



MANITOBA NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO SYNOD
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA

935 NESBITT BAY
WINNIPEG, MB R3T 1W6
204-889-3760 (P)
204-896-0272 (F)
MNOSYNOD@ELCIC.CA

March 16, 2020

Dear members of the MNO Synod,

Grace and peace to you in the name of Christ our Saviour.

The Bishops of the ELCIC issued an updated response to COVID-19 on Monday March 16, 2020. My prayers are with you all as you contemplate that letter and make ministry plans for the next several weeks.

In addition to the directive from the Bishops for congregations to suspend worship and other gatherings, I am applying this decision to our committees, councils, and affiliated ministries.

This has been an extremely difficult conversation and decision, but please know that we are making this decision for the protection of the most vulnerable in our communities – both inside and outside of the church. We see this is a faithful and loving response to the current pandemic.

We live in a world with almost limitless options for connecting with each other through technology. I urge you all to leverage that technology in any way you can to maintain the community of faith that you are a part of. **Please do not leave this to your pastor or leaders alone.** Each of us has a responsibility to live out our faith and build up our community through our care and concern. If ever there were a time to be Christ to one another within the congregation, this is it.

The MNO Synod's offer of partnership to provide live-streamed worship services and other resources is still open. Please let me know how we can help. Leaders, please check in with each other so that we can all mutually support one another in ministry and share resources for the sake of the church. The ELCIC National office has also assembled a list of streaming/ videos/ resources that individual congregations are making available. You can find that information here: <http://www.elcic.ca/publichealth> It will be updated daily.

One last reminder. This pandemic, beyond a health crisis, will have a significant impact on the stability of our congregations. This is an especially important time to be generous in your giving to your congregation. Please continue to give your usual offering through mail (don't send cash) or electronic means. The Synod office is working on a solution to assist members in online directed giving at this time. Hopefully we will have something in place in the next few days.

In order to stay informed, I am encouraging all members to like and follow our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/MNOSynod/>) and to sign up for our newsletter (<http://mnosynod.org/newsletter-subscribe/>)

I also understand that with so many closures and dire news each day, it is easy to live in fear and to lose hope. Remember that we are people called to live in hope because of the life we have in Christ. Even as we are being physically distanced from each other, God holds us firm and remains faithful to us. In the book of Romans, Paul writes:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am praying for you all. Please continue to pray for each other as we adapt and address this challenge that we face, knowing that we face it together as the body of Christ.

God's blessings to you all.

Yours in Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Zinko', with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Rev. Jason Zinko
Bishop
Manitoba Northwestern Ontario Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada