



March 16, 2020

**Beloved in Christ:**

I write to you again far sooner than I would have anticipated, because the situation in which we all live is changing so rapidly as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak and the responses that public health demand. Since I wrote you last week, the national Centers for Disease Control, as well as other federal and state agencies, our President and our Governor have called on us all to limit our gatherings so as to slow the spread of the virus.

I'm writing to urge you to suspend your in-person gatherings for public worship and other events

for the weeks ahead. Knowing that policy advisors may change the timeframes again, I would encourage you to suspend in-person worship and events at least through Easter, and be prepared to extend that suspension as needed.

I am urging this as a matter not only of Law but of Gospel. What is clear in this pandemic, as in other viral contagions, is that it can be easily transmitted by those who are not ill—or who do not know they are ill. Our love of neighbor demands that we refrain from endangering her or him by ignoring public policy, medical advice, and common sense. Martin Luther himself wrote of those who “do not avoid places and persons infected by the plague, but lightheartedly make sport of it and wish to prove how independent they are . . . . This is not trusting God but tempting him. God has created medicines and provided us with intelligence to guard and take good care of the body...” Now is the time to be using that intelligence and the medical knowledge God has granted us—for the love of our neighbor.

Remember: *not gathering in a building does not mean we cease being Church!* We are still part of the one Body of Christ, and we still connect with one another in prayer, worship, learning, and service. Regardless of our congregation’s size, we can be church together, even have a sense of worshiping together, without actually gathering face-to-face.

I encourage you to visit [this link](#) for resources on how to share worship and almost all of congregational life through means other than those we’re most used to. And continue to check that page for ongoing updates to the resources there. Among the things you’ll find are:

- Ways congregations of any size can share worship without gathering in a building
- How to handle funerals and weddings during this time
- Resources for receiving congregational offerings
- Ideas for reaching the most-impacted and ministering creatively and effectively
- Responses to questions about sacraments, “alternative” Easter and more

I’m also writing to repeat my deep gratitude for the ways in which you are serving and leading with grace, caring for others, encouraging one another, and sharing the high calling of proclaiming the hope, peace, and comfort of the Good News. These are challenging times, but I would remind you of the words of Sunday’s epistle lesson: “suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope; and *hope does not disappoint us.*” My prayers are with you in the critical work and witness you continue to do.

Yours in the strong name of Jesus Christ,

Brian D Maas,  
Bishop

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