



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



March 27, 2020

Dear Pastors, Deacons, and Leaders,

It's been just over a week since my last letter to you and in so many ways it feels much longer. I'm writing to update you on some changes, to offer guidance on some commonly asked questions, and to offer a pastoral word.

First let me say: I am giving thanks for you daily. I am thankful for your ministry, for your willingness to try new things, to experiment, and to reinvent. I am thankful for the phone calls you are making, the notes you are writing, and the at home worship packets you are providing. I am so grateful I am your bishop at this time. You are a blessed gift.

The days are full and work is always with us, especially now that we are working from our homes. Be sure to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. By this I mean: take your days off. Yes, even now. Even when there is so much to do. Even when you have time for one more call or email or edit of your prerecorded worship service. Beloved people of God, take time to rest.

It has been said to me this is a marathon and not a sprint. Frankly, I don't find these words encouraging. I do, however, find them helpful. I have seen so many of you work tirelessly to learn how to live stream worship and recalibrate your pastoral ministry. I am thankful for your willingness to do this. I also want you to pace yourselves.

There will come a time when we will gather again for worship (I cannot wait!). And there will come a time when the pastoral care we now offer over the phone or via text and other digital means will happen again over coffee. Our people need us now and they will need us at the end of this, too. So be sure to care for yourselves in all these things. Read scripture, pray, engage in your spiritual disciplines (or learn a new one!), pick up a holy hobby. Take care.

You have been called in this time and this place and for this I give thanks. I am also giving thanks for the truth we hear from Jesus in the gospel of John, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." I am so grateful the peace Jesus gives us is not dictated by the world around us. God gives us peace that the world cannot give. I pray you rest in this peace and that the peace of Christ reigns in your hearts and minds.

I am sure you have heard by now that our Synod Assembly for 2020 will not happen. I was looking forward to worshiping and learning with you and I'm grieved this opportunity has been lost. I am also hopeful that as public health guidance allows, we will be able to gather for a synod-wide worship service in the future.

Some of you have asked for guidance regarding funerals. There is a [Pastoral Care Primer for a Pandemic](#) on the synod website that includes guidance for funerals. In short: the guidance for funerals follows guidance for all other worship services and is dependent on the most current information from Governor Walz. Connect with the funeral directors at your local funeral homes to gain an understanding of their best practices in light of COVID-19.

A few of you have asked for guidance regarding Holy Communion. I join with our [Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton in calling for a fast at this time](#). And also commend to you the ELCA resource on [Worship in Times of Public Health Concerns](#) on this and other matters. Regarding Holy Communion both Dirk G. Lange's [article](#) and an [essay](#) by Dr. Timothy Wengert with a brief note from Dr. Gordon Lathrop are helpful. And, of course, I am happy to converse with you on this matter. We are all learning what it means to be church in a time of social distancing. Grace-filled conversations can help us do this well.

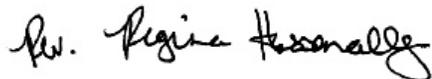
It seems our mutual desire to worship together physically will not be realized in short order. My recommendation to abstain from in person worship gatherings remains as it aligns with the most recent guidance from the CDC and MN Department of Health and the current Stay-at-Home order from Governor Walz. Please continue to pay attention to these resources regarding community mitigation strategies.

I join you in lamenting that this time of physical distancing will carry through Holy Week and into Easter. The synod website will be updated with resources for you to use and adapt for this liturgical season. If you have resources to share please let our Director of Communications, Ashley Corbett, know.

As you continue to navigate what it means to minister in this time, remember the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: "Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you."

Hold firmly to the Word. Preach it with grace and courage. Continue to proclaim the Good News. The world is in desperate need of hearing it.

In Christ,



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