

Dear friends in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! In Romans, chapter 8, the apostle Paul proclaims the certain hope he has by the faith given him through God's means of grace in Word and Sacrament: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (**Romans 8:38-39**).

On Monday, March 23, Indiana Governor Holcomb issued an Executive Order, directing Hoosiers to stay at home. As Baptized children of God we are directed to not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, including the governing authorities of our land instituted by God for our good to serve His creation. (**Romans 13:1-7**) Rather, we honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. We also give them our prayers and our patience as they seek to serve those for whom their public office was instituted. Insofar as the recommendations and mandates given at this time by our government and health officials do not violate God's Word or encroach upon our conscience, we are given to heed and obey them with patient endurance. According to the Lord's wise, gracious, and merciful command, we at Zion Lutheran Church will submit to Governor Holcomb's order.

Effective immediately, and until April 6 unless otherwise updated, all regularly scheduled corporate worship at Zion Lutheran Church is suspended. Videos of an appropriate Prayer Office will be posted to our website and YouTube page (Zion Lutheran Decatur) at the ordinary times appointed for these services: Wednesdays during the noon hour and Sunday mornings at 10:30 with a live radio broadcast. I encourage individuals and families to continue at home their usual schedule and practice for worship as much as possible. The Lord has blessed us with an opportunity for catechesis, and heads of families should consider how to teach the Lord's Word in a simple way to their households. That is, please consider getting up with your family when you normally would, even dressing to receive the Lord's Divine Service as you normally would, and using a hymnal to respond and sing throughout the Prayer Office as you normally would in God's holy house. (Hymnals will be available to take home with you, call or text me if you'd like to receive one.)

Nevertheless, we realize and remember that this is not normal, nor is listening to and even participating in an on-line Prayer Office the same as being gathered by and around Word and Sacrament in corporate worship. "Lord, I love the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells...for a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere" (**Psalms 26:8 & 84:10a**). Thus, please do not hesitate to contact me to establish a time when I may visit and serve you with the Lord's Divine Service in Word and Sacrament.

The Lord of hosts is with us and the God of Jacob is our fortress. Peace to you all and many prayers for you and your loved ones during this time of distress. Call, text or email me at any time with concerns and needs.

We pray: O most loving Father, You want us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing except losing You, and to lay all our cares on You, knowing that You care for us. Strengthen us in faith toward You. Give us grace to trust You during this time of illness and distress. In mercy put an end to the pandemic that afflicts us. Grant relief to those who suffer, and comfort all that mourn. Sustain in their labors all medical personnel and all whose vocations serve our bodily needs, and cause Your people ever to serve You in righteousness and holiness. Grant that the fears and anxieties of this mortal life may not separate us from Your love shown to us in Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

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