



May 8, 2020



East Central Synod of Wisconsin

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



A Message from Bishop Gerald Mansholt

May 6, 2020

Dear Pastors, Deacons and Lay Leaders,

**Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
We are illumined by the brightness of his rising.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Death has no more dominion over us.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

These dialog verses from the liturgy for Morning Prayer remind us we are in the Easter season. Though we live in the days of the COVID-19 outbreak, the comfort and

assurance of God's victory in raising Jesus from the dead surrounds and strengthens us. Thanks be to God!

I write to thank and encourage you in the work you are doing in these trying days. From what I have seen pastors, deacons and lay leaders have been providing exemplary leadership in caring for the people of our congregations and responding to the needs of the community. These are difficult days to be sure. But the grace and mercy of God is seeing us through these times. Thank you to all of you and thanks be to God for the life and hope we share.

I also write to give counsel and direction as we contemplate the gradual reopening of our congregations for public worship. I want to emphasize the word gradual. **We should not look upon these days as a sprint to the finish line when everything will return to normal but a marathon that is going to last at least a year but more likely 18-24 months.**

Yesterday I participated in an online presentation hosted by the ELCA Minneapolis Area Synod in which **Dr. Michael Osterholm** talked about the coronavirus and COVID-19. Dr. Osterholm is a member of one of our ELCA congregations, Edina Community Lutheran Church, and on the Board of Regents for Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. Most importantly, however, he is an epidemiologist and the **Director of the University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy**. He has worked with Republican and Democratic administrations at both the state and national level. Dr. Osterholm stressed the long-term nature of this global health crisis and the importance of our taking steps to mitigate the rapid spread of the virus. He stressed that "we live in virus time and the virus will continue to seek out and attach to humans."

While new cases of the coronavirus may decline periodically, we will need to deal with the virus for a long time to come. **We will have this health crisis until one of the following occurs:**

- A vaccine is developed, produced and distributed widely, or
- 70-80% of the population is infected and herd immunity is developed

Until then we are all susceptible but especially the more vulnerable in our midst. That means people of any age with underlying health conditions (e.g. asthma, diabetes, heart conditions) and older people (65+) are especially at risk of the disease and even death.

Dr. Osterholm stressed the unpredictability and yet the certainty of the virus. Using visual images the activity of the virus could be like any of the following:

- A slow burn of a fire across a field of grass
- Waves of differing size that come crashing periodically with lulls between
- One huge sudden outbreak

The purpose of physical distancing and the recent stay at home order has been to prevent the huge sudden outbreak. **Whatever scenario unfolds he stressed we need to be prepared for some tumultuous months ahead.** While restrictions may be lessened for a time, we may also need to impose them upon ourselves at a later time.

On April 20 Governor Evers issued **Badger Bounce Back**, a phased approach at lessening the restrictions of the Safer at Home Order issued on March 24. Phase One would allow gatherings of up to 10 people. Phase Two would allow gatherings up to 50 people. Phase Three would allow for the resumption of mass gatherings with minimal protective and preventative measures. Each of these phases is dependent upon a decline in the symptoms and cases reported and the capacity of the health care system

to move forward. I have attached a copy of the Badger Bounce Back for people who would like to read it in more detail. From what I have read and heard I do not expect a movement to Phase Three until sometime in 2021 at the earliest.

I know this order is being challenged in the courts and as I write we await a decision. Whatever the outcome **it is incumbent upon us in the Church to exercise our Christian moral sensibilities in these matters.** My colleague Bishop John Roth of the Central-Southern Illinois Synod offers these helpful words:

Lutherans have always recognized that God calls upon us, both individually and collectively, to recognize and to act on our responsibilities for the wellbeing of our communities. At a minimum, this means complying with health and safety orders issued by state and local officials. But this compliance alone may not be enough. The Apostle Paul's reasoning in Romans 12-13 is that the law restricts conduct, but sometimes the law does not go far enough. You may be keeping the law, but you may nevertheless be injuring someone. Love should restrict your conduct to the point where your conduct will not cause someone harm or cause someone to doubt the credibility of the gospel message you proclaim. **Consequently, if some form of gathering is permitted, but that form of gathering at this time may pose a significant health risk in your context, love ought to compel you to refrain yet from that form of gathering.**

In other words should the Badger Bounce Back order be ruled unconstitutional and invalid, we as Christians must still wrestle with these matters and seek to do what most contributes to the health and well-being our congregations and communities.

It has been my privilege to serve on the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Council of Churches for nearly 6 years, including a term as President of the Board. The Reverend Kerri Parker, Executive Director of the Council, and her staff have put together a document, ["Returning to Church: Ministry During the COVID-19 Outbreak"](#). This document, prepared in consultation with public health experts and church leaders, has been widely praised across the country in Lutheran and ecumenical circles. I have attached a copy with this letter. I encourage you to read it thoroughly and take to heart the guidance being offered. The document lays out recommendations to consider for each phase of Badger Bounce Back and poses questions to be considered for congregational life.

There are several points I will lift up for emphasis:

- **Plan on a gradual or phased return to worship.** During Phase One all congregations should continue online worship, maintain physical distancing, and keep office activity to a minimum. In Phase Two congregations will need to consider how to limit the size of the gathering, maintain physical distance, and properly cleanse the worship space.
- **Encourage high risk people to continue to shelter in place** throughout the pandemic. I have often been inspired by the hardy elderly who weather ice and snow to come to worship. But now is the time to encourage faithful yet vulnerable folk to remain at home.
- **Physical distancing and modification of behaviors.** Shaking hands, hugging, the sharing of the peace, passing out of printed bulletins, holding hands during the Lord's Prayer, the passing of offering plates—all these are behaviors that need to change so the spread of the virus is restricted.
- **Refrain from singing.** This is so difficult for me to write and yet so necessary. This tiny coronavirus spreads in tiny droplets while coughing or sneezing and in even smaller

aerosols while breathing. Dr. Osterholm told us to think of sunlight coming through a window that exposes all those particles hanging in the air. Singing propels aerosols along with the virus to much greater distances. Singing also brings the virus more deeply into our lungs when inhaling. There was a story from outside the Seattle area in March where 42 of 51 community chorale members became infected though they were practicing physical distancing.

- **Protect your congregation from liability.** Consult your insurance carrier. For the sake of those we love and for the protection of our congregational corporate life follow the guidance of public health officials. To put it more bluntly: don't risk the publicity and legal issues that could follow an outbreak caused by negligence or ignoring recommended practices.

- **New normal not without risks.** We don't know how the weeks and months ahead will unfold. We cannot live with the economic life of the country shut down. Yet we must also work to keep the impact of the virus from overcoming the health care system. While we navigate dangerous waters, let us pray wise decisions and actions for our governmental leaders, our public health officials and all those who serve in essential services and supply lines. Let us use our best thinking and reasoning to plot a way forward both in our communities and in our churches. We must adapt to continue our lives while reducing risks as much as possible.

- **Be Gentle, Be Kind, Reach Out, Stay Connected.** These are exceedingly hard and difficult days. People will have different opinions, expectations, and reactions to the upheaval going on around them. I pray our love for one another and those in the communities around us will be deeply rooted in the love of Christ. "Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor." (Romans 12:9-10)

I wish we were done with the coronavirus, and I wish we could just go back to being Church and doing Church like we were doing just two months ago. I really do! I miss corporate worship, hymn singing, coffee hours and hanging out with people who love Jesus and want to serve and witness in response to the Easter Gospel.

But we are living in the midst of a pandemic that is going to be with us for a long time. When I first addressed the synod about the coronavirus, I said "**for these days we have been baptized.**" This remains my mantra. While the way of doing Church has changed, we are still the Church, a people baptized into the life and death of Jesus Christ. We are an Easter people who know all about navigating the treacherous waters of death. We have the promise of God whose final word is one of forgiveness, life and salvation.

The Holy Gospel appointed for this coming Sunday is from John 14: "**Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.**" Jesus goes on speak about the many dwelling places in the Father's house and how he goes to prepare a place for us. The Risen Jesus is already in our future, preparing life abundant for us. We pray for long lives and health here on earth but undergirding our journey is the Promise of life eternal.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In peace and love for all,

Bp Jerry

Prayer

The best tool that we have for maintaining spiritual resilience in this time is prayer. Now the cynic in me, the "Debater of this Age," as Paul would call it, wants to disregard prayer. The argument usually is made, "What good is huddling in your room with eyes closed to the world and hands folded against any action speaking to a being on another plane of existence going to bring about in our world?" Especially in recent years when "thoughts and prayers" seems like the only response to things that happen.

We seem to be at a loss, especially when well meaning people appear to use prayer as an excuse for non-action. Yet, prayer IS an action, it is itself deliverance, a bold claim upon God's promises to us, and transformation.

The question was once posed, "When was Jonah delivered from the great fish?" Jonah was the angry prophet who ran away from God, rather than proclaim a message of repentance and reconciliation to Israel's enemies. It took him being tossed overboard in a storm and swallowed by a great fish to begin to see that running from God was not a good idea. Well, it took three days and three nights in the belly of the fish first, but I digress. It was the moment that he prayed that he was delivered. His prayer rose from the place he was to the throne of God. As soon as it formed in his mind and left his lips, God heard. Even there, in the depths of the sea, on the door of death, in the darkest night, God hears and delivers.

Jonah prayed, "I called to the LORD out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of *Sheol* I cried, and you heard my voice." Deliverance before being spit out onto shore. We are delivered from what is going on the moment we pray because we know and begin to perceive God's presence with us, we are no longer alone. This is also the boldness of prayer, because we hear, repeatedly that God won't give us a stone if we ask for bread (Matt. 7), we can ask whatever we want of Jesus and he'll do it, to the glory of God (John 14), and we are so bold to claim God as our Father in the Lord's Prayer. We know that God is not a wish granter. I know that my life would look very differently if my prayers were answered like wishes, and I also know there are many things that have shaped me and helped me grow that wouldn't have happened either, because God isn't glorified in my wishing.

God is glorified when we are transformed through prayer. There is a spiritual story where someone lists everything that is going on in the world and asks God, "Why are you letting all these things happen?" To which God responds, "I was going to ask you the same question."

When considering prayer, we hardly think that we may be the answer to someone else's prayer. Yet, in every way, that is what Jesus and the Body of Christ, were sent into this world to be. Not wish granters, but God glorifiers. The actions of the church and its members are shaped not just by our own prayers, but by the prayers of all who cry out to God in the midst of their isolation, pain, and confusion.

We live in a world in need of prayer, there really is no debate. Prayer that sustains us, prayer that delivers us, prayer that transforms us, prayer that finds its answer in us. Especially in these days, as we wrestle with COVID-19 and its impact on our world and on our lives. We need prayer, not as an escape, but to close our eyes to the world as it is and open our eyes to

the world as God would have us shape it to be. To fold our hands to stop doing what we want and set them to the task of building God's kingdom. To speak to the one who is not far away, but so very, very near. The god who suffers with us through COVID-19, who serves with the medical staff and first responders, who stays up with the families keeping vigil through the night, who stays with those whom the world has abandoned, and brings us that very precious kindled flame of hope that God is with us, even though the world around us is as pleasant as the belly of the great fish.

High School Senior Recognition Sunday, May 17

Saint Andrew would like to recognize the high school seniors in our congregation. On **Sunday, May 17** during the 9:00 online service, your confirmation mentors, pastors, and the church would like to surround you with a special prayer and blessing in worship and celebrate with you all of your accomplishments. We would also love to learn and celebrate your plans for the future, whatever those may be: working in town, heading off to college, serving our country, taking a year to think about what lies ahead, etc.



Please fill out this short [google form](#) and upload a picture that we can share with SALC.

Saint Andrew Member Survey

While we were not able to gather for Saint Andrew's anniversary as we had hoped, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are connected as the body of Christ. Even though we cannot gather in the church building, Saint Andrew's mission and ministry have not ended. Openness is more important than ever at a time when so much is "closed."

We are worshipping online, communicating weekly via e-mail, and working through the church directory to call every member, but we recognize that we may have missed you. Through [The Member Survey](#), we hope to reach those we have missed and hear feedback on how we might better be "open" to you - and stay connected at a time when it is necessary to remain apart.

God has designed us for connection and this difficult, even traumatic, time. Our faith is put to the test. When we look for it, we can see either the worst or the best of humanity. Know that your pastors pray for you daily and are available by phone, video conversation, or e-mail.



Helpful Hints for Worshipping Online

Worshipping online is just not the same as meeting together to worship God, sing together, or share in communion. These are odd times - singing at your screen, hunting for the live stream, trouble shooting technical difficulties.

One of the best things you can do to make sure you don't miss a live stream is to *Like* or *Follow* the Saint Andrew page. Then watch for an alert to tell you that worship is about to begin. If the live stream fails or updates, a new alert is sent that will prompt you to the right live stream.

At 8:30 am each Sunday, look for a post that will contain the bulletin, a link to share an offering, and "At home" Sunday school. Settle into a comfortable place, breathe deeply and welcome God's spirit into your living room or kitchen. When you're ready for worship say "hello" in the live stream comments or test the "like" or "love" button.

If you are not comfortable with Facebook or worshipping online, check out the website: www.salc-wausau.org. The weekly bulletin and "taking faith home" are posted there and can be read as you worship God in your own way. God gathers us together even when we are apart as we praise him for the life and peace God brings!

Sparkhouse Family Sunday School



Sunday school is now online! We are inviting families to take advantage of the free Sunday school lesson offered weekly through Sparkhouse. [Click here](#) for the link for this week's material.

Weekly Bible Studies

The weekly men's and women's bible studies are still going strong and meeting via Zoom. Both groups meet on Wednesday mornings - the men's group at 7:15 am and the women's group at 9:30 am. If you would like to tune into the men's group, [click here for the link](#) or contact Bob Wiederhoeft at bob.wiederhoeft@gmail.com. To join in the women's group [click here for the link](#) or contact Pr. Jenn at pastorjenn@salc-wausau.org.



The Weekly Wave in Your Inbox or Your Mailbox

During this time, we are not mailing the Network Newsletter because it requires significant office time and collaboration.

Instead you can expect The Weekly Wave to hit your email inboxes on Fridays with a brief pastoral letter and any other points or pieces of communication about activities or updates.

We recognize not everyone has e-mail so will mail paper copies of the Weekly Wave to those who are on this mailing list for the Network bi-weekly. If you know of someone who is not receiving updates because they do not have internet or e-mail, please contact Joy Mitchell to add their name to the mailing list: joy@salc-Wausau.org.

Face Masks Available for Saint Andrew Members

As things continue to shift and change almost daily, so are efforts to change with it. The quilting ladies would like to offer face masks to Saint Andrew members. All you need to do is call or email Linda at 715-573-4866 or lindaksp@aol.com to let her know you would like one. When masks are finished they will be put in a plastic bag with your name on it and placed in a plastic tote outside the north entrance of the church.



Submit Your Video Easter Greeting

Send your Easter greeting to the folks at Saint Andrew by creating a short 5-10 second video and emailing it to salc.live.stream@gmail.com to be included in the Sunday livestream. Please call or text Pr. Justin at 715-544-8925 with questions or technical support.



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