

Update on the Coronavirus – March 5, 2020

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the many responses and helpful suggestions that were sent as a result of last week's letter on the Coronavirus. As the news continues to unfold about the virus, I wanted to provide you with an update.

Many of our congregations have taken steps to reduce the risk.

Worship and Gathering Notes

- **Communion.** Use individual cups.
- **Greeting of Peace.** Some congregations have temporarily halted this practice. Others are finding inventive ways of greeting using the arm to form a cross.
- **Hand cleansing.** Place hand sanitizer in chancel area so that the pastor and assistants may wash their hands before and after communion. Place hand sanitizer in the pew or throughout so that it is easy for a worshipper to use.
- **Worship for those who are unable to attend.** Consider now how you may share the Gospel with those who are homebound. Alice Hedt has prepared a guidelines sheet for using a conference phone call as the means to gather for worship. You will find it on our website.

Kirk Hymes, SED Chief Financial Officer has prepared some suggestions for you. This reflects much of what we are learning from our congregations.

Finance and Stewardship notes and considerations for Coronavirus

I'm sure you are either deliberately or otherwise having discussions about how the Coronavirus might impact your church. I would encourage you to be intentional about those considerations to incorporate into your routine. We at the Southeastern District ask you to consider the following:

- **Offering plates/baskets.** Consider an offering basket at the back of the church or narthex. If you desire to "pass the plate" use a material like metal that can be easily wiped down with a disinfectant. Baskets made of porous material are the least desirable.
- **Counters.** Protect them. Paper money is not the most sanitary of all the things we handle. Make plastic gloves available to those who count offerings and encourage them to use them.
- **Electronic Giving.** Encourage your members to contribute electronically. Not only does this decrease the risk of sharing the virus, it also helps giving when attendance is low. It goes without saying that this should not be presented as an increase revenue stream.

From the Southeastern District, LCMS e-news sent March 5

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- **Church Spending.** Talk to your council and board members. You need to recognize that if attendance falls off because people are avoiding gathering with other people, there will likely be a reduction in offerings. This will impact your budget.

Community Notes.

- **CDC guidance.** A Link to each of the states' CDC pages on the virus is located on the District's website. There are resources to help prepare families for emergencies. Guidelines can be found at ready government. <https://www.ready.gov/pandemic>
- **Know Your Neighbor.** Identify those neighbors most at risk and develop a process to be in touch, to assist as needed, and to help with food.

Have discussions in your church, in your family, in your neighborhood—have a plan. The more we're prepared, the less we'll be impacted by this coronavirus.

Don't forget that you can be actively involved in stopping the spread of the virus. While vaccines are being developed, public health professionals recommend taking "non-pharmaceutical" precautions to protect yourself and your loved ones. Here are some actions you can take:

Because we are in peak cold and flu season, health officials encourage the following every day actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory viruses, including:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

And do begin and end with prayer. We are not alone. We have not been abandoned. Because of the love, grace, and mercy of our God, we are a people of hope and with hope to give to others. Thanks be to God.

In His Service,

Sally J Hiller