



South-Central Synod of Wisconsin
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

March 14, 2020

Dear Partners in Ministry,

I have long used that greeting in communicating with people in the synods I've served. I never feel the strength of that partnership more than in the midst of critical times. We are in those times now... and I am filled with admiration and pride in the ways I see our rostered and lay leaders leading. You face difficult decisions, in a context that seems to change day by day.

You may have seen/heard that one of our congregations, Our Saviors in Sun Prairie, has three known cases among its members, who have been present in worship. They won't be the last of our congregations to experience this. I happened to catch Pastor Tim Hansen as Madison TV interviewed him and I was proud of his expression of care for his congregation and the community as they cancelled worship. We are blessed with fine leaders throughout this synod.

No doubt you have been flooded with good advice as you make decisions – both the ELCA web page <https://www.elca.org/publichealth> and our synod's web page <https://scsw-elca.org/healthresources/> have good useful information. Vicki Hanrahan ran across other excellent resources <https://get.tithe.ly/blog/coronavirus-church> and <https://horizons.net/what-churches-can-do-to-stay-connected-during-coronavirus/> as well. Several make reference to electronic/online giving tools. As you give encouragement to your members to continue to support the congregation's ministry, it is helpful to appeal to those who can give over-and-above their usual level of support, as a way to lift the burden from those who will financially suffer during these times and be unable to give as they have.

Whether in person or electronically, we continue to be a community of prayer, never more needed than now. I will attach two I've seen that are profound. No doubt many of you are writing your own.

We are people who live by the two great commandments – to love God, and to love the neighbor. We find ourselves in a strange time when the central act of our communities' expression of love of God – our worship together – is in direct contradiction to the command to love our neighbor. It may be that in this moment a holy act of love for the neighbor – each other and our whole community – is what leads us to decide to refrain from coming together for worship. Seen in this light, refraining from gathering is no less a holy act than coming together. We seek to be faithful people however we respond.

Thank you for your leadership, courage, hope, and faithfulness.

Peter Rogness

Interim Bishop