Pastor Andrew Heisen, an ELCA campus ministry pastor in Boston/Cambridge, MA, published some thoughts in response to a request for what Lutherans might have to contribute to people in the current COVID-19 pandemic. He said, in part:

Lutheranism arose first as a fundamentally Christian response to the widespread fear and sense of loss felt by people in medieval Europe who were under constant threat of the bubonic plague. The actual conflict of the Protestant reformation was sparked when Luther opposed practices of the Roman church of the time, particularly the sale of indulgences, which were taking advantage of people’s fear and grief for the sake of profit. At the core of Luther’s faith, though, was his discovery in reading the Scriptures of the life-changing grace of God. Luther came to see that there are evils in the world and in ourselves that we humans simply cannot overcome on our own, but that we live in the hands of a God whose life-giving power and goodness is greater even than the death and chaos that we fear. In this way we Lutherans recognize evil for what it is, and we do not minimize its effects or the losses we suffer. At the same time, according to God’s promises, we remember that we need not be afraid, because all which is most important is in God’s loving hands. So we are freed from the fear that immobilizes or enrages us, and are able to focus instead on how we can use the gifts and resources God has given to help our neighbors for the good of all. In that way our world changes for good and reflects its Creator’s will...

When Martin Luther was dealing with the Black Death plague, he wrote (Luther’s Works, Vol. 43, pg. 132) a letter entitled, “Whether one might flee from a deadly plague.” I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer
medicine and take it. I shall avoid persons and places where my presence is not needed, in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others, and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me he will surely find me, and I will have done what he has expected of me, and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid place or person, but will go freely as stated above. See, this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy, and does not tempt God.

by Carl Wilfrid

Editor’s note: I offer this bit of history and wisdom from Pastor Luther because it was helpful to me (and startling!) and I hope it might be useful to pastors, church staffs, and lay leaders as you plan and provide resources for your congregations in these strange and dangerous days. This is not a typical Church Together article, but in these atypical days I invite others of you who find helpful resources or stories to share them with your Sierra Pacific Synod sisters and brothers through this Church Together vehicle. Simply email me at mic@spselca.org.

Do you have a story that you would like to share? Send any Church Together story requests to mic@spselca.org.