



Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

22598 Titusville Road
P.O. Box 43
Pleasantville, PA 16341-0043
Office of the Bishop
Rev. Michael L. Lozano, Bishop

E-mail: bishop@nwpaelca.org
Website: www.nwpaelca.org
Office Phone: 814-589-7660
Fax: 814-589-7566

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Dear Synod,

Several of our rostered and lay leaders have asked for my guidance and recommendation regarding in person worship and the current increase in COVID-19 in our synod.

I strongly recommend each congregation evaluate their local conditions. Are schools closing and moving to on-line learning only. Are hospitals seeing an increase in long term stays relating to the virus. Are members of the congregation becoming infected? Are extended family members or co-workers becoming infected? Is there a sense that the virus is growing in your community or moving into or towards your community? I know there are individuals in our congregations who have had and do have the virus. I know there are individuals and family and friends of congregation members who have died directly from the virus or from an underlying condition that the virus has impacted.

If you decide to continue in person worship, I strongly recommend mandating the wearing of face masks during worship, not singing and keeping physical distance along with more rigorous cleaning between worship. Many congregations already have effective controls in place, I would recommend increasing those control measures during this time. I would encourage our susceptible populations to not attend worship to reduce the risk of exposure.

Returning to in person worship will also be a congregation by congregation decision. I know the holidays are approaching and many feel the anxiety of what will Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas will be like in a COVID-19 environment. I prefer we do those things that keep us safe and healthy now so we can be together for next year's holy days and holidays.

Continue to follow both the CDC and Pennsylvania Department of Health guidelines as you make your decisions.

With prayers for peace and health,

Rev. Michael L. Lozano
Bishop, NWPA Synod