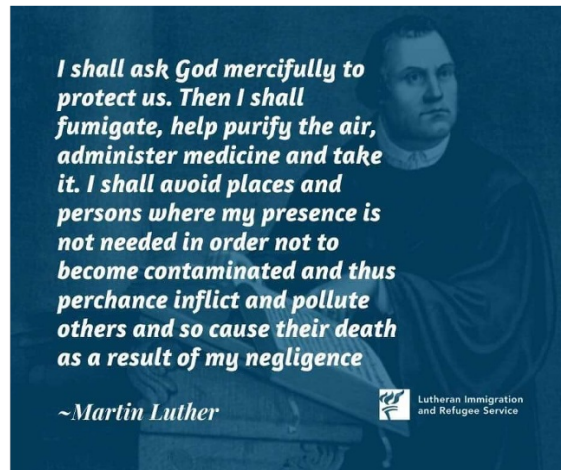




Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.



Dear Gulf Coast Leaders,

Yesterday I saw your encouraging, adaptive leadership: Many faithful pastors and deacons carefully and lovingly pivoting as a health crisis evolves. Whether you chose to hold in-person worship with social distancing practices, or cancelled worship and connected online, you responded with grace and compassion. This is a difficult time. Thank you for your wise and thoughtful leadership.

The CDC is currently recommending the cancellation of all gatherings of 50 or more people between now and May 10. The White House is recommending the cancellation of all gatherings of 10 or more people for the next two weeks. After consultation with staff, council, and deans, here are my recommendations. While our church polity does not permit me to issue a mandate, these recommendations come at my strongest possible urging, in light of all current available information:

1. Suspend all in-person worship, meetings, and activities through the end of March. We will continually reassess conditions and CDC recommendations.
2. Experiment with online and phone worship opportunities. See some suggestions and resources below. Now is the time for the church to be creative.
3. Stay in contact with those most vulnerable in your congregation and neighborhood, especially the infirm and the elderly, making sure they have groceries, medications and supplies. When delivering, keep your distance so as not to put them at risk.
4. Communicate regularly with your congregation through a phone tree, weekly email and/or video. Loneliness can increase for those who live alone.
5. Take care of yourself. Get enough sleep. Take social media and news in moderation. Every day at noon, stop what you're doing and take some time for prayer. Starting tomorrow at noon, we will begin posting a 3-5 minute prayer video on both the [Gulf Coast Leaders Facebook Group](#) and the [Gulf Coast Synod Facebook page](#). Be kind to yourself.

Resources for online worship, handling finances and other suggestions for this time can be found at the synod webpage here: <https://gulfcoastsynod.org/in-response-to-the-coronavirurs-covid-19/>

A hallmark of Jesus' ministry was his work among the sick. I also encourage you to find ways to serve your neighbor, and find ways to respond faithfully, innovatively, and safely.

We will keep you up to date through periodic emails like this, and even more frequently in the Gulf Coast Leaders' Facebook Group. Plan. Breathe. Pray.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Mike

O God our Healer,

*Come to our aid as the coronavirus spreads globally.
Heal those who are sick. Support their families.
Make us vigilant, attentive and proactive.
Give us grace to model Jesus' healing ministry among the sick.
Calm our fears. In place of our anxiety, grant us your peace,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Amen.*

Prayer for time of conflict, crisis or disaster. (ELW pg. 76)

O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.



Michael Rinehart, bishop
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

[TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod](#)
12941 I-45 North Freeway #210
Houston, Texas 77060-1243
Phone: [281.873.5665](tel:281.873.5665)
Email: Synod@GulfCoastSynod.org

