



**SYNOD OF  
ALBERTA  
AND THE  
TERRITORIES**  
Incorporated as Alberta Synod

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*Spirit-Led  
Leadership*

*Hope-Filled  
Discipleship*

*Innovative  
Tradition*

*Collaborative  
Partnerships*

February 24, 2021

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.***

During this time of continued restrictions in response to public health concerns regarding the ongoing COVID pandemic, we again enter the season of Lent. A time of waiting, pondering, and reflection. We slow down. We refrain. We anticipate resurrection.

These past eleven months have been trying ones at best. They too have been a time of waiting, pondering, and reflection. We still have a long way to go before our social interactions, at church and in our wider communities, can fully resume as we so dearly desire. I am confident that the Holy Spirit, who has sustained us these difficult months, will uphold and lead us throughout the duration of the pandemic. Thank you for your sacrifice, your persistence, and your loving care for those you are called to serve.

I am deeply grateful to the rostered and lay leaders of our synod for your diligent protection of our communities and congregations in refraining from in-person worship, as I have repeatedly recommended. By utilizing means of worship and congregational life not reliant on in-person gatherings, and by adhering to the guidelines set forth by Alberta Health Services and our Chief Medical Officer of Health, you are acting in love to protect both the members of your congregation and the communities in which they live, study, and work.

Recently, as many of you know, Rev. James Coates of GraceLife Church, Spruce Grove, was arrested after repeated violations of public health directives including refusal to maintain social distancing at worship services, wear masks, and limit the number of attendees as directed in the provincial mandate. On their website, Rev. Coates and his congregation urge churches to disregard public health directives and encourage Albertans to resume social interaction around meals, in defiance of provincial guidelines aimed at preventing the spread of

COVID-19. Protests in support of Rev. Coates and against public health measures took place in Edmonton over the weekend.

I am sorely disappointed, frustrated, and concerned when I hear of those who have chosen to openly defy the good work, advice, and directives of Alberta's public health officials.


As Christians, the call to love others is inseparable from our call to love and serve our God. The protection of our neighbours from COVID-19 is, in itself, an act of worship, in that so doing honours and glorifies God by the offerings of mercy and compassion. Conversely, actions that endanger others are not compatible with either the worship of God or our confession of faith in Christ.

During this pandemic, which imposes restrictions echoing practices common during the season of Lent, let us show mercy and compassion. Let us refrain. Let us anticipate resurrection.

***"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).***

In Christ---

Shalom,



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

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<https://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/gracelife-church-defies-closure-order-yet-again-holds-service-in-violation-of-covid-19-rules>

<https://gracelife.ca/> paragraph 10