



## Minnesota North and South Districts The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

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The Honorable Tim Walz  
Governor, State of Minnesota  
Minnesota State Capitol  
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Governor Walz,

We write as representatives of the 180,000+ members and 440+ congregations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) in the state of Minnesota. First of all, we wish to extend our thanks for your leadership during this time of crisis. Consistent with our Lutheran theology, we acknowledge that God is active in the world, blessing and preserving what He has created both through governing of duly elected civil authorities and the ministry of His Church. Both, we believe, are essential to full human flourishing.

Therefore, we welcome and endorse your recent actions designed to safeguard the physical health of the people of this state, including the call for social distancing and the temporary stay at home order which you have issued concerning nonessential activities through May 4, 2020. As you know, these restrictions have placed a special burden on our churches as these restrictions occur during an especially holy season of the year, namely Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. However, we have also understood that our personal pieties and our First Amendment right of religious liberty are properly and voluntarily suspended in view of our simultaneous calling to love our neighbors by not unduly enticing them to expose themselves to COVID-19. Which is to say, we have not viewed the recent governmental actions to be something motivated by a desire to diminish citizens' religious freedom or practice, but rather as a means of protecting their physical wellbeing.

That said, we do wish to express a concern—namely, that the structure of your stay at home order implies a view that the religious life of the people is something less than essential to our life together. The stay at home order assumes that the benefits offered in our corporate gatherings are not essential elements of our individual and communal lives. This concern, of course, grows more intense as the period of time these restrictions are in place lengthens.

And so we wish to communicate the sincere belief that the ministry of the Church is, in fact, essential and should be publicly acknowledged as such. It is our hope that going forward, as an expression of mutual respect for the place of both Church and State, the Church will be treated in the same way other essential entities are treated, namely, that we would be allowed to meet corporately for worship and other activities, provided we make the same good faith efforts at social distancing and other recommended mitigation practices as are currently practiced in other entities designated as essential, such as grocery stores and pharmacies. We believe that society is best served when both Church and State recognize each other's legitimate sphere of autonomy and each trusts the other to serve the common good within that sphere, just as U.S. Attorney General Barr recently publicly affirmed.

To that end, as you make plans for the days and weeks ahead, we would urge you to make a change to your stay at home guidelines, explicitly designating churches as essential. In so doing, you would be acknowledging that spiritual nourishment is no less vital to the health of a society than physical nourishment. It would also be an expression of trust that the Church's long-standing and sincere commitment to advancing the welfare of our neighbors will continue to ensure that the implementation of our gatherings will show good judgment and fall within the public health guidelines of both the state and the federal government.

Again, we want to express our thanks for your prudent leadership during this extraordinary time. Rest assured that you and all other elected officials are regularly included in our prayers. Indeed, we trust that God will bless our combined efforts to serve the people of this great State and bring us to a time of personal health and societal wholeness.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signatures of Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford and Rev. Donald J. Fondow. The signatures are written in black ink and are positioned side-by-side.

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