



Missouri District

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

March 12, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.” John 14:1 Our Lord Jesus Christ continues to calm troubled hearts today as He did His disciples on the eve of His Passion. In the midst of the anxiety over the Coronavirus, the Church has a message of comfort for those who are overwhelmed by the pressures of life. Now is not a time for the Church to be pushed to the side because of fear, but it is on account of fear that the people of God need the healing balm of the Gospel as it is proclaimed in Christ’s Church.

My encouragement is for congregational leaders to discuss ways to assuage fears related corporate worship, and to communicate the steps that are being taken for the care and health of the worshippers. Pastors and congregation leaders should regularly consult the Center for Disease Control website for any updates to its guidelines for Community and Faith Based Leaders (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html>). The most recent guidelines from the civil authorities at the CDC in response to COVID-19 provide us the opportunity to serve one another in very concrete ways. The recommendations say that all older Americans (60+), those with chronic health conditions, and those who have compromised immune systems are at “higher risk.” The CDC instructs all such people as follows:

*Stay at home as much as possible. * Make sure you have access to several weeks of medications and supplies in case you need to stay home for prolonged periods of time. * When you go out in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often. * Avoid crowds. * Stay up to date on CDC Travel Health Notices.*

The challenge for us as the Church is to be mindful of our concern for the health of the body and soul. We must also admit that the appropriate level of vigilance is something over which Christians may not be in complete agreement. However, it is prudent that our congregations take steps to demonstrate this concern. To that end, I offer the following counsel:

- *Congregations should encourage those who are sick or feeling under the weather to refrain from attending worship.*
- *Hand sanitizer should be made available in each entry way and narthex.*
- *Congregations can also encourage those who are concerned about being in large crowds to consider attending alternate service times (e.g. Saturday or Monday evenings) at LCMS congregations where the attendance may be smaller or even to view “livestream” services that are now being offered by increasing number of LCMS congregations in Missouri.*
- *Congregations strongly consider foregoing any greeting or sharing of the peace before the service, during the service or after the service that involves handshakes, fist bumps or hugs of any kind. Likewise, bulletins may be made available on tables or stands rather than handed out by ushers.*

- *Congregations should also consider having offering plates located on tables or stands near entrances, but not passed during the service.*
- *Regarding the Lord's Supper, the pastor and all those who assist in the distribution should wash their hands immediately before the Service of the Sacrament. This action could be announced prior to the service as a means of identifying the care and concern that is being undertaken for the flock.*
- *Lutheran Christians have historically left the method of receiving Christ's gifts to the area of personal piety. Decisions about receiving the host directly into the mouth or "the common cup" should be discussed by the Pastor and Elders with all seriousness and out of concern for those who for this practice may be an obstacle (as St. Paul addresses in Romans 14). If a congregation continues with the use of "the common cup," it would be wise to explain the process of rotating the cup and wiping it both inside and outside the cup with the purificators by those who assist in distribution.*
- *During this time period of increased vigilance, congregations may choose to not host fellowship time (with coffee and donuts), Sunday School and Bible classes, as well as other events. Pastors and church leaders may consider ways to utilize technology and resources for families to use in the home to provide for the continued study of God's Word and encouragement in the faith.*

What is needed now by our congregation families and even our communities is a word of comfort. Congregation leaders may not share complete agreement on every potential action to be taken. But for the sake of God's people, it is good for our congregations to be unified in communicating to all the sure and certain hope that we have in Christ Jesus.

Our congregations, our communities, our nation, and our world have faced times of affliction and anxiety before. Our confidence has always been rooted in our loving and gracious God. My hope is that at a time such as this that we would fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. So, we pray for the leaders of nations, those who work to eradicate this disease and all those affected by it. I have always found comfort in the Collect for Guidance in our Calling and invite you to pray it with me.

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In closing, I leave you with these words of blessing from St. Paul, "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

In Christ's Service,


 Rev. Dr. R. Lee Hagan
 President, Missouri District