

*Peace Lutheran Church  
Hastings, NE*

13 March 2020

Pastoral Letter Regarding COVID-19

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27*

Beloved in the Lord,

Our Lord Jesus Christ founded His Church so that His salvation might reach to the ends of the earth. In the Church we receive the love of God and His gracious mercy for Christ's sake through the Word and Sacraments. This love and mercy transforms us into people who wish to reflect God's mercy to others. We serve one another in love: in our own families, in the church, and in society at large.

The most recent guidelines from the civil authorities at the CDC in response to COVID-19 provide us the opportunity to serve one another in very concrete ways. The recommendations say that all older Americans (60+), those with chronic health conditions, and those who have compromised immune systems are at "higher risk." The CDC instructs all such people as follows:

*Stay at home as much as possible. \* Make sure you have access to several weeks of medications and supplies in case you need to stay home for prolonged periods of time. \* When you go out in public, keep away from others who are sick, limit close contact and wash your hands often. \* Avoid crowds. \* Stay up to date on CDC Travel Health Notices.*

**Program to Serve Higher Risk Members of our Families, Parish, and Community**

We need to ensure that every person from our congregation who falls into this "higher risk" group has the supplies they need at home. Therefore, the following steps will be taken in our parish immediately to ensure that we are serving our families, our congregation, and our community in the love of Christ.

**In our families:**

If you are under age 60 and in good health: ensure that folks in your family who fall into the higher risk category have the supplies they need at home according to the CDC recommendations above. If they do not, go shopping for them this week.

**In our congregation:**

If you are under age 60 and in good health: volunteer to do such shopping for higher risk members of our parish who do not have anyone in their immediate family who can help them. ***There will be a sign up sheet for volunteers in the narthex.*** You may also call or text Pastor at 308 627 7238. Pastor and the Elders will be contacting all members of the parish to ensure that those who need help get it.

**In our community:**

Check with your neighbors. If any of them fall into the higher risk category and don't have someone to shop for them, call or text Pastor immediately so that they can be added to our list.

## **Program to Provide Meals for Those Who Contract COVID-19**

In conjunction with other area churches, we are asking you to consider this simple task: If you are healthy, cook a meal and double the recipe. Freeze half of it. Then as we hear of people who are sick we will drop off the meal at their front step with instructions and a note of encouragement. ***Again, there will be a sign-up sheet in the narthex, or you can contact Pastor.*** Pastor will keep a list and coordinate deliveries.

## **Guidelines for Worship**

The word “church” literally means “assembly.” The church is the Body of Christ which assembles for worship. This vital ministry is all the more necessary in times of stress, fear, and uncertainty. We need to hear the Word, receive the Sacrament, and be strengthened in our faith by our common confession and worship.

The following guidelines should be kept in mind with regard to worship during this time of heightened health vigilance.

- If you are ill, stay home. If you are experiencing a fever, a cough, or other signs of respiratory illness, stay at home, take care of yourself, and get better.
- In church we will take the following steps to ensure that we are following good health procedures. Upon entering church, we have a bottle of hand sanitizer. Refrain from shaking hands. The offering plate will not be passed: please place your offering in the plate as you enter or leave the church.
- We will also be wiping down surfaces: pews, hymnals, communion rail, etc. after each service. ***If you are willing to help with that effort, please sign up in the Narthex or contact Pastor Gaunt.***
- Regarding Holy Communion. The Lord Jesus Christ gives us His Body and Blood for us Christians to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith. This Sacrament is a great blessing which we all need. Pastor Gaunt (and those who assist in setting up for communion) will redouble the sanitary procedures we already follow: meticulous washing of hands (and now the use of hand sanitizer). Likewise, after each communicant the chalice will be wiped with a purificator (cloth napkin) dipped in a high concentration of alcohol.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all,

Pastor Gaunt

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