



Southeastern Minnesota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



March 16, 2020

Dear Ones,

In light of President Trump's recommendation there be no gatherings of 10 or more people at the present time and the CDC's recommendation that groups of 50 or more not gather for the next 8 weeks, I am strongly recommending you suspend your in-person worship gatherings and congregational activities for the time being. Our polity does not allow me to mandate the suspension of worship. This decision must be made in conversation between congregation council and Pastors and Deacons. To be clear: it is my strong recommendation you suspend in-person gatherings for the time being.

I know this is unwelcome news for many of you and I do not make this recommendation lightly. At this moment our participation in slowing the spread of COVID-19 seems the best way to care for our neighbors. And while we may not be gathering in person for a bit of time, we are still the people of God, called to love one another as we are able in this season.

In light of this new recommendation synod staff will be working remotely beginning Tuesday, March 17. Staff will remain available by phone, email, and other digital platforms.

The synod website has a vast and growing collection of resources for you to use. These resources currently include links to congregations live streaming and/or recording worship services for you to share in your context. In the coming days the synod website will also contain resources for continuing generosity among the people in your congregation and guidance on how to continue to serve and care for others in this time of physical distancing.

I realize this suspension, if it is necessary for the full 8 weeks the CDC is now recommending, will occur over Holy Week and Easter. We will continue to make resources available to our congregations and leaders to navigate this particular time.

Remember this, dear People of God: it is the same God who called Abraham into an unknown land, who led Moses and the Israelites through wilderness and into promise, who worked through politics and circumstance to save God's people through Esther, and who tore through the heavens to proclaim Jesus as beloved Son that is with us still today. It is the same God.

Our realities may change. God does not.

I am holding you in prayer and giving thanks for your abiding faith.

In Christ,

Rev. Regina Hassanally
Bishop of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA