



# Upstate New York Synod

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

March 24, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God in all things concerning you for your faithfulness in the Gospel to this day. Thank you for all that you are doing.

I write as many questions and concerns continue to be raised in the midst of this pandemic; questions about how to keep our communities together, what are best practices for communicating with those on the margins and concerns regarding the offering of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Before I begin to talk about these please note that I am attaching a letter written yesterday by a doctor in the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA. Her credentials are included. I am also attaching some helpful words from Gordon Lathrop and Timothy Wengert for you to consider in case you haven't seen them before.

I don't believe that our first concern is worship. I believe the first concern is that of physical distancing and #flatteningthecurve.

Everything coming out of the CDC and other reliable sources indicates a strong request to isolate ourselves from one another. There is uncertainty about the many means by which the virus is spread. What is certain is that this will not pass until we take seriously the call to isolate ourselves. We cannot be overly concerned about this, it is the driving force of all that is taking place to halt this virus in its tracks.

I know that all of us have the innate desire to be part of a community, to be able to be present with others at worship, in fellowship, around the table. Our human desire is to be loved and appreciated by others. Achieving that without gathering physically is challenging.

In every effort to provide opportunities for prayer (via Facebook Live or streaming options) it seems to me critical that we limit the number of people involved in the same place at the same time. The "Nine at Nine" meditations being offered by your synodical staff has been designed with that concern in mind. The effort has been well received. I commend this "solo" format for your careful consideration.

With regard to the Holy Communion the issues are many and not a little complex. When we offer communion outside of the community gathered we are at risk of turning the Sacrament into something magical that we 'need' to survive spiritually. In fact, the Holy Communion is but one of the Means of Grace. Holy Baptism (in both the liturgical act and in our remembrance of our own) as well as the Word, read and proclaimed, offer that same amazing grace of God to us all.

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Bishop John S. Macholz  
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I leave you with these thoughts. There is much to ponder. And I am more than willing to be in conversation if you desire. I have no authority over what you decide to do. I only ask that you first take into consideration the medical realities of these days and the ease with which the virus is passed. Ask yourself the question “Why am I doing this?” and wrestle with that a bit.

Second, my strong recommendation is that we use this season of Lent as a time to “fast from the Sacrament” as has been suggested by some of our church’s exceptional pastors and teachers. When we get to the great celebration of Easter, which the Church celebrates for a full seven weeks, we will find great joy once more in the sharing of the Supper in the company of others and offer unstinting thanks for the healing of our bodies as well as our souls.

Know that I am deeply appreciative of your leadership and ministry in these impossibly difficult days. Know that I am proud of the innovative and amazing work that you are doing in the midst of it all. Finally, know also that you are loved and cared for by the One who makes all things new.

In Christ’s Peace,



John S. Macholz, Bishop

PS Please note that tomorrow at 1:00 PM there will be occasion for a Zoom Meeting with the rostered leaders of this synod and me. If you would like to join in it will be an opportunity for some prayer, reflection and conversation around questions and concerns we share. I will have a similar meeting with lay leaders at 3:00 PM. In the weeks that follow I will offer the same opportunities for rostered leaders on Tuesday and Thursday at 1:00 PM and lay leaders at 3:00 PM.

Attachments: Wengert and Lathrop  
Erica Bjornstand

