



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Dear Gulf Coast Leaders,

As the number of Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases continues to rise, our question, as always is: How do we live the gospel faithfully in this current context?

Synod Staff and Disaster Team members met this morning to consider several scenarios at the request of our Synod Vice President Robert Rivera. Though the situation is rapidly evolving, here are some things we have to offer at this time, in a Q&A format.

Is Synod Assembly going ahead May 22-23?

At this time we are still planning on holding Synod Assembly in New Orleans. As of today, 119 are registered. We will continue to monitor information and follow instructions from the CDC. It is too early to know what recommendations health officials will be giving at the end of May. Staff is monitoring the situation and will keep you apprised if there are any changes.

Will Chrim Mass still be held April 7?

At this time we are still planning to host the Chrim Mass at Augustana Lutheran Church in Houston. We will make a final call the week beforehand.

Should we cancel worship?

The decision to cancel worship is made by pastor and council together. It will depend on local circumstances. Congregations should heed the recommendations of health officials and elected leaders. Encourage people to stay home if they are not feeling well. Others who might consider staying home include the elderly and those with preexisting conditions. Ask your people to let you know if they have issues, so that you can provide appropriate pastoral care. Develop a plan in case you have to cancel worship. Will you broadcast a service? Will you offer links to congregations that typically post their worship services?

What if some of our people are quarantined or self-quarantined?

The ministry of the church continues and even intensifies when people are sick. Visiting the sick, whether at home or in the hospital, should be done judiciously. The quarantined may need groceries or meals delivered. They may need medications. Home communion can be offered with care. Ask your people to let you know if/when they have issues. Make sure to have the most current household records on file for contact purposes.

How should we handle communion?

Pastors should make distribution decisions with their Councils. Keep in mind that most germs are passed by hands. Those who prepare communion (altar guild/worship team) should wash hands and perhaps wear gloves. Those who distribute communion should wash hands prior to distribution, especially if they have shaken hands before or during worship.

Should we pass the peace?

This is a local decision. A simple bow, and the words, "Peace be with you," to those on either side of you is sufficient.

Should we pass an offering plate?

You can simply leave offering plates in the aisles, have folks process up to the altar, or purchase offering baskets with handles to avoid most of the congregation touching the same plates. This is an excellent time to promote electronic giving in the congregation - even the synod offers electronic giving for your congregation mission share.

What other considerations are there?

- Stay up on the spread of coronavirus, and recommendations from health officials and elected leaders in your area. [Current number of cases](#). Facts and resources can be found at www.cdc.gov, www.chron.com, and www.nola.com.
- If you are a pastor or deacon and test positive for coronavirus, please notify the synod office as soon as possible. We need to know, and we may be able to help you get pastoral coverage.

- Consider making a food collection the next few Sundays so you have food to give to those who may be quarantined. When the crisis abates, unused food can be donated to a food pantry.
- Now is the time to develop a plan to minister to the most vulnerable. Which of your members are elderly, have pre-existing conditions or have compromised immune systems? Who in your immediate neighborhood or community might need assistance? How will you help them? Encourage members to remember their own neighbors.
- If you have meetings coming up, consider if they are necessary, or if you could meet by conference call or video call. Although we don't know with certainty, it may be that the danger zone is March-May. Now is the time to make contingency plans.
- Develop a giving plan. Encourage people to continue their giving so that the ministry of the church can continue, and staff are supported. Promote online giving and sending tithes and offerings in by mail.
- If you routinely broadcast your worship service, let the synod office know. In the event of closures, we'll make a list available.

Above all, pray for those who are sick and extend the ministry of the church to those in greatest need, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Mike Rinehart, Staff and Disaster Team



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