

**Some Reflections on our Journey Together  
An Occasional (pretty much monthly) Letter  
from Bishop Peter Rogness**

Dear Ministry Partners,

Coronavirus

In just the past few days I've seen many advisories in response to the spread of the coronavirus, including several letters from bishops to their synods, and from pastors to their congregation. This of course is understandable, as we seek to respond appropriately to concerns about how to exercise care over the gatherings of people in our care. Some are pretty long and some pretty technical.

I borrow – with permission – some advice from Bishop Guy Erwin in California, and Pastor Rebecca Ninke here in this synod.

Among Bishop Erwin's counsel: Remain calm and encourage others to be calm. The spread of new flu-like viruses of varying virulence is an annual event. We can rely on public health agencies to keep us informed on the disease's progress and give us basic precautionary information. Be calm: there is every likelihood that this will be no more severe than the seasonal flu (which, people often forget, also brings a significant number of deaths each year). Constant repetition of media reports and news of illness throughout the world can make the situation seem much worse than it actually is. Our duty to our families and neighbors is to take the virus seriously, but to not allow ourselves to react in panic and alarm. Others may depend on your own calmness; practice it. Encourage everyone to monitor their own health; if someone develops any flu-like symptoms, they should seek medical help, let others know, and stay home.

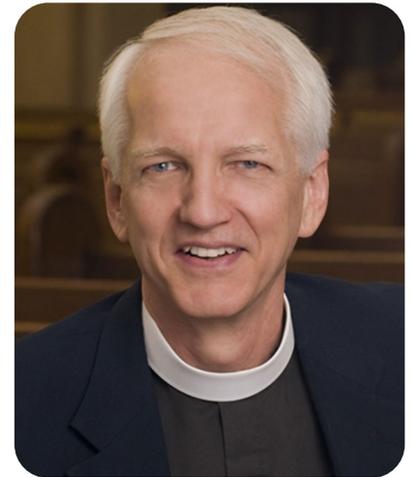
Treat this like any flu epidemic. Be vigilant in washing your hands often and thoroughly, and/or use hand sanitizer. Try not to touch your face, be cautious about touching surfaces in public places; cover your coughs and sneezes with your elbow and avoid unnecessary handshaking and hugging. Be more aware than usual of things you touch and handle. Thorough hand washing with soap on a regular basis is much to be recommended, especially often after shaking hands, blowing your nose, using door handles, etc.

Continue to observe a holy Lent. Our public lives and churchgoing need not change significantly. Simply remember that in a public place, together with numbers of other people and touching many things that others have touched, it is important to be careful. In church, specifically...

- Suspend handshaking/sharing the peace until flu season is over
- Consider taking the offering in ways other than passing the plate along the pew
- Use individual cups for communion – more sanitary than either intinction or common cup. Remind people who may prefer to receive only the bread of our teaching that each element is complete and sufficient in itself to communicate to us God's grace and healing in the sacrament.
- Do extra cleaning of door handles, bathrooms, etc. with bleach and/or sanitizers
- Request Lenten dinner participants to use hand sanitizer generously and do frequent hand-washing. Avoid open bowls for chips, etc.; use utensils only for self-serving.

Stay advised by visiting reliable websites

like <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus> and [CDC.gov/coronavirus](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus) for updated information.



Bishop Erwin, a Reformation scholar, adds this (a similar piece appeared recently in *Christianity Today*): “Centuries ago in 1527, facing a virulent plague far more deadly than the one that challenges us right now, Martin Luther told his people that even when in danger themselves, their first duty is the love of neighbor to which Jesus calls us all. It is foolish, he taught, not to take common-sense precautions; it is equally foolish to allow exaggerated fears to separate us from those we might be able to help, or to cause us to be concerned only for ourselves. In this Lenten season we are already called to a deeper consciousness of our own fragility and mortality and our need for God and one another—let us pray and trust that God will bring us and all our people safely and in comfort to their Easter hope.”

### The Election Process

Over 300 people throughout the synod took part in the six Town Hall meetings held around the synod; the discussion was lively and engaged, and was received by the Listening Team which turned 96 pages of notes into two concise, one-page profiles, one describing the synod and one profiling the bishop we seek. <http://bit.ly/SCSWProfiles2020>. Based on that profile, the 12 conferences were to meet and identify up to five persons for consideration as nominees for bishop. With 11 of the 12 having met, over 30 names were identified; some have declined, some have agreed to move forward, some are still discerning. By March 10 those moving forward will have written and given to the Bishop Call Committee their “Bishop Candidacy Profile” documents that provide the Committee with the starting point for doing their work.

It has been gratifying to see the level of participation and affirmation of this process. While I will not be involved in the evaluating and winnowing of the persons nominated, I know enough about enough of them to be confident that there will be some fine leaders set before the synod for consideration come assembly time.

### Lent

After having many years in synod work, last year was the first time in over 30 years that I was the parish pastor shaping the Lenten journey of the congregation I served as an interim in Bratislava, Slovakia. I loved it. I know many pastors and deacons also find this as a rich time of reflection... often with a smaller group, in various kinds of mid-week gatherings. We may lament that a generation or two ago it was more widely attended, but nevertheless it becomes a time for those who participate to pause, gather, reflect, and be touched by the Spirit of the Suffering Servant whose journey we follow.

May this season of Lent be a time of enriching your walk with God.

Grace and Peace

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Rogness". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Peter Rogness

Interim Bishop