

19 March 2020

Dear ELCA Leaders,

We are in the midst of a generation defining event. The ELCA should not underestimate its ability to lead and change the course of coming events. What we do now may very well save lives and will shape the ELCA and the whole Church for decades to come. I write this to urge you to take swift action and to prepare churches in your care more fully for the new reality that is emerging in the United States due to COVID-19. I am a pediatrician, epidemiologist with training in disaster relief and humanitarian assistance. I have also worked for 20 years in variety of capacities in low-resourced settings, which is what we may soon be facing in the U.S. I am also a Christian and a member of an ELCA church. I do not make these recommendations lightly.

I want to give you the data that has made me come to this conclusion:

- According to the CDC data, within 2 days the U.S. has doubled the number of cases of COVID-19 to >7,000. If this continues we will have >30,000 by Sunday March 22, 2020.
- 10-30% of people who are infected require hospitalizations in Italy and China.
- If rates of cases double in the U.S. every 4 days, based on CDC numbers from Friday March 13, the US may very well be out of ICU beds by the end of April and out of hospital beds by the end of May.
- Italian hospitals started crumbling due to this surge when they hit 20,000 cases.
- We are starting to see the impact. CDC has provided guidance that due to protective equipment shortage nurses should use bandanas and scarves if they do not have access to face masks.
- CDC data now indicate that 12% infected in the U.S. are hospitalized and 55% of those are 20-65 year olds.
- There is report of a family in NJ who has had 3 family members die within the span of 1 week.
- There are states/places that are not taking strong measures and bars/restaurants remain open. Mardi Gras parties continue in the New Orleans area.

I urge you to watch this video of the situation as of March 16, 2020.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZVLiEdWlm4&feature=youtu.be>

I will be making an updated video by this weekend but I fear that may be too late to make enough impact. These are unprecedented times and call for unprecedented measures. We are in the beginning days of an event that will be remembered in history books for centuries to come. What happens next determines how that story is told. I urge the ELCA to make the following stances and preparations:

- 1) Cancel all worship services through the end of April.
- 2) Plan for remote funerals, weddings, baptisms to occur for the next 3-6 months.
- 3) Plan for how churches will function and support one another when pastors become ill, or worse die due to the higher mortality rates in older populations.

The strong stance of the church can save lives. How lucky are we that we have the technology to continue remote e-worshipping. I am available to discuss my thoughts and ideas at any time.

Sincerely,



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