

CONTACT US:

E-mail Wendy Magruder,  
Office Manager  
office@augustanadistrict.org

E-mail Pr. Randy Freund,  
Service Coordinator  
director@augustanadistrict.org

E-mail Pr. Becky Hand,  
Program Coordinator  
b.hand@augustanadistrict.org

AD Office Phone: 320-234-8403

Mailing Address:  
335 Main St. S  
Hutchinson, MN 55350

Table of Contents

Faith, fear & a virus.....1

Virtual Worship ..... 4

Sample Letters .....6

Congregational Resources..... 12

Technical Resources..... 13



Support for addressing COVID-19 for  
Pastors and Congregations

NOTE: AS THIS DOCUMENT  
CHANGES WE WILL UPDATE THE  
ONLINE DOWNLOAD.

Document Updated:  
March 28, 2020 7:29 PM



## FAITH, FEAR AND A VIRUS

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear..." (Psalm 46)

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The last thing I wish to do with a pastoral letter is to do anything that might increase the panic, concern and fear regarding the Coronavirus. The hope is to do exactly the opposite. We are people who believe and confess that the Word of God is the final authority in all matters of life and faith. That would certainly include something called Covid-19.

There is no question that there is reason for concern and vigilance whenever we face a phenomenon like this. It has come on fast. There are many unknowns. It has caused death and its accompanying grief.

As people of faith we always ask: "What might God be speaking to us through and in this unnerving time?" I can think of 5 possibilities.

I'll respond with God's words, and few comments about His words.

A. One of the first things we can learn from a microscopic bug is that LIFE IS FRAGILE. While it is true that we are "wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), Covid-19 reminds us that life is still fragile. This is a good thing to know and confess because it draws us to the Maker and Sustainer of Life and the Power over Death, our Almighty God.

"Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Luke 12:6-7

Sometimes it feels, perhaps, that God has taken a nap and is letting the evil one get away with too much. But we know that God neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4). He is still God and still more than able to deal with all that goes on around the world and beyond. And you are of great value to him.

B. Though the degree may vary with each of us, we all WANT TO CONTROL OUR LIVES.

Therefore, when we cannot control our lives or when the comfortable flow of life is disrupted, it is troubling. This too is good to know and confess because it draws us to our God who has complete control. This means that God has our life and this world firmly and completely in His hands — always.

God is the unchangeable rock!

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, My God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, so I shall be save from my enemies." Psalm 18:2-3

C. Many things in this life can bring us comfort or peace or relief. But when our peace and our comfort get rattled, it forces a question: What or who do we truly count on for true peace and our comfort. This too draws us to the deeper truth of THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GIVE PEACE AND COMFORT. The God of peace brought from the dead our Lord. There is nothing more troubling than death. God's peace comes amidst the storms of life, not apart from them.

Jesus said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." John 14:27

I think Jesus reminds us to "not let" our hearts be troubled because he knows this is our nature. Our heads need to remind our hearts that God alone is our source of peace. We can let him flood into our fears and concerns and overwhelm our heart with his presence and peace. Thanks be to God!!!

D. We speak of a God who reigns over all things, all times and all circumstances. Yet, how quickly that gets set aside when a pandemic like this comes. God still reigns over this. We are caused to ask ourselves: How do I surrender all to the GOD WHO IS SOVEREIGN?

Jesus tells his disciples that they will scatter and abandon him. He reminds them that the Father is with Jesus. He says this, "so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" John 15:33

God Almighty is STILL King of the Jungle. Where we have uncertainty, he has full knowledge of what will occur, and he is at work. His will will be done.

E.. Scriptures proclaim that "perfect love casts out fear." (1 John 4:18) What is "perfect love?" Perfect love is the Lord Jesus. His Word and His promises create life and faith. Fear is a real and human emotion. The signs of this fear are all around us. Jesus casts out such fear and replaces it with this great gift called FAITH. And what is faith? FAITH IS THE ASSURANCE OF THINGS HOPED FOR AND THE CONVICTION OF THINGS NOT SEEN (Hebrews 11:1).

God has given each of us a measure of Faith (from Romans 12:3). And He has given us each the Faith we need in this time and place.

It is finally faith that is the power and the peace that attacks our fears...and a nasty, pesky, microscopic bug called Covid-19.

Faith and peace are gifts from the Almighty and they are sheer blessing. Let us pray for the people who do not know God and his presence, for the people who have no antidote for their fear. This is certainly an opportunity to express the Gospel of Christ by exhibiting the peace in your heart.

Grace and Peace, Pastor Randy

I leave you with St. Paul's prayer: "I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen." Ephesians 3:18-21

Pastor Becky

## MAKING IT REAL AS WE VIRTUALLY WORSHIP

All of us are struggling to provide worship opportunities in a time when we are not able to gather publicly during this pandemic. Technology becomes our friend and ally. For Lutherans who believe and confess that, through Word and Sacraments, the Risen Lord Jesus comes to real sinners in real time to deliver real promises, there is nothing "virtual" about this. We abhor abstraction. Jesus' promises are concrete. This is why we insist on the "for you" and "real presence." When we preach, we "do the text," in Gerhard Forde's famous phrase.

Holy Week, in general, and Maundy Thursday, in particular, present challenges for us. There have been conversations, for instance, about the possibilities for "virtual communion." This is the time to be creative, while maintaining theological integrity and clarity. Pastors have posed many good questions. "Shouldn't we offer communion for a time such as this?" "How could that happen in the home?" "How do we address 'good order'?" And with these questions come others that dive deeper into our theology. What are the assumptions about who says the Words of Institution (and why)? Should pastors offer a time for small groups (10 or less) to come to church at designated times to receive communion?

For me, this presses other questions and possibilities. We are so early in the game with this crisis. Our congregation offers the Lord's Supper every week. It seems that this is an important time (early in the crisis) to teach the sufficiency of the preached Word. The preached Word carries the promises of Christ Jesus to real people in real time. It does not return empty (Isaiah 55:11).

The challenges of Holy Week, and particularly, Maundy Thursday, remain. Perhaps a crisis creates a new opportunity. What would it look like to turn our empty parking lots into "journey to the cross and empty tomb" stations? How about a Palm Sunday car procession complete with branches and wave to people we have not seen? What might it look like to start at our empty mangers tucked away and move through Holy Week, with parents provided with words and pictures for each station? ***(Note: where there are Stay At Home Orders, this would need to be modified in a "virtual only" way.)***\* What might a livestreamed Maundy Thursday service look like that ended not with Holy Communion, as we normally do, but would end as we normally do not, with a family foot washing, following the example of Jesus who washed his disciples' feet? If you live alone, perhaps you could join a neighbor or a friend? What if the gathering darkness of the "Seven Last Words" on Good Friday included turning off the house lights until there was only a candle burning as Jesus breathes his last? There are powerful possibilities for songs and images

to conclude the service.

This is clearly a challenging time to do Word and Sacrament ministry in a church that so depends on corporate worship. But it could also be a great teaching moment. It could be a great opportunity to make it real in a virtual time—wherever and however the people of God gather.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Randy Freund

Augustana District Service Coordinator

***\*Augustana District is a nongeographic district of LCMC. All congregations are encouraged to follow CDC recommendations (subject to change) and their state's Stay At Home Orders.***

# SAMPLE LETTERS

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." John 16:33

Dear People of Good Shepherd Lutheran,

There's no doubt that the Corona 19 virus is causing a lot of anxiety and fear. While there are reasons for caution and concern, we would do well to recognize that this is NOT the first pandemic in recent history (e.g. Swine Flu of 2010). This outbreak, too, shall pass. The hysteria that's gripped many is not helpful. While there are things that can and are being done to protect and care for people, hysteria is not one of them.

As Christians, we have NO good reason to join in the hysteria. Faced with any trouble, we have the unbreakable word and promise of Christ Jesus our Lord. Being a Christian does NOT mean that we're immune from this virus or the many other troubles of life, but it means that we have a good Lord who's overcome the world. He will never forsake us. His promise will not fail us, no matter what.

Living by faith, we can be calm in a culture of hysteria and fear. We can look for ways to care for our neighbor's well-being. First, we tell people of the certainty that there in Christ and his gospel. That's the most important thing. Then there are some practical things for us to do: washing our hands, for starters. If you're sneezing, coughing, or feeling sick, stay home. Don't go out. That includes refraining from coming to worship if you're not feeling well. You can see this as a way of loving and serving your neighbor. Until your symptoms pass, listen to a sermon on our church website <https://www.gslmorris.com/>. Call me. I will gladly give you the word anytime. My number is 320-287-3218.

There are a few things that will change for the meantime in our public worship. I will refrain from shaking hands at the door. We will not pass the offering plate during worship. The plate near the door of the sanctuary for you to give your offering. People handing out the body and blood of Jesus will wash their hands immediately before serving. But otherwise, things will go on as normal for the time being. Some people who have compromised immune systems may feel they need to refrain from public worship. If that's you, there's no need to feel guilty about staying

home. Please be in contact with me so that I can speak the word to you.

As Christians, we do not want to join in the hysterical fear. That only makes us forget and lose sight of Christ, our light and life. Also, being gripped by uncertainty and fear turns us in on ourselves to toil and spin. There's no peace in that. When we do that, not only do we forget about God and His promise, we forget about our neighbor who needs us.

So, peace be with you. Jesus Christ is Lord for you and me. He will provide and care for us now and always. His grip is solid. He holds us fast. Even though there's much uncertainty in the world, you have the ultimate absolute certainty in Christ your Lord. This frees you to look for ways to help and care for your neighbor, to look close to home--to care for and watch over spouses, children, co-workers, and congregants.

There's a lot more we can say and will say in the coming days. But keep in mind that the current trouble that's gripping the world will pass. The Good Shepherd who cares for you and me will never pass away. He keeps us in his strong grip and won't let go. You're in good hands. You're in the hands of Jesus.

God's Peace,

Pastor Michael Hanson

---

## **SUSPENDING PUBLIC GATHERINGS: COVID-19 Response**

Dear Friends in Christ –

Over the course of the last several days, I have been paying close attention to updates regarding the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and Wright County Public Health. As of Friday morning (11:54am), there has been one confirmed case in Wright County. At 1:00pm Friday afternoon, Governor Walz and Health Commissioner Jan Malcolm requested that community mitigation strategies be implemented. These strategies are intended to minimize the spread of the disease, especially to those who are high-risk and to assist the healthcare system so they are not overwhelmed, especially in a short amount of time.

With that in mind and in conversation with Steve Berg, our Church Council President, we have decided to suspend all public gatherings (Worship Services, Bethel Series, Faith Formation, Midweek Lenten activities, etc.) through April 1. We will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates, especially with regard to our Holy Week services. In the midst of this unprecedented event, I remain committed to providing pastoral care, spiritual direction, and help to all of our members, friends, and neighbors, especially those at risk, who are sick, or are in need.

- I will provide a Service of Word & Prayer through Facebook Live and our YouTube channel as we have at other times.
- I will be at church on Sunday mornings from 8:00am-11:30am to provide prayer, mutual consolation, and the Sacrament for those individuals and families who wish to receive the gifts of God in small groups.
- If you would prefer a pastoral visit in your home, please call the church office, and we can make arrangements for this as well.
- You are invited to follow the church Facebook page (Holy Cross Lutheran Church, LCMC, Maple Lake, MN) or Pastor Culynn on Facebook and Instagram (@rev\_cul) to receive regular encouragement in the midst of all that is happening around us.
- I am grateful to one member who has offered to assist in providing support for webinar/e-learning opportunities for Bethel students. This could be a possibility.
- Also, we recognize that there are people within our community of faith who are high-risk or vulnerable to this disease. If you need assistance at any time, do not hesitate to call the church. It is my great hope that we can broker partnerships and assistance as the need continues.

Please continue to take care of yourselves and those most dear to you.

- Continue to wash your hands with soap and warm water (for at least 20 seconds). I have been praying the Lord's Prayer as I wash my hands.
- Wipe down common work surfaces more frequently.
- Cough into handkerchiefs, into your sleeve, or the crook of your arm.
- If you are sick, please stay home.
- Please remember that our children need consistency and emotional support.
- Check on your family, friends, and neighbors. How wonderful it is that we have the technology to provide care and abide by social distancing measures.

In the face of such uncertainty, it could be easy for us to fall into fear and despair. Pastor Barbara

Brown Taylor has said, "We do not lose control of our lives. What we lose is the illusion that we were ever in control in the first place." God reminds us of his power and support in Scripture: "Fear not, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10) He sent Jesus to heal and to save. I have been imagining Christ walking among us even now and caring for the sick (Mark 1:32-34). The Lord is with us. He continues to fight for the life and well-being of his good creation; that includes each of you. He invites us to call upon him in prayer, and so we pray together:

Keep watch, dear Lord with those who work  
or watch or weep this night,  
and give your angels charge over those who sleep.  
Tend the sick, Lord Christ;  
give rest to the weary,  
bless the dying,  
soothe the suffering,  
pity the afflicted,  
shield the joyous;  
all for your love's sake.  
Amen.

Peace to you all, I pray,  
Pastor Culynn

Daniel Ostercamp

Pastor's Desk

March 16, 2020

Immediate Release to Kittson County Enterprise

"Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, 'You are my Lord. Apart from you, I have no good.'" - Psalm 16:1-2

We are in a strange time relative to any lifetime experience. As a society and as a world, we are guarding ourselves against a pandemic that is a different sort of challenge from anything that we ourselves have already known.

Much of the fear and concern is being driven by "the unknown". We simply do not know how many people are carrying the coronavirus, where they are located, and how contagious they may be. We have some understanding about the methods of transmission, the types of people who are at highest risk, and the steps we can take to slow the outbreak. We don't know how many people - including those near and dear to us - may need hospitalization, may have complications, or may even die from this threat that is upon us. We don't know how long this state of emergency will last.

Fear and worry, however, do not create good states of mind. The British did well during the Second World War to adopt the slogan, "Keep Calm and Carry On." The beauty of these words are in turning the focus of life from "the unknown" to the things that we know and can keep our lives centered around. We are called out of a situation that can feed in on itself to one where we are more confident about life both in this world and in the hands of God.

Life in general is strange and worrisome with an "unknown God." When a person does not know who to turn to in times of thanksgiving, sorrow, joy or concern, life is much like a series of jumbled events. Some days are good, some days are bad, but all days lack an overall promise and protection. In sending his only Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Lord and Savior, God gave us a precious gift in that we can trust a "known God" for mercy, strength and deliverance. Our ways and our desires may not fit into God's plans, yet the promises of grace and peace remain unshakable throughout all emergencies. We certainly use the best of our reason and common sense each and every day. Yet we rejoice that we are turned to the Lord by his clear Word, "Be not afraid, for I have overcome the world." Thanks be to God.

*"We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in Christ! In the days ahead, we can anticipate that some of our neighbors may find themselves in need of help, particularly the elderly. As the church, this provides us with the opportunity to love our neighbors. If you or someone you know is in need of help with running errands, shopping for groceries, picking up prescriptions, etc., you may contact the church office or Pastor for assistance. Note also that Springfield Market currently takes shut-in phone orders for groceries on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 1-4 p.m., and then delivers them on Thursdays.

If you are well and willing to be contacted to provide help to your neighbors in need, please notify the church office or Pastor. Alternately, if you are well, please consider "adopting" an elderly person or couple and then check in with them periodically to see how they are and to inquire if they have any needs. Perhaps you can think of people like your next door neighbor from the farm when you were a child or your aunt's best friend? During this time of social distancing, it may prove to be a lonely time for many people, so even just giving a call to say I am thinking of you and praying for you may lift their spirits. Saying a prayer together while on the phone, even the Lord's Prayer, may give comfort. Sharing a bible passage from your devotional or from a meme would be a wonderful gift to someone who feels isolated!

We have this great promise from the Lord: "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (2Co 9:8 ESV)" We can trust that the Lord will work through us to bring forth good works for the sake of our neighbors.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and love of neighbor during this time of trial.

In Christ,

Pastor Tricia Mattson

# Resources for Congregations

[Illustrated Ministry](#)

[The Church Guide To Coronavirus](#)

[10 guidelines for pastoral care during the coronavirus outbreak](#)

[Canadian Association of Lutheran Congregations](#)

# Technical Resources

[How to stream on YouTube](#)

[How to Stream on Zoom](#)