

Dear Partners in Ministry,

To say that these are challenging times with ever-changing information regarding the coronavirus and how to respond to it is an understatement. I have never encountered anything like this in over 36 years as a pastor. We are in uncharted waters and you as pastoral leaders are in challenging positions. Not only do you need to be voices of hope and calm in the midst of the anxiety people are experiencing, but you also need to help your communities make decisions about the best way to care for one another, including whether or not to suspend in person worship services and other church activities. I recognize and respect that each congregation individually has the responsibility to make decisions that are right for them and that you know your congregations better than I.

Recognizing all of that, at this time, I do still respectfully and strongly recommend that all of our congregations throughout the synod **PAUSE (not panic but pause!) That means I am recommending that we suspend all in-person worship and fellowship activities in our buildings through the end of the month.**

There is much we do not know about the coronavirus in terms of having an effective vaccine, but we do know the only effective way to slow the spread of the virus, to “flatten the curve,” is to practice social distancing. This gives medical experts time to develop testing and treatments without overwhelming the health care system. By **pausing** (suspending in-person) group activities, including worship, in our churches, we are working together to care for our neighbors.

I do not make this recommendation lightly. I recognize that when congregations do not meet in person for worship, giving goes down and that affects the ability of the congregation and the synod to do its ministry. I also recognize that there will be push back and this could raise the anxiety in your congregations. Please communicate to your congregations that this is not a call to panic but to **pause**. And pausing during the season of Lent is not such a bad thing!

I am **not** asking you to **pause** from being the church. Rather I am asking you to be the church in new ways during this time, and I am asking us to do this together. Below are some ways in which we can do this:

- Please make decisions to cancel in-person worship and other activities in conversation and consultation with your council leadership. These are tough decisions. You have my support, but you also need the support of your leadership because ultimately it is your decision as a congregation.
- Formulate a plan on how you are going to continue to care for one another and provide worship for your congregation. Many congregations have already done this. If you do not have the ability to livestream (resources are on the synod website to help you do this), we will be providing worship services, including sermons on our synod website. We will provide ways in which we can continue to worship, to hear the gospel and hold one another in prayer. (More information will be coming about this in the next few days.)
- All synod staff travel will be suspended through the end of the month. Please know that we are available for you by phone and will be expanding our capacity to use Zoom and have conversations via the internet. At this time the synod office will remain open, but some staff will be working from home.
- All in-person synod events and meetings will be postponed or held on-line. (Again, more information will be coming out in the e-newsletter on Wednesday and will be posted on the synod website.)

I also want to assure you that we are here for you. We will be reaching out and touching base with you, but please know you can call or e-mail anytime. At our Tuesday morning staff meeting, we will be working out the

details of a synod plan to assist and support you as leaders as well as your congregations. Watch for more information to come to you through your deans.

I deeply appreciate your leadership during this time. Let us continue to remind one another that we are the church; we are the church together; we are the church for the sake of the world. So, for the sake of the world, for our neighbors, let us be examples and leaders of care. Let us not panic, but let us pause to do what we can in slowing the spread of this virus, and in our pausing discover new ways that the Spirit is indeed at work among us.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Susan Candea".

Bishop Candea