



Southwestern Washington Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Richard E. Jaech, Bishop

March 19, 2020

Dear Friends,

I want to thank you for the wonderful ministry that you are doing throughout our Synod in the midst of many risks and uncertainties. As pastors, deacons, and congregations, you are reaching out with dedication and care to serve the members of your parish and the people in your surrounding neighborhood. I have heard countless stories of how pastors, church council members, and care teams are calling all the members of their congregation to see how they are doing and to offer help. Even though we are separated physically more than we have ever been, you are using all kinds of creative means to stay connected to each other, such as phones, email, Zoom, Facebook, and live streaming.

I thank all of you who have completely stopped having worship services and meetings at church. This is a hard decision to make, since we gain so much from our time together. However, Christ teaches us, in Matthew 7:12, to "do to others what you would want them to do to you." We would not want anyone to come into our presence who could infect us with a dangerous virus. In the same manner, we should not put others at risk by scheduling and attending church gatherings where we might, without even realizing it, transmit a virus to them. We must err on the side of caution out of love for others. For that reason, I agree with both Governor Inslee prohibiting groups over 50 and President Trump prohibiting groups over 10. I strongly ask you to respect those limits and to end all services and meetings. The vast majority of you have already done so.

Again, I applaud you for finding many creative ways to bring people together spiritually and to minister to their anxiety and concrete needs. For example, many of you who have community dinner programs have teams who continue to prepare the food, observing all the health department guidelines, and then box the dinners up so that they can be distributed to people standing outside your church building in safe lines.

You are also using creative means to engage members in worship. Many churches are experimenting filming a worship service in which a small worship team does the liturgy in an otherwise empty church, and then the video is made available to all members on Facebook or YouTube. We are learning so much! At the Synod office we are creating a list of all the congregation websites or Facebook sites where people can view and participate in the worship services you have created. Tell us if you are doing this, and we will include a link to your site on our list.

The Holy Spirit is active among us. We are never alone. No matter where we are...sitting in our home, shopping at the grocery store, visiting a friend...God is always with us and the Spirit is uniting us with the whole communion of saints. Like the disciples walking down the roads of Galilee with Jesus, we will encounter many surprises and challenges. Yet with St. Paul we can say,

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The mission of the Southwestern Washington Synod is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ by empowering congregations and Church leaders to grow in worship, education, outreach, stewardship and other ministries.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through the One who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8)

I pray for you each day that Christ will fill you with a double measure of peace, wisdom, and strength as we journey this road together.

Rev. Richard Jaech

Bishop Rick Jaech