



March 20, 2020

Correspondence to Congregations and Lay and Rostered Leaders

Dear Beloved of God –

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

As the global pandemic continues to intensify, I want to assure you of my prayers for all of you in the midst of this challenge. This is an unprecedented time for us, and we are all discovering a new reality together, with the guidance of God the Holy Spirit. I pray that we will not lose heart but will be strengthened in our faith and in the ministries to which we have been called.

I continue to be encouraged by the creativity and diligence of our rostered ministers and lay leaders as they seek to provide support, comfort, nurture to those in their varied ministry contexts during these unusual times.

Many rostered ministers met with Pr. Prema Samuel, Assistant to the Bishop, and me this past Wednesday via ZOOM technology. We gathered for worship, *Thanksgiving for Baptism*, for a sharing of pastoral care and community connections taking place, and for prayer together. We will continue to meet weekly on Wednesday's via this format. Next Wednesday, March 25, I have asked our Synod Treasurer, Paul Ellison, to join our conversation, time of worship and prayer. Rostered ministers, please check the Synod website (homepage – Upcoming Events & Activities – COVID-19) for Zoom meeting information for next Wednesday, March 25 from 9:30am-10-30am or 11:00am – noon.

Today, I invite you to join me in a Synod initiative, ***Light One Candle***. Together, I am encouraging all members of our Synod to daily light a candle and to pray together. I will be lighting a candle each day at 10:00 am.

In addition, would you consider crafting a one sentence prayer with your name (optional) and your congregation's/ministry's name and location and forwarding this to me (lkochendorfer@elcic.ca) via email with ***Light One Candle*** in the Subject Line of the email? If email is not possible for you call another congregational member, share the prayer with them, and ask them to forward it to me, again with your name (optional) and congregation/ministry name and location, and ***Light One Candle*** in the Subject Line of the email.

Something like this: ***Light One Candle***

God of steadfast love,

As our Lenten journey deepens embrace your children with faith, hope and love.

- Bishop Larry Kochendorfer, Synod Office, Edmonton

We will be gathering these prayers and sharing many of them through our Synod website: albertasynod.ca.

As you pray, in this new reality, I ask you to remember those exposed to other health challenges on a daily basis in many areas of the world: to Dengue fever, Malaria, HIV & AIDS, and other life-threatening illnesses.

As you pray, I ask you to remember our Companion Synod Partner, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Colombia (correspondence from Bishop Atahualpa is available on our Synod website) and our ministry with and through Pastor Brian Rude in El Salvador: In Mission with El Salvador/"*En Misión con El Salvador*" (correspondence from Pastor Brian is available on our Synod website).

Please avail yourself of several resources on the National ELCIC website including Livestream and Worship Resources (<http://elcic.ca/publichealth/livestreaming.cfm>).

You will find on our Synod website (albertasynod.ca) the three pastoral letters prepared and distributed as a common correspondence from the National and Synod Bishops: March 4, 13 and 16, additional resources, and, my correspondence to Rostered Ministers of our Synod, March 18.

While we are not gathering in person for public worship, I have been inspired by the ways you are using technology to reach out to the people we serve: Sunday webcasts; the sharing of online resources; conversations by Zoom, FaceTime and Skype; blogs, texts, emails and phone calls; these have all helped us to stay connected. You have demonstrated social distancing but not faith distancing, and you have shown our commitment that, while we cannot come together in the usual ways, the Church of God is certainly not closed!

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 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 at this time the Synod Office will remain open and staff available to serve and support you within these reduced hours: 10:00am-noon, Monday-Friday. Pastor Prema and I are available to you anytime. It is best to contact us via email: psamuel@elcic.ca and lkochendorfer@elcic.ca.

In the midst of announcements and information of change and changes minute by minute, I am thankful for teachers who prepare online materials for students while who are at home; for cashiers and grocery store stockers who put themselves 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, and for all who put themselves in harms way; for custodians who clean and then clean again seeking safety for all; for health care personnel striving to provide medical aide for all in need, all the while putting themselves at risk; for government officials seeking to make wise decisions; for those who check on neighbors 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."* Perhaps the following prayer will guide us this day. Please feel free to share my prayer with others as you would like:

*God of steadfast love,
As our Lenten journey deepens embrace your children with faith, hope and love.*

*God of mercy,
Uphold all who are ill, all who provide care, all who grieve, and all who are waiting, wondering or watching.*

*God of liberation,
Sustain those most vulnerable due to age or health, the refugee, the poor, the homeless, and those desiring relationship.*

*God of wisdom,
Grant good judgement to elected officials, health care leaders and to all who are in authority.*

*God our shepherd,
Support faith leaders seeking to provide new ways of sharing the gospel and of sustaining community.*

*God of compassion,
Grant us gifts of generosity, endurance, courage, grace and mercy.*

*God of resurrection life,
Speak into this time with light, promise and strengthened hope. Speak into our hearts, into our communities, and into this world once again with new life promise, through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

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 of Christ which passes all understanding be with us all.

In Christ Jesus –
Shalom,
+Bishop Larry Kochendorfer

"The God of 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)