

# IMMANUEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH



Dear Members of Immanuel,

I know these are very weird times. Who would have thought we would have to give up gathering for Lent! It has been good to connect with so many of you via our gatherings on zoom and on the phone! I want to encourage you to participate in as much as you are comfortable and suggest when we are a little uncomfortable it can be a time for growth. I encourage you to visit our website at [www.immanuelnorwood.org](http://www.immanuelnorwood.org) and also follow our Facebook page to experience fellowship and conversation. If you are in any kind of need, whether you are feeling alone and want to talk, if you have something weighing on your heart and want someone to pray with, if you have a need for food or supplies and are nervous to reach out - I want you to know that you are not alone and there is help. Please feel free to email me [Pastor.immanuelnorwood@gmail.com](mailto:Pastor.immanuelnorwood@gmail.com) at or call me at any time 610-586-5860. I am available, and others are as well and would love the opportunity to connect with you.

Our whole way of living has changed and so has the way we worship. While I know we are not worshipping as we had hoped and planned, I pray you are able to find some quiet time to worship right where you are. While it is good together in person, God is just as present in your homes. Some might ask, then why do we gather in person? At the core of our Lutheran worship is the belief that God's presence comes to us through word and sacrament. The word proclaimed and the sacraments, Baptism and Communion, are the means of Grace and we believe that Jesus is present. Worship is a response to what we believe God is doing in our lives.

I know many of you are wondering, what about the meal? What about Holy Communion?

I have been wrestling with this, as have bishops and pastors throughout the ELCA. Each pastor must decide what is best for their community and at this time, it is my belief, as your pastor, that the recommendation from the Presiding Bishop to refrain from participation in "distanced communion" is best for our community. As of this writing, I do not believe we are in a Eucharistic emergency. I have come to this decision after much thought and prayer.

Two of the ways to commune with physical distancing are “drive through communion” and “virtual communion”.

### **Drive through Communion**

Practically, we have a mandate, from our governor, to stay at home in addition to social distancing. For the safety and health of all, it is impossible to make this option risk-free for all and respect the orders from the governor. Theologically, when we gather for communion, it is not only the bread and wine that are essential. The real presence of Jesus is in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine, with the word spoken, and in the gathered community. The meal is not intended for individuals - it is a communal celebration. When communion is shared with those in hospitals and nursing homes, the meal shared is an extension of the assembly that gathered on Sunday.

### **Virtual Communion**

One might ask: Pastor, can you share the words of institution during a zoom meeting, so we can have communion together? This is a reasonable question; however, I do not believe it is in good order. All video on the internet can be saved and viewed at any time. My presiding at the table would then be available at any time. This then begs the question, should someone be able to google virtual communion and have communion at any time, far beyond this crisis moment?

When thinking through decisions of all kinds, we must think about how our decisions in this time will affect every decision that comes after. For instance, if I were to make the decision to preside over drive through or virtual” Communion for this time, at what point does that end and become an improper use of the means of grace? If I were to agree that the sacrament of Holy Communion can be virtually shared, does the same decision apply to the sacrament of Baptism?

At this time, it is my decision that I, and the community, will abstain from Holy Communion.

We do not know how long the pandemic-induced physical distancing will last, but we do know we will gather again; it will not last forever. I am considering this a time of fasting from Holy Communion out of love for our neighbors and our community. May we be intentional in being and aware of God’s presence in ways we have never noticed before.

Peace and Blessings,  
Pastor Lee