

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Dear friends in Christ, on behalf of our Church Council and myself, I am writing to update you on the current status of our worship services and other church gatherings in light of the Covid-19 concerns that are urgent and pervasive around our state, country, and world at this time. In keeping with their responsibility as the elected church board, our council has decided, with deep regret, to temporarily suspend all worship services and church gatherings for the time being, in order to do our part to “flatten the curve” of the spread of this virus. I am in complete agreement with this decision and commend them for their swift and responsible action. In doing so, we are respecting the guidelines of the CDC, of the guidelines set forth in President Trump’s speech yesterday afternoon (Monday, March 16), and of the guidelines of our Synodical Bishop, who yesterday sent out this message: “We are dealing with an ever increasing threat to our congregations, our country and world with the moving target that is the Coronavirus pandemic. You are to be thanked for your role in being informed and talking sense to one another about canceling worship services. It has become clear that the time has come to do our part as faithful members of the Body of Christ, to flatten the curve of the spread of COVID-19. **I am strongly encouraging all congregations to cease corporate worship for this extended period of time.**” (The full text of our Bishop’s letter is included below) This means we will not gather for Sunday worship, and all week-day gatherings within the church are also suspended for the time being. We hope fervently this will not be necessary for very long; but as all of us know, this situation changes daily, even hourly, and it is difficult to make predictions at this time.

I will continue to work throughout this time, both from church and from home, and I can be contacted about anything at any time, but preferably by phone, text, or email, as we are discouraging use of the church building by any but necessary staff. Should an emergency arise, by all means contact me! I will do my best to figure out how to respond in a pastoral, but responsible, way! I will not be making home, hospital or nursing home visits, except under exceptional circumstances.

I will, however, be connecting via email, Facebook, and our church website. It is my intention to write a weekly sermon, record it in a podcast form, and have it posted through the previously named media. My intent is to include a Scripture reading, sermon, and prayer within a 15 minute format. The written sermon, Scripture reading, and prayer will also be posted not only on our website (as we have been doing), but on our Facebook page, and as an attachment on a congregational email. As this situation progresses, I am sure we will find more creative ways to connect congregationally through the means that we can.

In the meantime, please be sure and check on and to assist those who may be especially vulnerable or isolated through whatever means are available to you. If ever there was a time to demonstrate our Christian love of neighbor, now is that time! I know our church treasurer would appreciate my including a reminder that our expenses will continue, so please try and send in offerings, in lieu of placing them in the offering plate on Sunday (KRLC, PO Box 218, Knife River, MN 55609). Stay calm, be responsible, be well, and pray---for all who are sick, for all health workers, for all leaders, for teachers and children, for the elderly, and for all who are bearing the brunt of these difficult and unique times economically, physically, or emotionally.

Today is St. Patrick’s Day, so I leave you with this beautiful and heartfelt prayer, attributed to him:

I bind unto myself today  
The strong name of the Trinity  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three in One and One in Three.

I bind unto myself today  
The power of God to hold and lead,  
His eye to watch, his might to stay,  
His ear to hearken to my need,  
The wisdom of my god to teach,  
His hand to guide, his shield to ward,  
The Word of God to give me speech,  
His heavenly host to be my guard.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

I bind unto myself the name,  
The strong name of the Trinity  
By invocation of the same,  
The Three in One and One in Three,  
Of whom all nature has creation,  
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word.  
Praise to the Lord of my salvation;  
Salvation is of Christ the Lord!

In Christ's Peace,  
Pastor Susan Berge

Full text of Bishop Aitkin's letter:

March 16, 2020

## Bishop's Letter Regarding Congregational Gatherings and Covid-19

Dear Synod,

We are dealing with an ever increasing threat to our congregations, our country and world with the moving target that is the Coronavirus pandemic. You are to be thanked for your role in being informed and talking sense to one another about canceling worship services. It has become clear that the time has come to do our part as faithful members of the Body of Christ, to flatten the curve of the spread of COVID-19.

The Center for Disease Control along with our Governor's office has issued guidelines this past week-end and asked that all gatherings of 50 or more people be canceled or postponed for the next 8 weeks, as a starting point. If gatherings do take place, the organizers must insure that safeguards are in place to protect the vulnerable among us. The most important practices are hand hygiene and social distancing.

**I am strongly encouraging all congregations to cease corporate worship for this extended period of time.**

I do not have the authority to cancel worship services. The decision must be made by the local pastor and church council. But it is my recommendation. Many of you are talking creatively about ways to pray, worship, do online Bible studies, and care for one another both inside and outside of your congregations. Thank you for this kind of head and heart thinking and serving with sensible social distance.

The spread of COVID-19 changes daily. Information about it changes daily too. I intend to be in regular communication with leaders in our synod who will share ideas, practices and decisions about the days ahead, including our Synod Assembly, slated for May 1-3. Now is a time to find renewed appreciation for what we take for granted in our weekly worship and work cooperatively with others to share live stream, written resources and video sermons.

Keep watching our Northeastern Minnesota FaceBook, our Website and our weekly "onlines."

In Christ's peace

Bishop Tom Aitken