



Northeastern Ohio Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

March 16, 2020

Dear siblings in Christ of the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

Grace and peace in these times of uncertainty from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

In my previous letter I stated that decisions about modifying congregational activities are made by pastors and congregational leaders, not by synod or Churchwide offices.

However, in light of the rapidly deteriorating landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic, I must now strongly recommend to all pastors and congregations that you consider suspending all public worship and other in-person gatherings and meetings until at least April 1. I ask that you consider some form of virtual worship, whether via live-stream or other alternatives, until the public is given some assurance that the risk factor is mitigated.

This difficult decision was reached out of growing concern for the high level of risk to which many of our members expose themselves by attendance at worship. The press briefings from Governor Mike DeWine indicate that the virus is advancing at an alarmingly rapid rate and our responsibility as citizens is to do what we can to care for each other and lessen the danger.

This is not a mandate, but a fervent request, that you and your council strongly consider other ways to be “church together,” or, at the very least, use your best judgment in consideration of your congregation.

I thank you for the ways that you serve your congregations and your leadership of the people of God who are under your care. The synod's pastoral team and I pray for you daily at noon, especially during this time of Lent that calls us to reflect on how much Christ loves us.

Here are other things we are doing in light of the crisis in which we find ourselves:

- Beginning Tuesday, March 17, the Lutheran Center will be operating under modified hours. Office Administrator Sony Gilroy will be in the building on Mondays and Wednesdays from nine a.m. until two p.m.
- Essential individual appointments may still be held at the participant's discretion, but ALL group meetings will be held electronically. This includes the Worship Committee, Ecumenical Committee, and the Deans Meeting. You will receive instructions on how to link in to those meetings.
- The pastoral team will be working remotely. However, you will still have electronic access to any of us via email and voicemail.
- The pastoral team will also be recording weekly sermons for your use during this time. They will be available on the [Northeastern Ohio Synod YouTube Channel](#).
- Please refer to our synod [resources page](#) for helpful information. We will continue to update that as new information becomes available.

Here is what you or your congregation could be doing.

- If you don't already subscribe to our [electronic communications](#), you may do so by clicking on the link above.

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- If your congregations offer live streaming, online, or downloadable worship opportunities, please notify Marilyn Matevia (mmatevia@neos-elca.org) so she can list them on our resource page and make that information available to others.
- If you are not currently live streaming but would like to learn, please click on this [training website](#). We will have this information available on the resource page as well.
- We realize that not worshipping has a negative financial impact on congregations. We encourage you to create and develop electronic options for giving. The ELCA has two preferred vendors to assist with this: [Tithe.ly](#) and [Vanco](#). Either link will provide information to begin the enrollment process. Vanco is offering a training webinar [Three Mobile eGiving Tools for Easter Success](#), on Tuesday, March 17, at one p.m. ET. You must register, but if you can't make that time, the session will be recorded and sent to all registrants.

We are still in the process of making a final determination regarding Synod Assembly and the Bishop's Election. For now, the date is still June 12-13. However, that is subject to change. Please stay tuned for further information.

I close with a prayer that is appropriate for these times when you may not wish to gather publicly:

Gracious God, it is good for us to gather as your beloved in community. We treasure your presence with us in word and meal, song and prayer. Be with us in these days when gathering together as often as we would like is not possible. When we must be apart for reasons of safety, we trust that you surround us with your sheltering wings. Encourage us in connecting as we are able, reaching out to our neighbors in need and being persistent in prayer. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our constant companion. Amen.

In Christ,



+Bishop Abraham Allende