



Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

April 29, 2020

Greetings Beloved,

Grace and peace to you in the name of the One who can do all things but fail, Jesus Christ, our risen Lord! **I pray that you and your loved ones remain safe, sheltered in place and being mindful of others.**

Siblings in Christ, the questions of “when and how” do we re-open worship in our physical plants is being asked of lay leaders and Rostered Ministers. Yes, as we hope for the lessening of death, sickness, depression, and fear caused by COVID-19, some people are ready to re-open. I believe we hear our governor’s language of red, yellow, and green phases to be implemented for us to gather as community in worship and service.

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod in her five-county make-up is unique; therefore, it would be challenging to share synod-wide guidance on re-entering. **We can provide information and raise questions congregations could consider, but we cannot provide the specific guidance that some are requesting.** Buildings, staff, childcare centers, social ministries and community context all play a role in how a congregation/community of faith may or may not open, e.g. location, vulnerable age group, etc. Possibly our eight conferences will become decision making groups for their areas. We think particulars of re-entry need to be shaped in local contexts.

Over all, **we ask you to be mindful of the governor, CDC, and local leaders, and align with public health directives.** Our concern and caution is to keep people safe, which is why slow, methodical steps need to be in place to ensure proper distancing, cleaning of buildings, protocols for masks, screening, etc.

Albert Einstein says, “In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.” 1 Samuel 12:16 says, “Now therefore stand still and see this great thing that the Lord will do before your eyes.” God works in pandemics! We are seeing missional opportunities: continuing online worship via video or live streaming in addition to face to face, expanding the collaborative sharing of resources (i.e. prayer pauses, Bible studies, Godly play, etc.) We can share collective wisdom and insight on remote communion. Personally, I have made a conscious choice to refrain from communion, as a spiritual discipline, until we gather. However, I acknowledge, I don’t have congregants and I respect the prayerful decisions made by Rostered Ministers on the sacrament for those in their care. We now have an opportunity to have deeper conversation on the sacrament during times of 21st century pandemics or other crises.

Let me close with a heartfelt thank you to our Rostered Ministers, lay leaders, Synod Council, Deans, and Synod Staff for your Christ centered faithfulness to loving God and serving our neighbors.

+ In Christ’s love,

The Rev. Patricia A. Davenport,
Bishop

God’s work. Our hands.

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