



SYNOD OF ALBERTA AND THE TERRITORIES

Incorporated as Alberta Synod

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***Spirit -Led
Leadership***

***Hope-Filled
Discipleship***

***Innovative
Tradition***

***Collaborative
Partnerships***

March 16, 2020

Dear Beloved of God - Colleagues in Ministry.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

As many of you will know it was my intent to begin a brief time of holiday upon the conclusion of the Conference of Bishops meeting, and the joint National Church Council and Council of General Synod meeting, Thursday-Sunday, this past week. In the light of the current situation, I have returned home to Edmonton and to the synod office, in order to be available to you and to our Synod.

I have cancelled all synodically sponsored events scheduled to take place in advance of Holy Week and will be making decisions on subsequent events in due course. Please note that as of today, March 16, 2020, the Synod Office will remain open and staff available to serve and support you within these reduced hours: 10:00am-Noon, Monday-Friday.

In order to be in touch and to pray with you I am inviting rostered ministers to join me and Pastor Prema in one of two ZOOM sessions this Wednesday, March 18. The intent of these first ZOOM sessions (of up to one hour) is to be in conversation as to how we are providing, and how we might provide, pastoral care and community connection during this time; and then to pray together.

Regarding ZOOM: The web browser will download automatically when you start (click on the meeting link) or join your first ZOOM meeting. Further information can be found at www.zoom.us or contact Pastor Prema at the Synod Office.

ZOOM 1 – Wednesday, March 18 – 9:30-10:30am
Click on the link within the body of this email to join.

ZOOM 2 – Wednesday, March 18 – 11:00am-Noon
Click on the link within the body of this email to join.

I hope that you are able to join Pastor Prema and me.

A third correspondence from the National and Synod Bishops, regarding suspension of worship services, is currently being drafted and you can expect to receive it via e-mail, or view it on our synod or national websites, this evening or tomorrow morning.

I am writing to you today in the midst of an unprecedented time.

In the midst of announcements of change and changes for us all, I write to express my thanks to you for your ministry and for your faithfulness in caring for the people of God in and beyond your ministry context. I am thankful today for teachers who prepare online materials for students while who are at home; for cashiers and grocery store stockers who put their own selves at risk to help and serve others; for Deacons, Pastors, musicians, church leaders who prepare ways for their communities to worship while not physically being able to be together; for first responders, police and fire officers, fire and for all who put themselves in harms way; for health care personnel and those striving to find a cure and medical aide for all in need, all the while putting their selves at risk; for our Provinces Chief Medical Office, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, a member at Trinity Lutheran, Edmonton, and for her wisdom, compassion, and gentleness; for those who check on neighbors, the elderly and alone to ensure their wellness and that they have the food and supplies they need; for parents, family members and neighbors who find creative and beautiful ways to ensure that children are happy and safe and sound in these odd times; for each of you who I have witnessed having shown great care and deep and abiding love for your neighbor.

In these days of anxiety and what seems like fear upon fear for many, may we heed the words found throughout scripture, *"Do not be afraid. You are not alone."*

Moving forward together, friends:

Continue to monitor the most up to date information and guidance from AHS:
www.alberta.ca/covid19 including as of yesterday, Sunday, March 15 schools and place of worship have now been included in decisions related to mass gatherings.

Monitor the ELCIC National website – Public health resources for faith communities:
<http://elcic.ca/publichealth/>

Check the Synod website for correspondence, including links to correspondence from the National and Synod Bishops...and sign up to *Wednesday's Word* if you haven't done so.

Consider using and/or sharing these prayer resources which I find to be helpful:

- 1) Pray As You Go: www.pray-as-you-go.org
- 2) My Daily Office App: <https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/my-daily-office/id1215675361>

In addition, you may find the following resource helpful: Caring Connections – An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling (Volume 5 Number 1 Spring 2008): https://www.lutheranservices.org/sites/default/files/images/pdfs-CaringConnections/2008/CaringConnections_2008_vol05_1.pdf

As we relate to this new challenge, I also call upon you to remember those exposed to other health challenges on a daily basis: to Dengue fever, Malaria, HIV & AIDS which continue to be a devastating reality, and other life-threatening illnesses, including, remembering our Siblings in Christ in Colombia and El Salvador.

It is my prayer that the Coronavirus does not make us indifferent to these realities for many, but rather, a renewed understanding of the vulnerability of human life, and a moment to recommit to prayer for and loving service of the neighbor (Luke 10: 25-37).

May we continue to trust our lives and place our hope in our God of healing and grace for all people. Perhaps the following prayers will guide us this day:

O God, where hearts are fearful and constricted, grant courage and hope. Where anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace and reassurance. Where impossibilities close every door and window, grant imagination and resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking, grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen. (EvLW pg. 76)

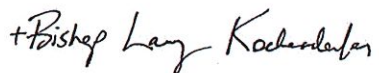
God, our God, you are full of mercy and grace; you are rich in love. You call us to love with a love like Jesus' love. We come to you with empty hands and waiting hearts, for this is more than we can do. Work within us your gifts of grace and forgiveness, so that we may live beyond the power of those who have hurt us and learn to love even our enemies. Immerse us, again and again, in your lavish grace. Bathe us deep in the love of Jesus, who takes our wounds and our hurts, our anger and our grief. Break them open, moving within them with resurrection. Give us your life so that we might live in love for the world you love. Amen. (Prayer by Christine Jerrett, taken from 'Faithfully Yours: Letters for the Wondering' <http://ow.ly/IVpJ50yyAml>)

Friends, take care of each other, pray, continue to be the children of God, which is your calling through your baptism into Christ.

May the peace that passes all understanding be with us all.

"The God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

With love for each of you –
In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Larry Kochendorfer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop
Synod of Alberta and the Territories
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada