

From the Bishop – A Call to Abide by California Governor's Public Health Directive

July 13, 2020

The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:19-24

Dear Rostered Ministers and Lay Leaders of California's Pacifica Synod Congregations,

Today, Governor Gavin Newsom issued [new public health directives](#) to 30 counties in the state of California, including Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego counties, where all of Pacifica's California congregations are located. The directives require that congregations cease meeting indoors for worship for the time being.

This does not mean that we are not to worship. Many of our congregations are continuing their good work of providing online worship services. Others may hold outdoor worship services, provided masks are worn, physical distancing is maintained, and other measures are taken to ensure, as much as possible, that the virus will not be spread during the outdoor service. I urge you to worship, but I also urge you to comply with the law, a law that protects your neighbors from the virus. Indoor worship should cease for now until California public health officials have deemed it safe to being again.

It is difficult, after waiting so long to be together, to hear that we may not meet for worship inside our sanctuaries. But Christians are used to doing what is difficult in service to our neighbor. As long as the virus threatens to overwhelm our health care system, we need to do all we can to slow its spread so that the sick may obtain life-saving treatments. By doing this, we are showing love not only to those who worship with us, but also to our neighbors who serve as doctors, nurses, and other health care workers.

From the beginning, I have asked our congregations to abide by directives from public health officials. Please see [my letter](#) about reopening congregations that was sent out on June 3. This short letter continues in that vein. Please abide by the directives of California's governor.

In John 4, Jesus was asked a question by a Samaritan woman who wondered if it was permissible to worship away from Jerusalem, particularly away from the temple, the sanctuary where people were commanded to worship. Jesus responded by telling her that those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth. The place is not as important as the Spirit who calls us to worship and who blesses us as we turn to God in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. That God will be with us wherever we worship—in our homes, outdoors, and, in time, back in our sanctuaries. Until that time comes, please know that God is with you, and do God's important work of caring for your neighbors.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Andy Taylor/he, him, his
Pacifica Synod of the ELCA

Together in Christ we equip, accompany, and serve boldly so all may experience God's boundless grace.