



LOWER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD

WHERE THE HUNGRY ARE FED AS WE HAVE BEEN FED BY CHRIST.

The Rev. James S. Dunlop
Bishop

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I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. – John 13:35 NRSV

Dear co-laborers in the Gospel,

We are writing because we care deeply for the wellbeing of our leaders and congregations; we also want to make it possible for all of us to gather safely and faithfully in this season. As we continue to monitor COVID-19 trends, there are some important updates to share.

As of September 23, every county in our synod has an infection rate higher than 1, which means that COVID-19 continues to spread at a constant rate. Positive test rates across our synod exceed ten (10%) percent, in some cases, as high as nineteen (19%) percent. In general, our counties average between 40 and 50+ new cases daily per 100,000 people. Every county in our synod is considered very high risk. While the national trends look hopeful, Pennsylvania trajectory continues in the wrong direction. Pennsylvania remains a high-risk state. We have not seen these numbers since we recommended moving to online worship last fall. Even though many of us have been vaccinated, we still have high rates of community spread. The vaccine is not yet available for children under the age of twelve. We recognize our responsibility to protect the most vulnerable among us. We offer these recommendations (not mandates), as we have in the past, to encourage loving care for our neighbors.

- Continue to utilize a COVID-19 task force, regularly reviewing your practices.
- Everyone, regardless of vaccination status, mask while indoors.
- Indoor congregation singing should be minimized, if not eliminated. Under no circumstance should there be singing with people who are not masked indoors. A small choir or worship team may sing safely if they are properly distanced from the congregation and one another.
- While the weather continues to stay warm, outdoor worship is always safest.
- This COVID-19 Indoor Safety Guideline assesses your congregation's safety and mitigation risk of spread: <https://indoor-covid-safety.herokuapp.com/>.

We recognize there is no one-size-fits-all response, and offer some additional best practices to consider as we move into the fall and winter months:

- When possible, offer multiple worship opportunities. If indoor worship services regularly include people who are unmasked and/or congregation singing, you may consider offering an alternative worship service, perhaps once a month, fully masked with spoken liturgy.

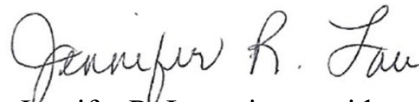
- If your congregation holds multiple worship services indoors on the same day, consider using alternating sides of the sanctuary/worship space for the different services.
- As feasible, offer hybrid meetings, worship, or faith formation opportunities which include options for joining in-person or online. Consider the possibility of partnering with others if this makes online worship more sustainable.
- Offer special prayers or healing services for the sick alongside messages of hope and comfort.
- Looking ahead to Christmas Eve, depending on the size of the congregation, you may want to offer multiple worship opportunities over multiple days (i.e., December 22, 23, 24), to limit the size of the gathered community. If your Christmas Eve services include congregation singing and unmasked worship participants, consider offering and advertising a fully masked and spoken liturgy at a different time.
- Whenever possible, clearly communicate your congregation's expectations and safety protocols for worship and other gatherings.
- Continue to develop multiple online giving options (Vanco, Tithly, PayPal, Text to give, QR Codes, etc.). Different generations hold varying giving preferences.
- Be open to learning from one another and from other congregations.

Finally, we want to remind you that we care deeply about you and your congregation. Be gentle and gracious with one another. None of us can do all things well. Paying attention to your own wellbeing, allow yourself time to rest as you care for your body and soul. We continue to hold you in prayer; we are here to support you always. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us as needed. Together, we are partners in the Gospel, and siblings in Christ.

Yours in Christ,



† James S. Dunlop, bishop
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Jennifer R. Lau, vice president