



Eastern North Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



Western North Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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April 29, 2020

Dear Beloved ELCA Members in North Dakota,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you...” (Philippians 1:2-3)

On April 16th the White House and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) released a document entitled [“Guidelines for Opening Up America Again.”](#) This document outlines three phases, based on the trajectory of identified COVID-19 cases, for communities as they consider how to engage in communal activity and re-open currently-closed operations. The document states clearly that this process will be contextual to each state, county, and municipality. North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum released the [ND Smart Restart Protocol](#) on April 28th which provided new standard operating procedures for businesses to open in a manner consistent with these federal guidelines.

Gathering as an assembly is a fundamental part of Christian community. It is understandable that communities want to be able to gather together, but care must be taken. Our congregations have responded faithfully and innovatively in this time. The church never closed; it adapted in order to continue to proclaim the gospel and to care for our neighbors. This need for flexibility and adaptation will continue.

The measures taken to reduce the spread of the virus have been challenging and caused significant loss and grief; however, they have been effective in preventing our medical systems from being overwhelmed. As we begin to plan for the upcoming months, we encourage communities to be wise and flexible, putting first the needs of the most vulnerable.

Please take time to review [Returning to Gathering In-Person in Our Congregations](#). As we return to our church buildings, it will be important to celebrate but also to recognize the losses and griefs experienced in this time. [Returning to our Sanctuaries: Worship Resources](#) offers guidance for worship to aid our communities in centering this experience in praise, prayer and service.

We are grateful to the Synodical Bishops serving in Texas and Louisiana for providing documents which offered the foundational framework for the recommendations you find attached and linked above. Your synod staffs have worked together to revise these recommendations, so they more appropriately match our context in North Dakota.

God bless you in your work. We are grateful for your faithful leadership and service to our communities and to the gospel we proclaim.

In Easter Hope,

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