



April 22, 2020

To the Disciples who are the Nebraska Synod

Dear Friends in Christ:

***Christ is Risen!***

This confident proclamation is the first thing that must be said, even when we don't get to do it in the physical company of other believers. This is our fundamental truth, our reason for existing, and our hope in the midst of every challenge, including pandemic.

***Thank you—and God bless you!***

This word is second only to expressing Easter's Good News. I continue to be inspired by your generosity, your innovation, your persistent efforts to sustain the work of the Gospel, the very life of your congregation's ministry, in the midst of disruption and distancing like we've never faced before. I thank you, and I thank God for you, and pray God's continued blessings on you and your Easter work of sharing the Resurrection.

**Critical decisions lie ahead.** I'm also writing to invite your attention and your prayer as this experience of pandemic enters a time of even greater uncertainty. Nebraska Synod congregations continue to refrain from in-person gatherings through at least May 11 in compliance with the Governor's Statewide Directed Health Measure (DHM)\*.

As we move forward, it appears possible that there may be a transition from a statewide DHM to locally-determined DHMs. Some areas *maybe* permitted to congregate earlier than others; limits on gathering size may vary by locality. Some precautions, such as masks and social distancing, may remain in place long after other restrictions are lifted. We face *months* of continuing vigilance; this is the very nature of pandemic.

I am asking you to be in conversation NOW about how your congregation will live into these transitions. Your pastors, deacons and PMAs, in conversation with your congregational leaders, are making important decisions. Please pray for them and honor their decisions—not because those decisions will always be right, but because they will be made faithfully.

As those decisions are made, please hold the following matters in mind:

- Good information is essential to good decisions. The CDC, Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and your local public health authorities provide reliable information and guidelines. Please consult them first.
- Plan for the work of deep cleaning and disinfecting. Anticipate a schedule (and perhaps a volunteer roster) for this critical and ongoing need.

- Anticipate how to implement recommended practices\*\*:
  - o How will you handle crowds in excess of recommended limits?
  - o How will you reinforce best practices like physical distancing or masks?
  - o What precautions will you take for distributing Communion when we gather again?  
For receiving offering, distributing worship bulletins, etc.?
- Determine how you will continue to connect those whose health conditions or age may require them to remain isolated longer than the rest of the community.
- Continue to monitor the ELCA, Nebraska Synod, and Portico Benefits websites for helpful resources
- Consult your congregation's insurance provider for resources and recommendations for protecting your members

By the time we begin to gather together again in person, we will all have endured a cost—some of us, a very high cost—of time, energy, lost income, lost opportunity, even the death of loved ones. *Let us not waste the cost we've paid by rushing too quickly or acting too carelessly in our eagerness to find a sense of normalcy.*

This is a highly disruptive season. Life seems upside-down. But we are an Easter people. At the core of our faith is the conviction that the Resurrection always turns lives upside down: endings become beginnings, loss becomes gain, doubt becomes faith, fear becomes courage, death becomes life.

Now is the time to live out our faith in the disruption that is Easter. Now is the time for a faith deep enough to strengthen us for the ongoing work of caring for our neighbors, a hope strong enough to sustain us until this long season of pandemic ends. Because it will.

Because Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed!  
Gratefully in the name of the Risen Christ,

Brian D Maas  
Bishop