



Central States Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

November 17, 2020

Dear Partners in Ministry,

Throughout this pandemic, we have continually adapted and changed plans in response to the Corona Virus with hopes that we would be able to “flatten the curve” until a vaccine could be developed and widely distributed. We are now facing the reality that the curve has become a steep incline, and medical experts are warning that the virus is out of control. While many of our congregations have already taken steps to modify or suspend in-person worship, I strongly recommend that all congregations of our synod suspend in-person worship through the end of the year.

It is my deep concern for you as Pastor of the synod that leads me to make this recommendation, and I do not make it lightly. Over the past few months, I have traveled and preached in several congregations, something I have thoroughly enjoyed because I have missed being with you. I felt that not only could we figure out ways to gather safely, but that we needed these opportunities to gather in-person to support one another during these difficult times. With the explosion of cases across this country, hospitals overwhelmed, and the death rate continuing to climb, I can no longer justify these feelings. What we are doing as a society to control this virus is, quite frankly, not working. Therefore, I am suspending travel for myself and the rest of the synod staff as it is time to pivot once again.

I make this recommendation out of my pastoral concern for you and our whole country knowing and respecting that the decision to suspend in-person worship is not mine to make. The decision is ultimately up to each congregation. I deeply appreciate how challenging these times have been. I know how much work you have done to develop plans and protocols to gather as safely as possible. I also know how difficult these changing decisions have been on you and your congregations. I respect that as the called and covenanted leader of your congregation, you are in the best position to know your context, understand the needs of your community, and work together with your congregational leaders. Therefore, for those of you serving as Synod Authorized Ministers with a yearly authorization to preside at communion, I am not going to suspend that authorization. I will not, however, be granting any new authorizations for PMAs providing pulpit supply through the end of the year. While I respect that this is your decision to make, I am asking that you take this recommendation seriously and share it with your leadership. My staff and I will continue to support you in whatever ways we can. Please do not hesitate to reach out and call us if you have any questions, concerns, or needs.

Finally, I ask that we, as faith communities, not see ourselves as “exempt” from county health guidelines, especially guidelines that limit gatherings. I am calling us to lead by example, showing how we can worship, proclaim the gospel, support one another, care for our neighbors, and be the church in ways that help this nation work together to bring about healing in the midst of this pandemic.

The Rev. Susan Candea, Bishop

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