



Lower Susquehanna Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. James S. Dunlop
Bishop

jdunlop@lss-elca.org

March 26, 2020
Season of Lent

Dear Siblings in Christ,

Thank you, again, for the heroic ministry you are accomplishing in difficult circumstances.

I continue to hear about the creative and wonderful ways that congregations are adapting to serve God's people, such as telephone ministry teams that are connecting regularly with congregants, and online worship streaming and inventive digital faith-formation programs. It's amazing how quickly so many congregations were able to shift into digital gear. And to good effect! Leaders report that online worship has enabled some shut-in members to "attend" worship in their home church for the first time in years. Good work!

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic is still spreading rapidly and showing no sign of slowing down. Schools and businesses are still closed. This reality and knowing that so many of our church leaders and members fit categories most vulnerable to the worst effects of COVID-19 leads me to recommend that services for Holy Week and Easter **not** be held in our church buildings. Concern for our neighbors must be our highest priority. If a congregation can accommodate an outdoor service and maintain a safe physical distance between members, that might be a reasonable alternative. I realize that only a few of our congregations have the capability for this alternative.

Churches are doing their best to find ways to relieve the suffering in our communities, as the poor and hungry are at added risk in this time. I know that congregations are working to alleviate problems for their neighbors. Our synod has a Disaster Response Fund available to be used in the Lower Susquehanna Synod to help fund ministries that assist those affected by the crisis. If you have a program that needs funding to help, please contact me or our LSS-LDR Network coordinator, Pastor Glenn Beard, and we will work with you.

Similarly, grants are available from our synod's hunger funds for programs to feed people. Normally these grants are distributed annually, however they will be granted as needed in this emergency. Please contact Pastor Beth Martini in the synod office and she will be able to help you complete an application.

Both our disaster response and hunger grant funds are limited. If you or your congregation would like to donate to replenish the accounts, our synod would be grateful.

No one knows exactly how long the COVID-19 crisis will require us to hunker down in our homes and we know that churches generally lose income with every service cancelled. As a

result, we encourage every member of our synod to support their congregation and our synod as generously as they are able. And we thank you! Your generosity in the past has enabled us to do the ministry that is happening every day during this crisis.

Our synod has curated some excellent resources to help you and your congregation get through this crisis. Visit our [Coronavirus Resource Page](#) for materials and links on such topics as worship, digital technology, hygiene, stewardship, and even clergy self-care.

For the convenience of our members, our synod has established a [webpage](#) listing congregations that are offering online worship services. To add yours, please drop a note to [Rob Blezard](#) of the synod staff. My office invites you to our synod's own chapel service at 9 a.m. Wednesdays during the crisis. Go to the Lower Susquehanna Synod page on Facebook.

Of course, we know we are not suffering alone. The COVID-19 crisis is global. Please pray for our siblings across the ELCA and Lutheran World Federation, and especially our ministry partner, the Konde Diocese in Tanzania. If your congregation is in relationship with a congregation in the Konde Diocese, please reach out in prayerful solidarity.

Please take care of yourselves, not only physically, but also emotionally, spiritually and mentally. You are working hard and that can raise your stress level and deplete you. Please be sure to take breaks from ministry, from your computer and devices, to rest and reach out to friends and family. This coming Monday I will be unavailable, as I will be taking the day unplugged, to be in a prayer retreat. I will be praying for all of you. As always, my staff and I are available to talk and help in whatever way we can.

God be with you! And God bless you for what you are accomplishing!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James S. Dunlop". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† James S. Dunlop, bishop
Lower Susquehanna Synod ELCA