

**ASCENSION**  
LUTHERAN CHURCH & SCHOOL  
a church of the Lutheran Reformation LCMS

March 20, 2020

A Letter to the *Saints* of Ascension Concerning our Times,

***Grace and Peace to you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ!***

I have started this letter numerous times, only to be halted and revised in its intended content due to lightning fast changes happening concerning the Coronavirus and how we go forward during this pandemic of pestilence.

Decisions over the last week concerning our worship and fellowship have changed multiple times in keeping up with our duty as good and caring citizens of a country now in a National Emergency. While not yet bound in law to what the President of the United States and the Center of Disease Control are "requesting" of us, we are aware that civil authority is also a God-given and established blessing for our good. All that is being strongly encouraged of us to observe is not meant to be of hurt or deprivation to anyone's rights or liberty, nor to serve against God's will, but that we all would recognize the seriousness and importance of the emergency at hand and do our part to care for our ourselves, our families, and our neighbor.

Before I get to the decisions made and what they mean, I would like to begin at a place I didn't originally intend. A few mornings ago, after a late night of meetings and decision making on matters we were all reluctant to make, and carrying in thought what the future holds and what that means for our church and school, and trying to make sense of the chaos and confusion our society is experiencing charting new territory in dealing with a global threat, and wondering how to address the congregation with the Word of God for a time like this, and quickly departing my family for another meeting at church with my mind in a whirlwind of what the day ahead holds ... I stepped outside our apartment and closed the door.

It was night and day. Silence. Deafeningly so. Calm. Still. I was so struck, even my own thoughts miraculously abated for the moment. They had already kept me up half the night, subconsciously and stubbornly working through the problems and challenges that lie ahead that day. And then I heard it, in the silence, in the stillness ... voices singing. Not people. *Birds!*

Many birds. Joyfully chirping away in all their God-given variety, and yet in harmony with one another. Choral. There was no hint of worry. No detected anxiety. Just *joy* and *peace*. And it hit me with the same. God speaking through His creation. "*Be still, and know that I am God!*" ~ Ps 46:10.

And so He speaks ... "**Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?**" ~ Mt 6:26-27.

Indeed! A lesson from God in nature. The birds sing in joy and peace because they know God feeds them. He gives them their food at the proper time. He provides them place and shelter for their nests and young ones. He clothes them sufficiently for their time and circumstances.

In this crisis we have a voice and Word from heaven to calm us. To know that He is God. To even in times like this find *joy* and *peace* in the Lord. All is under His control, will, and authority. This too is for our good and remembrance of God, even to remind us of the most important things in our life ... faith and family ... together and in the Lord.

Birds also face the dangers of the day. Yet they still sing ... *joyfully!* ... in the waking moments of the day. Praying, if you will. Thanking God in their own way for the food they are provided, the places they are afforded to build their homes, and the protection they have from the wild world around them. And yet, not even they will fall to the ground apart from our Father's care. And so—they sing, always—as we ought, those of even greater value than they!

The voice of heaven comes down and sings among the saints on earth—"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ~ Php 4:4–7.

Reasonableness. Luther offers us an excellent example of this under the very same circumstances, perhaps even more so. (*Thank you, Barb Hamm, for sending this!*)

**When Martin Luther was dealing with The Black Death plague, he wrote these wise words that can help inform the way we approach things happening in our world right now...**

**"I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God."**

[Luther's Works Volume 43 pg. 132 the letter "Whether one may flee from a Deadly Plague" written to Rev. Dr. John Hess.]

Again, reasonableness. First, that we not unnecessarily or carelessly expose others to the current pestilence. Second, that during the prevailing pestilence we remain steadfast and faithful in duty to our neighbor not only in avoiding passing on the virus unnecessarily, but so also necessarily caring for those under our care should they become infected. This means that during such times there is risk that we take, and rightfully so, but not to fear for ourselves when required, but trust in the Lord who values our lives much more than many sparrows (Mt 10:28–31)! And so third, we avail ourselves when most needed and necessary for the life and good of our neighbor in need when called upon by the Word of the Lord, trusting that God is an ever present help in every need. As the Psalmist writes:

<sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,  
<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. . . . for  
<sup>7</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. ~ Psalm 46

*And a mighty fortress is our God indeed!*

In light of this, in keeping with our Christian liberty to either continue gathering or suspend for a time, the most difficult decision was made to temporarily suspend our public services, Bible studies, classes, and fellowship activities for the near future. As of this moment we continue as a country to move toward more mandatory restrictions in gathering, including gathering in groups of more than ten, so as to greatly reduce both exposure and contamination from the virus, and ultimately, reduce a potentially high death rate.

Regarding Holy Communion, our Pastors stand ready to administer Confession and Absolution and the Lord's Supper as desired. This is to be done by appointment and at the church, unless circumstances require otherwise. Such administration will be done in groups of ten or less, unless otherwise considered and excepted by the administering Pastor. If travel is restricted, or circumstances do not allow for the Sacrament immediately, please know that it is ok to wait patiently to receive the body and blood of Christ. God is good to justify us by grace through faith alone, regardless of our frequency of the Sacrament's reception.

Please know that we do not like any of this, though we believe it is necessary at this time in doing our part to lessen as much as possible contamination and the loss of life. We understand and share your disappointment in this interruption of our public worship, work, and family schedules, and what it means in our daily needs and life.

We will continue to monitor and evaluate the current pandemic, and the government's recommendations and mandates, and their effect on our current plans. We will inform you of any changes or further actions via email, Facebook, our website, and phone calls. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Church Office, the Pastors, or the Elders.

And now, let us not despair, but "**rejoice in the Lord always,**" just as He commends us, and so join the chorus of Creation that sings in *joy* and *peace* that God is God, and He will deliver us and provide for all our needs as we journey through these uncertain times toward the certainty of our life with Him there in eternity.

May we then take hold of our families, and even one another, in this time of reprieve from the daily grind of earthly life, and remember and cherish what is most important, our redemption and place together in heaven with God—in prayer, song, and devotion. For this time has been given to you as a gift ... *to be still*—in *joy* and *peace*—*and know that He is God!*

*Indeed ... peace be with you in Christ Jesus, our Lord!*

**Pastor Gier and Pastor Zieroth**

8811 St. Joe Road ✘ Fort Wayne, IN 46835 ✘ 260-486-2226 ✘ office@alcsfw.org  
www.alcsfw.org

## **Additional Questions and Helpful Links:**

### **1. How long will this last?**

We do not yet know. In fact no one really knows as events continue to unfold. But rest assured we will continue to monitor this situation. In short, it will continue until you hear from us otherwise. Please be patient and keep us in prayer. Thank you!

### **2. Will there be online services?**

Yes. We are in process of pre-recording church services for posting on Facebook and our church website ([www.alcsfw.org](http://www.alcsfw.org)), along with a downloadable service bulletin for your participation at home with your family.

### **3. What time will the online services be available?**

It is our goal to have the services available by the normal service times and day. After that the services should be available at any time for your viewing and participating.

### **4. Can I still communicate with the Pastors?**

Yes, please!

Pastor Gier's cell # (816) 769-7375  
email [revgier@sbcglobal.net](mailto:revgier@sbcglobal.net)

Pastor Zieroth's cell # (260) 415-3000  
email [gary.zieroth@ctsfw.org](mailto:gary.zieroth@ctsfw.org)

### **5. What if I need/desire communion?**

Our Pastors are available by appointment to give you Absolution and the Sacrament. Please do the following: call the Pastors directly, or call the Church Office.

### **6. What if I need help with food, medicine?**

Please call the Pastors, the Church Office, any of the Elders, or a fellow Ascension member. Please don't hesitate to let us know your needs. We are here to help!

### **7. Why are we making this decision?**

For the good of our neighbor and in good faith toward our civil authorities who are established by God for the public welfare of our society. Please know we make this decision not from compulsion, but in our Christian freedom and best judgment knowing we shall obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).

### **8. What does the Bible say about the pandemic?**

Please see the following article (as well as LCMS President's article pasted below)

**9. Does this cover all activities (i.e. Confirmation, Boards, Choir, etc)?**

In general, Yes. Please use phone calls, email and/or conference calls to conduct business of the church. Contact Darin Koenemann at [d.koenemann@alcsfw.org](mailto:d.koenemann@alcsfw.org) if you need help setting up an online forum or conference call. At the same time, gatherings deemed necessary for recording of worship services, including choir practices, are to be done with cautious discretion, and as much as possible in keeping with requested recommendations by civil authorities.

**10. What about Ascension Lutheran School?**

We are currently under order of our Governor to close our school until May 1, 2020.

**11. Where can I find more information on Covid-19?**

Please use the CDC website as well as the Indiana Department of Health website.

CDC - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/>

ISDH - <https://www.in.gov/coronavirus/>

**12. How do I make an offering to the church while activities and worship services are suspended?**

We will provide a convenient means for making an offering online. A link will be provided with the worship videos. Or you can send a check by mail to:

Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church  
8811 St. Joe Road  
Fort Wayne, IN 46835

**13. Will our church employees still be compensated?**

Yes. We will continue to pay all of our employees as budgeted for the time being. Some of them may work from home and/or have some of their duties adjusted accordingly.

**14. What is the recommendation of the LCMS?**

We are following the suggestions of the LCMS. More information, along with a video from our President, may be found here: <https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/resource-helps-congregations-plan-for-widespread-illnesses/>

**15. As a member how can I help?**

Pray. Remain in the Word. Follow the recommendations of the CDC and the State of Indiana. Practice social distancing. Wash your hands. Cover your coughs. Isolate if you show symptoms, or care for another with symptoms. Contact the Church Office or Pastors if you test positive. Care for your family. Check in on your neighbors, family and church members by phone call, email or text. Continue to provide your offerings to the Church as our bills, payroll and commitments continue. As appropriate, we will publicize additional opportunities for service.

## 16. Will the Pastors still make house calls?

Yes. If you or your family are under quarantine, it would be best to limit the pastor's exposure, not only for his sake, but also his family and others he may need to visit. This is a difficult time for pastoral visits, as they are not currently allowed to visit hospitals or nursing homes. Yet they stand ready to give the members of Ascension the Lord's gifts and serve accordingly.

## 17. What is the church phone number and email address?

(260) 486-2226            email: [office@alcsfw.org](mailto:office@alcsfw.org)

## 18. What are the Elders doing?

Praying for you and your family. Making phone calls to members. Ensuring that our pastors are cared and provided for. Assisting the pastors with the work of Word and Sacrament ministry. Feel free to call them if you need any assistance, have questions, or concerns.

### Helpful links:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/> Center for Disease Control - US Government

<https://www.in.gov/coronavirus/> Indiana state website

<https://www.alcsfw.org/> Our church website with information, services, bulletin and more. Please check this and our Facebook Page regularly!

<https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/a-message-from-lcms-president-matthew-c-harrison-amid-the-coronavirus-pandemic/> LCMS website with a special message.

[www.issuesetc.org](http://www.issuesetc.org) A Lutheran talk radio program on a vast variety of Issues. You can click on the "on demand" button to find your topic.

<https://lutheranpublicradio.org/> For quality Lutheran Music that you can understand and trust the words, check out Lutheran Public Radio. Lutheran Public Radio streams Sacred Music for the World, 24/7, following the course of the Church Year. Listen anytime, anywhere.

<https://worshipanew.org/> An LCMS website with worship services.