



SYNOD OF ALBERTA AND THE TERRITORIES

Incorporated as Alberta Synod

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*Spirit -Led
Leadership*

*Hope-Filled
Discipleship*

*Innovative
Tradition*

*Collaborative
Partnerships*

November 12, 2020

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.

Like many of you, I have been following the increased case numbers and impact of Covid-19 on our population, including today's Provincial announcement that infection rates are increasing at an alarming rate.

With today's announcement we have been given notice that further restrictions will be in place beginning tomorrow, November 13, 2020. The latest restrictions still allow for faith-based gatherings, however all areas under enhanced status must restrict weddings and funerals to a 50-person limit, and limit in-person worship attendance to 1/3 of the sanctuary (room) capacity.

With these restrictions in mind, I feel that what is "permitted" is not always what is in the best interest of our members and our communities. For this reason, I am **strongly recommending that all congregations suspend all in-person worship and meetings until the pandemic response level is lowered.**

These past months have been difficult. I know how much many of you have appreciated returning to in-person worship, or were looking forward to returning to in-person worship, and how diligently you have all prepared and planned for a safe return to your buildings.

I do not make this recommendation lightly. However, our baptismal call to care for our communities must take precedence over our personal longing to see each other or to practice our faith in ways that are familiar for us. God calls us to care for our neighbor and right now that means limiting how many people we come in contact with, even for worship.

I encourage you to make use of the many alternative ways that rostered and lay leaders have been providing worship and devotional materials while we cannot gather. Many are providing online worship services, devotional materials and recordings, and several have developed print

materials where internet is not reliable. If your congregation is not able to offer such resources, then I encourage you to connect with other congregations in your Area to collaborate.

In addition, the ELCIC has many resources available: ELCIC Congregations - **Livestreaming and Worship Resources** <https://elcic.ca/publichealth/livestreaming.cfm>; **Sermons by Email** (an initiative of the *ELCIC's Program Committee for Worship*) During this time of social distancing, some might like to receive sermons sent to their emails directly – hard copy and/or video. If you would like to receive a sermon each week, prepared by a different rostered minister, please send an email to: jdgingrich11@gmail.com

I encourage you to continue to monitor updated information and guidelines from Alberta Health Services and from the Province of Alberta: **COVID 19 information: guidance for places of worship** <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/covid-19-information-guidance-for-places-of-worship>; **important AHS updates:** <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page16944.aspx>.

Beloved of God, as people of faith, continue to be humble and gentle with one another. Honor 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.

Thank you for your witness to patient trust in God and to sacrificial, cruciform love for your neighbour.

Know that I continue to be inspired and moved by the many ways in which you have proclaimed the Gospel, offered pastoral care, and served one another.

Know that I continue to pray with you and for you during this uncertain time. And most importantly, remember that God is with you and even now is planning and nourishing seeds of resurrection life.

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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bishop Larry Kochendorfer".

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