

**Dear LCC members and friends,**

I wanted to connect with you to join in the important conversation that's already taking place throughout our country and world about the COVID-19 virus (also known as the Corona Virus). Lutheran Church of the Cross staff and council have been prayerfully discerning proper steps to ensure we're following best practices in our faith community during this season of sickness.

The recent realities (and uncertainties) related to the COVID-19 virus have heightened this conversation in many of the places you gather, including church. As we've listened to and learned from other church leaders and medical experts in our area, we have developed a congregational response plan with three stages that we'd like to share with you.

**In this first stage**, with confirmed cases in North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Minnesota, so far we are continuing our ministry programs as usual. We will, however, take the following steps:

- We will suspend the shaking of hands during the sharing of the peace.
- Pastor and Janie will no longer shake hands at the Sanctuary doors as people exit.
- We will receive the offering as you leave, with ushers next to offering baskets.
- We will encourage individuals who are not feeling well to stay home and worship with us via our livestream online.
- We will place hand sanitizer units around the building and encourage all of us to wash hands frequently.
- We will increase the frequency of the cleaning and sanitizing of public spaces in the church.

**In the second stage**, if a case of the COVID-19 virus is confirmed within our community, our response will increase:

- We will suspend the serving of food, including Wednesday meals and Sunday fellowship treats.
- If the Bismarck Public Schools close, we will close our children and youth ministry programs, too, and consider whether to hold worship and any other events at church.

**And in the third stage**, if there is a confirmed case here at church we will:

- Suspend all worship at LCC.
- Provide online worship only.
- Cancel any meetings and events taking place in LCC's facilities.

Throughout this process, we will stay in close contact with the city, county and state health departments ELCA and WND Synod leaders, and public school officials. We will communicate with you if/when the stages progress through our email, texting, and social media platforms. We do not wish to cause panic or overreact, but we also bear the responsibility of being prepared for best practices that allow us to continue to live into our mission together as a church in these uncertain times. Please continue to pray—and to wash your hands!

**Yours in Christ, Pastor Lisa Ahlness**