



Returning to Worship

ELCA Recommendations & Bishops' Responses

Dear Pastors, Deacons, and SAMS,

The Milwaukee Brewers, the Green Bay Packers, and your churches are all struggling with similar questions! When can we go to the stadium to see a game again? When can we go to our church buildings to worship again? When can we return to worship?

Professional sports teams can't fill their stadiums and we can't fill the pews. It isn't safe. I wish I could see into the future and tell you exactly when we can safely gather in groups of more than 10, but I can't.

I am grateful that well over 100 of you were a part of the ZOOM conversation about Returning to Church with me and the Executive Director of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, Rev. Kerri Parker Tuesday, May 5. What we learned was this: *It's going to take a long time. We aren't going to rush back into our sanctuaries in June.*

To protect the most vulnerable members in our congregations, the elderly and those with underlying health conditions we will not be having normal in person face-to-face worship for a long while. Singing, Holy Communion, Sharing the Peace, offering plates, coffee fellowship, hymnals, bulletins, your friends that show no symptoms, bathroom door handles, can all pass on the coronavirus!

Church is a dangerous place. Whatever you can do to help your members accept this longer timeline to return worship will lower the anxiety. **Fulfilling the greatest commandment, Loving God and Loving our neighbor will be best done by staying home for some time.**

I encourage you to share as much information with your congregation as you can. This will help them have more realistic expectations about when they will be able to gather together again in worship. Below are the links I believe are most helpful. I am hopeful that sometime in 2021, this will all be in the rearview mirror. As you know, it all depends on development and mass production of a vaccine and/or herd immunity; 60% of the population being infected.

Attached here is the link to the official [ELCA Recommendations on Returning to Worship](#). Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and the Churchwide staff has prepared a comprehensive resource that will help you make decisions as you consider when and how you will return to worship.

Share this letter, ELCA Recommendations and these links with your church council, worship committee, and entire membership if you like.

[Badger Bounce Back Plan](#)

[Video recording - Conversation with Rev. Kerri Parker \(WCC\)](#)

[Printed summary of conversation with Rev. Kerri Parker \(WCC\)](#)

[Returning to Worship Recommendations from the WCC](#)

[Minneapolis Area Synod Zoom conversation with Dr. Mike Osterholm](#)

There is a great deal of confusion about when we can return to church and what the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision on May 13 means for the church. Please see the attached [Pastoral Message](#) from the Six ELCA Bishops of Wisconsin and the other resources attached.

Dear friends, this is an opportunity to reflect on God's Word, the purpose of worship and connect in new ways. Dear friends, this is also a stressful time. Take care of yourselves; take care of your neighbor, lean on your family and friends, we are in this together. Don't hesitate to reach out to the synod ministers. We are here to help.

Bishop Laurie Skow-Anderson

Psalm 100: 1-2 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing.