



Southwestern Texas Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

November 23, 2020

Dear Leaders of the Southwestern Texas Synod:

We pray for your health and safety, particularly as we enter this week of Thanksgiving which is like no other we've experienced in our lifetimes.

We trust that you are doing your best to be responsible in this time; wearing masks, physically distancing and limiting gatherings. Nevertheless, pastoral leaders and church members have been getting infected. In the last two weeks, we've added **three more pastoral leaders** to the growing list of clergy/interns who have contracted the disease. Yesterday, **two members of the synod staff** tested positive and have symptoms; one of them is very seriously ill. These five leaders are spread out around our synod, in the Bluebonnet, Hill Country, Alamo and Cibolo conferences. They were taking precautions and they still got ill. We covet your prayers for them and for those around them.

We are all so very tired of this pandemic and the ways it has impacted our lives. We wish for it to be over now, but the fact is that we cannot wish it away. Throughout these last months we have continually adapted and changed plans in response to the virus with hopes that we would be able to "flatten the curve" until a vaccine could be developed and widely distributed. We are now facing the reality that the curve has become a steep incline, and medical experts are warning that the virus is out of control. Until there is a vaccine, people will continue to get sick, infect others, and many more will die. The latest numbers show close to 257,000 have died already in the US, and over 20,000 in Texas. In some parts of our state, there are not enough hospital beds or coroners to handle the staggering caseloads.

While many of our congregations have already taken steps to modify or suspend in-person worship, **we strongly recommend that all congregations in our synod suspend inside, in-person worship through the end of the year.** We do not make this recommendation lightly. It is out of deep care and concern, not only for you as parishioners, but for our neighbors around us. As Christians, loving God means loving our neighbor. And in this time of pandemic, the best way we can do that is to limit our face to face interactions in close proximity with others.

Please share this with your congregations. We are grateful for all the ways that you proclaim the gospel in the midst of these challenging times we find ourselves in. As always we want to support you in your leadership, so if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

In Christ,

Rev. Sue Briner
Bishop, Southwestern Texas Synod

Mr. Carl Teinert
Vice President, Southwestern Texas Synod