



Southwestern Washington Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Richard E. Jaech, Bishop

March 12, 2020

Dear Friends throughout the Southwestern Washington Synod,

I write to offer my care and support in this very uncertain time, especially as we witness and experience the on-going COVID-19 pandemic. The entire Synod staff and I are praying for your health and protection. In the face of so many unknowns, it is vital that we daily remind ourselves of God's deep love for us and, in turn, lovingly care for one another in every way that we can.

I know that all of you are actively trying to discern what adjustments to make in your congregation's ministry in the interest of everyone's health. Since our Synod's congregations are located in many different areas and circumstances, there is not a single, correct course of action that applies to every church. I respect and support the decisions that each of you will make in your own setting.

I would like to offer these suggestions that, hopefully, will be helpful to you as you decide what to do.

1. Go to the website of your county's Health Department to find an update on the number of COVID-19 cases in your area and what your local Health Department is advising. It is wise to make our choices based on the latest facts. For an online directory of all the county Health Departments in Washington, click here: <https://www.doh.wa.gov/AboutUs/PublicHealthSystem/LocalHealthJurisdictions>

2. Create or expand a phone network in your congregation that allows church volunteers to regularly call other members, particularly those at higher risk, in order to find out how they are doing and mobilize medical support if needed. With many people choosing to stay at home and distance themselves from others, loneliness and increased anxiety will be very common. This is an important time for us to practice being an actively caring church community. Show this care not only to church members but to others in your neighborhood, such as families who have children in your childcare or preschool program, nearby merchants, and first responders.

3. A few of our Synod congregations have chosen to suspend worship services and church meetings for a given time. If your church chooses to do that, use this time as an opportunity to experiment with using Zoom teleconference (zoom.us) or conference calls to have your Bible studies or meetings. Some of our congregations have the capacity to live stream their church services to people at home. Let the Synod Office (swwsynod@plu.edu or @SWWASynod on Facebook) know if you are doing that and we will publish a link to your service for people who aren't able or choose not to go to church for worship. (One congregation offering this is St. Mark's by the Narrows, Tacoma, which you can reach at <https://www.smlutheran.org>. They will have their worship leaders lead services online Sundays at 10am and a devotion weekly M-F. Their worship will stay on line for the week for viewing anytime.)

4. For those of you having worship services, I strongly recommend that you serve only bread for Holy Communion, but no wine. All the options for serving wine carry heightened risk. The bread should be served by a pastor or communion assistants with freshly disinfected or gloved hands who place the

420 121st St S Tacoma, WA 98444 • 253-535-8300 • swwsynod@plu.edu • www.lutheranssw.org

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.

piece of bread into the hand of the communicants. Another choice would be to worship without having Holy Communion until the pandemic has passed.

5. I recommend eliminating all physical contact at the Sharing of the Peace. Instead, worshippers can bow to each other with hands folded. Other churches are asking worshippers to not move around during the Sharing of the Peace. Instead, the pastor simply says, "The peace of the Lord be with you!" The people respond, "And also with you!" And then the liturgy continues.

6. For the Offering, there is greater risk when the Offering plate is passed from person to person. Some churches are having the ushers lean into the rows to receive the offering from each person. Others are placing the offering basket on a stand in the aisle where the worshippers place their own offering.

7. I strongly recommend that you not serve any food during Coffee Hour or at church meetings.

Once again, you will want to choose the options that best match the needs of your community, based on the most recent public health updates. I encourage you to let us know at the Synod Office what you are choosing to do, so that we can pass on good ideas and considerations to others. You can email us at swwsynod@plu.edu. Another way to share your decisions and ideas is to post them on our Synod Facebook page that can be reached through this link: [@SWWASynod](https://www.facebook.com/SWWASynod). It is good to make use of social media to support each other as such times as this.

Our national church body provides a variety of health-related resources at <https://elca.org/PublicHealth>, including a congregational planning list, prayers, livestreaming recommendations and a resource for worship in times of public health concern.

We know that many of our church members tend to only share their offerings when they are present for worship. When members do not attend worship for a number of weeks, this may very quickly add financial vulnerability to your congregation's ministry. It is appropriate to remind folks of this and encourage them to send their offerings by mail or through electronic means. You can communicate this to members in the midst of the many steps you take to care for them. They can set up online banking with their own bank, your congregation can set up an ACH through your own bank, or you can use an online system like PayPal or [SimplyGiving](https://www.simplygiving.com) through Thrivent.

Please know that you are in my prayers during this very challenging and confusing time. I am grateful for your leadership, companionship, and partnership as we walk together through this unfamiliar wilderness.

May God bless you and keep you. May God's face shine upon you with grace and mercy. May God look upon you and the people you serve with favor and give you peace.



Bishop Rick Jaech