

Dear Brothers in Ministry,

In the last 24 hours we have gone from 250-50-10. With the current request by President Trump and Governor Ricketts to limit our gatherings to 10 people or less, this creates a crisis for all our congregations – even the smallest among us. My heart hurts with you. The idea of canceling worship goes against everything in us! The question that follows is the same one for all of us: “What do we do now?” (a.k.a. – “What does this mean?”)

I cannot make the decision for you, your leaders, and your congregations. I can and will stand with you in your decisions. I also pray that, as you meet with your leadership and prayerfully seek God’s direction for a decision, you will consider the following.

This currently **IS NOT** an Acts 5:29 thing: *“We must obey God rather than man.”*

This **IS** a Romans 13:1-4 thing:

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good.

This is **ALSO** a Philippians 2 thing:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In the midst of this challenge of public health we are called to obedience to the Third Commandment (Sabbath) along with the Fourth (Governing Authority) and Fifth Commandment (Care of Neighbor).

We need to hear the Word. Caesar is God’s servant for your good. Our concern for the weakest among us is critical in this moment – even when we, and everyone around us, are feeling just fine. Part of this means protecting our members and community by finding other avenues to check on our members, go to them or invite them individually to come to us, so they can be fed with the Word and Sacrament, as needed. Do not carry this burden alone. Share this struggle about what to do with your congregation. Be transparent and seek God together. Your congregation loves you and is given by God to work together as His body. Do not decide emotionally nor unilaterally, but rationally in conjunction with your leaders.

If you are not able to provide alternatives to gathering for worship (Facebook Live, YouTube, Vimeo, live stream on church website), work with the guys in your circuit. We have just created a google form about congregations across our district that are providing streaming of worship services. The page does not yet have any content, but this is where information will be posted (it will be linked in several places, including the main district webpage) at <http://www.ndlcms.org/covid-19/>

To fill in your information go to:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeKxU-3z8k_tIN4jGXAnAyUaLw7Roy4JHbpaG7GmdYg9oi2VA/viewform?usp=sf_link

It has occurred to me that with a greater online presence, God once again works all things for our good and His glory, providing a way for an even greater number of people to receive His Word.

I know that many of you are concerned about finances. A number of our congregations are only “one bad offering” from being out of money. Remind your people about the importance of their continued stewardship partnership, even

in these moments. Appeal to them – they will respond. Ask them to mail or drop off their offerings. Provide on-line methods for giving, such as LCEF Joyful Response. LCEF is also activating Natural Disaster Assistance Loans for LCMS organizations and Rostered Church Workers and is prepared to assist existing loan customers if they are anticipating/experiencing cash-flow challenges (e.g. from needing to switch to online-only services.) Check the LCEF website or contact Nate Meier, LCEF Nebraska District Vice President, for more information.

Several creative ideas have been shared with me:

- Interactive Bible Studies and Sunday School via Zoom, Go-to-Meeting, Oovoo, or Skype.
- Multiply service times on Saturday and Sunday and have folks sign up to come for Small Group Divine Services.
- Get a radio transmitter like they have for Christmas light displays and lead services in the parking lot with everyone in their cars. Carefully distribute communion to each car (and pray for good weather).
- Re-celebrate Holy Week May 24th - May 31st, God willing. Include Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter services. These dates will come a few weeks after the "8 weeks" are over.
- Make sure people in high-risk groups are cared for, both members and non-members alike. Please check on them to make sure that they have their necessary medicines, food, and contact. They may be too proud to ask for help, and too afraid to go out of their home.
- Email or call members to arrange family/small group appointments for Holy Communion.
- Remember and teach that though Holy Communion is a precious gift of God, there have been extended times when the church has not been able to receive this gift. It wasn't that long ago that distribution was only 2-4 times a year. Many of our churches plan to offer only Service of the Word in the next 2-8 weeks.
- If you are placed in quarantine or isolation, out of concern for the flock do not lead divine services, administer the Sacrament, conduct Bible study classes, etc. Please notify me immediately.
- Pray for all those dealing with COVID-19, those suffering, those caregiving, and government officials. Please include those RSO's that are on the frontline of this issue, specifically nursing homes.
- In a COP conference call today, President Harrison is encouraging that even Winkels consider meeting electronically both to protect you men as caregivers and to avoid contamination between congregations and communities.

This is a temporary situation and we do not want to make it worse; nor do we want to be responsible for anyone's illness or worse. That said, divine services are an essential aspect of community life much like grocery stores etc. The decision is yours. I likely have not answered nor can I provide the answers to all questions, but I do *give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.* 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

Finally, a short but helpful 10-minute video from Lincoln Public Schools can be linked at

https://youtube/N_BxvzkJsZs that really speaks to the importance of staying ahead of the curve to minimize health care stress and overload. Much longer but very informative is a 1½ hour YouTube blog interview by Joe Rogan featuring a medical disease expert from the University of MN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3URhJx0NSw&t=3958s> that really helps explain the facts on some of the realities that will challenge the days ahead. It even gives the bonus topic of Lyme Disease. If you have the time, I commend it to you.

Blessings in your service in Christ,
Richard Snow