



The Virginia Synod

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ISLAND DISTRICT, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Since, then, we have such a hope [through Christ Jesus], we act with great boldness [2 Corinthians 3:12 NRSV]

A PASTORAL LETTER ON CELEBRATING HOLY COMMUNION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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As we all approach Holy Week and Easter it seems difficult and painful to imagine continuing the fast from sharing our Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday or gathering with all those desiring to receive at the Holy Communion on Easter morning.

St. Paul asked in Romans 8:31, "*What are we to say about these things...?*" I have been pondering this question in regards to so called "virtual communion." Prayer, study and conversation have led me to this conclusion: **I recommend we continue to fast from Holy Communion until we can gather in-person.** (Currently prohibited by VA law to **no sooner than Wednesday June 10**) Here are some reasons why.

Dr. Timothy Wengert points out in a brief paper on sharing the eucharist during the pandemic, (*Holy Communion Under Quarantine 3.17.20*), Luther wrote, "...even if throughout life they did not dare or could not receive the Eucharist... the Eucharist is not so necessary that salvation depends on it. The gospel and baptism are sufficient since faith alone justifies and love alone lives rightly." (*Concerning the Ministry*; LW 40:9).

The spoken scriptures and proclaimed holy Word of God carry the fullness of Christ risen and the promises of forgiveness, life and salvation. They are sufficient. (cf: Dr. Gordon Lathrop re: Wengert statement) To be certain, we yearn to share the sacrament and will rejoice when we are reunited in the eucharistic feast.

I also am concerned that Holy Communion remain available for *all* the faithful, not only those with access to technology. This is a concern shared by several ELCA bishops, including Bishop Bill Tesch of the Northwestern MN Synod who pointed out, St. Paul's strong admonition to the church at Corinth after detecting divisions in the body of Christ over the proper understanding of the holy meal. (I Cor. 11: 17-34) (*Tesch FAQ statement*)

If only some of those who wish to participate in the Holy Eucharist, (perhaps the most communal part of the liturgy), are able to do so – and only if they have the technology and necessary elements available – isn't that an equity/justice issue?

What provision can we now make for those who may wish to be included – but are unable to do so? And, in this time of restricted contact, we are unable to go to them. Therefore, I feel we should follow St. Paul's advice, "*So, then, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.*" (I Corinthians 11:33)

While I feel that fasting from Holy Communion is the best option, I recognize that some pastors and congregations (along with some ELCA Bishops) disagree with my recommendation and will choose to offer communion in the midst of their online community. Given that reality, I have gathered the best recommendations I can find should you proceed. You can find those resources using [this link](#).

Thank you for your faithfulness and witness to the love of Jesus during these difficult times. I will continue to remember you in my prayers. May our Lord bless you, your family and those you serve!

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