



Ascension Ev. Lutheran Church

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March 20, 2020

Dear Member(s) of Ascension,

Greetings to you in the name of our Savior Jesus, who *is* still in control of all things and *is* still ruling the universe and in our hearts by His almighty power, and His all-powerful Word of life and salvation!

We are in a time of much upset, confusion, worry, wondering, and uncertainty— but *only* as far as what will happen next regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its current shelter-in-place advice. There is *NO* uncertainty or confusion about who our Savior is, what He has done for us, and what He continues to do for us, even in these present chaotic conditions (see Psalm 22:28; 66:5-7; and especially [Eph. 1:18-23](#))! Our almighty Lord and Savior is still ruling and reigning on His throne! Of that you can still be certain, and can still rest assured of His love for you and His care for you!

I'm writing to you to let you know what our plans as a congregation are concerned during this time of "social distancing" due to the novel corona-virus. You've probably heard that term being used by our health care professionals, as one of the only (and also most effective) ways of dealing with a disease that is known for its very contagious nature. Current advice and directives from the CDC, the White House, and our own South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem, are to refrain from gathering together in groups of more than 10 people in one location. So even for our small congregations, that mandate has a big and direct impact on our worship services— both for Sunday mornings, and for midweek Lenten services. In light of this, it would seem to be most prudent for us to suspend our Sunday and midweek worship services for the present time, at least for this Sunday (March 22), as well as next week's midweek Lenten service (March 25). At the end of next week then, we would make a further determination as to what to do next.

In the meantime, if you are in need of basic supplies, groceries, etc., and don't want to leave your house, please do not hesitate to let me know. I will do all I can to help in whatever way possible. Or: maybe *you* could, if you are comfortable and able to do it, make that same offer to your friends, neighbors in need, or others that you know— as a way to "*let your Light shine before people, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:16)! Let them know that you want to help, out of love for your Savior, Jesus! Use it as an opportunity to "*give [them] the reason for the hope that you have*" (1 Peter 3:15) in Jesus! Share with them one of those "*Victorious*" Easter cards you still have laying around from your Sunday bulletins over the past few weeks, and invite them to a great Easter celebration service (whenever it might be held, depending on this virus thing!); What other "love for Jesus" actions might you also be able to do for your neighbors?! You might be able to come up with many others— and then, put them into practice, *but* with care and caution so you don't spread this illness!

I was on a teleconference phone call with our fellow WELS pastors in the Eastern Conference (which is made up of the two Sioux Falls congregations of Bethel and Good Shepherd, Our Savior in Brookings, Trinity in Elkton and Immanuel in Ward, and First in Gary), as we were discussing this whole matter with each other. We were all in agreement that, even though none of us *wants* to do this, it seems to be the only reasonable action to take in this very difficult and confusing time, so as to minimize the possibility of further spreading this disease. We also shared information about what each congregation has been doing in the recent past (extra cleaning, disinfecting, special care and alternative procedures in giving Communion, etc.). It was a very lengthy discussion, and very helpful to all of us as we work through this together.

One thing that was also beneficial from the discussion was knowing that there are other reliable opportunities to hear God's Word via the Internet and technology. For example, you can listen to the Scripture readings and the sermons from past Sundays on our website (www.ascensionlutheran-mitchell.com) from up to a year ago (which would include last year's Sunday and midweek Lenten services). Bethel, Sioux Falls, also makes their sermons from past Sundays available to listen to (<http://www.youtube.com/c/bethelwels>). Redeemer in Mandan, ND, also puts their Sunday morning worship service online (<http://www.redeemermanndan.com/worship>) at 9 AM. And there are many other WELS congregations across the nation who do something similar (I have 9 pages of such listings, if you'd like to pick a different one! Let me know if you'd like a copy!). If you don't have access to a computer at home, pull out your Bible and begin reading a chapter a day from the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Read (or re-read!) the articles in your issue(s) of the Forward in Christ magazine. Read from your Meditations booklet (we still have a few of the newest issue left over at church, if you need one!). Or maybe you have another reliable, biblical, doctrinally-accurate devotion book that you can use (or are already using) on a regular basis in your own personal, private, at-home devotions time. If you don't have any of these, please let me know. I can give you one of mine, or you can take one out of our Church Library! That's what it's here at church for! Just let me know! I can also make a CD for you of any worship service we have had here at Ascension, up to a year or so ago, that you can listen to when you're at home or in the car (if you have a CD player in the car!). I'd be happy to do that for you. I am also working on putting together a short devotion and/or Bible study sheet for everyone, that I will either snail-mail to you, or send via email (provided I have your email address... Do I have yours?!)— just another way to keep you informed and in contact with God's Word during this crazy time! And: if there's something else I can do for you in this regard, to keep you connected to the Means of Grace, please let me know. I'd also be happy to bring private Communion to you (either at your house, or at church), if you so desire. Again: just let me know!

In the meantime, please do all you can to stay *physically* healthy and safe against this new virus; as well as *spiritually* healthy and safe against the old "virus" of Satan's tricks and temptations, and our own sinful nature's tendencies to worry and fear and doubt. Our Savior Jesus still rules and reigns over all things for our eternal good! Our Savior Jesus is still "*The Son of God [who Went] Forth to War*" for us and for our eternal salvation— and WON!! You are all in my prayers that the Lord will continue to keep you safe and in His care always.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Pastor David D. Reichel
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