

Sample pastoral letter to congregation members

*Shared by Pastor Sarah Kerkes – Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in Chisago City
March 12, 2020*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I spent most of yesterday in discussions about Coronavirus precautions. My colleagues and I are sharing information and precautions set up by a church in Seattle. I was in contact with the Chisago County Department of Health, talked with local medical professionals and answered countless questions like "Do you really think it will be that bad?" Let me say straight up that I am not a medical professional. I am reading what infectious disease experts are writing, listening to our local medical providers, and hearing stories from folks currently in the fray. This morning I found out that a good friend is in mandatory 14-day quarantine after she returned from visiting her son in Morocco.

This is not the reality that we want to be living in, but here we are. As a church we want to hope/pray for the best while we prepare for the worst. The church council will be meeting next Tuesday and part of that meeting will be approval of a plan to implement when the virus hits our community. Our first priority will be to keep our at-risk population safe. In the meantime, there are things we can do to "flatten the curve" which means we slow the spread so the medical community is not overwhelmed.

1. Wash your hands. We have provided you with lyrics to sing while you are washing up in the church bathrooms. Feel free to add your favorites!
2. Stay home if you are sick, especially if you are running a fever. Better safe than sorry.
3. Treat the people around you with kindness. Some of our folks working in retail have been yelled at, sworn at and disrespected because there are no more face masks/bleach/toilet paper on the shelves. I found myself apologizing to the store clerk when I was checking out with a large pack of toilet paper. "Really," I said, "I need this. I will share it with my neighbors, promise."
4. Check in with your family and friends. Phone calls, text messages, e-mails all count. Even if we cannot shake hands and hug, we can still be in touch.
5. Be patient with us, at church, as we make changes to how we do communion, collect the offering, etc. We are all figuring this out as we go along. We do not want to be alarmist or stoke the flames of fear. We just want to protect you.
5. Look for ways to help. Parish Nurse Sherri and I will be putting together a "phone tree". If we do have to cancel events, we would like to stay in communication with each other. If you would like to be one of our phone visitors, let me know.
6. Continue to support the church. Our operating expenses will continue as usual. If you cannot attend for a while, please continue to contribute so that we can continue to "Share the love of Christ with others."
7. This is the most important: Pray. Pray for our community, our nation, and our world. Pray for those who are sick, those who are isolated, and those who live in fear. Pray for our medical providers and nursing home staff, they are already exhausted. Pray for scientists and other

researchers. Pray for community and church leaders who will have to make difficult decisions in the weeks and months to come. Pray, and then wash your hands again.

Psalms 27

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?