



COVID-19

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Synod Partners:

As you know, there have been confirmed cases of COVID-19 in several of our synod's counties. We lift our prayers for those who are grieving, those who are ill, and those who are anxious in these days. We are so grateful for the excellent leadership of our rostered ministers and church councils as they take in rapidly evolving information and make decisions to keep their congregations and wider communities as safe as possible. Your mindfulness about what is important for all the members of your community is important. Keep up the good work! (And keep washing your hands!)

Below you will find the two most recent letters from from the Bishop.

Be sure to keep apprised of any new health recommendations or mandates from your local county health department and the CDC. We will do our best to share what we learn as well.

March 6, 2020

Dear Beloved Leaders:

As I witness your conversations online and read the letters you are sending your faith communities, I am grateful for the ways you show compassion, calm and care. Thank you for this witness in our world.

As developments and recommendations regarding COVID-19 continue to rapidly change, I am especially mindful of the most vulnerable populations in our midst. These vulnerable groups include anyone over 60 years old, those who are immune-compromised, those with underlying chronic health conditions, and those who are pregnant.

I encourage you (along with your leadership teams) to consider your upcoming gatherings - including worship and other events. I strongly encourage you to follow your county's health recommendations on gathering. For example, the King County Health Department is recommending that we not gather in large groups. ([See here.](#)) However, if you choose to do so, be sure to follow recommended hygiene practices. Please encourage vulnerable persons to stay home. While we do not want to perpetuate panic, we want to help limit the spread of illness and protect those who are most vulnerable.

There are many options to share the Good News of Jesus online or via email. A simple prayer, Bible reading and message would be welcome for those who are



unable to attend. As always, please be mindful of copyright law.

Resources:

- <https://kingcounty.gov/coronavirus>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- www.lutheransnw.org/covid-19
- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- [Facebook Page](#) for our NW WA Synod Rostered Ministers
- [Example Letter](#) to congregation regarding canceling worship. (Thank you to Pastor Darla DeFrance for permission to share.)
- Example of a Congregation Health Plan - coming

Thank you for helping us protect one another.

Please keep in your prayers all affected by this virus, those working toward better safety and health practices, those working on prevention, and those working for a cure.

Above all things, remember that we are a faithful people, trusting that God is here, and God is working in this world.

Holding you in prayer,

Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

March 4, 2020

Dear Beloved Leaders:

With news of the COVID-19 virus in the daily headlines, there is concern about the spread of illness. Since churches are centers of communal gathering, it is our responsibility to be particularly mindful of our health and hygiene practices. On Tuesday, March 3, several of our synod's rostered ministers attended a presentation for faith leaders that was led by the King County Public Health Department. Below you will find a summary of their learnings. Please know that you and your communities are in our prayers as you navigate best practices for your context.

Learnings:

- Risk of infection for healthy populations remains low. Most people who are infected with COVID-19 will experience a mild illness.
- Symptoms include fever, cough, and shortness of breath, to varying degrees.
- The virus is spread through droplets, which means that it is passed through direct contact. For example, if someone coughs into their hand, then touches your hand, and you touch your mouth, you would be at risk of infection.
- Increasing our care around health and hygiene right now is very important. That is what will keep the risk low and decrease the chance of a major outbreak. Even if you are not feeling worried about contracting the virus, please follow these practices in order to care for those who are at higher risk.
- The Health Department is currently not mandating the cancellation of mass gatherings and events. However, people who are immune compromised should assess their own risk and consider avoiding crowds. Congregational leadership will need to consider their context and population to determine what events may need to be cancelled.

Based on these recommendations, here is what some congregations are doing in response to COVID-19:

- Promote proper [hand hygiene](#). Hand washing stations or hand sanitizer available in all spaces used by your community.
- Encourage [coughing/sneezing](#) into your elbow or tissue (and discard tissue immediately).
- Don't touch your face.
- Minimize person-to-person physical contact. Consider a bow or wave in lieu of handshakes or hugs during passing of the peace and following worship.
- Consider your communion practice. Communion Assistants should wash/sanitize hands prior to serving. As the Health Department advises against sharing liquids, forego wine/juice or have it in individual cups passed out by a server with clean hands. (As Lutherans, we trust that Christ is fully present in both elements of Holy Communion.)
- For now, cease the practice of making the font available for "remembering your baptism" and use a sanitized baptismal font for baptisms only.
- Follow strict food safety protocol. Food should be served by people with clean, gloved hands. Some congregations are avoiding potlucks and/or eliminating fellowship meals during this time.
- Eliminate the use of high-touch items. This may include printing hymns in bulletins vs. using hymnals; NOT reusing bulletins for a second service; and

collecting offering without passing the plate – instead, creating a station where offerings may be placed.

- Increase cleaning and sanitizing practices. Disinfect smooth surfaces and door handles after every event. Work with the outside groups who use your building to employ this as well. Evaluate cleaning practices of nursery, classrooms, etc.
- Most importantly, please stay home if you are ill. Moreover, while we pray daily for health and healing, we also believe that God has blessed us with the gifts of science and medicine. Trust experts and seek medical attention when you are ill.

Resources and updates can be found online at:

<https://kingcounty.gov/coronavirus>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

[ELCA Pandemic Checklist](#) for congregation preparedness (added to letter on March 5)

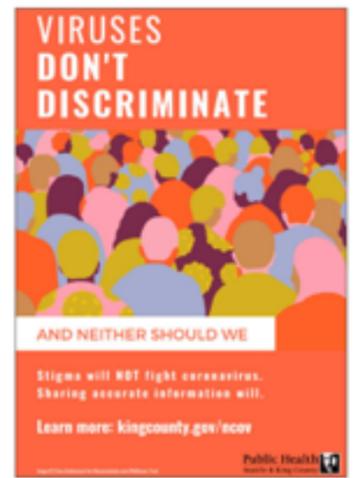
Thank you for helping us protect one another, especially those who are most vulnerable. Putting into practice these precautionary measures is an act of stewardship, as we seek to care for the safety of one another and our neighbors. Please keep in your prayers all affected by this virus, those working toward better safety and health practices, those working on prevention and those working for a cure.

Above all things, remember that we are a faithful people, trusting that God is here, and God is working in this world.

Blessings,

Bishop Shelley Bryan Wee

(Find the bishop's previous February 29, 2020 letter [here.](#))



Bishop messages re: COVID-19 may be found [HERE.](#)

Spotlight

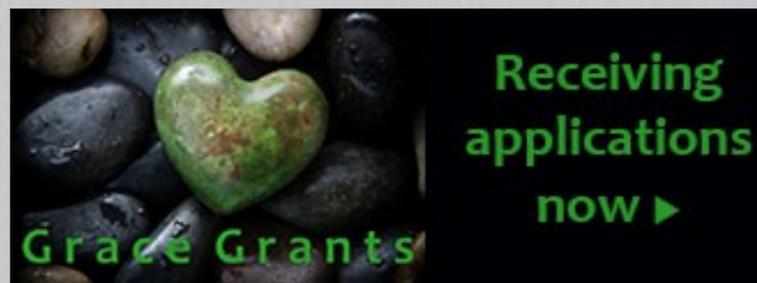
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[Northwest Washington Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(ELCA\)](#)

5519 Phinney Avenue North | Seattle, WA 98103

P: 206-783-9292 | F: 206-783-9833 | E: office@lutheransnw.org

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