



**SYNOD OF
ALBERTA
AND THE
TERRITORIES**

Incorporated as Alberta Synod

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***Spirit-Led
Leadership***

***Hope-Filled
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May 5, 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 all.

In recent weeks many of us have been wondering how and when our congregations might return to in-person worship and programming. Some of us have been planning for outdoor worship services. Others have been contemplating a return in the fall. Still others have been considering what a future as a hybrid church, one that embraces both online and on-the-ground ministry, might mean in the rethinking and reforming of ministry. And many of us were, as yet, unsure as to when we might be able to return to our sanctuaries.

Yesterday, May 4, Premier Kenney announced increased restrictions for the next several weeks. Details and information for high case regions are available on the Government of Alberta website: alberta.ca/covid19

Expanded restrictions, effective today, May 5, include the following as stated on the Government of Alberta website:

“Places of Worship:

- Faith services are limited to 15 in-person attendees.
- Physical distancing between households must be maintained at all times.
- Virtual or online services are strongly recommended.
- Drive-in services where people do not leave their vehicles and adhere to guidance are allowed.

Funerals:

- 10-people maximum for funerals, including participants and guests.
- Funeral receptions are not permitted.”

I recommend that all in-person worship and meetings be suspended.

With you, I continue to long for regular gathering, fellowship, and worship in-person. I am grateful and heartened to witness the steady ramping up of vaccination efforts and I am hopeful that we will experience a much less restricted life in the foreseeable future.

That time, however, is not yet here, and we need to maintain the vigilance and care that you have expressed throughout the course of this long and challenging year. We who love God need to continue to regulate our behaviour in ways that also give faithful expression to our love of neighbour.

While our current worshipping practices may leave us longing for the in-person aspect of our life together, I am deeply encouraged by the faithful and fulsome ways in which our congregations and specialized ministries have continued to offer vibrant ministry throughout this pandemic. It is urgent for us to embrace this opportunity to reflect deeply on the questions I have continued to raise: What is God calling us to do; how have our ministries been enhanced; what new needs have been discovered; and how will we maintain connection with those who cannot and/or choose not to return to in-person worship?

Please pray for those who will find these restrictions difficult, for all who are isolated or lonely, for our congregations, rostered leaders, lay leaders, for our specialized ministries, for the vulnerable in our midst, for those suffering from COVID-19, for all grieving losses of any kind, for those who are burdened with additional work and those who are unemployed or underemployed, for provincial leaders, for those developing and testing vaccines, and for emergency workers, doctors, nurses, and essential workers who are bearing the burden of this pandemic.

And pray, dear friends, in lament for the deepening division and polarity we are seeing politically, and also within our communities, neighborhoods, congregations, and families. This is the time for us to be working together, to strengthen relationships, including through our care of neighbour.

Beloved of God, as I have shared several times, and will continue to do so: continue to be humble and gentle with one another. Honour each other. Make space for lament. Welcome moments of joy. Help each other live into hope. Learn from this journey in the coronavirus wilderness and let the learning lead us forward. Trust that God is at work in this time and look for the new things God is doing even now.

May we continue to trust our lives and place our hope in our God of healing and grace for all people.

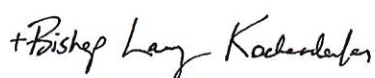
Perhaps the following prayer will guide us these days:

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)

Alleluia! Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed. Alleluia!

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 Jesus –
Shalom,



The Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop
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