



Southeastern Minnesota Synod

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



August 12, 2021

The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Exodus 33:14 (NIV)

I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, “Do not fear; I will help you.” Isaiah 41:13 (NIV UK)

Dear Siblings in Christ,

It has been a long season. We had thought, perhaps, that the summer was ending one chapter of our collective life and opening us up to something new. In many ways, it has, but I don't think I'm alone in having hoped COVID would be less prevalent than it is now.

You have done so well in continuing to navigate this pandemic season. You are stepping into your leadership roles, working with your leaders, making decisions and recommendations using science and your own contextual knowledge. Thank you for the ways you are continuing to lead. I know it hasn't been easy. I also know many of us, pastors and deacons and folks in the pews, are growing weary of COVID life.

I have no new COVID recommendations to share in this letter. I will say, as I always have, follow the guidance of the CDC and MDH (this might mean encouraging or requiring masks for periods of time). Collaborate with your lay leaders. Freely give grace. Care for one another and remember that to which you are called.

I do want to offer a pastoral word, one that is rooted in the words of the Scripture above. Hear in the words of God spoken to Moses in the book of Exodus the promise of rest. Hear in the prophet Isaiah the promise of God clasping us by the hand and offering help.

It is okay if things look different *again* this year. It is okay if the plans you made now need to be changed. Remember the work to which you are called. Preaching the gospel, pointing to God's goodness and grace, welcoming the stranger, living in faithful community together.... These things can be done in a myriad of ways. The methods are not our focus, but the ministry to which we are called is.

Dear siblings, we are called to holy work. In tending to your work, please make time to rest. There are no trophies for those of us who log the most hours in a given week. There are no prizes for those who believe they are the center of the life of the church (because only Jesus is!).

One of the gifts and necessities of Sabbath is that it keeps us mindful that God's good work continues even when we take a break.

In this vein, I want to offer a brief word regarding our upcoming Fall Theological Retreat. We are planning to gather in Onalaska, Wisconsin, under the theme of Sabbath. The conference will actually be a retreat, and we will continue our learning about Sabbath (yes, you have more to

learn!). We will practice Sabbath-keeping rhythms that can continue beyond the days we are gathered.

The planning team has been hard at work making preparations. We are fervently hoping it will be safe for us to gather in person and plan to do so. Because the nature of this year's event will likely not translate well to digital platforms, we will alter our plans significantly if we cannot physically gather. We will keep you informed as time goes on. At this point, we ask you to plan to be in Onalaska November 7-9. If adjustments need to be made, we will be sure to let you know.

I trust you are well acquainted with the flexibility that is now required for ministry planning. As you continue to plan and recalibrate plans for the fall, know that I am holding you in prayer. As I pray, I am asking the Holy Spirit to lead you to promised places of deep rest and to hold you by the right hand, leading you, guiding you, helping you, every step of the way.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Regina Hassanally". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Bishop Regina Hassanally
Southeastern Minnesota Synod, ELCA