

nebraska synod



March 27, 2020

To the Saints of the Nebraska Synod

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...” --Psalm 46

Dear Friends in Christ:

In a time such as this, in which threats with names like virus and recession are piled on top of countless other less-specific uncertainties, I call you to remember the promise of the Word in texts like that above. Beneath everything that feels unsure, we stand on the Good News of God's grace in Jesus Christ, and the assurance of his constant presence.

I'm writing to remind you of that truth, and because some have asked for clear guidance for a variety of matters. Please understand that what I share here isn't put forward as "commandments from the bishop," but as counsel from the synod's pastor. Every congregation, leader, and member will need to make thoughtful decisions appropriate to their situation. In the acknowledgement that I may be wrong, I offer the following counsel:

Not gathering for worship: while the information is not always clear or consistent and the temptation is strong to gather in person—we miss each other!—we have an obligation of love to our neighbor not to endanger her or him by violating guidelines put in place for the sake of the community's health. My desire to be with others does not trump the reality that I may be the source of another's infection. I urge congregations to follow community directives on avoiding or limiting gatherings until those directives are lifted.

Holy Communion practices: the Lutheran understanding of the Sacrament of the Table is that it is a bread-and-cup experience of Christ's presence in a flesh-and-blood gathering of his people. While deeply important to believers, it is not essential to salvation, and there are times when we may, voluntarily or otherwise, fast from receiving it. My counsel, affirming the guiding principles of the ELCA, would be simply not to celebrate the sacrament in any form until we are able to gather in person again. This is a truly exceptional time, and I recognize that congregations, in consultation with their pastors, may choose another practice for the duration of the current situation. Our pastoral leaders are well-trained theologians sensitive to ministry in their context. Trust them. And know that when "normal" returns, exceptional practices will no longer be necessary.

Offerings and finances: your congregation is even more reliant on your support when you can't gather in person. Now is the perfect time for your congregation to set up online options for receiving offerings—and of course one can always send a check in the mail. I urge congregations to prioritize staff salaries and benefits should decisions about expenses need to be made. Our office is working to stay abreast of help available for congregations through the Mission Investment Fund, the ELCA Credit Union, and other sources, as well as understanding what federal stimulus-related resources, if any, congregations might access. In this uncertain

time, *those of us with the means to do so need to step up our generosity*, recognizing that there are those whose means have changed drastically. We are all in this together, and we share our burdens and our blessings.

Holy Week and Easter: the holiest time of our year is approaching, and we almost certainly will not yet be able to gather in person. Most of our congregations are finding ways to share worship online, by phone, or by mailing in-home worship resources to members. I'm certain this will be true for all of Holy Week and Easter. While we can't change the date of Easter, every Sunday is a celebration of the Resurrection, so if your congregation chooses to make the first Sunday you're able to gather again in person your celebration of Easter, with all the music, decoration, and festive elements of Easter Sunday, do so with joy.

Care for others: I am humbled and awed by the creativity and energy I see as members and congregations of this church invest themselves in innovative ways of staying connected with those most isolated and alone, providing food and more for those most negatively impacted, partnering with neighboring congregations to provide inspiration, encouragement, and worship, and so much more. Such faithfulness. *Thank you, church—for being church!*

Care for self: the radical shift in daily life is draining on all of us, and this new reality is going to stretch on for some time. Please, pace yourself. Limit your exposure to news, to social media, to anything that compounds uncertainty or distress. Breathe deeply. Take the time to pray. Be patient with yourself (and with those who live with you). Remember that you are God's beloved creation. Care for yourself as such.

We are all in this together—with one another and with the God we know most fully through the life, sufferings, death, and *resurrection* of Jesus Christ. Be encouraged. Have hope. Know you are prayed for, cared about, and much appreciated.

The Nebraska Synod staff are here to serve and support to the best of our ability. We are committed to keeping you informed—while being sensitive to the vast amount of information being shared these days. Thank you for your prayers. Please know you are in ours.

Yours in Christ,
Brian D Maas,
Bishop

Video Message from Bishop Maas

A video message from Bishop Maas is available at [this link](#).

Share this email:



6757 Newport Ave., #200 | Omaha, NE | 68152 US

[Manage](#) your preferences or [opt out](#).

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

This email was sent to .

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.