



May 1, 2020

**Grace to you and peace from the One whose Resurrection brings life and gives hope, even in the greatest of challenges.**

I'm writing in response to the Governor's announcement of permission and guidelines for congregations to resume in-person worship May 4. As the guidelines note, permission to gather "*should not be interpreted as a diminution of the threat of the virus.*"

That threat is real, which is why all other public gatherings are limited to 10 persons. For that reason, I continue to urge Nebraska Synod congregations to postpone resuming in-person worship until public health officials in your community indicate it is safe to exceed the 10-person limit on public gatherings. This will vary by community. For most, it will be May 31. For many, it will be longer. Be in conversation with local health officials—and your insurance provider—as you make your decisions. And know that the State's guidelines ([available at this link](#)) must be followed.

Please give special attention to these words from those guidelines:

***Faith leaders are responsible for the safety of those who attend services in houses of worship and must limit physical participation on the premises depending on the size and structure of the house of worship. This document anticipates flexibility in the timing of reopening of services at houses of worship throughout the State based on the judgment of the faith leaders responsible for making such decisions.*** [emphasis added]

Permission to gather is not the same as safety to gather. With you, I long to be with others in worship, in person. But it is not yet time. Our Christian convictions compel us to temper the free practice of faith with the faithful practice of freedom. We are called to be discerning and wise.

Each community must decide for itself when it is safe and responsible to resume worship in person. Every week we wait puts us that much closer to reducing the threat, flattening the curve, developing effective treatment, and finding a vaccine.

We *will* gather again. Soon. But not too soon.

Our highest priorities as a church body are providing the encouragement, comfort, and hope of the Gospel while protecting life and serving the neighbor in need. I commend all of you for the inspired and creative ways you are providing worship, extending care, and serving your

communities, safely and carefully. Thank you. Please plan for continuing these modified ministries for some time to come, even beyond any eventual reopening.

The journey ahead is long. And God continues to be with us every step of the way.

The Nebraska Synod and the ELCA maintain lists of resources to assist and guide you. Nebraska Synod staff continue to work, remotely, to support you any way we can. Please contact us if you need assistance. We are grateful for you and hold you in prayer.

Yours in Christ,  
Brian D Maas, Bishop

For your reference:

<https://nebraskasynod.org/learn/covid19-updates-and-information.html>

<https://www.elca.org/publichealth>