



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

April 8, 2020

Dear Gulf Coast Leaders,

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ~ John 13:12-15

In a sacred meal, Jesus gave us a new commandment to love one another. In his washing of the disciples' feet, he taught them to serve all people. At times like these, simple gestures seem more poignant than ever.

We are all going through a kind of corporate grief over the loss of our routines and relationships as they were. It is critical that we acknowledge the grief, while at the same time pointing to a hope that brings us peace in the midst of that grief.

In times of plague, it is natural to want to place blame. Historically, that blame gets placed on the least powerful, and whoever we want to scapegoat. Jews were blamed for the black plague and the bubonic plague. I have heard people blame the Chinese, immigrants, the LGBT community, and even Jews for this outbreak. People naturally ask, who sinned that this catastrophe took place? Jesus, of course, dismissed scapegoating in the midst of disaster: "Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?" (Luke 13:4) When this is over, there will certainly be an analysis of how political and religious authorities dealt with this situation. Our role this Holy Week is to lift people's eyes beyond simplistic and cruel reactions, calling them to respond to God's grace by serving and loving as Jesus taught us.

Recommendations

Our current recommendations remain unchanged. Continue to suspend in-person worship until further notice. Please stay home. We do not recommend parking lot communion. You cannot stop people from rolling down their windows or getting out of their cars for whatever reason. Why take the risk? For resources about home communion click [HERE](#). Let us do all we can to protect the most vulnerable.

Louisiana residents are aware of [Governor Edwards' stay-at-home order](#), issued on March 23. Texans are aware of [Governor Abbott's stay-at-home order](#), issued March 31.

Worship

[Videos and PDFs of sermons](#) for Maundy Thursday (Bishop Mike), Good Friday (Bishop Sue Briner) and Easter (Bishop Erik Gronberg) are up on the [synod website](#). Sermons

for Easter 2 (Mike Rinehart), Easter 3 (Tracey Breashears Schultz) and Easter 4 (Chris Markert) will also be available [here](#). Please feel free to borrow from these sermons or use the videos, dropping them into your livestream.

There are a host of other useful resources at the above link to the Gulf Coast Synod [website](#), which can be found easily by going to gulfcoastsynod.org and clicking "Resources in response to COVID-19." LEAD has [Holy Week digital liturgies](#) available for free.

We recommend that you have an offering time in your online services. Post information on giving by mail or giving online (for example, check out Tithe.ly), and use the time to share impact stories of your congregation's essential ministries. How are lives being impacted by your ongoing work?

Funerals

We do not recommend congregations hold any funerals at this time. Encourage families to have a memorial service after restrictions are lifted. If a family insists on moving forward now, then it should be a graveside burial with only family, limited to ten people, obeying the law, and observing strict social distancing.

Calling

Many of our congregations have instituted some kind of a phone tree to check in with people. Make sure they have everything they need, and pray with them. This takes some organization, but it is incredibly compassionate and well received. Consider adding some of the congregation's neighbors to the list.

The CARES Act

The CARES Act Bill has provisions for churches, including payroll protection and unemployment for individuals, that normally would not apply to religious institutions. Apply quickly, because there is a cap on funding this program. More information is available [here](#).

Synod Assembly

On Saturday, April 4, 2020, the Synod Council met to discuss the current health crisis with coronavirus. In light of all the information provided by the CDC and WHO, combined with the declarations of various levels of government, the council has passed a resolution cancelling the 2020 Synod Assembly.

We are refunding 100% of all registration fees. Due to the number of events being cancelled and the number of registrants for our event, we are unable to process refunds directly to credit cards.

No action needs to be taken on your part to cancel your registration , but you will need to request a refund. You (or the individual who registered on your behalf) will receive another email soon confirming your registration has been cancelled, and this email will give information on how to complete a refund request. More information can be found on the [website](#) and remember you will receive an email with refund request instructions.

Thank you

Thank you for all you are doing at this in this highly unusual situation. The synod staff and I are praying for you this Holy Week. We are happy to field your calls and provide

resources. Please don't hesitate to contact us if there's anything we can do to support you.

Yours in Christ,



Michael Rinehart, bishop
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