



Indiana-Kentucky Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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Pastoral Message to the People and Communities of the Indiana-Kentucky Synod, ELCA Bishop Bill Gafkjen + November 6, 2020

Dear Partners in Mission,

Our long slog through the wilderness continues. As I write this message, we do not know who will serve as president of the United States for the next four years. It is likely that we won't know for at least a few more days. What we do know is that we are a country divided and that much of the tension that has developed among us in church and world in the last eight months will not subside with the announcement of election results.

Sometimes when I teach about stewardship, I refer to Martin Luther's explanation of the petition from the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." What Luther wrote in the Large Catechism about this petition is actually quite appropriate for us now as we anticipate the results of this election cycle and life afterward.

To put it briefly, this petition includes everything that belongs to our entire life in this world; only for its sake do we need daily bread. Now, our life requires not only food and clothing and other necessities for our body, but also peace and concord in our daily business and in associations of every description with the people among whom we live and move—in short, everything that pertains to the regulation of our domestic and our civil or political affairs. For where these two relations are interfered with and prevented from functioning properly, there the necessities of life are also interfered with, and life itself cannot be maintained for any length of time.

Indeed, the greatest need of all is to pray for our civil authorities and the government, for chiefly through them does God provide us our daily bread and all the comforts of this life. Although we have received from God all good things in abundance, we cannot retain any of them or enjoy them in security or happiness unless he gives us a stable, peaceful government. For where dissension, strife, and war prevail, there our daily bread is taken away, or at least reduced.¹

Note Luther's concern that our domestic and our civil affairs function properly, each and together, in order for all to receive the necessities of life. No matter how we may feel about the outcome of the election, as the people of God we have the responsibility to work the best we can as individuals and congregations and in consort with civil and other authorities to see that all of God's beloved children receive the physical, spiritual, and social necessities of life. The call of the church to love and serve every neighbor is not dependent on who lives in the White House or serves in any other elected office. **I invite every community of faith in this synod to see the experience of the last few months, including the results of the election, as an opportunity to renew our commitment to this mission to love and serve our neighbors in every aspect of our domestic, congregational, and civic lives.**

Note also Luther's assertion that "where dissension, strife, and war prevail, there our daily bread is taken away, or at least reduced." The last eight months of life in this country have been rife with all sorts of dissension, strife, and war. Relationships have broken, bodies have been harmed, congregations have split, extremist and destructive movements have clashed with one another...the fabric of our life together has been torn, daily bread reduced for too many. We are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation in every arena of our lives, including our communities and congregations. The love of Christ compels us – and the world needs us – to take the lead in peacemaking, in crossing divides, offering forgiveness, and stitching together with the thread of the Spirit of

¹ Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. (p. 430). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

Christ a beloved and loving community. **How might you and your faith community commit to concrete acts of peace-making, relationship-building, and reconciliation in coming months?**

A Brief Word about COVID-19

The numbers of positive covid cases are rising at record rates across our territory. Positivity percentages are rising, too, as are the number of hospitalizations and deaths. We are exhausted, impatient, anxious.

And, yet, we need to keep on loving our neighbors and caring for ourselves and our communities by complying with health and safety protocols. Wear your mask. Keep distance. Do not gather in-person unless necessary and then only with strict adherence to appropriate protocols. Be kind and understanding of those, including deacons and pastors, who are not yet able or do not think it wise to participate in in-person worship or other gatherings. Reach out to folks who may be alone or isolated in some way. Pray for, reach out to, and support and thank health care staff. They carry a particularly heavy physical, spiritual, social, and mental load on our behalf. Think of them, along with others whom you love or who are vulnerable, when in your own weariness or defiance you are tempted to cheat.

With the support of the Synod Executive Committee, we have extended the suspension of synod staff travel at least through the end of the year. **If your congregation has not yet begun in-person worship, please consider holding off for at least a few more weeks. If your congregation has been gathering in-person, it may be most prudent at this time to take a break from that and return to outdoor, virtual and/or live-streamed worship until the numbers and percentages of new positive covid cases drop significantly and consistently.** It is crucial that we work with others in our communities to do our part in stemming the tide of this dreadful, deadly virus.

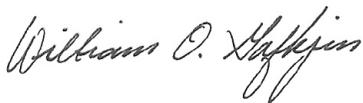
I pray for and give thanks for the pastors, deacons, and other ministers and leaders who are working so hard, learning new skills, reimagining ministry, and tending to God's people, mostly at a distance. They are exhausted, impatient, and anxious, too. Please pray for and reach out to your community's ministers and leaders to thank them. Offer them and their families a gift in appreciation and support. Pick up part of the ministry load and learn some new skills yourself in service to Christ, the congregation, and the neighbor. This is especially important as Advent and Christmas are on the horizon and we will all need to find creative ways to worship and celebrate under pandemic protocols. The way through this is together, bearing one another's burdens, trusting the Spirit's power and presence just enough to step out and do new things, to offer our gifts in new ways.

Mindful of the particular load this pandemic has placed on our rostered ministers, I am pleased to announce that the Synod Executive Committee has approved my recent request to set aside \$25,000.00 from designated funds to provide small grants to deacons and pastors to help them tend to their own spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. More details about this and the process for applying will be forthcoming. I hope that your congregation will consider a matching gift to your ministry leader(s) and/or some additional time off for rest and renewal.

Finally, beloved of God, I am grateful for you. I pray for you. As God has led God's people of every age through every sort of wilderness imaginable, God will lead us through this one.

"Now to the One who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Peace be with you,



The Rev. Dr. William O. Gafkjen, Bishop