

## Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, our rock and refuge, our ever-present help in every time of trouble.

These are times that try our souls. Yet Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9, ESV). Still, this is new to us, and so we struggle under the weight and complexity of our circumstances. In a matter of 24 hours, the CDC and our government leaders went from limiting public gatherings to 250 then to 50, and now the recommendation is 10.

With the recent request by President Trump to limit our gatherings to 10 people or fewer, this creates a crisis for all our congregations—even the smallest among us. My heart hurts along with yours. The idea of canceling worship goes against everything we stand for! The pressing question that follows is the same for all of us: “What do we do now?”

## We must go to God in prayer.

The first thing I would suggest we do is pray together these verses from Psalm 91:

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.*

Together, we pray that God would heal all those who are sick, comfort all those who mourn, and stop the spread of the pandemic.

## This is not government intrusion.

Even though the evolving recommendations (or mandates in some states) might be viewed by some as government intrusion, this does not currently appear to be an Acts 5:29 situation: “We must obey God rather than man.”

Rather, this is a Romans 13:1-4a situation:

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good.*

Additionally, this is also a Philippians 2:3-4 situation:

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than*

*yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

As Lutherans, we have a robust theology, rooted in the truth of Scripture, that compels us toward love of God and love for our neighbor while honoring those in authority over us. We should consider the current request to limit gatherings to 10 or fewer as one made in good faith—namely, to help slow the rate of infection and help our healthcare community prepare for the surge of infections that could occur in our communities and potentially swamp our hospitals.

## **We can find creative ways to continue receiving the means of grace.**

Certainly, we can never forsake the means of grace—Word and Sacrament. But perhaps we can best serve our neighbor in love during this crisis period by being more creative and collaborative in how we continue faithfully receiving the means of grace.

The concerns of the weakest among us should be uppermost in this moment, even though we and everyone around us might be feeling just fine. Jesus says He is present where two or three are gathered together in His name (Matthew 18:20). Consider organizing multiple family-sized, staggered gatherings throughout the week. Make use of technology and work together with your fellow congregation members and sister congregations to meet the needs of your community.

I believe we can work our way through this together, with patience and love, and with the confidence of our Lord Jesus Christ and the encouragement of His Holy Spirit.

## **Your congregation's financial concerns are valid.**

We have the promise of our Lord Jesus Christ that the Holy Christian Church will carry on, that not even the gates of hell can prevail against her (Matthew 16:18). Yet as gatherings of all kinds are being suspended, your church may be concerned about financial stability.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is being felt on multiple levels, not the least of which is financially. We heartily encourage you to find alternative ways to give if you are not meeting in-person for worship. This may include giving online, over the phone, or via mail. Contact your church office or pastor for help finding out how you can continue to give as normal.

## **We stand united by Christ.**

Above all, remember you are not alone in these difficult days. You have your brothers and sisters in Christ rallying in prayer alongside you. We all need each other; there is strength in numbers as we share our burdens and joys with each other. Even as recommended social distancing challenges our ideas of what it means to bear one another's burdens, we continue to come alongside each other in bold expression of our service to Christ.

This is a fluid situation that is constantly changing. But we know that our Lord is ever-

unchanging. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is with you. As the Psalmist declares, He is our refuge and our fortress, our God, in whom we trust (Psalm 91:2).

The God of peace sanctify you wholly, dear brothers and sisters, and preserve your whole spirit, soul, and body, sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and He will do it (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Your Brother in Christ,

*Pastor Lucas*

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