

April 27, 2020



Sierra Pacific Synod
committed to being re-formed



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

We are Church Together -- Our Journey Forward

Greetings!

Christ is Risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Blessings as we continue to live in and celebrate the Good News of the Resurrection of Jesus. We pray that all of our congregations and ministries are finding ways to proclaim the Gospel in creative and new ways that honor this time of social distancing.

In this very different time for our shared ministry, with each day bringing new challenges and opportunities for our work and witness, we are being called upon to adapt the way we have been church together. Online worship, meetings by Zoom, pastoral care offered over the phone, stewardship, and baptisms, weddings and funerals that have had to be postponed are all a part of "figuring out" ministry these days. It has been compared to "building an airplane while we are flying it."

We are all facing this important question: *How and when will we be able to gather again for worship and other gatherings from which we have been restricted since mid-March?* The word we are consistently hearing from government officials is that the lifting of gathering restrictions will not happen "all at once," and may happen over the course of several months. Currently, both Nevada and California have restrictions of gatherings over ten people. There is no "end date" on these restrictions in California, and even though the restrictions are set to expire in Nevada on April 30th, it seems likely they will be extended.

Our advice regarding "re-opening" is the same as it was when these restrictions were enacted in March – *we must adhere to all federal, state and local restrictions.* These restrictions reflect our shared values of caring for the most vulnerable among us. The

number of people who have been infected with COVID-19 in this country, as well as the number of people who have died from this virus, continues to rise and people are still at risk. The advice of state authorities in California and Nevada continues to be against loosening these restrictions too soon, so that the spread of this disease will not be hastened by our impatience with social isolation. We continue to advise against all forms of “drive in worship,” “drive-through communion,” or other means of gathering that violate local health department recommendations for social distancing. Please consult with local and state health officials before relaxing any social restrictions. It is important for us to remember there are lives at stake in these decisions.

We have included [a link](#) to what we think will be a helpful guide for all of our congregations and ministries as we move through the next several months when it is likely these restrictions will be relaxed. It is a slightly redacted version of an article, “[24 Questions Your Church Should Answer Before People Return](#),” by Pr. Ken Braddy, Jr., of LifeWay Christian Resources. He is “not of our tradition” as we sometimes say, but his ideas are helpful as a starting place for the conversations we will need to have as we consider the “What now?” questions in our lives and ministries on the other side of this pandemic. We hope this guide will prove helpful for the leadership of your congregation/ministry in the weeks and months ahead.

We hear stories from many places around our synod of how you are offering bold proclamations of the Gospel that are reaching people who have not been connected with the church for a while, if ever. Thank you. There will be questions of how we will gather as the church “on the other side” of this pandemic, in such a time when restrictions have been lifted. Our prayer is that the leadership of our congregations and ministries will work together to discern with the help of the Spirit the lessons that have been learned during this time, trusting there is no place we are being called where Christ is not already present. Our synod’s leadership, including the staff of the Office of the Bishop and our Synod Council, will be about this same work; we ask for your prayers as well. The following prayer sums up well our journey in this time:

“Oh God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen”

Blessings and Peace,



The Rev. Mark W. Holmerud



Ms. Gail Kiyomura

bishop,
Sierra Pacific Synod, ELCA

Vice President,
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