, churches need to prayerfully consider how best to offer members the opportunity to support ministries even during times of limited physical contact.

There are any number of different sites and ministry platforms that allow you to gather online donations. These options range from simple to complex:

- PayPal offers a giving platform that allows for one time or monthly donations along with a bunch of other tools. You can find out more at [paypal.com/us/non-profit/fundraising/fundraising-online](https://www.paypal.com/us/non-profit/fundraising/fundraising-online).
- Vanco has been helping schools, churches, and nonprofits for 30 years and has their own tools for online giving as well. You can visit [vancopayments.com](https://www.vancopayments.com) for more information.
- Tithe.ly offers more than just online giving, but their giving platform can help to get you started. They offer mobile giving kiosks if you want to encourage online giving within your building along with much more. They have seen massive growth in the past months in response to COVID-19. Visit <https://tithe.ly> for more information.
- If you are a developer and want to build a custom giving option, options like Stripe offer the processing backend so that you can integrate giving options into your website without the help of a developer. If so inclined, visit [stripe.com](https://stripe.com) for more information.

There are many [more partners](#) out there to look at, including some that may integrate better with your current ministry. Collaborate with your congregation, circuit, district, and the synod in order to navigate all of the choices. In all cases you need to consider the fees assessed in order to handle the transfer of



money, how the money will be tracked and deposited, and the ease of use, but the prayer is that the ease and comfort afforded to members will more than make up for the transaction fees.

The most important part is to teach your members about why they give—as a thanks to what our Savior God has done for us—and to focus on that reason when rolling out any online option. Put together a page on your website outlining all the giving options and let the good news of Jesus predominate. Record a short video showing members how easy it is to give online and share it on your giving page and other digital channels. It may even be worthwhile to send a postcard about the new offering containing a [QR code](#) and link directly to your giving page. This combination of physical and digital communication can be very powerful.

This transition will not happen overnight. My own congregation, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in New Ulm, Minn., rolled out online giving as an option years ago and its usage was relatively low until recently. With COVID-19 closing down our normal worship routines, the option to be able to point people to our online giving page during our live streaming services has allowed us to weather the changes better than we would have otherwise. I would expect to see the trend toward increasing use of online giving to continue even as we start gathering together again.

Paul writes in Philippians 4:19, “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.” This is not something that is true only in good times but even post-COVID. Online giving does not change this message, so be bold. Preach the risen Christ. Take on what comes with confidence and work with joy.

*Robert Martens serves as webmaster/technician at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn.*

## **MINISTERING TO THE STRAYING DURING AND AFTER COVID-19**

“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’” Psalm 122:1

They may have attended worship on Easter Sunday once again, but this time you did not know it. They are out there . . . members who struggle with worship attendance. Some have labeled them “C&E Christians” (Christmas and Easter worshipers). Because of “safer-at-home,” you did not get to see the faces of those members you have been encouraging to come back to church. Because of this isolation, connecting with straying members has become more difficult— or has it? Before predominantly online worship begins to return to onsite, in-person worship, consider some practical ideas in your continuing efforts to bring missing members home. How can your congregation grow the connection with straying members beyond the virtual?

## Opportunities right now

Use this “safer-at-home” time to connect with your church family in a personal way, especially your straying members.

- *Personal contacts.* Utilize faithful, outgoing members to make phone calls to your entire church family, letting them know you care about them and miss worshiping with them.
- *Stay connected to the vine.* Use this time to encourage your flock to remain in the Word through online media. Do not assume everyone knows where to find your online presence or that they are making use of available resources. Highlight your online opportunities for worship, devotion, Sunday School, and Bible study. At the same time, build anticipation for that family reunion back in God’s house (perhaps a “Welcome Back” Sunday) when onsite, in-person worship returns.
- *Physical needs.* The people of your congregation may be experiencing a variety of responses to the prolonged quarantine: fear, anxiety, financial challenges, health concerns, etc. As you reach out to your flock, lend a listening ear and direct them to help as needed.
- *Prayer requests.* Offering to pray for someone, whether a missing member or a regular attendee, connects us back to Jesus in a heartbeat. Do not just ask; follow through on the prayer.
- *Update records.* Use this time to have your members confirm their contact information. Up-to-date church membership records are important, because they are used to serve and care for God’s flock.
- *Ask for ideas.* Ask congregation members to think of ways to make personal connections, especially with missing members. Any method of reaching out, even though it may seem small, can make a big difference.

## Opportunities in the future

Along with keeping the flock connected to the vine, leaders will also want to give members something to look forward to. In October 2019, our synod encouraged each congregation to host a “Welcome Home” celebration ([welscongregationservices.net/welcome-home](https://welscongregationservices.net/welcome-home)). For many congregations, legal restrictions have forced nearly all members to be absent from their church home. What an opportunity, after restrictions are eased in full, to plan a “Welcome Back” celebration for the entire congregation! Your local circumstances will dictate the progression toward onsite and in-person worship. The date for full participation may be weeks, even months in the future, nonetheless, begin your plans now to keep your members focused on coming back together.

When planning a “Welcome Back” Sunday, keep in mind that some members will not feel comfortable returning to onsite and in-person worship right away. They may struggle with anxiety over returning to a public gathering. Underlying conditions or age factors may keep them away. Others may use the current “recess” from onsite worship as an excuse to become or remain a missing member. Elders and church leaders would do well to maintain personal connections that speak frankly about staying connected to the vine. The goals behind this type of planning are twofold. First, congregations hope to prevent a new wave of missing members. Second, congregations want to faithfully care for the entire flock. That means knowing what is going on in their spiritual lives in order to serve them with the Word.

One more thing to consider as you plan. A missing brother or sister might be anxious that coming back will be awkward. Since the missing member has not been at worship for a while, they fear being judged. However, the “safer-at-home” restrictions have led everyone to be absent from God’s house these past weeks, including regular worshipers. We are all starting at square one.

The time is coming when we will be able to worship together again as fears ease over the Coronavirus. Until then, make use of the time of grace that God has given us by faithfully caring for his flock. Our goal is more than returning to onsite and in-person worship in our buildings with our church family; our ultimate goal is to worship in heaven with Jesus and all believers. Blessings as you faithfully keep your flock connected to our Good Shepherd.

*Pastor Paul Schupmann from St. John, Juneau/Lowell/Horicon, Wis., and Pastor John Koelpin from Calvary, Dallas, Tex., co-authored “Welcome Home: Elder Training.”*

# RESOURCES FROM YOUR PUBLISHING HOUSE

## Faith Care Packages: For churches

During this extended period of mandated isolation, congregations are finding creative ways to stay connected to the souls under their care. Northwestern Publishing House has developed Faith Care Packages to help congregations strengthen their connection to some specific groups—groups whose spiritual welfare is particularly vulnerable while sheltering in place. Use these thoughtfully assembled and specially priced bundles to express care and concern coupled with spiritual support and encouragement. A complimentary personalized message is available to accompany your care package.

**Aging Christian Support Package:** perfect for senior members and shut-ins! Includes a large-print devotion book, a book featuring prayers for an entire year, and a pocket-sized spiritual resource booklet.

**Prospect Connection Package:** let your congregation's prospects and neighbors know you're thinking about them and invite them to learn more about Jesus! Includes a book on Bible basics, the powerful *Road to Emmaus* (DVD), a booklet about Lutheranism, and a pocket-sized devotion booklet.

**New Christian Support Package:** what ground the Holy Spirit has gained in the lives of new Christians! And then a pandemic keeps them from interacting and growing with other Christians face-to-face at church for an extended period of time. Show your commitment to the spiritual growth of your new members with this package that includes the EHV synoptic gospel "The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ," the faith-building movie *Come, Follow Me* (DVD), a booklet prayer guide that includes *Luther's Small Catechism*, and a booklet explaining Lutheran worship practices.

## Faith Care Packages: For members to use or give

*Please share this opportunity with your members—they can gift them to others or purchase for their own family.*

Strengthen the faith of children, teens, families, and shut-ins with a Faith Care Packages from Northwestern Publishing House. These packages have been carefully assembled and specially priced so that gestures of care and concern come coupled with spiritual support and encouragement. A complimentary personalized message is available to accompany your care package.

**Family Devotion Starter Kit:** includes devotion book, prayer book, and prayer guide with *Luther's Small Catechism*.

**Train Up a Child (Under 10):** includes an age-appropriate Bible story book and a music CD of Bible songs.

**Faith Strengthening for Teens:** includes a five-minute devotion book for teens, a book about living with purpose, and a pocket-sized on-the-go spiritual resource booklet.

**Family Faith Formation Package:** includes three core volumes every home should have—a Bible, *Luther's Catechism*, and a hymnal.

**Family Spiritual Development Kit:** includes a Bible story book for kids, a family devotion book, a prayer book, and a book to strengthen parenting.

**Aging Christian Support Package:** perfect for senior members and shut-ins! Includes a large-print devotion book, a book featuring prayers for an entire year, and a pocket-sized spiritual resource booklet.

### **Worshiping while at home**

Many churches are unable to meet for public worship as a result of shelter-in-place mandates. But families are encouraged to keep worshiping at home! Not only can they take advantage of streamed service viewing opportunities, they can also enjoy enriching and interactive worship experiences using the same tools that you and your worship team use for corporate worship. Point your members to “Worship while Isolated” by Northwestern Publishing House for suggestions and resources to conduct in-home family worship.

**Find all these packages and more at [nph.net](http://nph.net).**

## NPH is your source for church well-being supplies!

### HAND SANITIZER

While serving the Lord's Supper in our new environment, many churches are utilizing hand sanitizer. NPH is making available to our churches an 80% alcohol antiseptic hand sanitizer. Options include a convenient and discreet 2-ounce spray bottle, a 25-ounce refill bottle, and a discounted combination bundle. Supplies are limited.

**Available for order today!**



**2 oz. Spray Bottle \$2.99**  
Item #2901090

**25 oz. Refill Bottle \$10.99**  
Item #2901089

**Bundle (1 of each of the above) \$12.99**  
Item #2901091

<b>Just</b>	<b>Just</b>
Alcohol 80% v/v	Antiseptic
<b>Use</b> Hand Sanitizer to help reduce bacteria that potentially can cause disease. For use when soap and water are not available.	
<b>Warnings</b> For external use only. Flammable. Keep away from heat or flame. <b>Do not use</b> • in children less than 2 months of age • on open skin wounds When using this product keep out of eyes, ears, and mouth. In case of contact with eyes, rinse eyes thoroughly with water. Keep out of reach of children. If swallowed, get medical help or contact a Poison Control Center right away.	
<b>Directions</b> - Place enough product on hands to cover all surfaces. Rub hands together until dry. - Supervise children under 6 years of age when using the product to avoid swallowing.	
<b>Storage</b> - Store between 15-30C (59-86F) - Avoid freezing and excessive heat above 40C (104F)	
<b>Ingredients</b> glycerin, hydrogen peroxide, purified water USP	

DSP W- 15006

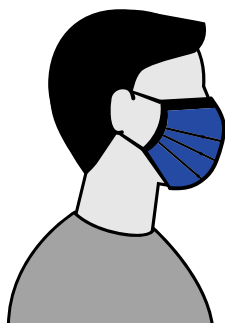
Distributed by: Yahara Bay Distributors, Inc.

Order at [nph.net](http://nph.net) or call 800-662-6022

## COTTON CLOTH MASKS

With changes in hospital and nursing home rules and sensitivities around close contact within church, NPH is making available cotton cloth masks for use by pastors. Designed to CDC specifications, masks include two cotton fabric layers sewn together with elastic bands to ensure a snug but comfortable fit. Machine washable and dryer safe. Supplies are limited. Additional liturgical color options will be available in the future.

**Available for pre-order today!**



**Royal Blue Cloth Mask \$6.99**  
Item #2901092 Ships May 18

**White Cloth Mask \$8.99**  
Item #2901093 Ships June 8

## COMMUNION CUPS AND WAFERS AUTO-SHIP

With the anticipated return to corporate celebration of communion, NPH offers a convenient communion cups and wafers auto-ship program. This program provides a 10% discount and ensures churches have the communion supplies they need when they need them. For more information on this popular program, visit [nph.net/communionsubs](http://nph.net/communionsubs) or call 800-662-6022.



NPH is also researching the availability of disposable gloves and disposable masks to support you in your ministry. Be sure to watch for news in the future!

Order at [nph.net](http://nph.net) or call 800-662-6022