



NORTHEASTERN IOWA SYNOD

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

Office of the Bishop
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April 29, 2020

People of God in the Northeastern Iowa Synod,

We write to you today as the deans and chaplains of the conferences of the Northeastern Iowa Synod, ELCA. We are rostered ministers who have been appointed or elected to care for the other rostered ministers and congregations throughout the synod.

We are writing to thank you for your Christian witness during this difficult time. We see this public witness in the ways you are proclaiming the Gospel creatively through online worship and through the sacrifices you are making for the sake of the neighbor and for sake of the common good.

First, together, our communities are proclaiming the Gospel powerfully in various online spaces in this time. The Good News of Jesus is getting out beyond the church walls. It is reaching people throughout our communities who need a word of hope in this difficult time. Thank you for all the ways *you* are making this happen. So many people contribute to this movement of the Gospel through online offerings, prayer, encouragement, generosity, and support of the whole congregation.

We are all making important sacrifices for the sake of the neighbor and the common good. We want to gather with our communities in this difficult time. We want to gather in the place where we hear the Word of God and receive the Sacraments. Yet we are staying home in order to protect those most vulnerable in our community. We are staying home in order to do our part to flatten the curve of the virus, so that our healthcare system is not overwhelmed. We are making sacrifices out of concern for others. We are choosing the *path of love* even though it is hard. This is a powerful Christian witness.

21st Century Americans are not often asked to sacrifice. We prize individual liberty but are rarely asked to consider the good of the other. Often, more emphasis is placed on rights and less on the responsibilities we each have for our democracy to function well. Christians are called to live differently. We are called to be salt and light in the world. We can lead by modeling and encouraging the way of sacrifice, responsibility and service to the other.

In this time, we are growing in endurance, character, and hope. We are growing in our public witness to the Gospel. As Romans chapter 5 proclaims,

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

We are writing to encourage you to hold fast to your Christian witness. Even when we are *allowed* to worship together, we must ask is this the best decision for the sake of the neighbor and the common good? Can we ensure the safety of those dear to us in our community if we gather? **We encourage the congregations of our synod to continue the powerful public witness we are offering by staying home and worshipping together through online worship until such time as public health officials and science assure us that it is safe for all.**

In Christ,

Three River Conference
Rev. Lisa A. Dietrich, Dean
Rev. Kim W. Smith, Chaplain

Water of Life Conference
Rev. Joshua J. Martyn, Dean
Rev. Paul N. Amlin, Chaplain

Jubilee Conference
Rev. Gary C. Heidt-Johnson, Dean
Rev. Kristen C. Rod, Chaplain

Riverside Conference
Rev. Timothy J. Maybee, Dean
Rev. Grant Woodley, Chaplain

Upper Iowa River Conference
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson, Dean
Rev. Laura Gentry, Chaplain

Living Waters Conference
Rev. William J. Peters, Dean
Rev. John W. Gannett, Chaplain

Shepherd of the Hills Conference
Rev. Erika J. Lenth, Dean
Rev. Margaret R. Yackel-Juleen, Chaplain

Shechem Conference
Rev. Adam T. Starrett, Dean
Rev. Virginia A. Olson, Chaplain

Tree of Life Conference
Rev. Corey W. Smith, Dean
Rev. Dawn L. Pederson, Chaplain

Bishop Steven L. Ullestad

Assistants to the Bishop:
Rev. Mark A. Anderson
Rev. Steven P. Brackett
Linda J. Hudgins

Rev. Dr. Joelle Colville-Hanson, Director for Evangelical Mission