May 13, 2020

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
Live in harmony with one another.
Romans 12:15-16

To the Pastors, Deacons, Leaders and Congregations of Minnesota,

Since we learned of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Minnesota on March 6, through the first stay at home order and its extensions to the moment of our writing today, we have lived in a rapidly changing reality. It has been over two months of transition and exploration, of creativity and innovation, of uncertainty and grief. Circumstances continue to evolve.

We are, as of this writing still living under Governor Walz's extended stay at home order. We know even as the current order expires, as is expected on May 18, things will not simply go back to the way they were.

We give thanks for you and all the ways you have remained flexible and faithful, striving to serve your congregations and ministry sites in the midst of this ever-changing reality. We acknowledge that innovation and experimentation will continue and that faithful responses may be as varied as the contexts we serve. We know there are multiple precautions to take as new challenges arise. The logistics of gathering when it is safe and wise to do so, the special concerns around singing and communion distribution, the reality that there will be those who desire to participate that cannot, these are only some of the myriad pieces we consider.

We the six bishops of the ELCA in Minnesota share particular values as we live and lead together - with you in this pandemic reality. We continue to engage with and listen to state and local officials. We look to scientists and epidemiologists to guide our decision making. We keep ever before us a commitment to the wellbeing of our neighbors, those in our congregations, communities and beyond. We remain focused on our shared vocation of proclaiming the gospel.

It is the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, that anchors our hope. As we continue to discern how to enter this next phase of life, we are committed to working together. We know particularities will vary with the specificities of context yet our shared values remain. As more detailed guidance is made available from the CDC and MN Department of Health we will continue to collaborate as we offer best practices in light of our shared values.

As we hold you in prayer, we give God thanks for your faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Bishop Jon Anderson
Southwestern MN Synod

Bishop Tom Aitken
Northeastern MN Synod

Bishop Regina Hassanally
Southeastern MN Synod

Bishop Patricia Lull
Saint Paul Area Synod

Bishop Ann Svennungsen
Minneapolis Area Synod

Bishop Bill Tesch
Northwestern MN Synod