



# The Virginia Synod

*of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ISLAND DISTRICT, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

*Since, then, we have such a hope [through Christ Jesus], we act with great boldness.*  
(2 Corinthians 3:12 NRSV)

*Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14:27 NRSV)*

These are extraordinary times. There is so much anxiety about the future in general as well as for our individual lives. The well-being of millions as well as the world's economy are being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hour by hour the situation changes as new information and additional restrictions are imposed or recommended. Our leaders and members alike are concerned, to say the least.

It seems like such times would be the most important time for the church to gather for prayer, hymns and to receive God's Holy Sacraments and the support of our communities of faith. Of course!...

I wish such in-person gatherings did not carry with them the very danger we are all trying our best to avoid. I wish such gatherings would not potentially transmit this deadly disease to those we love back home or at work or school or the grocery store. If only...

But, the risk is real... and the need to do what we can, right now, to help slow and prevent the spread of the virus is urgent. This why we, along with many of our ecumenical siblings, have strongly advised we not gather in-person until we know it is reasonably safe to do so. Currently, government and medical professionals estimate that we will need to practice physical distancing for at least the next 8 weeks... That would mean a new target date to resume gathering for worship is May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020. Of course, that could change as we monitor the spread of this virus.

Like you, I feel heartbroken to realize we should not gather to celebrate the highest festival on our Church Calendar – Easter! The Resurrection of our Lord! It seems unbelievable and somehow wrong.

But, based on available information from public health officials, ELCA leaders, including me, are convinced that – for the time being – and for the sake of our communities, especially those most vulnerable – not only worship, but ALL direct in-person contact should be avoided – at church; at work; in the store, etc. The only way we can slow the spread of this virus is to avoid being in close proximity.

The Virginia Synod Office of the Bishop staff will follow our own advice. We are closing the physical offices and working remotely as much as possible. We have cancelled or postponed meetings and events or moved them to online formats. Travel and in-person contact are restricted and we are closely monitoring and communicating news and resources for your use as we receive them on our website and in emails. We are trying to stay connected to our Rostered Ministers and praying for all of you! Be assured we are all still available through email, text and phone calls.

Of this I am confident: Together, led by the Holy Spirit, we can... not only survive, but serve and support one another! In Jesus name and following God's example, we can indeed strive to be FAITHFUL + BOLD + SERVING... for the sake of the Gospel;... for the sake of the world...

Of this I am sure... Christ's Peace will be with and guide us all... Amen!

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robt F. Humphrey', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

The Rev. Robert F. Humphrey  
Bishop  
Virginia Synod, ELCA