

March 14, 2020 **Pastoral Letter – TLC Responding to COVID 19**

Dear Family in Christ,

We thank our God, remembering each of you in our prayers. We imagine that you are paying close attention to government officials, reading numerous bulletins and emails, and watching the many news reports. As the nationwide response has rapidly increased, it is easy to become anxious and worried about COVID19's developments. We remember the Psalmist's words: "**God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in times of trouble...Be still, and know that I am God!**" [Psalm 46:1,10].

The devil finds great joy in God's children seeking shelter, hope, or peace in anything except the LORD and His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. **Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus**, not even Coronavirus (Romans 8). At a time when unsettled reactions are growing and things feel out of control, we are reminded that He is God, and we are not. But we find hope in this truth: He is an **ever -present help!** And this certainly is a time of need.

On Thursday, a portion of our Leadership met with your pastors to discuss things we could and/or should do as responsible Christians in light of current governmental recommendations. We plan to meet again this Sunday (Lay Ministers, Leadership Team, Safety Team, and Parish Nurse) to check our current actions and develop an appropriate health risk management plan. It is a fluid situation; yet our approach is three-legged: to be medically informed, practically effective, and gospel of Christ focused.

On Friday, Governor Walz and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) announced a series of community-level strategies to slow the spread of novel coronavirus in Minnesota communities. A total of 14 cases of travel-associated COVID-19 now confirmed in Minnesota (including one in Stearns County) have health officials urging swift action to limit the spread of the infection and reduce its impact upon our communities and health care system.

We want you, first of all, to know that we elders, leaders, and pastors care deeply about you and your health. We care also for our health care workers and our health care system. We do not wish to see our health care system overwhelmed and consequently unable to care for those who need medical care.

With love and concern, we ask you to proactively consider the following:

Prayer. This is the time for us to pray. Pray with confidence, for our Lord promises to be with us in every season, time, and challenge.

Stay Safe. If you have medical challenges, are at risk or prone to illness, or have chosen to practice "social distancing" at this time, please be at peace about staying away for a couple of weeks if you deem it necessary. We understand. Know that we will be praying for you and thinking of you.

Stay Connected. It's easy to disconnect. If you are physically away, contact the church office if you want a pastoral at-home visit, a Holy Communion visit, to talk on the phone, or to schedule a private time at church to receive the Lord's Supper. Even if you are generally healthy and resilient, it is very important that you stay home if you are not feeling entirely well.

Worship Where Able: If not attending, listen to the Divine Service on the radio or find us on Facebook Live. We are looking into streaming our Services as well. Stay tuned for more information regarding that possibility. We pastors can make digital document copies of our sermons available if there is interest. We will do our best to put these things on our website and invite you to check www.trinitysr.org. Electronic Giving is also available, and in this way, you can continue that act of worship response.

Note Changes: If you plan to attend, come confidently. This Sunday we hold worship at 8:00 and 10:30AM, so...

- 1) we encourage you to spread out in the sanctuary as to provide spacing. (Medical representatives suggest a 6' distance.) This puts a strain on the communion of saints, yet we will promise together, for the benefit of one another, not to be offended nor offensive to one another. Instead, let us fear, love, and trust in God above all.
- 2) the pastors will mingle with you but not officially shake hands. We encourage verbal greetings, but again, we will seek not to offend nor be offended.
- 3) the offering plates will not be passed. For safety's sake please use the electronic offering option (contact the office for help setting it up) or place your offering in the plate at the door as you enter or exit the sanctuary.
- 4) those serving Holy Communion will wash their hands and use hand sanitizer immediately before the distribution.
- 5) the person distributing individual cups will place the cup in your hand to minimize physical contact with the other cups.
- 6) Sunday School and Bible Study will be postponed on Sunday.
- 7) volunteers will be opening the entrance doors for you, both for entering and exiting the building to minimize contact with shared surfaces.

We desire all to stay safe and grow in the knowledge of our Lord. With that in mind, here are a few last things -

- We have increased how our facility is sanitized.
- If you do not take your Connect sheet or bulletin home, please deposit it in the waste basket near a door.

- Please practice normal hand sanitizing procedures as advised. Wash your hands when you return home from church.

The full set of recommendations for general and faith-based organizations can be found at the MDH Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) website:

<https://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/coronavirus/mdh.html#pan>

Don't rely on social media for up-to-date information as it is a breeding ground for rumor and panic. We will be checking with local authorities to ensure the latest information regarding COVID19, its transmission and treatment. Check [this site](#) provided by the Center for Disease Control for the latest up to date information.

Please pray for our medical people and first responders, for our government and school officials, for people in industries where lay-offs have come as a direct result, and for the family of God in Christ. And remember, you are His.

Sincerely,

Pastors Dave Hinz and John Beck

Board of Lay Ministry and Leadership Team