



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

# Minnesota South District

... cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God

March 13, 2020

Dear Brothers,

I thank my God as I remember each of you daily in my prayers. Just a few days ago, I sent you my preliminary thoughts on the present pandemic. As the nationwide response has rapidly increased in these few days, I find it necessary to send this letter of encouragement as a follow-up.

In such an unprecedented public calamity, human confidence is radically shaken. Fears naturally arise, and then panic ensues. People need a steadying influence, a voice of calm reason to bring them perspective and hope. This is especially true regarding our communal worship services and practices of administering the Lord's Supper.

You are that voice, dear brother. You have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. Let me suggest that you adopt a three-legged stool approach as you minister to your people in this public crisis: medically informed, practically effective, and pastorally focused.

## Medically informed

- Make sure you have accurate information. Don't rely on social media—it's a breeding ground for rumor and panic. Ask your own physician. Check with local authorities to make sure you have the latest and best information available regarding COVID-19, its transmission, and treatment.
- Regularly check with [this site](#) provided by the Center for Disease Control. There, you will find the latest information. You may also use [this excellent guide](#) to best practices specifically recommended for faith communities to help contain the disease and minimize its impact.
- By now you know the fundamental facts. Prevention includes limiting social contact, respiratory etiquette, thorough and frequent handwashing, and daily cleaning of frequently touched surfaces.

## Practically effective

- Make sure you've thought through procedures you want to implement now and contingencies should the need arise. I mentioned several items in my earlier letter:
  - *According to our two-kingdom theology, what is your congregation's responsibility with respect to complying with the CDC or other government agencies trying to prevent the spread of this disease?*
  - *If you had to quarantine, whether self-imposed or demanded by the government for a period of time, how would you care for your non-salaried workers who would basically be put on a furlough and without income?*
  - *If your congregation were to find itself in a situation where many members were sick, would it be advisable to self-quarantine by canceling services?*

- *How can you teach your members and lead them in home devotion and prayer if they're not able to be in church?*
- To these I would like to add the following:
  - Convene your board of elders to discuss how your church will respond to the contagion. Be proactive, not defensive. Discuss how you will protect and serve the vulnerable in your congregation and community. Who needs to be trained and ready to step in for other leaders in your church should they need to be quarantined? Utilize the Synod's resources and bulletin inserts to help inform and prepare your congregation. They can be found [here](#).
  - Convene a small task force of informed and competent lay leaders (and professional staff if you serve with multiple staff members) to review your sick worker and paid leave policies.
  - Strategize ways your church could mobilize to provide food and other needed services to members who are quarantined or to people in your community who are isolated because of the contagion (foreign students in a local university, for example). Be creative and positive about this opportunity to extend compassion and care in Jesus' name.
- Introduce careful hygiene into your pastoral practice.
  - Follow your physician's ritual as he or she enters and leaves the examination room: Wash your hands carefully and thoroughly with soap and water after visiting with people during a pastoral visit (especially if you continue to shake hands).
  - Consider a public notice to worshippers that until the danger of contagion is over, your church will permit verbal greeting and conversation in place of the ritual handshake.
  - **\*Administration of the Lord's Supper:** This deserves special attention. Pardon me for going on at some length, but this is vitally important right now. This is a time to encourage more frequent communions, not less. Satan delights in using fear to tempt us toward despair. As you think through the proper administration of this sacred meal during this time, please consider the following suggestions:
    - You and your communion assistants need to carefully and thoroughly wash your hands just before the Service of the Sacrament—and between tables if you accidentally contact someone with your hands (perhaps doing so in a manner visible to the congregation).
    - Make sure that you, the altar guild, and any liturgical assistants are especially careful in the way you handle the sacred elements. The Savior's body and blood always deserve meticulous care, but especially now.
    - If your church utilizes both individual cups and the chalice in Holy Communion, make sure all cups are carefully cleansed before the Divine Service. Also consider that [the CDC has never found a case where the common cup has spread or transmitted disease](#). Nonetheless, to help your people be confident, add additional linen purificators to the altar preparation, and make sure you carefully and publicly cleanse the entire rim of the chalice between each and every communion table, even as you clearly and carefully wipe it after each individual use.

- Be extra cautious not to touch a communicant's mouth or hands when you distribute the Savior's body. (Take your time when administering. There is no need to rush.)

### Pastorally focused

- The Office of the Holy Ministry brings with it a great responsibility and privilege. By your call and ordination, you have been placed by the Lord of the Church Himself to care for the sheep and lambs under your charge. Despite the uncertainties and fears abroad in our land, you can be sure, dear brother, that you are Christ's and He is yours. He will strengthen and supply you with all you need, for you are His servant and steward of God's own mysteries.
- We have been told the aged and infirm are especially vulnerable to this virus. That means that they need your special attention. Perhaps make a list of those congregants and phone them on a regular basis. Visit them as needed, taking extra care for personal hygiene if you do. Thoroughly clean the vessels you use for private communion between each and every visit.
- In all your preaching and teaching, Law and Gospel are more important than ever. Help your people to see this public health menace in the clear light of God's Word. Repentance is always in order, but especially now. As Luther wrote, plague times are God's chastisement for our sins. We daily sin much and deserve nothing but His wrath and punishment. But God, who is rich in mercy, has sent His Son to bear all our iniquity in His own body and give us His perfect righteousness.
- Lead your people to see that through this and other public calamities, God is testing both our faith and our love. He wants us to learn how we should act in faith toward Him and how we should care for our neighbor in love.
- Practice the deliberate care of your own soul. Set aside time for focused meditation in a private place where you can read Scripture and pray out loud so you can be strengthened for ministry by God's Word and Spirit.
- The great news is that God is at work in all His people both to will and to do that which is pleasing to Him. Therefore, you may be sure that He will supply all you need for this current challenge. He's calling all of us to get out of ourselves and to live in Him by faith and to live in our neighbor by love. His promise is that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

The God of peace sanctify you wholly, dear brother, and preserve your whole spirit, soul, and body, sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

Your Pastor and Brother in Christ,



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