

# Central Illinois District

## The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

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Office of the President  
1850 North Grand Avenue West  
Springfield, Illinois 62702-1626



(217) 793-1802  
Fax: (217) 793-1822  
Email: [mmiller@cidlcms.org](mailto:mmiller@cidlcms.org)

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Re: COVID-19, Coronavirus pandemic

Dear beloved in Christ,

As of this last Friday, I was greatly concerned that too much hype was being generated by the media about this illness and was quite skeptical about some of the seemingly contradictory recommendations that were being offered by many venues.

Over this weekend, my thinking changed, even from Sunday morning to Sunday evening. I became concerned as I looked at statistics that explained that in 2 weeks the confirmed cases in the United States had gone from 100 to 3300 on Sunday and as of today there were close to 4200 cases (CDC count). Although about 99% of those who catch the virus will survive it, we should not overlook the suggestions that are being made to forestall further spread of COVID-19 where we can.

I am convinced that while trusting in the Lord who can do far greater in stemming this virus than even the finest and greatest professionals, it is also not good to put the Lord to the test by asking Him to do what we are unwilling to do ourselves. *“God is our Fortress and our Strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble.”* (Psalm 46:1) Even in the case of certain highly contagious diseases in the Bible divine mandate stated that contact should be avoided. God had His own recommendations for quarantine or “Social Distancing.”

Some will have to trust the Lord for divine protection more than others when their vocation puts them on the front line of service to their neighbor, such as medical personnel, first responders, and pastors. Most will take common-sense precautions to avoid exposure as they receive recommendations of appropriate behavior. The latest information includes avoiding gatherings of more than 10 people, discretionary travel, and going to bars and restaurants. A number of other public venues such as theaters and cinemas, and public and private schools have been asked to close by government authorities.

I have been in consultation with our leadership in the Church at large and locally, and I am recommending that we follow some basic precautions.

Be concerned for those in high risk categories: 1) Those above age 65. 2) Those with serious preexisting health conditions that weaken their immunities (heart and lung disease, diabetes). 3) Those already displaying symptoms.

Use common-sense and good hygiene practices and avoid physical contact.

Some of our larger congregations are not holding public worship services for the next two weeks but are providing on-line devotions, Facebook contacts, or live-streamed services in their stead. Most of these congregations will reevaluate what they will do after April 1<sup>st</sup> based on the best information and public health recommendations available at that time. Pastors and

congregational leadership should be in regular communication at this time to determine what each congregation is going to do and how they will keep the membership informed. Pastors should be in contact with each other in order to know what local congregations are doing. Perhaps Circuit Visitors can contact hospitals in their area so that Pastors are kept aware of what visitation practices are allowed or curtailed.

The economic impact at this time is going to require that people maintain regular support of their congregation when and where they can.

I have received many phone calls and emails from Pastors and congregational leadership, and I make myself available for any consultation at any time.

We continue in prayer for the pastors, people, parishes, parochial schools and teachers of the Central Illinois District, and in the long run, we are reminded that “All things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.” Our loving God assures us, “I will never leave you nor forsake you!” We commend ourselves into His gracious care and keeping.

In His service,  
Rev. Mark A. Miller