



Northwestern Minnesota Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

MEMO:

TO: Leaders of NWMN Synod Congregations
FROM: Bishop Bill Tesch
RE: Mask Wearing in Public and Other Current Guidance Related to CoVid19
Date: July 28, 2020

There's been a lot of confusion on the efficacy of wearing masks as a way to slow the spread of CoVid 19. Some of that confusion is due to the fact that the CDC and the WHO shifted their recommendations from advising **against** mask wearing back at the beginning of the Pandemic and now strongly advising **for** the use of cloth face coverings. Their shifting guidance is partly due to concerns about mask shortages earlier on, but mostly due to the lack of evidence or understanding about how this particular virus works. Now, that has changed.

National, state and local public health leaders agree: wearing a mask works. Mounting evidence is showing that because of the unique way this virus spreads, mask wearing significantly reduces the chances that a person who is infected and asymptomatic will infect others. In the absence of herd immunity through mass infection or a vaccine, there is no one strategy to slow the spread of the virus, but the data clearly show that mask wearing coupled with physical distancing are quite effective.

Here are links to articles related to the data about masks.

[From Stanford Medical School](#)

[From UCSF](#)

[From the CDC](#)

My guidance as your synod's pastor remains the same:

- Large, in-person, inside the building gatherings should wait until it is safe for everyone to gather (when there is herd immunity). ***This is about our identity as an inclusive church who love and care for all of God's people, not just the young and the healthy.*** As one congregational president said, "We don't plan family events that Grandma can't attend, so why would we plan a church service that's not safe for her?"
- Continue to find ways to provide worship outdoors, in parking lots, online and via radio and TV. ***This is about our call to share the good news of Jesus Christ!***
- Continue to find creative ways to share the sacrament through small (fewer than 10) gatherings, virtually where all are able to be present through multiple forms of accessible media, by bringing home communion to the vulnerable in safely prepared and delivered packages, through home presidency or in outdoor settings where the sacrament is safely prepared and distributed. ***This is about our need for the spiritual nourishment that God longs to give us.***