



# COVID-19: In This Together With Neighbors Near and Far

*by Bishop Patricia Lull  
March 12, 2020*

The daily updates about the coronavirus, COVID-19, have us concerned about our own health and the well-being of our neighbors. I am grateful that so many of you are being attentive to the important messages from our public health officials. Those who work to curtail the spread of diseases like COVID-19 have expertise that far exceeds mine as a bishop in these matters. What I want to address are steps we can take as congregations and as individuals:

- **Listen to the public health and medical experts.** If events are cancelled or people are asked to stay at home, we need to heed those mandates.
- **Remember your neighbors,** especially those who are elderly, frail or facing expanded responsibilities for children. Phone calls or video calls are a great way to stay in touch without physical contact. Offers to drop off groceries can be a godsend for a person isolated at home. Shared childcare – if safe by health guidelines – can lift a burden on a family facing an extended time away from ordinary routines.
- **Follow the basic sanitary steps we are all being asked to take** – washing hands, covering a cough or sneeze, staying home when sick, seeking health care when needed. Be a model for others.



In the Saint Paul Area Synod we are monitoring all gatherings and planned travel and will update and communicate decisions about such on a regular basis. The coordinators who work with our companion synods in Tanzania and Guatemala have created FAQ sheets about travel and international guests:

- [Tanzania travel](#) (Bega Kwa Bega)
- [Guatemala travel](#) (Iglesia Luterana Agustina de Guatemala-ILAG)

These FAQs and other resources may also be found on a [COVID-19 Resources page of our website](#).

Week-by-week we are reviewing synod events to see if any need to be canceled. You will be able to learn about cancellations via emails, our website, our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), or our weekly [News & Events newsletter](#), and/or messages on our phone system (651-224-4313, option 6).

Our synod has congregations in five different counties so there are multiple public health agencies that may weigh in on whether or not church gatherings should be held or cancelled. Again, listen to the experts.

The ELCA has issued guidelines for worship practices, along with additional resources for congregational planning, online giving and live streaming. Visit the [ELCA public health webpage](#).

Last week I was with the Conference of Bishops and the ELCA Church Council. In our worship we made some accommodations. We shared the peace by bowing or nodding without shaking hands. Communion was not served by intinction, which gets tricky as fingers accidentally touch the wine while dipping the bread. We were reminded that it is acceptable to receive the sacrament in only one kind (the bread), which is what I chose to do. This is the season where individual cups may be more desirable than drinking from a chalice. Instead of passing offering plates, gifts were received in baskets at the door. Please think through the sacramental practice in your congregation. And the same holds for coffee hour, shared meals, classes or group events where we may unwittingly spread the virus.

None of us know how the impact of COVID-19 will unfold. We do know that this is a global health crisis, designated as a pandemic by the World Health Organization, and one in which our own actions can help to slow down the spread of this virus. As people of faith, we also know we are in this together with neighbors near and far. Thank you for your calm, thoughtful, careful response for the good of all.

In Christ's service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patricia Lull". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "L".

Bishop Patricia Lull