



Rocky Mountain Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

24 April 2020

Beloved in Christ,

Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

As we journey through this Easter season, it's time to address the question of when and how we might gather in person as church in light of changing restrictions about stay-at-home policies in the five states of our synod.

As of this date, we know the following:

- In Colorado, the state will move from stay-at-home to safe-at-home protocols on April 27; gatherings of more than 10 will still be prohibited.
- New Mexico's stay-at-home order continues through April 30, but the governor has announced her intentions to extend this order until May 15.
- The stay-at-home order in Texas is scheduled to end on April 30. It is expected that the governor will make an announcement about any subsequent orders on April 27.
- There are no statewide stay-at-home policies in effect in Utah and Wyoming; changes to local policies are being considered within the context of nationally recommended protocols about how to safely relax current restrictions.

While there is a great desire on everyone's part to return to something "normal," the simple fact is that the reopening of our country, states, and communities will include a progression of steps leading to a new life rhythm for us all. **Many of the protocols implemented during the stay-at-home orders—including remaining home unless necessary, social distancing, and the wearing of masks in public—will need to remain in effect in most places for the foreseeable future.** It's important for us to recognize that the only reason the rate of infections has begun to plateau or even lessen is because we have adhered to these protocols for the sake of our life together and out of consideration for our most vulnerable neighbors. Now is NOT the time for us to lessen our caution, lest there be a second wave of infection, perhaps worse than the first.

For this reason and based on the information available to us at this time, **we —your bishop and Synod Council—strongly recommend that no in-person gatherings be held by congregations or ministries in our synod through at least the end of May.** Towards the end of next month, we will assess the situation and update this recommendation; it is very likely that there will continue to be restrictions on our ability to gather through much of the summer, if not into the

fall. As always, we encourage you to pay close attention to advice from the CDC and local public health officials.

In the meantime, we have before us a choice as Christ's Church. We can endure the next month and beyond, only lamenting what we have lost in our life as church. Or, as we give attention to our grief, we can also **live into the invitation to be a *Church Becoming***.

Knowing that we may have many months before us until we can safely gather in familiar ways, we can explore new dimensions for how to be church in this time, expanding our capacity to use digital technology and other resources to foster authentic community. We can imagine ways of reaching beyond ourselves to those who may never have set foot in our churches yet desperately long for the good news of a cross-shaped love that will not let us go. We can experiment with new ways to embody Christ's love for those who are most impacted by this pandemic. We can ask what it means to meet and serve our neighbors and world at a time when we can't be with them in person. In short, we can live into the Spirit's promise to become the very church we have been gifted to be.

The church has always found new Spirit-led life when living through challenging and chaotic circumstances. Let us embrace this opportunity to respond to our current situation with faith, hope, and openness to where the Spirit is leading, trusting that nothing is ever wasted in God's economy, not even during a pandemic. This is a good time for us to move from a posture of emergency operations into one of **investment into vital ways of being church in this new season**.

As we move forward together as *Church Becoming*, there are both short-term and longer-term steps we will need to be considering. As a starting point, we invite you to take time to review these two resources:

Questions Your Church Should Answer Before People Return

<https://kenbraddy.com/2020/04/18/20-questions-your-church-should-answer-before-people-return/>

Church in these VUCA Times (VUCA = Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous)

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&v=0uAKQXagwms>

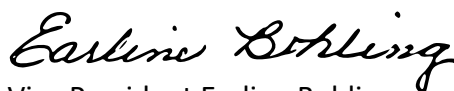
Let's learn together through this time, sharing best practices and new ideas, confident that the God who created us in love and binds us together as Christ's Church will lead us every step of the way.

Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

Yours in Faith,



Bishop Jim Gonia



Vice President Earline Bohling