



North/West Lower Michigan Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Dear Friends in Christ,

Given the ongoing spread of the COVID-19 virus and the continually updating recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the World Health Organization (WHO), I am joining my ELCA and ecumenical colleagues in strongly urging congregations to suspend all in-person worship services and weekly in-person gatherings for the next eight weeks, or until May 10. This includes weddings, funerals, memorial services, non-emergency baptisms, and Holy Week and Easter services. While I do not have the authority to suspend in-person worship in our congregations, I implore you to do so.

As your Bishop, part of my responsibility is to discern and make recommendations to protect our rostered ministers, congregation members, and the general public. I understand the sadness, disappointment, and dismay at not being able to gather as a church during Holy Week and Easter. I do not make this recommendation lightly. However, given the increase in confirmed cases of the COVID-19 virus throughout our country and in the state of Michigan, I cannot in good conscience recommend gathering in person. The more physical distance we put between ourselves and our neighbors, the more we help reduce the spread and impact of the virus.

In this time of darkness, I see the light of Christ shining though in our congregations. Being Church Together is more than what happens in our buildings, and I rejoice in the many ways our congregations virtually care for one another, love their neighbor, and continue to proclaim Christ. In time, I know we will once again return to the Lord's Table and gather as church around Word and Sacrament. While we are still apart, I encourage you to transition your worship, meetings, and classes to video or phone conferences and operate food pantries in a "curbside only" capacity.

I have already suspended synod travel, in-person meetings, and synod events for this time. The Synod Office will be closed and staff will work remotely as much as possible. We continue to be available to you by telephone, zoom, and email. We thank you for your patience and understanding as we work to respond to everyone who has reached out.

O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

-Evangelical Lutheran Worship

Peace,
The Rev. Craig Alan Satterlee, Ph.D., Bishop

Information & Resources

Upcoming Synod Events

- **March 19-20:** Lenten Preaching Retreat - *Cancelled*
- **April 23:** Synod Boundaries Workshop - *Cancelled*
- **May 14-16:** Synod Assembly – *Cancelled*
- Registration fees for these events are in the process of being refunded. If you submitted a credit card payment, it will be refunded to your card. If you submitted a check, you will be issued a refund check. Please allow 2-3 weeks for processing.
- For Synod Assembly, all hotel rooms at the Comfort Inn & Suites and the Fairfield Inn have been automatically cancelled. If you booked at another hotel, please verify the status of your room directly with your hotel. If you have any questions about refunds, please contact Ann Stavros at annstavros@mittensynod.org.

Opportunities for Online Worship

- Many congregations are hosting weekly worship via live stream on Facebook. Check with your congregation or [follow us](#) for more information.
- Bishop Satterlee will be preaching for Psalm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter on his [YouTube channel](#). We will announce when the videos are posted.
- If you are looking to stream your worship service, the ELCA has provided [a starter guide](#).

Maintaining Congregational Stewardship

During this time, please be mindful of your ongoing stewardship with your congregation. Remember that day-to-day operation of our churches often relies on the ongoing gifts from the congregation.

- Consider setting up automatic withdrawals to be sent to the church.
- Consider using an online donation system.
- Consider mailing in your donations (being mindful of your procedures for money-handling).
- If you are looking to set up online giving, the ELCA has a [list of preferred vendors](#).

Resources for Outreach Ministries

Based on current CDC Guidelines, we recommend:

- No more than ten people gathered for preparation or distribution at any time.
- Avoid the use of the church building for food preparation or distribution.
- Distribution should be "curb-side" only.
- Consider delivering goods, rather than having a central point of group distribution.

COVID-19 Updates and Resources

We will continue to post updates and resources on the [Coronavirus Resources page of our website](#).