

## **A PASTORAL LETTER FROM BISHOP KEVIN STRICKLAND REGARDING COVID-19, THE CORONAVIRUS**

As we have all watched the news recently and seen the spread of a novel coronavirus, COVID-19, around the world, many people have expressed concerns over this disease and the potential for it to disrupt our normal, daily lives. As the church, we are called to not give into fear, but to equip ourselves with knowledge so that we can be prepared to respond appropriately should the need arise.

At this time, the synod is monitoring the situation and will continue to provide our congregations with updates and guidance as we learn more.

But the most important piece of advice that we can give you right now is that if you are sick, regardless of why you are sick, you are encouraged to stay home and go see your primary care physician. In addition to COVID-19, we are experiencing a bad flu season and many of our congregants have pre-existing conditions which could make them susceptible to any illness. Taking proper care of ourselves also helps us take care of one another.

Some have expressed concern about how this new disease might impact our worship services. At this time, there is no evidence to support radical changes to our worship service or to encourage altering worship practices. There are, however, some practices that are always a good idea to consider when thinking about worship. For example, the use of hand sanitizer after the passing of the peace and before communion are easy ways to help limit the spread of illness in general. Additionally, some individuals may choose to simply pass the peace verbally or to only receive communion through the bread, a perfectly acceptable practice in the Lutheran tradition.

Again, we want to stress that we should not give into fear. As Bishop Eaton has so often reminded us, we are called to be church together. Our identity in Christ is fundamentally communal and as there are more cases, and even the first death here we should not push away those who are sick or may have been exposed. While there are proper precautions that should be taken, we should continue to love and support our brothers and sisters and not stigmatize them. Instead we should identify how to continue to minister and support them through prayer, phone calls, and material support, if they are being asked to self-isolate.

There are many things we still do not know about this new disease, but we should continue to work to be prepared and to support our brothers and sisters who are being impacted by this disease as well as supporting our brothers and sisters who are working to address this disease.

**+ In Christ, Bishop Kevin Strickland, Southeastern Synod**

