



Northern Illinois Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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March 17, 2020

Dear siblings in Christ:

Hear the words of the Psalmist:

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Psalm 46:1-3 (NRSV)

There is something about these days that is simply disorienting. The world we know has been upended and is not feeling very comfortable. In fact, it is just kind of scary. As we face the COVID-19 virus, allow me to remind you that God is with us. Everywhere and always. God is our refuge and strength. So, this is a time when we must intentionally stay connected to God.

It is difficult to stay connected to God while we are distancing ourselves from each other. We depend so much on our corporate worship for both connecting to God and to each other. If your congregation has not yet done so, I am recommending that all congregations of the Northern Illinois Synod suspend worship for the remainder of March. Our local, state and federal officials have asked for our cooperation. Now is not the time to think that you are the exception. "Social distancing" is meant to protect all of us.

In recent days, I have also suggested to your pastor, interim pastor, vicar or Synodically Authorized Minister, to prepare for the possibility of not being together for Holy Week or Easter worship. I am not sure that you can understand how hard it is for me to even imagine that. I am, however, asking congregations to remain nimble enough to resume worship quickly when it becomes safer.

I am encouraging congregations to find ways to stay connected, using technology when it is possible. I have asked pastors to stay in communication with you and tend to your spiritual needs. The Internet has made many options available to us that we have not had in the past.

Here are three things we can do to keep the church strong in these difficult days:

1. **JOIN TOGETHER IN PRAYER.** I am calling this synod to pray together at noon each day. Please stop and take a moment to pray for your congregation, the

Northern Illinois Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Pray for your members. Pray for yourself. Pray for the ill, the frightened, the vulnerable, and the poor. Pray for the dying. Pray for world leaders and our own elected leaders. Pray for our healthcare workers. Pray for researchers. Pray for the unemployed, underemployed and laid off. Pray for all students from college to kindergarten who have been forced away from school. Pray for your pastor or whomever leads your congregation.

Will you join me in prayer at noon beginning tomorrow and continuing through May 13?

2. **PRACTICE SOUND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP.** Your congregation is probably not prepared for a financial crisis. The church's ability to do ministry is dependent upon your regular gifts. The synod and churchwide expressions of the church are dependent upon the generosity of congregations. We will remain strong only if we continue to practice first fruits, proportionate giving. While we are away from corporate worship, please give electronically or mail a check to your congregation. Your pastor and the staff of your congregation is still working hard. Let's not make them worry about their paychecks. Let's maintain our gifts to food pantries, Lutheran Social Services, Grace Place, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries Center and the many other ministries we support.

Will you join me in supporting the work of your congregation on a weekly basis?

3. **DON'T LET SOCIAL DISTANCING BECOME SOCIAL ISOLATION.** My heart has been broken by some of the stories that I have heard. Continue to extend the ministries of the church to the homebound. Take all the precautions to prevent the spread of illness but check on your neighbors. If you head to the grocery store, shop for someone who cannot. A crisis such as this quickly exposes those who are the most vulnerable. That is who the church is called to serve. Be a source of encouragement.

Will you join me in loving our neighbors and encouraging others?

It feels like the ground is shaking beneath us. These days are disorienting. But we are in this together. We are church together. We are stronger together. Even when we cannot be together physically.

Thank you for your faithfulness. God bless and keep you.

Walking with you,



Bishop Jeff Clements