

South Carolina Synod - ELCA
Recommendations & Resources for our Faith Communities
COVID-19 Current Guidelines
Information about the Vaccine
March 2021

Dear South Carolina Leaders,

We recognize that across the South Carolina Synod our congregations have experimented with and participated in a variety of worship gathering practices throughout this pandemic that have been highly contextual. Our main concern and recommendation is that while congregational leaders seek to offer the proclamation of the gospel and the opportunity to worship they also follow best practices for keeping everyone in their communities as safe as possible.

As we come to what we hope will be our homestretch in this pandemic that we pray everyone will remain patient, calm and considerate of one another. We have all come a long way in the last year by simplifying our lifestyles and simply staying home. While the vaccine and the warming weather brings us all hope for gathering in-person once again as soon as possible, we still need to be mindful of the need for truly safe practices. It is important to remember that even if you have been able to get your vaccine, someone in your faith community is still be waiting. Time is still needed for more members of our communities to have access to the vaccines and to let those vaccines take full effect. Please show continued care and respect for all our neighbors and give everyone time to allow this to work.

The DHEC website indicates that we are now in Phase 1b for the vaccine and we understand that this includes front line workers of any age, and further, that pastors, deacons and church staff members are included. Please check the [SCDHEC.gov](https://www.scdhec.gov) website for more details and information about how to make an appointment for your vaccine.

We continue to recommend that online, or outdoor gathering, physically distanced and with face masks be your first choice for worship options. Indoor gatherings should continue to be limited in numbers with good physical distancing and the use of face masks. Holy Communion may be celebrated following appropriate protocols. Please keep a record of all in attendance at any in-person gathering in the event that contact tracing needs to be done. Indoor worship should not include congregational singing yet. Outdoors, singing may be permitted at significant, safe distance and wearing face masks. We do not recommend hosting any coffee hours or fellowship meals yet. We highly recommend that everyone who can, get a vaccine when it is made available to you. Continuing to follow these safety guidelines now can mean that we are all able to gather more fully in the near future.

We remember those we have lost during this pandemic and to hold in prayer all those sisters and brothers who grieve. We also give thanks for all the faithful partners in our communities that are bringing us through this pandemic: the healthcare workers, the teachers and school administrators, the farmers, the truck drivers and grocery store workers, the parents, the pastors, deacons, musicians, and all the tech folks who have made our online gatherings possible. God has shown us that we are people who can persevere, who can innovate, who can be creative and amazing neighbors to one another. Let us continue to pray for everyone in our communities and work together to continue lifting one another up as we all look forward to the day when we can all gather together safely and sing from the top of our lungs our praises to our Lord and Savior, Jesus, in whose name we gather.

Bishop Ginny Aebischer

COVID-19 Current Guidelines

CDC offers the following general considerations to help communities of faith discern how best to practice their beliefs while keeping their staff and congregations safe.

COVID-19 Cases are Extremely High. Avoid Events and Gatherings

COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths [are extremely high across the United States](#). To decrease your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19, CDC recommends that you [do not gather with people who do not live with you](#) at this time. **Attending events and gatherings increases your risk of getting and spreading COVID-19. Stay home to [protect yourself and others](#) from COVID-19.**

Please follow this link for more information about COVID-19 and the recommendations from the Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/faith-based.html>

Vaccine Information

Elizabeth Davidson, MPH [Pronouns: She/her/hers](#)

Vice President | | United Against Inequities in Disease

There are currently two mRNA vaccines approved for use in the United States (Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna) and a third viral vector vaccine approved for immediate widespread use (Johnson & Johnson). As mRNA and viral vector vaccines have different mechanisms to create an immune response to the virus that causes COVID, they have different clinical considerations for how long it may take for such an immune response to be effective following administration of the vaccine.

- *For mRNA vaccines ([Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna](#)):* These are both a series of vaccines consisting of two doses administered 21 days apart (Pfizer-BioNTech) or 28 days apart (Moderna). Individuals are not considered fully vaccinated until 2 weeks have passed after receiving their second dose.
- *For viral vector vaccines ([Johnson & Johnson](#)):* This vaccine consists of a single dose and based on large-scale clinical trials, individuals are not considered fully vaccinated until 28 days after receiving their dose.

Although these vaccines have been proven to be safe and highly effective at preventing severe disease, it is important to note that fully vaccinated does not equate to being fully immune to COVID with no chance of contracting or transmitting the virus. For that reason, it's important for everyone to continue using other mitigation measures including physical distancing and mask-wearing to further prevent transmission of the virus to themselves and others, regardless of vaccination status.

Ecumenical Resource on Re-Gathering

https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Resuming_Care-filled_Worship_and_Sacramental_Life.pdf