



LCMS KANSAS DISTRICT

# Moving Forward After COVID

What's Next for Your Ministry?

Life in our churches, schools, and other organizations has been chaotic since the pandemic was declared in March 2020, with familiar routines disrupted by the spread of the virus, changing restrictions, and near constant uncertainty.

Last spring, we shared a few “Coming Out of COVID” ideas, when the first optimistic reopening plans were unveiled. One year later, as we are approaching herd immunity, the vaccinated population grows, transmission slows, and restrictions relax, **our congregations have another opportunity to think about how best to move forward and to reevaluate action plans that serve the congregation and community.**

As you make plans with your ministry leaders, we encourage you to keep in mind two key words: **GRACE** and **FLEXIBILITY**.

- On “grace”: We live in grace, we receive grace, and we give grace to others. Reasonable people have differing opinions about the “best” course of action. This is a time to be especially mindful of giving others—and yourself—grace.
- On “flexibility”: Over the past year, we’ve seen transmission trends and case counts change. The science has changed. Recommendations have changed. The virus itself has changed. While it would be nice to flip a switch and resume “business as usual,” be prepared for COVID-related concerns to persist. Plan accordingly for your context and community and be ready to adjust.

We realize that our congregations and schools are in different places with respect to operations. Some of you may already be functioning much like you did before the pandemic, while others are still working on transition plans. **Take the following suggestions for what they’re worth in your context.**

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

ROMANS 6:4

## Big picture questions

*For you, your ministry leaders, and other planning groups in your congregation/school.*

- What has the past year taught you about your mission, ministry, vision, and purpose as a congregation/school or even part of the church-at-large? Why is “XYZ Lutheran Church/School” here?
  - What is your purpose?
  - Who is your mission field?
  - What talents, abilities, and gifts has God already blessed you to use for this purpose?
  - What are you lacking to accomplish the work He has given you to complete?
- What have you missed the most?
- What did you not miss so much?
- What surprised you about the last year plus?
- What were you least prepared for?
- What was lost/gained in this experience?
- What’s been most draining? What can be done to offset that?
- What blessings have come from this pandemic?
- What are your biggest challenges now? What resources are available to help you meet those challenges?
- What new things will you begin?
- What systems, programs and ministries need to be reorganized, reworked, or ended?

## Gathering for worship and other activities

- How will you adjust worship services as conditions improve?
  - The 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> commandments continue to be useful criteria for decision-making.
  - What local county health orders and health department recommendations need to be taken into account?
    - Know the ramifications of [Senate Bill 40](#), which was passed by the Kansas Legislature in March 2021. The bill allows for any aggrieved party to [challenge an order](#) within 72 hours.
  - Be aware of your context and community of people; what are they comfortable with?
  - How are other LCMS congregations in your circuit handling adjustments? Having a “circuit protocol” might prove useful.
  - How will you communicate changes to your members and the public?
  - How long will your congregation continue to offer extra smaller worship services?
  - Are there any adjustments you made during the pandemic that you’ll retain going forward?
- How will Holy Communion be celebrated for the sake of the conscience?
  - Many congregations offered Holy Communion more frequently during the pandemic due to the sporadic attendance of members. Times of testing cause us to “seek the Lord where He may be found.” Consider the blessings of continuing to offer more frequent communion or even weekly communion services (if you’re not already doing so).

- What markers will you look for in deciding when to resume more standard communion procedures (e.g., use of the common cup; increasing the number of individual cups in a tray)? What sanitary procedures will need to be in place?
- What safety protocols will you continue?
- How soon will fellowship time be reestablished following or between services? If you've already resumed this practice, how is it going? Are any adjustments needed?
- How will offerings be received? Do you continue to forego passing the offering plate?
  - Don't forget to mention the offering in the worship service. Announce where the congregation and online viewers can give. Have an usher bring one of the offering plates forward to the pastor as the offertory is sung.
- Many congregations have offered streamed or recorded services over the past year, as well as online catechesis and Bible study. What will this look like as in-person activity increases?
- What will your Midweek program look like? Confirmation instruction? How soon do you resume Midweek or potluck-style meals?

### **How will you celebrate the Lord's grace and provision over the last year?**

- Special service? Thanksgiving? Recommitment? Training?
  - How will you get the word out?
  - What sort of preparation/planning is necessary?
- The LCMS just observed the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Luther's bold "Here I Stand" moment. If you didn't celebrate "Here I Stand" Sunday on April 18, consider celebrating it in some way later this year.
  - A thought worth noting from the "Here I Stand" Sunday bulletin: "We do not stand on Luther, but we will gladly stand with him, firm on the testimony of the Holy Scriptures to confess the saving Gospel of Christ, our Good Shepherd."
- Consider planning for a fall "Recommitment Sunday" that coincides with Sunday School Rally Day. Consider an all-congregational renewal of confirmation vows.
- What about calling your congregation to something new (e.g., training with an emphasis on discipleship)?

### **Are there divisions that need to be repaired?**

- Have divisions emerged in your location, either generally or within specific ministries? Have any relationships been strained over decisions that have been made?
  - In the words of St. Paul: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3).
- How might you make use of Confession and Absolution?
  - See pages 290-293 in the *Lutheran Service Book* for the rites of Corporate and Individual Confession and Absolution as well as the confession in the Compline service (p. 254). We also have a Litany of Reconciliation (created for intentional interim ministry situations) that could easily be adapted for the pandemic context; contact President Panzer if you'd like a copy.

- Would a Bible study and/or group discussion be useful in addressing divisions and building up the body of Christ? If so, consider the following:
  - Ambassadors of Reconciliation (AoR) resources
    - Consider pairing one of AoR's foundational studies with a companion piece, [Application Study Guide COVID-19 Pandemic Edition](#). As groups work through either [Go and Be Reconciled: What Does this Mean?](#) or [Conflict Resolution vs Reconciliation](#), they can use the COVID-related case studies for the application questions, which guide them to apply God's Word directly to COVID struggles.
    - [Mask\(ed\) Idolatry - COVID and God's Word](#). You can find this free webinar on the AoR website.
    - Additional free digital options: [Conflict Resolution vs Reconciliation Online Self-paced Study](#) and [Conflict Resolution vs Reconciliation Seminar](#).
  - [Built on the Rock: The Healthy Congregation](#) (Concordia Publishing House)
- How about a newsletter piece? Or a special sermon emphasis?

### **What about those members you haven't seen in church and/or with whom you've lost contact?**

- Do you have a system in place for reaching out to members?
  - Some will appreciate a phone call or a letter in the mail, while others (e.g., those who are working) might be easier to reach via text message, Facebook messaging, etc.
- High-risk populations may still be uneasy about leaving their homes. How will they continue to be served? (E.g., Midweek service option)
- If you're dealing with members who have drifted away, consider looking into LCMS Church Revitalization: <https://www.lcms.org/church-revitalization>
  - Pr. Mark Wood of the LCMS Office of National Mission offers several steps you can take with disengaged members, including the free "Shepherding the Strays" workshop, in a [10-minute video](#).

### **How can you use technology to strengthen the Body of Christ in God's Word?**

- What are your goals and plans going forward with respect to technology and ministry?
- Consider the following observation: "The collective faith of church members is nourished as individuals become more connected with God's Word, equipping them for spiritual battle" (*Built on the Rock*, Ted Kober, p. 93). How might technology help strengthen the connection to God's Word in your context?
- The pandemic expanded the online presence of congregations. God's Word has gone into homes like never before (worship; family/home devotion materials).
  - How will you effectively reach out to your online community?
  - What will you drive them to?
  - What will your online ministry offerings look like moving forward?
  - What kind of budget and tech support will this require?

### School-specific considerations

- What was learned during the past year that can be continued? What didn't work?
- What changes are you making for the upcoming school year?
- Are there any local or other orders that impact your plans?
- Be ready and vigilant—have a “Plan B” in place.
- Are there rifts or divisions that need to be addressed with staff, the congregation, parents, or the community? (See the earlier section on reconciliation.)

### Worker wellness

- How are you and your fellow workers (called and non-rostered) doing?
- How might you carve out time (and *take* time) to rest and recharge?
- Would it be worth checking out available resources?
  - May is Mental Health Awareness Month—a perfect time to review the resources that Concordia Plan Services (CPS) has available on their [Mental Health page](#). You can access links to other wellness benefits from that page, too.
  - The [Church Worker Wellness page](#) at [kslcms.org](#) includes links to devotions for church workers and other support resources, including Doxology, Grace Place Wellness, and the Kansas Christian Counselors list.

### What can make your congregation, school, or organization “better” and “stronger” than it was before the pandemic?

- Theologically (what we believe, teach and confess)?
- Organizationally (from your leadership teams, to staff, to volunteers)?
- In stewardship (using all of God's gifts as resources for mission, ministry, aid and comfort)?
- Practically (procedures, policies, practices, lessons learned)?

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Please don't hesitate to contact our staff in the Kansas District Office with questions. **We're here to help.** We also invite you to share ideas that have worked well in your congregation or school as you've resumed more standard operations.

“But seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things  
will be added to you.”

MATTHEW 6:33

