

## **An update on coronavirus (COVID-19) and communities of the ELCIC.**

Dear friends in Christ,

Since the letter issued by our Bishops on March 4, 2020, the World Health Organization has categorized the coronavirus (COVID-19) as a global pandemic. Infection rates have risen, along with many people's level of concern. We have received many questions and requests over the past days and feel that another response is needed.

We want to first ask you to keep praying for all who are affected – those who have been infected, those who are quarantined, those who are grieving the death of loved ones, those who are experiencing racism and prejudice, and for all those who continue to care for the sick and vulnerable. The Lutheran World Federation has prepared intercessory prayers that you may use in worship or individually (<https://tinyurl.com/wz2y7v3>).

Many leaders in the church have asked for direction regarding communion practices and whether or not worship gatherings should be suspended. At this time, we are refraining from giving directives that would apply across the entire church. We are asking our leaders to be attentive to their particular context and to make decisions that best reflect each congregation's setting and practice.

We do ask that whatever decisions your congregation/organization/ministry decides that they will reflect a deep concern for those most vulnerable – particularly elderly members and those with compromised immune systems. This is a way of being the Church and of loving each other in a supportive Christian community. A faithful response to this pandemic will include care of our neighbour along with our trust in God's faithfulness.

### **Best Practices**

Please refer to your local or provincial/territorial health authority for the most accurate and up to date information about COVID-19. They will also provide the most complete and effective advice with respect to containing and preventing the spread of the virus. At a minimum, we strongly encourage the following:

- Stay home if you are feeling unwell.
- Practice 'social distancing' (ideally two arms lengths between others).
- Clean hands regularly using warm water and soap. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Practice good cough hygiene (cough into your elbow).
- Regularly clean and disinfect common areas and high-touch areas.
- Greet in ways that do not involve physical contact; smile, wave and nod rather than hugs or handshakes. This includes sharing the peace during worship.

## **Worship Practices**

In all settings, we strongly discourage the use of common communion vessels that are not silver or gold (or plated). Juice should not be used in common cups. If using individual glasses, minimize the probability of multiple people contacting the glasses. All ministers, servers, communion assistants should wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after presiding/serving.

If your community chooses, you may opt to temporarily suspend communion with wine altogether. Theologically, to receive communion in one kind (bread only) is to receive the full body and blood of Christ.

Offering plates could be a potential contamination risk. We advise congregations to develop an alternative way of collecting offering that would minimize multiple contacts. This may also be an opportunity for members to enrol in pre-authorized remittance to mitigate this risk while also ensuring provision of resources for the congregation.

## **Suspending Worship**

Even in the early church, when gathering was difficult, it was incredibly important for communities to read scripture, pray, and worship together. If your faith community is considering suspending worship, we strongly encourage you to find other ways of gathering or worshipping.

Meet in smaller groups using worship resources available through [www.worship.ca](http://www.worship.ca) (Where Two or Three are Gathered: Worship for Small Assemblies). Consider streaming your worship services, or directing congregants to live streams from other churches or televised services on Sundays. Agree to pray at home at a specified time so that your community can still pray together. Make sermons and study materials available to each member. Meet virtually (tele- or video-conferencing).

## **Potential Self-Isolation of Key Leaders**

It is possible that key leaders, both rostered and lay, may experience the need to self-isolate. It is important that contingency plans be put in place, in advance of such need, to ensure the continued provision of leadership in key congregational functions. All rostered and key leaders should designate someone to take on these key responsibilities should illness occur.

## **Maintaining Community**

Even as this pandemic presents a challenge to gathering, we hope and pray that our communities will stay strong and supportive of each other in the name of Christ. This is an excellent opportunity for the whole community to engage in ministering to each other.

During this time, we encourage the entire community to be in more regular contact by phone or personal visits (when appropriate). We encourage healthy members to take an active role in ensuring that our more senior members have adequate support to stay home. Pray for each other.

## Our Prayers

Through these challenges, we hope and pray that each of our communities will continue to be faithful and public witnesses to the grace and love of God through Christ. We continue to pray for our leaders and members, asking for God to give us courage, faith, and compassion. Blessings in your ministry during this time.

In addition to our words, we direct you to responses from our partner churches for further guidance and encouragement:

Lutheran World Federation – <https://tinyurl.com/vyg2ap9>

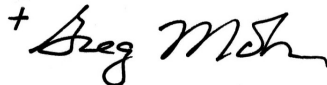
Anglican Church of Canada – <https://tinyurl.com/yx6n7uxr>

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - <https://elca.org/publichealth>

Yours in Christ,



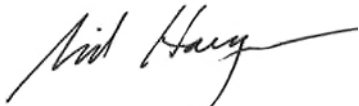
The Rev. Susan Johnson  
National Bishop, ELCIC



The Rev. Dr. Greg Mohr  
British Columbia Synod



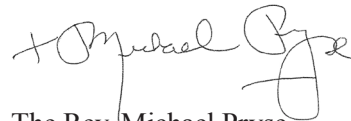
The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer  
Synod of Alberta and the Territories



The Rev. Dr. Sid Haugen  
Saskatchewan Synod



The Rev. Jason Zinko  
Manitoba/Northwestern  
Ontario Synod



The Rev. Michael Pryse  
Eastern Synod