



**SYNOD OF
ALBERTA
AND THE
TERRITORIES**
Incorporated as Alberta Synod

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***Spirit-Led
Leadership***

***Hope-Filled
Discipleship***

***Innovative
Tradition***

***Collaborative
Partnerships***

June 4, 2021

Dear Beloved of God –

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

With the recently announced Provincial Government (<https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx>) 3-stage roadmap outlining an anticipated easing of restrictions as vaccination targets are reached and hospitalizations decline, we are seeing positive and hopeful signs for the coming months and into the fall.

These next weeks and months will present our faith communities with a number of questions, including when is it wise to return to in-person worship? How will we gradually, carefully, and intentionally return to in-person worship, to in-person meetings, and to in-person gatherings? How will we remain connected with those in our congregations who choose not to return to in-person worship, or who are unable to return? How will we care for and acknowledge all who have experienced grief, and losses of many kinds? In what ways might we accompany and care for those who have been most deeply touched by the trauma of the COVID pandemic?

I am aware of congregations in our Synod who have already returned to in-person worship, mindful of their own context and the guidance of health authorities, and of other congregations in our Synod who are considering a return to in-person worship beginning in September. I urge caution and purposeful planning, and ask that you give thought to the following:

- It is vitally important that we rigorously abide by the counsel and guidance of our government and health authorities.
- The decision of whether or not, and when, to return to in-person worship is one that needs to be shared by both the rostered leader(s) serving under Call and the elected Congregational Council.
- When returning to in-person worship it is imperative that we do everything possible to ensure the continued safety, health and well-being of those who gather.

- "May" gather for some form of in-person worship does not mean "should" or "must". This decision needs to be based on what seems most prudent and responsible for your particular context.
- Consider that many rostered ministers have not taken their full vacation in over a year. Care for your rostered minister by ensuring that there is much needed time for rest and renewal, particularly before the fall begins.

Whatever you determine, be assured that as your Bishop I will support your decision, and that together as synod staff we will seek to assist you as you journey forward.

A helpful resource as in-person worship begins, or continues, in your context, is the ELCA's "Re-Gathering Rite" which can be used, and or adapted, for congregational usage. It is available on the Synod website: albertasynod.ca - Our Resources/COVID 19/Worship Resources, and a link will also be distributed in the June 9th Synod e-newsletter, *Wednesday's Word*.

And, I encourage you to make full use of the 2021 Summer Sermon Series from the ELCIC Bishops and Assistants to the Bishops.

As a leader, now is your moment to lean into the future and to walk with other leaders in ministry as they do the same.

It is imperative that as we lean into the future, our new reality, that we ask ourselves: Do we try to put it back like it was? Or do we carefully rethink each aspect of our ministry, naming the things we have decided to set aside, incorporating the things we have learned, while continuing to explore innovative possibilities to meet this new reality?

Important questions for conversation, discernment, and planning include:

- Should we have online worship once we are back in the building? If so, what should it look like?
- How should we encourage and support stewardship now that online is so much bigger?
- What does community building and congregational care look like in the new world?
- How can we expand small groups and how does access to online change that?
- Who in our community should we talk to in order to find out how life around us has changed for our neighbors and surrounding community?
- What potential new partners will we need to be in conversation with as we continue to explore collaboration – for worship, faith formation, study, prayer, advocacy, service and ministry?

The conversation should include some form of question(s) for every aspect of congregational life – internal and external. Being a congregation in this time will mean rethinking every aspect of life and ministry, and putting it forward (not back) in a new place that very intentionally asks what we can do to make post-pandemic church life fresh and effective in the post-pandemic world.

I have found that a very valuable and readable resource for conversation and study in this regard is, “Becoming A Hybrid Church,” Dave Daubert and Richard E.T. Jorgensen, Jr. ([Day8Strategies](#)). Copies of this resource are available through the Synod Office (\$14.50 per copy) while supplies last.

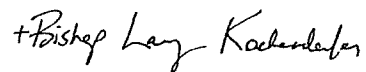
I am deeply encouraged by the faithful and fulsome ways in which you, as individuals, as congregations, and as specialized ministries, have continued to offer vibrant leadership and ministry throughout this pandemic. I am excited about the new possibilities and opportunities that the Spirit of God is calling us to.

Beloved of God, as I have shared several times, and will continue to do so: continue to be humble and gentle with one another. Honour each other. Make space for lament. Welcome moments of joy. Help each other live into hope. Learn from this journey in the coronavirus wilderness and let the learning lead us forward. Trust that God is at work in this time and look for the new things God is doing even now.

May we continue to trust our lives and place our hope in our God of healing and grace for all people.

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Larry Kochendorfer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop
Synod of Alberta and the Territories - Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada