

## **SOUTHWESTERN MINNESOTA SYNOD – ELCA**

### **LIVING INTO A NEW NORMAL AFTER COVID-19 SHUTDOWNS - April 14, 2020**

**BACKGROUND:** Someday soon public health restrictions will be eased. As of this writing we do not know exactly when it will happen, but it will. We suggest that now is the time to begin to plan for ministry in a post COVID 19 reality. The intent of this document is to stimulate your thinking.

**ASSUMPTIONS:** We will leave the current “stay at home” world much as we entered it.

- At first there will be restrictions on the size of gatherings and on long-distance travel.
- There will be periodic emergence of “hot spots” where new infections, hospitalizations and death will suddenly increase after a period of decrease. This will require the return of restrictions. This is the “whack-a-mole” scenario that is the best-case outcome of the current restrictions.
- Even as things open up many people will be reluctant to begin to emerge in public gathering. Other people will be very eager to return to past behaviors without reflection.
- It is possible that public authorities will give conflicting, perhaps partisan, guidance.

**Planning for the future that will come:** We suggest that pastors and lay leaders begin now to do scenario planning together. As you do we encourage you to take seriously your responsibility to follow public health guidance, particularly that of state and county officials. Conditions will vary from place to place. No one wants their congregation’s event to be the site where a new outbreak begins.

- How would you successfully and faithfully gather for worship and share the Lord’s Supper in a series of small groups, based on the restrictions as they develop?
- How will you continue to minister to people who are reluctant to gather for some time?
- There is likely to be pent up grief and a sense of loss. It is likely that funeral practices will be restricted for some time. Medical professionals, EMTs, and other first responders will be exhausted. How can your congregation help the whole community deal constructively with grief?
- Pastors and other church staff will also have spent the period of restrictions being caught in the middle of the anxiety and pressure of conflicting expectations and fears. Consider offering your staff time and space to come down.
- When will faith formation activities and programs - VBS, Sunday & Wednesday School, youth activities - resume and with what adaptations?
- What practices and experiments did you develop that you want to retain and carry into the future?

**A FINAL WORD:** This is not the first time that the Church has faced disruption. It is not the first time that leaders have had to deal with realities they did not sign up for. Then and now the church is called to cling to the promise of new life in a world after Easter. In Christ, God makes all things new. Our call is to trust that God is constantly creating, redeeming, and inspiring us as we are, where we are.