

# nebraska synod



March 13, 2020

*You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,  
will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.'*

Greetings in the strong name of Jesus Christ, our refuge and fortress, our encourager and comforter in every distress.

This year's Lenten journey is an unusual one, as rapidly changing news and large-scale actions regarding COVID-19 continue to unfold. The admonition to "remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return" seems a more potent reminder of reality this year. We in the Nebraska Synod office have received a host of inquiries about how congregations might handle worship practices, visitation, gatherings, and more; and questions about plans for upcoming synod-related events. Like most of you, we have no particular knowledge or wisdom about the underlying realities of pandemics or how populations respond to them. We rely on experts in the fields of medicine and public health to guide our decisions, and encourage you to do the same.

What we *do* have knowledge of is the Spirit of God, ever present and ever tending each member and every community of the Body of Christ. I'm writing to thank you for your ministry and for the many ways in which you make that same reassuring truth known to one another. I'm also writing to urge you to begin all of your responses to this moment's demands for decisions in this truth: *All will be well*. God is truly our "very present help in trouble."

That is not to deny or avoid the reality that we must make responsible decisions about our congregations' gatherings, worship practices, events and more. Instead, it is to begin with confidence that God has the last word, as always—and to understand that decisions made in conversation and community, using good judgment and common sense, will be the right decisions. Trust yourselves; trust those with whom you share leadership; above all, trust the God who says, "I will never leave you or forsake you."

In that trust, please be sure not only to strive to find answers regarding congregational activities, but to ask important questions as well—questions you may be the only ones in your community raising. Ask questions like, "how will we remain in touch with the most isolated among us—especially those seniors whose health keeps them home alone?" "How will those in our community who depend on school lunches or food banks have enough to eat while schools, and other public sources are closed?" "How can we be in prayer together even if we're not gathered in worship together?" In short, ask how we can be church together, witnessing to and serving those most impacted by this pandemic, especially those already marginalized and most likely to be overlooked; those to whom Jesus always points.

As our journey through Lent and through new challenges continues, know this: the God of resurrection, the source of all life, is with us in this and every moment—and that this same God has called each of us into ministry *for* this moment; for the sake of our neighbor and for the sake of the world God loved enough to give a Son. Thank you for responding to that call. Thank you for your faithfulness.

With my prayers and those of the entire Nebraska Synod staff,

Brian D Maas,  
Bishop

*Please refer to the resources linked to the following page for assistance in your planning.*

The following links are commended to you for the reliable guidance they provide:

Faith community practices in general, from the Centers for Disease Control:

[https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html?CDC\\_AA\\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fguidance-community-faith-organizations.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/guidance-community-faith-organizations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fcommunity%2Fguidance-community-faith-organizations.html)

Ideas for ways to sustain community, worship and prayer apart from or in addition to physically gathering:

<https://sojo.net/articles/community-without-communing-resources-virtual-church>

A simple and understandable explanation from a Nebraska public health physician describing what we might realistically expect from the pandemic, and why communities benefit from limiting large gatherings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSSDbZzVwtc&feature=youtu.be>

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