



North Carolina Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Re-Gathering Task Force Considerations for Re-Gathering—January 2022

The Re-Gathering Task Force recognizes that the pandemic is an ever-changing event and acknowledges the exhaustion of keeping up-to-date with current guidelines.

The Omicron variant has changed the landscape once again and is proving to be more contagious than other variants. Recently, our Episcopal siblings in North Carolina have issued a recommendation that congregations consider not gathering in person.*

We have found the guidance from the Wisconsin Council of Churches to be helpful in considering the safest options to gather. This guidance relies on current vaccination and transmission rates and lets congregations wrestle with their risk tolerance. Here are excerpts from their [Returning to Church 3.0](#) document.

UNSAFE TO GATHER WITHOUT MITIGATIONS	SAFER	SAFEST
Vaccination rates <50% AND	Vaccination rates 50-70+% AND	Vaccination rates 70-85+% AND
Viral Transmission ◆ New Cases >10/100K ◆ Positive Tests >10%	Viral Transmission ◆ New Cases 5-10/100K ◆ Positive Tests <10%	Viral Transmission ◆ New Cases <1/100K ◆ Positive Tests <5%

Mitigations are actions people and communities can take to help reduce the likelihood of transmission and slow the spread of viruses like COVID-19. **While there is no risk-free approach to gathering at this time**, using multiple mitigations will provide additional protection. Mitigations include:

- Improving ventilation
- Reducing duration of gatherings

- Reducing the number of people
 - Increasing physical distance
 - Universal masking
 - Safer choices for the riskiest activities (eating, drinking together)
 - Vaccination expectations
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We suggest a level of at most **50 new cases per 100,000 persons** in the past seven days as a level at which a community should undertake its strictest COVID protocols. Your congregation may choose to move to its strictest protocols sooner.

The entire state of North Carolina currently falls into the “unsafe to gather without mitigations” category. Find the most current vaccination and transmission data here: [COVID Data Tracker—County View](#).

Additionally, please consider adopting the use of better-performing masks: N95/KN95/KF94 masks being the safest, followed by surgical masks which are safer, and finally, cloth masks.

We recognize that there are trade-offs for safety. Prayerful consideration for the least of these is central. We are grateful for the leadership you provide your congregation and recognize that when it comes to re-gathering, we are not of one mind on how to do so safely. We continue to urge caution as we seek to do the right thing and recognize that central to all things is a desire to worship.

****January 10, 2022, CORRECTION:** In our original version of these Considerations (published January 7), we mistakenly mentioned that “...our Episcopal siblings in North Carolina have issued a declaration that congregations may not gather in person.” That declaration is not accurate. It is true, however, that the Episcopal Diocese of NC issued a recommendation to its leaders on December 28 that “in-person worship is not recommended.”*