

Dear Congregations of the Eastern North Dakota Synod,

Grace and peace to you in this season!

What an interesting time to begin our work together – in this season of COVID! I am grateful for each of you and the ministry you carry out for the sake of God’s mission in the world. Now more than ever people are in need of hope and good news. The ministry of your congregation is so important in this regard.

I know that there are difficult decisions to be made during this time. I am not naive to the complexity and weight of those decisions. Summer was a helpful reprieve as we were able to worship outdoors and undertake other options for safer gathering. Thank you for the ways in which you have exercised great caution for the sake of your neighbor. This is an important and powerful Christian witness.

Now, as the COVID numbers are greatly increasing, as the capacity in hospitals is near the maximum, and as healthcare workers are working on empty reserves, it is time to consider again the ways in which we worship and gather. Many of you have already returned to all-digital worship and gathering. Thank you! Some of you are considering this option. *My strongest recommendation is to not gather in person until the conditions are safer.* This is one of the most impactful things you can do right now.

As COVID continues, I would also encourage you to consider again how you care for those who are a part of the staffing in your congregation; from Rostered Ministers or SAMs to church administrative assistants. Might they work from home? What other safety precautions can be taken? What are your plans if one of the staff becomes sick or is exposed to COVID? And how might they be encouraged during this difficult season of ministry? We engaged around these questions eight months ago and it is time to ask them again as the conditions are worse than they were in March. Many are also looking ahead to annual meetings and what those might look like when you can’t meet in person. Western ND Synod’s attorney will be hosting a Zoom session to help you consider alternate ways your congregation can attend to business. Register [HERE](#) for the November 24th session (noon CST)

Lastly, please see the **attached** guidance from our synod attorney regarding State Health Officer Order 2020-08 regarding mask use in public. Synod attorney, Kristy Albrecht, has provided a helpful summary as to how the order applies to congregations and I commend it to you for your utilization.

As we continue to live in love as we serve, equip, and challenge God’s people, we are in this together. Please reach out to me or any of the synod staff as we walk with you during this season.

In Christ,

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