

## Philadelphia Lutheran Church—Process for developing their in-person worship plan

The blessing of the whole process has been everyone's willingness to comply with everything I have insisted upon. Those who have been at Philadelphia for one thing or another will understand some of my references to our physical building. I have been sending complete worship services to everyone through email attachments and snail mail, plus I put a video of the day's sermon on our Facebook page created just for that purpose. I also include the Worshiping Safely flyer every week, so no one is surprised when and if they decide to attend. Prior to gathering the first time, I called every single person in the most vulnerable groups (age, diabetes, asthma, heart disease, obesity, and recent serious illnesses) to explain what the plan was, what risks remain and will always remain, and blessings for whatever decision each one made. It was a fine line to walk—making sure they felt welcome and safe as I could make it and pastorally convincing them they really ought to stay home. That step decreased our weekly attendance to 12. We have a family with children, and they sit in the back. It is easy to alternate pews. We place bulletins where everyone is to sit (eliminating greeters) and have prepared them as hygienically safe as we can. We have cancelled Sunday school and Ladies' Aid meetings. We are a country church and hold no meetings or host no organizations nor do we have a staff with office hours. It is simply Sunday morning only.

We removed all the hymnals and print up bulletins which everyone takes home following worship. The flyer goes in the bulletin every week as a reminder, and I change up the graphics to keep it fresh. The treasurer is the only one who handles the offering which she picks up following worship from a wire basket (easily disinfected) for offerings and a box with bagged extra masks we have made which sit on a table in the narthex. There are also small bottles of hand sanitizer available on that table. My husband and I arrive early each Sunday to disinfect everything (the cleaning lady comes during the week but I personally need to do a second run through, so I know it's been disinfected). We open the doors at our only entrance (and do not run the AC) and leave them open throughout the service. My son-in-law is a culinary school graduate and former chef, who taught me Serve-Safe methods required in restaurants. So now I bake the bread we use and we then personally prepare the communion elements as explained in the flyer and place them, covered with cloth napkins, on a table at the foot of the chancel steps. No one else touches the bread or the wine except the individual. The communion assistant and I say the words of distribution behind our masks as we stand behind the table. They immediately dispose of the cups in the wastebasket at the end of the table. Communion is served one at a time with no one standing in line waiting. The bread I use during the Words of Institution is bagged up and taken home following the service.

We have no choir or praise band, so that has not been a worry. We do sing wearing our masks, but listening to Curt will change that practice. There has been no hugging and not even elbow bumps because no one (at least not at our church) has a humerus that is three feet long, and since no one can hang out anywhere in the church, the visiting takes place outside with social distancing and masks. Although I stand on the porch following worship to watch for compliance, I haven't had to do much policing as they know what it costs me emotionally and physically to conduct worship in the first place. And being that I am a member of the "most vulnerable" I think that plays a bit into how everyone is coping with the guidelines.

So that's how Philadelphia is doing it.

Blessings and peace,  
Pastor Cheryl Siegenthaler  
Philadelphia Lutheran