

## CONCERNING THE CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) A Statement from the President of Lutheran Church-Canada

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). Those words of Holy Scripture came to mind as I was contemplating what to write to you . . . the preachers and hearers of the Word in the congregations of Lutheran Church-Canada . . . in light of the uncertain, confusing, and volatile times which have fallen upon us, our nation, and nearly all the nations of the world.

Yesterday, the President’s Ministry Council, along with some of our communications people and the CTCR chairman, met via a conference call to discuss and address various matters concerning the coronavirus pandemic. One result of that meeting was the recommendation that LCC congregations temporarily suspend normal and ordinary worship services and other group events. This, I would point out, is a recommendation and not a mandate; the reason being, as Article VII of our Synodical Constitution states: “The Synod is not an ecclesiastical government exercising legislative or coercive powers, and with respect to an individual congregation’s right of self-government, the Synod is advisory.”

As we seek to respond to this matter, I would call to your attention four of the Ten Commandments which are especially applicable to the current situation in which we find ourselves.

First, the Fourth Commandment deals with the obedience we owe the governing authorities whom God has placed over us for our good and welfare. Since the federal, provincial, and various local governments have issued statements urging and requesting the closure of large group events, including worship services, we are bound to obey those directives. These directives, I would point out, have not been made to silence the proclamation of the Gospel, nor does such constitute a persecution of Christ’s church; rather, they have been made in the interests of the safety and welfare of all the people. At the same time, the various governments across our country have recommended diverse courses of action on this matter. Congregations should, as such, be mindful of what is currently being ordered, directed, or suggested in their particular locality and act accordingly.

Second, the Fifth Commandment tells us, as the Small Catechism put it, “that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him and every physical need.” We all thus need to be mindful of the various protocols issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada – reducing contact with others, social distancing, proper hygiene practices, and the like. In addition, with the need for many to self-isolate, the care for the physical welfare of members and neighbours is even more pronounced and urgent.

Third, the Second Commandment enjoins us to, as the catechism again states, “call upon [God’s name] in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.” How necessary that all of us spend more time on our knees in prayer at this time! We have just put together *A Brief Guide to Home Devotions* to assist you in your prayers and which is now available on our synod’s website.

Fourth, the catechism explanation of the Third Commandment states: “We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.” This is the primary challenge before us; namely, providing various new ways for our people to hear God’s Word and so receive the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation which Christ offers and bestows through that Word apart from our ordinary and normal public worship services. Moreover, if there is any time when we are all especially in need of those gifts, it is certainly in these present and trying times.

The following are some suggestions which pastors and congregations may consider implementing:

- Pastors are encouraged to have regular office hours so that individual members and families may come to church and find solace, absolution, and receive the blessed Sacrament. Encourage members to phone or email in advance to make an appointment, so as to maximize social distances.
- Copies of the congregation's *Lutheran Service Book* may be given (after wiping the exteriors down with a sanitizer) to members for home use during the suspension of worship services, along with a copy of synod's new *Brief Guide to Home Devotions*.
- Pastors (along with the assistance of the elders and others) are encouraged to contact all members to inform them of the protocols put in place by the congregation, opportunities for home devotions and/or services over the internet, etc. This could well be an excellent opportunity to contact each member of the congregation, even those who have not attended worship services for some time, and encourage them with prayer and fraternal discussion of "the one thing necessary" (Luke 10:42).
- Congregations may establish alternate forms for times and location of worship services; as well as Bible studies, catechesis, and the like via social media, YouTube, and other electronic means of communication. Our Communications Committee is in the process of providing additional guidance in this area.

In conclusion, I would share with you the following for your hope and comfort and assurance during these dark days. Martin Rinckart was a Lutheran pastor serving in the town of Eilenburg during the horrors of the Thirty Years' War, which experienced a great famine and epidemic that broke out in 1637. It is reported that he often conducted funeral services for as many as 40 to 50 people a day – nearly 4,500 in total. Following the death of his own wife, he returned home and wrote the following prayer for his children:

*1. Now thank we all our God With hearts and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done, In whom His world rejoices;  
Who from our mothers' arms Has blest us on our way  
With countless gifts of love And still is ours today.*

*2. Oh, may this bounteous God Through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us  
And keep us in His grace And guide us when perplexed  
And free us from all ills In this world and the next!*

*3. All praise and thanks to God The Father now be given,  
The Son, and Him who reigns With them in highest heaven,  
The one eternal God, Whom earth and heav'n adore;  
For thus it was, is now, And shall be evermore. (LSB 895)*

May God bestow upon all of you an extra measure of His grace and mercy and peace.

Rev. Timothy Teuscher, President  
Lutheran Church–Canada