



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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## ELCA presiding bishop addresses concerns about COVID-19

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In 1527 the plague returned to Wittenberg, Germany. Two hundred years earlier the plague had swept across Europe killing up to 40% of the population. Understandably, people were anxious and wondered what a safe and faithful response might be. In answer to this, Martin Luther wrote "Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague." In it, he emphasized the duty to care for the neighbor, the responsibility of government to protect and provide services to its citizens, a caution about recklessness, and the importance of science, medicine and common sense.

To provide care for the neighbor, Luther recommended that pastors, those in public office, doctors and public servants should remain in the city. Luther himself remained in Wittenberg to care for his people. He recommended that public hospitals be built to accommodate those with the plague. He condemned those who took unnecessary risks that put themselves and others in danger of contagion. Luther also encouraged the use of reason and medicine, writing, "God has created medicines and has provided us with intelligence to guard and take care of the body. ... Use medicine; take potions which can help you; fumigate house, yard, and street; shun persons and places wherever your neighbor does not need your presence" ("Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague," 1527).

We are living in the time of the coronavirus. We are also living in the time of social media and constant, relentless news coverage. Many of our people have the same concerns as those in Luther's day. Many of our people are anxious. Luther's counsel, based on Scripture, is still sound. Respect the disease. Do not take unnecessary risks. Provide for the spiritual and physical needs of the neighbor. Make use of medical aid. Care for one another, especially the most vulnerable.

The churchwide organization recommends the following for churchwide staff: Wash your hands, stay home when you are sick, wear a mask if you have symptoms, consult your medical provider. Bishops and pastors will provide guidelines

([https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Worship\\_in\\_Times\\_of\\_Public\\_Health\\_Concerns.pdf?\\_ga=2.49647279.804131654.1583427426-2025289056.1557504087](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Worship_in_Times_of_Public_Health_Concerns.pdf?_ga=2.49647279.804131654.1583427426-2025289056.1557504087)) for worship and church gatherings.

Luther also reminded his people and us that we should trust God's faithfulness and promises, particularly the promise eternal life. Paul writes: "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Romans 14:8).

In peace,  
The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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**About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:**

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3.5 million members in more than 9,100 worshipping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of "God's work. Our hands," the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA's roots are in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther.

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