



Upstate New York Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

March 13, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In Luke, Jesus calls his followers to be as innocent as doves and as wise as serpents. It is now time for us to be wise as we follow the One who brings hope and healing to our lives and world.

I am announcing the cessation of “in person” worship in this synod beginning March 15 and continuing for at least three weeks through Tuesday, March 31. At that point in time we will reassess and make additional recommendations if needed. I recognize that I do not have the authority of Scripture or constitution to do this but I do believe that we have the imperative of both to act responsibly for the well-being of the Church. The rapid spread of COVID-19 requires that we act. Some may see these measures as drastic. I consider them prudent.

Many of our members at the Sunday liturgy are age 60 and older. People in this age group have been designated as persons at higher risk, as well as those who are vulnerable for health reasons. It is our responsibility to care for them and for all our members in every possible way. This is one of those ways.

Continuing to gather only gives the virus increased opportunity to grow and spread. We have the ability to slow this spread. This is, in my pastoral opinion, the time to act.

I am in continuing contact with the Churchwide office in Chicago and the Governor's office in the state of New York. We will continue to seek their advice and counsel in this regard.

As we move forward, remember this: we are not closing down congregations. We are seeking new ways to be in ministry with one another. We are working on resources for use at home, some have already been posted to the synod website and on Facebook. The synod website will be continually updated and include information on COVID-19 as it becomes available. In addition, making use of Facebook and Instagram Live can provide an opportunity for continuing contact for some. A simple phone call on a regular basis to those most isolated will be an important ministerial tool and a welcome gift. To paraphrase Presiding Bishop Eaton's words, “we are practicing physical distancing, not social distancing”

Please also note that during these times Church Staff (Administrative Support Staff, Sexton, Musicians and the Pastor/s) will continue to work in connecting with their faith communities and the local authorities to remain current with realities and progress, as well as planning for the future. It is important; therefore, that we continue to pay salaries and provide insurance for staff members. It is also good stewardship that we find alternative ways to give our regular offering to the church. There will be an article on the web site that may prove useful for you.

I am deeply grateful for technology that allows us to work remotely, which many of us will do moving forward. It adds another level of distancing ourselves from the source.

If you need someone to absorb the disappointment or anger of parishioners about this decision, please know that I am happy to shoulder that responsibility. If you have questions or additional concerns please be in touch. In the meantime, I will be holding you and your people in prayer that together we may find hope, promise and solace in the presence of the One who makes all things new. To God alone be the glory!

In Christ's Peace,



John S. Macholz, Bishop

