



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

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Dear congregations and leaders of the Eastern North Dakota Synod,

Grace and peace to you in this Epiphany season where we celebrate the gift of Jesus for the whole world! I write with guidance and encouragement as you navigate the ever-unfolding realities and pressures of both COVID-19 and our national political crisis.

First, thank you for stepping up to the public health challenge when the COVID-spread was peaking in late 2020. After I wrote in November, many of you suspended in-person worship. I am so grateful for your care for your neighbor and the common good. I truly believe we were a part of averting an even bigger crisis.

We are now at an in-between time in terms of gathering in person. Many of you are resuming in-person worship. I understand that. Some of you continue by other means. I appreciate that. I believe our actions taken for the common good are very impactful. Without continued precautions, the numbers will creep back up again. I recognize the burden borne by suspending in-person activities and therefore encourage you to remain vigilant about watching the numbers for your area. Active cases, hospitalizations, and positivity rate are helpful factors. Please continue safety precautions when in-person such as 6-feet distance, masks, no singing, vigilant hand-washing, no eating and drinking, etc. If you return to in-person worship, discuss as leaders how the public health situation will be monitored and at what point you would suspend in-person worship again. Watch and take into account the new, more contagious strain and how it might change the precautions we need to take. In short, in this in-between time, I am encouraging you to consider your situation and make a decision that is best for your context, while continuing to monitor current conditions.

Second, last week was a difficult week. This is a different kind of crisis, but not unrelated to matters of in-person worship and public health. Our national political crisis also calls for leadership and care for the common good. We have a lot of work to do as citizens and people of God.

I would like to call us to a portion of the baptismal liturgy (p. 228 ELW):

As you bring your children to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:

To live with them among God's faithful people,  
Bring them to the word of God and the holy supper,  
Teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments,  
Place in their hands the holy scriptures,  
And nurture them in faith and prayer,  
So that your children may learn to trust God,  
Proclaim Christ through word and deed,  
Care for others and the world God made,  
And work for justice and peace.

Do you promise to help your children grow in the Christian faith and life?

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In baptism, promises are made to live a life of faith that includes nourishment and participation in the Christian life in the church *and* in the world. It includes caring for others and God's world as well as working for justice and peace. If you were confirmed in a Lutheran church, the words on that day mirrored what was promised in baptism as Confirmation is an Affirmation of Baptism. Those words likely were even used if you joined a congregation as an adult. These promises are the normative basics of our shared Christian life; living into them is what a life of discipleship means.

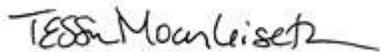
As we are turned upside down by ongoing crises of national identity, I invite all of us to renew our lives of faith and recommit to the journey with Christ to be shaped, claimed, and redeemed by his unending love and power. May that goodness flow from our lives to the lives of others through our words and deeds. Lest you think I've fallen off the Lutheran ledge, a reminder that our good works are not to please God but because God has set us free to serve our neighbor.

During my term with you, I will also be inviting and encouraging us to grow in our understandings of race in our nation and in our world, how we are all impacted by the history of our nation with its roots in slavery, and how we are called to strive for right-relationships in all regards. My story is one that has been shaped by the places I have lived and the people I've met. I look forward to future dialogue about how each of us is growing in our appreciation and understanding of the diverse human community.

In closing, if you are feeling unmoored, carry the words of Psalm 46 with you:

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Psalm 46:1-3, 11*

In Christ's great peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tessa Moon Leiseth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bishop Tessa Moon Leiseth