



Immanuel Lutheran Church LC-MS
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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

For the time being, we are suspending all services and activities at the church. What a topsy-turvy time the last few days have been. I apologize for the length of this letter, but there is a lot to convey. If there are any questions or concerns, please let me know.

Gov. Reynolds issued a State of Public Health Disaster Emergency activating the public health response and recovery aspects of the State Disaster Emergency Plan effective at noon today (3/17).

The parts that relate to our congregation are as follows:

*Pursuant to Iowa Code § 135.144 (3), and in conjunction with the Iowa Department of Public Health, unless otherwise modified by subsequent proclamation or order of the Iowa Department of Public Health, I hereby order that effective Noon today, March 17, 2020, and continuing until 11:59 p.m. on March 31, 2020: ...E. Mass Gathering: Social, community, **spiritual, religious**, recreational, leisure, and sporting **gatherings and events of more than 10 people are hereby prohibited at all locations and venues**, including but not limited to parades, festivals, conventions, and fundraisers. Planned large gatherings and events must be canceled or postponed until after termination of this disaster.*

There has been much discussion and prayers around the 3rd, 4th, and 5th Commandments in these times, and I invite you read these words of Luther on Genesis 12:

“Careful note should be taken of this description: ‘Abraham went, as the Lord had told him.’ The Lord, it says, has spoken, and He has told Abraham that he should go out. Therefore this going out was a most sacred work, an obedience that was most pleasing to God.”

“One must note, however, that the Lord also speaks to us through human beings. When parents give orders to their children, the tasks may seem insignificant and unimportant in their outward appearance; yet when the children obey, they are obeying not so much men as God. For God has commanded that parents should be obeyed...Thus when the government, by virtue of its office, calls citizens into military service in order to maintain peace and to ward off harm, obedience is shown to God. For the Lord tells us (Rom. 13:1): ‘Let every person be subject to the governing authorities.’ But someone will say: ‘Obedience is dangerous, for I may be killed!’ My answer is: ‘Whether you kill or are killed is immaterial, for you are going as the Lord told you.’”

“Let us, therefore, remember this brief statement: ‘Abraham went, as the Lord had told him,’ and write it above all the activities that we carry on, whether at home or abroad, whether in war or in peace, whether during a plague or in any other danger. Then it follows that even if we have to die, we may comfort ourselves that we continued steadfast in our obedience to God. Even though the outcome may seem rather sad, it is a great comfort to know that you have obeyed God. Therefore you should expect help from Him and a far greater reward than if the matter had turned out according to your own way of thinking” (LW 2:271–272, 272–273).

These words are timely and poignant for our time. The government is not asking us to halt the preaching of the Gospel, and they are not oppressing the right to free speech. They are not singling out the Church in efforts to quiet her; nor are they shutting down or have a single aim to hinder the preaching and communication of the Gospel by other means. The government's call to limit gatherings and to restrict work and business activities may be inconvenient and challenging; but these are the people God has established to restrain evil and maintain good order. This is not an issue of stopping the Word of God; it is an issue of physical welfare for our neighbors.

To this end there are several important items of note for you, the members of Immanuel, and our life together in His Word and Sacraments.

- 1) Anyone who doesn't have a hymnal at home, is encouraged to take one home. Please borrow one from the church for your home use in devotions. There are many resources for family devotions, prayers, the catechism, daily Psalms, lectionary readings for each day, in addition to the hymns.
- 2) If anyone desires the Lord's Supper over the next several weeks, or has any issue of pastoral care, please contact Pastor, and he will arrange a visit (either in the home or at the church).
- 3) Sunday Services, Wednesday (Evening Prayer), and daily Holy Week Services (if we are still with suspended services) will be sent via email, published on the website, or can be found at <https://anchor.fm/ImmanuelGrinnell>. They will not be on the YouTube channel anymore, and this is a free service that allows us to give access in different ways. Because this is a podcast, it can be downloaded and listened to in your car, on your walks, or wherever else you listen to podcasts.
- 4) If you do not have internet access, or a smartphone to stream the services, a copy of the sermon can be mailed to you. Please let myself, or Amber, know if you would like the services sent to you via mail.
- 5) Concordia Publishing House, the publishing house of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, has many free resources available for you at this time. They can be accessed at <https://www.cph.org>.
- 6) Family Devotions are done by LC-MS radio station KFUE, and can be found at <https://www.KFUE.org>.
- 7) As you are able, please continue to give your offerings to the church. The giving envelopes you have are designed to be able to mailed. We also have online giving, or can arrange someone to pick it up.
- 8) If you are in need of any physical assistance (meals, groceries, medication or other supplies), and are unable, or it would be unsafe for you to leave your home, please contact Pastor, and we will find someone to help.
- 9) Lastly, rather, it should be firstly, pray. Take it to the Lord's in prayer, and know that He gives peace, not as the world gives. We live in this valley of the shadow of death, knowing that He has already walked through it, and in life, sickness, or in death, we are His children in time and in eternity. He has given us the gifts and resources to face this day, and He will give wisdom and strength for tomorrow.

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. (Psalm 118:24). In the midst of the fear and chaos, we have been given an opportunity to show our love in words and deeds. You have an opportunity, ***“in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”*** (1 Peter 3:15)

You have an opportunity to pray; an opportunity for “*supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*” (1 Timothy 2:1-4) Lastly, you have opportunity to spend lost time with your family. Reconnect with them around the Word of God, and strengthen each other by being in His Word.

As is everyone else, we will continue to evaluate and re-evaluate the situation. When services are allowed to resume, we will let you know.

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

Rev. Dr. Joel G. Koepp