



Southeastern Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

March 18, 2020

Dear Rostered Ministers,

We live with anxiety rising in our culture and daily being told something new about this Covid 19 virus. All the while, trying to find ways to pastorally care for people. Worship continues to be a primary location for the proclamation both of the good news of Jesus Christ and of the continuing compassion and care of God in the midst of our humanity. It is a place where we can find solace and reassurance in the midst of our fears. Great care should be taken to continue this central ministry of the church, especially in these times.

As I said in my video yesterday and the letter last week, I strongly implore you to cancel public worship for the time being. This virus is ever growing and we need to flatten the curve as much as possible. As Pastor Jacqui Lewis said, “Love looks like an empty church”. Maybe just for such a time as this, we show what that love looks like in order to keep the whole body and its members of Christ safe and healthy.

Please look for ways to worship virtually and meet that way: morning and evening prayer, daily prayer, service of the word, bible study, etc. The synod webpage has a host of suggestions for what to do in your own community for this, how to learn zoom, and our synod staff will be offering video sermons weekly for the time being that are being posted. Check-in by phone and email. Seek to help your neighbors in need and those who are alone in these days. Pray earnestly for those who work tirelessly in our medical field and work for a vaccine and cure for this. Many have inquired about should the eucharist be offered virtually. There have even been many who are and have come up with a host of ways to offer the sacrament in these days through virtual means. Where I give thanks for the pastoral heart put into thinking through those things, I also want us to be mindful that what we do in the midst of a crisis has a profound effect on what will become tradition when the crisis is over.

There was a time in our church where the sacrament of Holy Communion was not offered every Sunday, but was quarterly and then monthly and then weekly. I am someone who treasures this holy meal, but in the midst of the gathered assembly in physical presence. As retired liturgy professor, Dr. Gordon Lathrop helpfully frames for us a good understanding of how to navigate these times:

“For Lutherans it is not only that the sacrament is a sort of Word — it is the Word itself is sacramental: it is full of the presence of Christ, come “to do us good.” I think of that marvelous passage about what happens in the reading of the Gospel in Luther’s preface to the Church Postil. I want us to remember that Luther argued that when the Gospel-book is read and preached, we should know that Christ is here, coming to us or we being brought to him, present

in the reading and preaching, doing to us now what the text says he did then: forgiving us, healing us, raising us from the dead: "If you pause here and let him do you good, that is, if you believe that he benefits and helps you, then you really have it. Then Christ is yours, presented to you as a gift. After that it is necessary that you turn this into an example and deal with your neighbor in the very same way, be given also to him as a gift and an example." I love also especially that final "happy exchange" turn! So, in this time we may just cling to the sacramental word. Then, in a healthier time, we can carefully rebuild that wonderful Sunday eucharistic-frequency that has been built up so lovingly among us. But not the sacrament as required, not the sacrament as fetish."

Since the Eucharist is properly shared when the assembly "gathers" physically and visibly together, I want to encourage you to use this time apart as a time to dwell deeper and wider within the Word of God, to "give thanks" around your tables and in your homes for all the many things you are thankful for and to offer prayers for and with the sake of the whole world.

Our synod staff are also working on ways that you can continue to give to your local congregation through the synod website if your community doesn't have online giving.

This week and next I'll be holding zoom calls with all our deans, pastors and deacons. As well our synod disaster team and social service agency to keep everyone up to date and as safe as possible.

Pray and give thanks for those sanitation workers who continue to do their jobs, the cashiers and grocery clerks who put their selves at risk, parents who struggle with children at home and children who struggle with parents who can't go into work. Pray for those who worry and know the reality of job loss and food insecurity. In all things, do as we always do—be there church at work active in Love for neighbor.

Please see the synod website for up to date resources on communities offering online worship opportunities, synod staff sermons, tutorial on how to for zoom, a presentation on what you need to know about the Covid 19 virus, and more.

Below are helpful links for you as you navigate this season from our synod and the ELCA. As well an article from Dr. Timothy Wengert that might be helpful in discerning the Eucharist.

Most importantly, be not afraid dear ones. You are loved and you are beloved. Check in on one another. Please do not hesitate to let me know how I can be of prayer or support for you.

+Bishop Kevin Strickland

RESOURCES:

Use of the Means of Grace: Sacramental Practice Statement of the ELCA

http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/The_Use_Of_The_Means_Of_Grace.pdf?_ga=2.89878427.1020664107.1584536057-1987994693.1566247859

ELCA Public Health Page

<https://elca.org/publichealth>

Southeastern Synod Page

www.elca-ses.org

Attached: [Article by Dr. Timothy Wengert](#)