

March 21, 2020

Dear Saints of Grace,

I am guessing most if not all of you have heard of the order for the state of Illinois calling us to "Shelter In Place." As a part of this order, there is a restriction even against religious gatherings. To be clear, this restriction is not a form of persecution. The government is not forbidding us from praying, from proclaiming the Gospel to the world, nor from being Christians in our society. It is doing its job to protect the citizens under its authority. Some may agree with the path chosen, some may not. However, it has not overstepped its bounds. In fact, there were similar courses of action taken with the "Spanish Flu" epidemic in the early 1900's.

As challenging and saddening as this, we do have a duty to observe this. In view of that duty, we are cancelling services at Grace until the lifting of the order. As your pastor, I am sure you know how difficult it is for me to do that. The Church is not the building, but the believers united by faith around the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus and the administration of His gifts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. This means that she inherently gathers together in the flesh, just as Jesus Himself came to us in His flesh. With such a restriction we are being inhibited from the fullness of that joy for a time, and it saddens me deeply that we would have that restriction. To be clear, I don't mean this with regard to the statement of the governor, but the reality of the circumstances. There are times that the Lord, in His wisdom allows for such things to occur. In this case, my hope is that when the restriction is ended, it will draw all of us to an even greater appreciation for the fellowship we have together in person.

Having said that, it is with great joy that I can tell you that through a gift from Faith, Hope, and Peace Ministries we now have the technology to stream videos. Therefore, I will be preparing services with sermons according to our regular schedule. These will be uploaded to the internet and I will send you a link that you can view them. This certainly does not take the place of that community that we have in person, but still unites us in a joint worship together. It also gives me as your pastor that ability to continue to proclaim our Lord's Gospel to you all. Thanks be to God!

Additionally, I still intend to avail myself to you if you have the need for pastoral care in person. This Sunday I plan to be at Grace from 9 A.M. – 12 P.M. However, if you intend to come, please contact me so that we will not accidentally have an abundance of people coming together at the same time. I can also meet with you another time if that's preferable. We really do want to take the responsibility of social distancing seriously. This duty to our neighbor and the care for him in his body is a matter of the Fifth Commandment, so it is our responsibility to honor it. It also is a very trying time and as your shepherd I feel remiss if I would neglect you of that ability to meet with me in person.

In other considerations, take this time of anxiety as an opportunity to pray all the more! If you recall, I went to a conference a few years ago where the speaker made the point that we

shouldn't waste a good worry, but use it as an opportunity to pray! Take time as a family and personally to read your Bibles. Here are a number of great passages for times of worry:

Longer Passages:

Romans 8 (especially v. 18 – the end)

Matthew 6 (especially v. 25 – the end)

Luke 12:22-34

John 10

2 Corinthians 11:19-12:10

Psalms: 46, 23, 4, 27, 91, 34:4-9, 19, 22 (and many more! The Psalms are a great place to read and pray through them as you do, praying for the things they speak of!)

Shorter Passages:

Philippians 4:4-7 (although the whole chapter is good)

John 14:1-6

Exodus 14:10-14

Isaiah 41:8-13

Matthew 10:26-31

Lamentations 3:55-58

Luke 10:38-42

Individual Verses:

Hebrews 13:5

1 John 4:18

1 Peter 5:7

Psalms 73:26

Thankfully, there are also an abundance of resources available to us in our age of multimedia. Please utilize those as well:

Worship Anew (formerly Worship for Shut-ins, a ministry of the LC—MS) – found on My50 (Channel 50 over the air, but it may be different if you have cable) on Sunday mornings at 8:00-8:30 A.M.

The Lutheran Hour on WGN Radio 720 Sunday mornings at 6:00-6:30 A.M.

KFUO Radio (this has many shows that focus on Bible Study and devotions, you might even be able to find your pastor in some archives) – [www.kfuo.org](http://www.kfuo.org)

President Harrison, the President of the Synod is giving daily devotions found on their Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/TheLCMS>

and on You Tube for Archives

[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDu0iVoFL\\_d4xe2e-Mwyoxh-rR\\_hYiKXw](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDu0iVoFL_d4xe2e-Mwyoxh-rR_hYiKXw)

Some other sites:

[www.lcms.org](http://www.lcms.org) – Synod's site

<https://nidlcms.org/devotions-and-prayers/> - The Northern Illinois District's site

<https://www.ctsfw.edu/daily-chapel/> - Daily Chapel from the Fort Wayne Seminary

<https://www.csl.edu> – The site for Concordia Seminary in Saint Louis, I couldn't find Chapel services on there.

[www.issuesetc.org](http://www.issuesetc.org) – a lot of good interviews for contemporary topics from a Lutheran perspective.

[www.cph.org](http://www.cph.org) – the publishing house for the synod, which has a number of resources they're distributing for free right now.

CPH also has an app for daily Bible readings called "PrayNow" that has additional prayers and devotional materials. It's a one time cost of \$8.99, but I've appreciated it:

For Apple/iOS - <https://www.cph.org/p-18058-pray-now-app.aspx>

For Android - <https://www.cph.org/p-20368-pray-now-android-app.aspx>

Furthermore, in the midst of all of this, if you have needs, please let me or your elder know. We are all very willing to bring food to you or to take you somewhere for an appointment, the grocery/pharmacy/etc (I've also been informed that the Interfaith Community Partners also provide great help for this: (708) 354-9328, <https://interfaithcommunitypartners.org/>). Please also let me know if you have particular prayer requests for me to use in the service, or if you have any questions during this time. As I said, I want to be available for you all. I will also plan to check in at the church daily for any messages on the phone, correspondence/offerings in the mail, etc.

Likewise, for those who are able, remember that in the midst of this, we have the One who has given to us so generously, that we are freed in Him to give generously to others. Generously pray for all of those affected by this. Especially remember those who may be unable to make ends meet during this time, for children whose only safe place usually is school, etc. Also, if your income stream is not affected and you can afford to donate, do so. Food banks, schools, shelters like BEDS Plus, are all in great need. Beyond that, if you know some who is need that we can help as a church, please let know that as well.

Finally, remember that we belong to the One who has all things in His hand. Our Lord Jesus has entered into this sinful world to bear all judgement for sin that we might have the promise that God will never leave us nor forsake us. Furthermore, He has ascended to the right hand of the Father that He would now be "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come" (Ephesians 1:21). We will get through this, through Paul our Lord promises "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38).

Thanks be to God for His eternal promises in the midst of these temporary trials and uncertainty!

His Peace be with you,

Pastor Zickler

P.S. I've heard some good advice for the psyche in this time: watch only the official, factual reports and not all of the commentary on them. The spin on every side can be a downer. Also, obviously we've heard to wash our hands a lot. I've heard that we can do this the length of singing Happy Birthday, however, the "Doxology" (Praise God from whom All Blessing Flow) and the Lord's Prayer are great alternatives that help us to direct our attention to prayer in this time.