

Concordia: Restarting In-Person

Our congregation has the desire to gather in-person. That's what all of us really want. The reality of the situation, though, is that not all of us are in a position to gather in-person at this time, though many are. And so, based on the results of a recent congregational survey, we are planning to begin meeting together again in addition to maintaining online worship for those who are not able to attend in person.

What's the general schedule?

Starting November 1, we will offer 3 times for worship. One will be online and two in-person:

9:30am Sundays: Online, alternating styles each week

11:00am Sundays: In-person Communion Service (shortened, maximum 30 min.)

6:15pm Wednesdays: In-Person Prayer Service (maximum 30 min.)

Will the online gathering stay the same?

In general, yes. We will still do it live as we have been doing. There may be minor changes to the order of service, though it will stay largely the same to start with. The biggest change is the time. It will move from 10:30am to **9:30am** to accommodate the in-person gathering at 11:00am.

Why are we adding in-person gatherings with case numbers rising in BC?

It's true that over the past few weeks the number of COVID-19 cases are rising in BC. However, the vast majority of these cases are in the Vancouver area. The Interior Health region has far fewer cases, and even the majority of those are in the Kelowna area. Penticton and area continue to see far fewer cases than other parts of BC. So we can't over-generalize the BC numbers as a whole.

In addition, among the congregation there is strong desire to be in-person. This is expected, and has been true all the way through this time of pandemic. We want to be in person – after all, that's the way God has designed His Church! After consultation with the congregation, the leadership believes that to continue to not meet at all, while being safer in terms of virus health, also carries much risk of increasing feelings of isolation, frustration, and disconnection from the church family.

At the same time, we know that it's important that if we're to meet in person, we cannot simply pretend that things are "back to normal". We continue to be motivated by the Fourth Commandment – in terms of respecting authority, including government – and the Fifth Commandment – in terms of not only refraining from physical murder, but striving to "not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and befriend him in every need and danger of life and body" (Small Catechism) – so that we are not focused only on what we have the *right* to do, but what is showing care and love for those around us. And in that, we include not only one another in our church family, but also considering what our Christian witness is to our community and world in the decisions we make and actions we take.

What protocols will be in place to minimize risk of virus transmission?

All of the common protocols that have been developed and proved effective (when observed all together) will be in place. Being indoors for a sustained amount of time (more than 15 minutes) has been identified as a high-risk activity, and that's what our worship will be, so we do need to be diligent about observing these protocols.

More information on all of these are below, but the basic protocols will be:

- Only attending if healthy
- Maintaining physical distancing for those not in the same household
 - o pews will be marked and some blocked off
 - o visiting with others to be done outside the building
- Wearing masks (encouraged; this cannot be strictly mandated)
- Entering and exiting as directed to maintain distancing
- Hand sanitization upon entering and exiting
- Cleaning will be done before and after each service

Will people need to register in advance for in-person worship?

Yes. You will be able to register on our website, or you can call the church office at 250-492-5902.

To register online:

1. Visit the website calendar at <https://concordialive.ca/calendar>
2. Click on the event that you wish to attend (each worship service will be its own event, listed on the day and time that it's happening).
3. Fill out the form on that event's page and submit it. You will need to submit the form once for each person in your family/group that would like to attend. (For example, if five people in your family want to attend, fill it out and submit it five times, once for each person.)

We require a name and contact phone number for every person who attends, for contact tracing purposes. This is following direction by the province of BC for any large gathering.

What if something changes for me after I register for a service?

Worshippers will be asked to not attend if they are not well on the day of the service, even if they have previously registered. If your health or something else changes, you can cancel any registration(s), you can do that on the website (<https://concordialive.ca/contact/cancel>) or by calling the office at 250-492-5902.

Will there be a limit on how many people can attend one service?

Yes. To start with, we will be limiting both Sundays and Wednesdays to 25 worshippers, plus leaders (Pastor, ushers, etc.). We know this is under the strict limit of 50 imposed by the province, but we want to retain some flexibility as well as ensure that we allow for adequate distancing in the sanctuary. We will re-visit this limit regularly and adjust it as needed.

I'd like to attend every week. Can I do that?

We certainly understand that for those who are ready to attend in-person, there is a strong desire to be regularly involved. We will ask that you consider alternating between Sundays and Wednesdays and/or consider attending every 2nd week, so that we allow as many as possible to attend who would like to, and especially to allow people to receive Holy Communion on Sundays. We'll re-visit this guidance after a few weeks as we get a feel for what the numbers will be like.

What will Sundays' 11:00am Communion service look like?

The focus will be on Holy Communion. Though it shouldn't be seen as a "finishing" of the 9:30 online service, it will have the same theme. There will be an examination (confession of sin and absolution), 1-2 readings, a short version of the sermon from 9:30, and a shortened Communion liturgy. The whole thing will take no more than 30 minutes from beginning to end.

It will alternate styles each week, being the same style as the 9:30 online service. So on Nov. 1, it will be a more traditional style, with Pastor Michael vested and a bit more formal feel. On Nov 8, it will follow more of our contemporary style.

So this means Communion will be offered every week?

In this "hybrid" schedule, yes. We'll have fewer people at each service, so we will offer Communion each week for the near future.

How will Communion be handled?

Because we are limiting numbers of people in attendance, to begin with, Pastor Michael will administrate and then distribute the elements for Communion, without assistants. It will be served "pilgrim style" (a continuous line, similar to our regular 11:00 practice) every week, so as to minimize surface contacts and allow for physical distancing.

Pastor Michael will wash his hands both immediately before the service and immediately before Communion. Worshippers will be asked to cup their hands to receive the wafer from Pastor Michael's hands as he will place it in the worshipper's hands without making contact. We will use only individual cups in trays, appropriately spaced so that worshippers can take a cup without making contact with other cups. The cups will then be discarded as usual in the bowls set up for that purpose.

Pastor Michael will not plan to wear a mask while leading worship, including serving Communion. As a representative of God to our people, it's important that his face be visible and not hidden from you during worship in this setting. As he so often says to you is the blessing, one way God blesses you is to "make his face shine upon you". God is not hidden from you when He brings you His gifts in the Word and in the Sacraments.

The preparation for Communion will be done by the Altar Guild and/or Pastor Michael. Anyone who handles the elements and serving wares will ensure their hands have been washed immediately prior to preparing, and they will be masked while preparing.

What about music on Sundays?

While we are still finalizing details, the plan is that we will have music on Sundays. However, singing in an enclosed space carries a greater degree of risk. The science isn't yet settled, but current research indicates that there is greater risk of virus transmission because droplets (larger particles) and aerosols (smaller particles) project further with singing, and aerosols, being lighter, stay in the air longer than droplets. And so, sadly, the act of corporate singing (especially indoors) is one of the higher-risk activities.

We will have accompaniment and plan to have one or more music leaders who will be invited to sing, and will be situated so that they are not facing the congregation. Worshipers will be invited to sing, as long as they are wearing masks and appropriately distanced (well more than 6 feet) from others. As with all of these things, we'll revise this practice as needed, based upon the developments that happen over time.

Why are we having a Wednesday gathering in addition to Sundays?

The biggest reason is that we are limiting the numbers in each gathering. So we're offering more opportunity for people to gather in person by offering more times for it, with smaller numbers in each gathering. Also, some people may be ready to attend in-person, but their consciences aren't ready for Communion and the slightly closer contact that requires.

Our hope is that by continuing online worship, and having both Sunday Communion and Wednesday prayer services, all who wish to gather in person will have an opportunity to do so every couple of weeks, at least.

What will Wednesdays' 6:15pm prayer services look like?

In some ways, these will resemble our regular mid-week seasonal services (Advent, Lent). They will be a bit more informal. They won't, however, be as participatory as our regular midweek services have been. We won't have responsive readings and the like. There will be a focus on Scripture readings (a Psalm and one other reading that will carry the theme), a short homily/sermon, and a time for prayers. We are not planning for music at the Wednesday services at this time.

The prayers will vary, with some guided tools for individual prayer and collective prayer.

We will strive to keep this service under 30 minutes. All the same protocols will be observed Sundays and Wednesdays, though Wednesdays will not have Communion as part of the service.

I have more questions or concerns.

That's understandable; we are all living with a great many unknowns about our own lives and the lives of others. The congregation's leadership is striving to make wise, prayerful, thoughtful, and informed decisions. You can contact Pastor Michael directly if your question or concern is more theological and spiritual – 250-492-5902 or mschutz@concordialive.ca – or the Governing Team if your concern is more about the logistics and general life of the congregation.