

# Protection Concept during the Corona Pandemic

(as of: 5 May 2020)

## 1. Preliminary remarks

With effect from 10 May, worship services may be held again in all federal states in the conference area. However, this will be subject to the statutory regulations issued by the individual federal states, with measures and restrictions that can differ considerably from state to state.

It will be up to each individual charge/church council to decide when and where worship services will be possible again in our churches and facilities.

For some of our congregations, so many people are categorised as being vulnerable that the congregation will decide not to celebrate worship services on the church premises. The commandment to love our neighbours helps us to give special consideration to those of our brothers and sisters who are at special risk and to include this aspect in our deliberations. In the initial phase, we will have to manage without certain things and in some cases, progress will only be possible step by step.

Other congregations will have to check how many people will be able to attend worship services while obeying the social distancing rules.

Whatever a congregation decides to do, we feel it is important that in each case, we step out on the chosen path sensibly and joyfully. If congregations decide to enter the "unknown territory" of face-to-face worship services under corona conditions then that is fine. On the other hand, we also support congregations that decide they have good reasons not to do this for the time being.

When deciding what to do and when making preparations for face-to-face worship services, due consideration should also be given to the following aspects that have been discussed with the Bishop in the Central Conference Cabinet and which should be implemented accordingly in each congregation:

## 2. Hygiene rules

The most important thing is to comply with the hygiene rules that apply throughout Germany. The hygiene rules cover the following areas: social distancing, ventilation, hand hygiene and face masks.

1. The necessary preparations (see the enclosed congregation protection concept) are necessary before worship services can take place. Some federal states expect those attending worship services to enter their names in lists for tracking and tracing any possible chains of infection. These lists must be retained for at least 21 days.

2. When celebrating worship services, there must be a minimum distance of at least 1.5 metres<sup>1</sup> between the attendees, measured in all directions. In some federal states, people belonging to the same household may sit next to each other. This results in the maximum number of people who may attend the worship service. The seats are marked. Social distancing also applies when entering and leaving the church. In accordance with the social distancing rule, the church council stipulates the maximum number of people for the specific premises, paying attention to any additional individual state rules.
3. Hand sanitisers must be provided for everyone attending the worship service.
4. All rooms must be well ventilated.
5. Face masks (community masks) are recommended. Here again, the individual states may have different regulations with regard to wearing face masks. Those taking an active part in the liturgy are exempt.
6. The singing of hymns and songs is subject to the individual state rules. Generally speaking, we would advise a cautious approach. Face masks should be worn for any singing. It is also conceivable for a leader to sing hymns/songs and the congregation just hums or sings along quietly.
7. Individual musicians are permitted (social distancing still applies). Choirs, brass bands or orchestras are not permitted.
8. To protect each other, please refrain from shaking hands, giving hugs or any liturgy-related contact (e.g. passing the peace).
9. The collection will be taken on the way out.
10. There must be no gatherings or fellowship (coffee/refreshments) after the service.
11. Any surfaces, utensils and items must be disinfected after use. As far as possible, any items that would normally be used by several people (e.g. hymn books) should not be handled. This also applies to all doors and door handles: doors must be left open when entering and leaving the building.
12. No-one showing symptoms of an infection or who has had contact with infected persons (SARS-CoV-2) is allowed to attend the worship service.

### **3. Other remarks and instructions**

1. Worship services for children, Sunday school, kids church and crèche/nursery provision are not possible at the moment, but may begin again as soon as the situation allows. Until then, consideration should be given to making it possible for families to attend worship services (e.g. with all-age services or child-friendly elements in the service).
2. Some federal states demand a written infection protection concept for all premises where worship services take place, which must be presented on demand. Even in places where this is not mandatory, it is advisable to draw up a corresponding protection concept to establish clear rules for the most important points. (A corresponding specimen is enclosed).
3. Pastors whose health puts them in the vulnerable category for the pandemic should clarify the limits of their participation in worship services with the superintendent. General absence is conceivable. The same also applies to lay persons who are actively involved: they should clarify their situation with the pastor.

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1 Please comply with the rules issued by the individual state government. The rules can deviate from state to state.

4. The worship service should last max. 60 minutes.
5. If more people are expected than allowed, it may be necessary to hold more than one worship service (in succession or at different times). In this case, it would help to know who wants to come to which service.
6. Until a vaccine is available, it is advisable for members of the congregation who have been classified as vulnerable to avoid the face-to-face worship services. Other formats may therefore still be necessary in future (e.g. streaming worship, sending sermons by e-mail or post).
7. Sacraments, rites and rituals may be celebrated, subject to the rules and regulations in each individual state.
8. If Holy Communion is felt to be acceptable, the following instructions should be heeded:
  - Social distancing rules apply all the time while celebrating Holy Communion
  - The elements are served without saying the usual words, which can be featured collectively at the start of the Communion liturgy.
  - All those taking part in serving the elements should disinfect their hands visibly for the congregation before they begin.
  - For hygiene reasons, there are many arguments in favour of face masks being worn by those who are serving communion (even if this may take some getting used to in liturgical terms).
  - Only individual cups may be used.
  - It is also conceivable to deliberately do without the cup.

#### **4. Validity**

This protection concept is based on the basic principles agreed by the Central Conference Cabinet on 4 May 2020. It is valid until a new protection concept for the North Germany Conference is published.

#### **Encls:**

- Congregation protection concept (specimen)
- Master documents for printing and lists (zip file)