

From the Office of the Pastor:

## **April 30 Update from the Office of the Bishop James Dunlop via Zoom meeting with Synod Pastors**

These are the continuing concerns and guidelines of the ELCA and our Bishop as communicated to Synod Pastors for implementation and consideration as regards public and personal safety directives for the continuing pandemic. The recommendations are intended to support the breaking of the Covid transmission cycle and are provided here for your guidance and information.

The Bishop and Pastors of the Synod are united in encouraging faithful Lutherans to continued patience, calm, and understanding in all aspects of our lives together and to remember safety is the Church's duty to its members.

### **Topics and Highlights:**

1. Regarding "Stay at Home" Governor's order and staged return to work/gatherings {including worship]

- because the virus has only just reached its peak in our area, restrictions from gatherings of 10 or more will remain in effect
- therefore churches will remain closed in accordance with the guidelines set forth by the Governor's office. The new possible lifting date is set for May 31st. It is important to note, however, that at this time a staged and gradual diminishing of gathering regulations has been established. expect the following process by code: Code Red - Essential business operations only. Masks to be worn in all publicly accessible places. No gatherings of more than 10 individuals at a time and continuation of CDC safety procedures and continued social distancing.
- ***York and Adams Counties remain at this level [Red] until updated by the Governor.***
- Code Yellow - Some additional business activities [as yet to be determined] to be restored with continued CDC safety procedures in place. Gatherings limited to 25 individuals or less in any given space.

**In short, this means Lower Susquehanna Synod Church remains closed to worship and social/business gatherings of more than 10 individuals at any given time.**

2. The distribution of Communion outside of the gathering of the community [ie private or individual excepting pastoral decisions regarding life and death emergencies] also remains on hold. Theological and doctrinal discussions within the ELCA and our sister denominations regarding this aspect of Christian life are under way and changes to the present and/or established understandings and procedures will be shared should there be any.

3. The questions surrounding safe re-opening of Churches is also underway and there are many questions to be answered:

- who decides when it will be safe and what provisions will be set in place to assure our safety when we gather once more?

- how shall we effectively disinfect our buildings?
- how will we inform members of re-openings and community expectations for "self-safe" responsibilities?
- shall we continue the practice of "social media" based worship for those who continue to be at risk?
- will we sing? [knowing that singing may actually accelerate the spread and increase distance the virus can travel]
- will we pass the peace and the offering plates?
- will we require masks during services, and hand sanitizing both when entering and exiting the building?
- how shall we embrace recommendations on all these things knowing they are not permissions nor do they have status to protect the church from potential liabilities? [Will our present insurance cover the possibility of Covid related litigation?]

NOTE: A Synodical Document regarding the reestablishment of Public Worship is forthcoming.

4. The Bishop strongly encouraged the continued self-care of pastors and collegial patience, calm, and understanding where there will be disagreements among leaders and members with decisions and procedures established by the Government and the Church. Jesus offers us His Peace at all times; especially in times such as these and we should always embrace His Peace together.

5. The Bishop will offer a Synod Wide Sabbath Day of Rest on Memorial Day Sunday. A recorded worship service will be prepared and made available for broadcast and/or web posting to the congregations to facilitate some rest for pastors and an opportunity for the Bishop to address the Congregations of the Synod together as One Body of Christ.

6. With further regard to staying safe, healthy, and Virus free, ... Do Less & Be More, ... for God's people.

God's Peace and Blessing be with you all.

*Pastor Burkhart*