

March 31, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

God's Peace!

We the Board of The Apostolic Lutheran Church of America send our greetings.

Our nation together with the citizens of the world are living in extraordinary times. To protect the lives of the citizens of the United States, our government has taken measures to stop the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). One of those measures has been limiting the size of public gatherings. Because of this limit on public gathering size the congregations of the Apostolic Lutheran Church of America, together with other church denominations, have canceled their church services.

These gathering restrictions are difficult for Christians. We treasure being together in fellowship under the hearing of God's word in corporate worship. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... and in Hebrews 10:25 we are instructed to, "not forsake the assembling of ourselves together." Luther explains the third commandment in the Small Catechism this way, "We should fear and love God that we would not despise preaching and His Word but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." As important as it is to our Christian life, the public gathering of Christ's Church is not a law. It is not something we do to earn favor with God. Jesus tells us that "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

There are times when in Christian love a member chooses not to attend services due to illnesses lest they infect others in the congregation. Churches have had to cancel services for many reasons, including inclement weather. It is good for us to be reminded that this is not the first time the Church of Christ has found Herself in this situation. We, however, have something that past generations of our brothers and sisters did not. We have the internet and the ability to livestream the Service of the Word (prayer, reading of the Word and preaching).

But what about the Blessed and Holy Sacrament of the Altar? The Church of Christ longs for the service of the Blessed Sacrament of the true body and blood of our Lord given to us. This can become a hardship for the body of believers.

We must remember that the forgiveness of sins is not missing when we are not able to commune for a time. Forgiveness is still delivered by The Gospel as it is read and preached to us. The Holy Spirit reminds us of the forgiveness that we have received in our baptism, and the Blessed Word of Absolution spoken to us in Christ's stead by the pastor and the priesthood of all believers in the mutual consolation of brethren. God's wondrous Means of Grace are manifold through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Again, this is not the first time the church has known this hardship. Congregations and even entire church bodies have gone weeks, months, even years without the Holy Supper.

Congregations have been without pastors, there have been other epidemics such as the 1918 influenza pandemic where entire communities were quarantined, and churches were unable to gather to receive the Sacrament of the Altar.

For pastors this can be difficult. But it is important that we do not try to “find solutions” or “innovate” in ways that are contrary to our Lord’s institution of His Holy Sacrament. The hunger and thirst for the Lord’s Supper that may cause us to consider such measures is both understandable and commendable. The Central Board does not seek to judge the intent of a pastor who loves the flock that has been entrusted to him and desires to administer Word and Sacrament to them. We must, however, warn against the temptation to organize an online virtual communion. The live streaming “consecration” with words spoken by a pastor remotely and the communion elements from homes of those watching via the internet. This is not the Holy Sacrament of the Altar.

The Lord’s Supper was instituted by Jesus with words and actions spoken and carried out by him in the direct presence of his disciples (Matt. 26:26-28). Throughout history, the church has sought to be faithful to Christ’s practice in this regard. Pastors speak the words of institution and distribute the Holy Supper in the presence of the assembled congregation as our Lord has instructed us to do (Luke 22:19).

Whenever the actual words and actions of the celebrant in consecrating the elements are intentionally separated (by time, distance, or technological means) from the distribution and reception, no assurance can be given that our Lord’s instructions are being heeded and that the body and blood of Christ are actually being given and received for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of faith. The Lord’s Supper is intended to strengthen faith in God’s forgiving grace, a faith that receives Christ’s Word of Promise that the bread and wine are His body and blood, broken and shed for us.

To introduce doubts or uncertainty about the Sacrament negates Christ’s purpose for instituting His Feast of Love. We can be thankful that God in His mercy has not given the Lord’s Supper as the only “means of grace.” Instead, he showers us with His grace. The Gospel is not silenced, forgiveness is proclaimed even when we must fast from the Sacrament of the Altar.

As great as the hardship is when we cannot receive Christ’s body and blood, the hardship ought not be “resolved” in ways that administer an uncertain “sacrament” without the absolute assurance that Christ intends.

We who are living under these extraordinary times join with the Saints who in times past faced similar circumstances; we humbly and repentantly ask the Lord that the regular administration of the Sacrament of the Altar be restored to us, together with an end to the “deadly pestilence” that is killing thousands of souls who are precious to God, their Creator (Psalm 91; Jonah 4:11).

In this uncertain time, let us be fervent in the seeking of opportunities to hear the Word of God. We are blessed with the ability to participate in the live streaming of the Service of the Word. We have written sermons we can read, publications dedicated to God’s Word, online blogs, the Lord has not left us without His Word, He has implanted it in us. Most importantly, we have been given the Holy Spirit who leads us in all truth and reminds us of all our Lord has said, the Holy Bible.

Husbands and Fathers gather your families around you and read Gods Holy Word to them. Pray with them as you have been called to be the pastors of your home. Implore God Almighty to end this plague and preserve His Church – His royal priesthood – to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

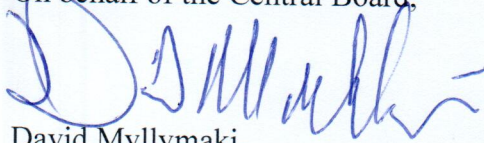
Again, it is important to note that this letter is in no way intended to pass judgment on the motives of those pastors and church leaders who look for ways to serve their congregations.

The sole purpose of this letter is to promote and encourage the proper practice of the Lord’s Supper in faithfulness to the teaching and example of Christ, so that doubts and questions may be replaced by faith in Christ’s gracious word, promise, and presence.

In closing we would like to encourage our member congregations to communicate with the Central Board when faced with these types of decisions. Together with you we can prayerfully seek the will of God. We are one Body. Our decisions and actions effect every member of the Body of Christ. As one Body we look to Christ our head for His grace and wisdom.

God bless you all.

On behalf of the Central Board,



David Myllymaki,
Secretary