

Dear community: As we are still caught in the middle of the coronavirus crisis, I would like to reflect on how we might face this issue as a church, rather than seek to give a homily based on the scripture. I offer three points for your consideration:

Point 1 Dr. Larry Brilliant, an epidemiologist, who played a key role in eradicating Smallpox and who warned about a coming pandemic fourteen years ago and who has worked on virus issues all his life was asked for his thoughts on the present crisis and what he sees as the solution. His talk is titled: *A global pandemic calls for global solutions*. He has also been interviewed many times about the coronavirus and his responses are all available on the internet.

Point 2 I don't wish to be the only one making the decision about the opening or closing of our church. The decision affects us all. If you have an opinion, phone or email the church office and I will let you know what the consensus is. Our bishop says 'open the churches' but most bishops, including the bishop of Dallas, says 'keep them closed.' The Fort Worth Diocesan protocol calls for a maximum of three people to every two seats. That would mean a maximum of 45-50 people in St. Paul Church at any service. All elderly would be excluded and those who could come would need to wear a mask and bring some cleaning wipes to clean your area after the service, unless you presume some angels should come and clean up for you.

Point 3 It grieves me to see our church building closed with no fixed time for reopening. However, what the doctors say is that we are doing the right thing. One biochemist said that one of the ways most susceptible to catching the virus at the present time is by attending church! In addition, in all this talk about a response to our crisis, I don't hear any talk from church or State about the confinement of thousands of children at our border and the anguish of their mothers and fathers

who may never be able to locate them. This forces me to realize that the pain we face is miniscule compared to their pain. Nature can deal us some heavy blows, but it is sobering to realize that human beings can inflict even greater pain for political gain. I see this being played out in our politics at the moment. I truly hope and perhaps we as church can pray that when our country returns from the virus we will be a more compassionate people than when we entered into quarantine.

God bless you.

6th Domingo

17 de mayo de 2020

Querida comunidad: Como todavía estamos atrapados en medio de la crisis del coronavirus, me gustaría reflexionar sobre cómo podríamos enfrentar este problema como iglesia, en lugar de tratar de dar una homilía basada en las Escrituras. Ofrezco tres puntos para su consideración:

Punto 1 El Dr. Larry Brilliant, epidemiólogo, que desempeñó un papel importante en la erradicación de la viruela y que advirtió sobre una pandemia que se avecinaba hace catorce años y que ha trabajado en cuestiones de virus toda su vida se le preguntó por sus pensamientos sobre la crisis actual y lo que él ve como la solución. Su discurso se titula: Una pandemia global requiere soluciones globales. También ha sido entrevistado muchas veces sobre el coronavirus y sus respuestas están disponibles en Internet.

Punto 2 No deseo ser el único que tome la decisión sobre la apertura o el cierre de nuestra iglesia. La decisión nos afecta a todos. Si usted tiene una opinión, teléfono o correo electrónico a la oficina de la iglesia y le haré saber cuál es el consenso. Nuestro obispo dice 'abre las iglesias', pero la mayoría de los obispos, incluido el obispo de Dallas,

dicen 'mantenlas cerradas'. El protocolo diocesano de Fort Worth exige un máximo de tres personas a cada dos escaños. Eso significaría un máximo de 45-50 personas en la Iglesia de San Pablo en cualquier servicio. Todos los ancianos serían excluidos y aquellos que pudieran venir tendrían que usar una máscara y traer algunas toallitas de limpieza para limpiar su área después del servicio, a menos que usted presuponga que algunos ángeles deben venir y limpiar por usted.

Punto 3 Me apena ver nuestro edificio de la iglesia cerrado sin tiempo fijo para la reapertura. Sin embargo, lo que dicen los médicos es que estamos haciendo lo correcto. Un bioquímico dijo que una de las formas más susceptibles a atrapar el virus en el momento actual es asistiendo a la iglesia. Además, en todo esto se habla de una respuesta a nuestra crisis, no escucho ningún discurso de iglesia o estado sobre el confinamiento de miles de niños en nuestra frontera y la angustia de sus madres y padres que tal vez nunca puedan localizarlos. Esto me obliga a darme cuenta de que el dolor que enfrentamos es minúsculo en comparación con su dolor. La naturaleza puede darnos algunos golpes fuertes, pero es aleccionador darse cuenta de que los seres humanos pueden infligir un dolor aún mayor para obtener un beneficio político. Veo que esto se está llevando a cabo en nuestra política en este momento. Realmente espero y tal vez nosotros como iglesia podemos orar que cuando nuestro país regrese del virus seamos un pueblo más compasivo que cuando entramos en cuarentena.

Dios les bendiga

Statement for May 17

List provided by the [Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America](#).

Twenty Questions for Congregations Considering In-Person Worship

1. Have pastor and congregation council prayed about this together?

Are we in agreement that it is time to start in-person worship? Have we voted on this?

2. Has there been a decline in cases and fatalities over the last 14 days?

Are the hospitals overwhelmed? Is there sufficient testing and contact tracing? [State and Local Emergency Management websites](#)

3. What percentage of our congregation are part of a vulnerable population that should not be meeting in groups yet? (65+, pre-existing conditions, compromised immune systems...)

4. Is our pastor a vulnerable individual? Other staff?

5. Will people 65 and over be allowed to come to worship? How will we make it clear that vulnerable populations should not come?

Communications? Signs on doors? Will we turn them away?

6. Will we require masks? Will we provide masks? What will we do if people refuse to wear masks?

7. People not living in the same household should stay at least 6 feet apart. How will we facilitate this? Tape on the floor?

8. People should sit every third pew. How will we facilitate this? Tape off pews?

9. If cases and fatalities begin to grow again, will we stop having in-person worship? What will be the benchmarks for this decision?

10. In Phase 1 there is no nursery, and children cannot wander from their household group. Will small children be allowed to come to worship? What age? What will we do if they wander?

11. In Phase 1 churches can only operate at 25% capacity. What is that

number for your worship space? Is there overflow seating available? What will we do when we reach that number? Will ushers block people from entering?

12. Will we continue to livestream for those who are unable to be present?

13. It is recommended that hymnals be removed, and worship materials not be distributed. Do we have projection? If not, will we announce everything?

14. Singing increases the distance aerosol and viruses can travel. Singers are super spreaders. Will we sing? Choirs? Masks reduce risk, but do not eliminate the spread.

15. Do we have a written plan for sanitizing all surfaces after each worship service?

16. Communion preparation and distribution require a much higher and more complex set of protocols. Are preparers, distributors and communicants trained and ready for communion yet?

17. How will this plan change if somebody tests positive for COVID-19? Will everyone who is in the room self-quarantine for the next 14 days? Will we cease holding worship in person? How will this plan change if somebody dies from COVID-19?

18. Have we called our insurance company to see if we have liability insurance for claims against us if a lawsuit is filed due to infection or death by COVID-19 as a result of our ministries?

19. Will we have baptisms? Babies are in the low risk group, but they can and have become infected with COVID-19. Is it worth the risk right now?

20. Will we allow outside groups to use our space? What expectations or guidelines will we expect them to follow? (Masks? Social distancing? Sanitizing?)