



Northeastern Ohio Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

March 30, 2020

*Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

[Psalm 90:1-2 NRSV]

Dear siblings in Christ of the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

Grace to you and peace in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ!

The COVID-19 pandemic has unsettled our normal way of life since the beginning of March. We find ourselves in a state of anxiety, not knowing what the future holds, relying primarily on the guidance of the medical experts.

In my previous letter, I requested the suspension of all public worship and other in-person gatherings and meetings until at least April 1. However, the escalating number of confirmed cases give clear indication that the danger has not yet reached its peak. Therefore, **I now encourage ministers and congregational leaders to extend that suspension for another month, through the end of April.** This is one of the chief precautions we can take as a way of caring for each other and to deter the spread of the virus.

Last week, Governor Mike DeWine signed a bill (House Bill 197) allowing, among other things, for remote meetings. Thus, for now, every possible meeting should be arranged by whatever electronic means available. It does pose somewhat of a challenge, but it becomes easier to arrange the more it is done.

This news is no doubt disappointing to all who were enthusiastically looking forward to Holy Week and Easter worship and activities. It may be of some consolation to note that Easter is a season of seven weeks, not just one day. The Resurrection can be celebrated at a later date, and the delay may provide for an even more festive occasion. God is still with us, in times of separation as well as celebration.

I am grateful for the many ways our pastors, deacons, musicians, and those with the gifts of technology have risen to the occasion to care for the people of God whom they're called to serve. Again, it is a challenge, but it does become easier as time goes on.

Our Northeastern Ohio Synod website has a [resource page](#) for those who may not have the capability to offer electronic services.

Of course, caring for God's people extends beyond the Sunday service. And this involves everyone, not just the ordained. This time offers us an ideal opportunity to build on the gifts that each of us was given, as St. Paul says, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." Each one of us can make phone calls to other members, write notes, and perhaps even offer more tangible assistance – such as picking up groceries, supplies or prescriptions. We are all in this together, to use a well-worn cliché.

On another matter, last Friday, our ELCA Presiding Bishop, the Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, announced [a series of grants](#) designed to provide support for our most vulnerable congregations and ministries. I encourage you to visit the [ELCA website](#) for more information. We will announce other, more local grant opportunities in the weekly e-news. If you have not already subscribed, now is an excellent time, as it is a good source of late-breaking information.

Third, I wish to call your attention to the following scheduling items:

- 1) The Renewal of Vows service, normally held Tuesday in Holy Week, has been canceled. That is one huge personal disappointment for me, as it would have been my final one as bishop. Should any of you be in need of oil, there are still vials available at the Lutheran Center (Synod Office) in the lobby which you may pick up Monday through Thursday, between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. We will replenish the supply as needed.
- 2) The Conference Gatherings to lift up names for potential bishop candidates has been changed to a mail-only process. See the Synod E-news for more details.
- 3) Synod Council will still meet on April 25, most likely in an electronic meeting. We will most likely have an announcement regarding Synod Assembly following that meeting. As of now, the assembly is still scheduled for June 12-13.

Finally, Psalm 90 at the top of this letter is a reminder to us that our human existence is limited in comparison to the timelessness of God. Pandemics and the resulting fear and isolation, are as old as humanity. Yet throughout the ages, God has been faithful. God has promised to be with us through the ups and downs of life. That is the source of our strength and the source of our hope in this time of insecurity. Let us hold fast to God's promises.

Peace and blessings,



+Bishop Abraham Allende