



Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

July 8, 2020

Dear Gulf Coast Leaders,

These are challenging times for us all. Many church leaders are working hard. The fall is coming. Be sure to find a way to take some time off and get rest. Synod staff are here to support you.

More and more, our congregations are reporting having members and church staff test positive for COVID-19. This is inevitable. If those members attend an in-person worship before showing symptoms, they have potentially exposed all present to the virus, which is why we are counseling caution with in-person worship at this time. If you do hold in-person worship, all precautions must be taken, and masks provided for those who don't bring them. Keep in mind, one-third of those infected NEVER develop symptoms, and yet still are contagious. This is the insidious aspect of this virus.

We are still seeing people neglect to protect, which can infect. To ask for the mask is not a burdensome task. (Been watching too much Hamilton). When the plague hit Wittenberg, Luther said those who fail to follow rules to protect their neighbor should be handed over to "Jack the hangman." That's a bit much, but we must remember that love does no harm to a neighbor.

The last three weeks, numbers of cases and hospitalizations, as well as the percentage of positive tests (15% in Baton Rouge and 24% in Houston), all have been moving in the wrong direction. Governor Edwards of Louisiana and Governor Abbott of Texas have been pressing restrictions and mitigation efforts to rein this in. If we want to have in-person school and church this fall, we need to get to a better place.

I've been asked about church preschools. Here are the CDC's recommendations so far:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools-faq.html>
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Children get coronavirus, but the mortality rate is low. Still, if one child dies, it is tragic. What worries experts is children taking it home to parents and grandparents. There will be huge risks in not having school in the fall as well. Parents must work. Kids could fall behind academically. Many kids depend on school lunch programs for nutrition. We need to find a way forward, carefully. Now is the time to plan diligently for the fall, which is only six weeks away. As a reminder, our recommendations can be found [HERE](#).

Third Ward Food Distribution

Many thanks to all who so quickly stepped up to help on Saturday at the Third Ward Food Distribution. You should have received an email from me with location and instructions. We need your release forms today. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee will be with us, as well as some of George Floyd's football teammates. Along with food from the Houston Food Bank, there

will be voter registration, distribution of children's books, and more. I am grateful for your quick responses. There is still room for more volunteers. Email me if you're interested: bishop@gulfcoastsynod.org.

Tuesday Service of Prayer and Reflection

Since we were not able to have Chrism Mass, we will host an online Prayer Service with Renewal of Vows this Tuesday, July 14 at 10:30 am. Given the spike in coronavirus cases, we have decided to forego the distribution of oil. You can find information on how to connect to the worship [HERE](#).

Blessings to you as you navigate this liminal space. God shows up in the wilderness and provides rivers and blossoms in the desert. Dear God, let our hearts be good soil, where tiny seeds produce amazing fruit.

Yours in Christ,



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

*Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold,
some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"*

Matthew 13:8-9

[TX-LA Gulf Coast Synod](#)

12941 I-45 North Freeway #210
Houston, Texas 77060-1243
Phone: 281.873.5665

Email: Synod@GulfCoastSynod.org

