



**Indiana-Kentucky Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

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May 22, 2020

Dear People of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod,

Today President Trump called upon state governors “to allow our churches and places of worship to open right now.” This has led to some confusion on the part of worshippers across the country and, in some cases, the expectation on the part of some church members that their congregation will have in-person worship this Memorial Day weekend. Please feel free to share this communication from me with the members of your community of faith if you think it will be helpful.

In light of what President Trump said today, I am writing to reassert my earlier recommendation to the people and communities of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod that in-person gatherings for worship continue to be suspended, at least into June and probably longer.

As I said in previous communication, the church does not need to re-open. The church – the body of Christ – has been open and working all along. Most of the congregations and other ministries of this synod have continued to engage in active proclamation of the Word, fellowship, faith formation, and service to and with the neighbor throughout this wilderness, albeit in different ways. We can continue to engage these ministries for as long as we need to, even as we begin to plan to gather in-person and in new ways when it is safer and we are better prepared to protect God’s beloved. Yes, the ministries of the body of Christ are “essential services,” but we don’t need to sit in a sanctuary to experience and share them.

“‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other” (1 Corinthians 10:23-24). While something like gathering in-person for worship might be “lawful”, that does not mean we should necessarily do it. Rather, we are called to keep our focus on doing what is beneficial, what builds up, and what addresses not only our own needs and well-being, but the needs and well-being of others.

“For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Galatians 5:13f).

We are not only freed from enslaving powers and attempts to appease God, but we are freed for bearing Christ’s love to the neighbor. Freedom in Christ empowers self-giving love and service to others and to the world...especially at times like this.

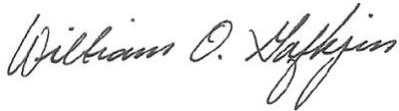
I know that it’s not easy to stay at a distance from siblings in Christ. It’s incredibly difficult for many of us to not be worshipping together in person. It’s incredibly hard for me, too. I long to be in the physical presence of congregations, leaders and ministries, to gather in person with groups of deacons and pastors, to preach and preside in person, to pass the peace, to share a cup of coffee in the narthex, to laugh and pray and wonder and weep together.

But we who bear the mark of the cross of the crucified and risen Christ on our brow and the seal of his Spirit on our hearts have a particular call: to let cross-formed love for our neighbor take precedence over the urge to satisfy our own needs and desires, as appropriate or well-intentioned as they may be. And we, of all people, can be patient in caring for ourselves and our neighbors. We know that God is at work, just as God was at work in and through the cross and empty tomb.

In an early treatise entitled “On the Good of Patience,” Bishop Cyprian suggested that when Christians entrust themselves to the patient God, who steadfastly and persistently continues to work hope, healing, and reconciliation in the world, and live patiently with themselves and others, they shine with the light of Christ in ways that both run against the impatience of the cultures in which they live and draw others toward Christ.

May God give us such patience and peace now and in the days ahead.

Peace be with you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "William O. Gafkjen". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Peace be with you,".

The Rev. Dr. William O. Gafkjen, Bishop