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| Dear Florida-Bahamas Synod Members,Greetings in Christ in whom is our hope and our salvation!In case some of you have not read the news of March 12 from Florida’s Governor, let me quote this piece of information from his webpage:*“Governor Ron DeSantis issued*[*Executive Order 20-52*](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001jUKbDsgFOlILTvInisLt8y9qmxcbWD3fuVeFQuHSFxdJ-HkGA9QFD9oP1nqyzDu4HUxO-Su7vCGTZ7d3zPqG2pqcgzgpllxLv73tE1fVf8QZ2DbJMy25n0pZoDOmRlRFXBF8tUBkdJoR6APN1HZhiAfivaCJoVkv5fpq6AfyFy3vyjUW8504_weOZfk5x3cQQKdyAxnkD4J2_d5UXquIujkRueyCBM-sHbsiTVbz-qnJVb696YztXMgAP4Op2Ps5XiACNiDcRRI1Mkjz4xIR5is3tN1IaIlCdlQyP59q7-XiYpSOPhGPPK6tQTz4_jMBMGQVg69uP04DqWMFM4dWYzPH-0gluGdosOGfl8YMJPPNWPMKEC1yZSJZibhCG1U2AUrfb5bXZxue_E4GsSVT2WJEVCkeH_bJDzR50kOMmAUYDfOzUOWkDXOW5XCgk3b_YB4HZSqZwbl2J4y3KwAaz35TCA7SrBoSyC-BRQFykIreqJMW-zjLBLTy0dXpz7eq&c=HnPJE7YOV77rCgbonfiwtmEqVOaZv0WtujpWONb41Ki2fS2-ZF8kpQ==&ch=J3jY36qGVCbu94Lem3LoTxQXpeFV-RYKsh6U9pVk3DC1LGKLR2tyeA==)*declaring a State of Emergency for COVID-19 and directed the Florida Division of Emergency Management to activate the Florida Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to a Level II, to coordinate the state’s response to COVID-19. Last week, the governor issued*[*Executive Order 20-51*](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001jUKbDsgFOlILTvInisLt8y9qmxcbWD3fuVeFQuHSFxdJ-HkGA9QFD9oP1nqyzDu40TYE5uAZXATPDHq5opY425D0OpyW1oz2DrKsuKgppxdzgnH9X68wT7dvLZ5BpUn7pEWk3gWOpeY0vxFBQPlNj8w8lUrCmxl4gzy-V3cUVwJPdUnYLorBy_sIXuUMBGkgd6vdWWyediI8lzw5kAYmoVE7EbNnPk39ub6EX7xKqQVPGr_b1XDeEYs_Wv254i-cOV88eFnSWuRqoZlI0nPrp2IkzAdBoKWSDqObXbovRx3eO5fhKITpRL9_P2LxdSOc7e7YCjcCB5PcLUj-cKB4N_lDfEiu91sZWRtwp_1eA71DFfQ5o_pqJfFyNIUbz5GLm_2yFPiLELpyQHCbmA0pGPCA4R6A5Hl6o3_EWP40OzbhYgrihio_cTkFtJZDKl5wgBbIKeAa2mxaj3IUYys9hF_GjrFThY8sse0H0tdeGEUCaJ7JzxrKTDO9AnW-CPhNm2LdmOXj7Gs=&c=HnPJE7YOV77rCgbonfiwtmEqVOaZv0WtujpWONb41Ki2fS2-ZF8kpQ==&ch=J3jY36qGVCbu94Lem3LoTxQXpeFV-RYKsh6U9pVk3DC1LGKLR2tyeA==)*directing the State Surgeon General to declare a public health emergency.* *For the most up-to-date information about COVID-19 in Florida, please visit the Florida Department of Health’s dedicated*[*COVID-19 webpage*](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001jUKbDsgFOlILTvInisLt8y9qmxcbWD3fuVeFQuHSFxdJ-HkGA9QFD9oP1nqyzDu44oOJgikdT6WAo92eIEPL4H24b8qdPf0Mc5fYrXznYBX9zDukKSWeC8cZbJ_znM0wUL9kf7fh5cb86CIeM_Vsz-XHjY9GXRWgDDp5wQysi9Rzinvu8v3A6F0WXnfkE-P-6M3swD2_RlOJegYsXUVwfY9k2FkzyntyOb3ni5CLOaXtvqWDerjQlItHeP6Oj-fMwOTeipQHCCn5WVij0FI2Vwg2VDAHFSCdG-t1ptHNtDTNjT_rg35YWyt27YwJKGYD02O2jTGrdI9gQmwPa3jxKNliPtu9igy9Xm4xwJFLxgiKjlZ5UPJYHrw0P-kr37W9bpW2VNonJDnc0OWmZ8r6w-jre9j4IFrTEkhRVsqgUzVf_c6qZSVKvCyTwBnt_H6lnoWbyrZMVxi3j6GIuBapWA==&c=HnPJE7YOV77rCgbonfiwtmEqVOaZv0WtujpWONb41Ki2fS2-ZF8kpQ==&ch=J3jY36qGVCbu94Lem3LoTxQXpeFV-RYKsh6U9pVk3DC1LGKLR2tyeA==)*. For any other questions related to COVID-19 in Florida, please contact the state’s dedicated COVID-19 Call Center by calling (866) 779-6121. The Call Center is available 24 hours per day. Inquiries may also be emailed to**COVID-19@flhealth.gov**”.* Many large institutions have closed their operations. We now know the virus can spread very rapidly. Most places of worship are exempt from the State directive above. However, in other states and in other denominations, bishops have required churches to close for at least the rest of this month.We in the ELCA will not dictate what you do, and each congregation will do what the leadership considers is best for their context. However, as your Bishop here in the Florida-Bahamas Synod, I strongly suggest the following in order to combat the spread of the virus:* First and foremost, remain calm and rely on information from credible sources, like the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
* Abstain from congregational gatherings at least for the rest of this month of March. This includes Sunday worship and weekly meetings.
* As much as you are able, use live-streaming, Facebook Live, YouTube for worship, and Zoom or Skype video conferencing for smaller meetings. ONE LICENSE is offering free licenses through April 15 to help congregations cope with COVID 19 challenges. Please click [here](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001jUKbDsgFOlILTvInisLt8y9qmxcbWD3fuVeFQuHSFxdJ-HkGA9QFD9oP1nqyzDu4vXH_O3LECKxAqQu22eWynpYey8FJ4CrURnqevzTPPHwAHgJ96vOMFw8VFSlBfhevdI9Sz93LyRZezeKiBNwCxACw4PkvJZSE3GEhwzEgJLab0AEOD5hWBAtitqNxxJBKb3uyurL5CK1-6WMHGtBK-uXDUL4V8TYXrG_PmgKVRaWwAKr9ofVhlXSVj1LggPMMfyTEUNqyioOVerqPNuD83oPP0Tx2xFkXyPbzjpTnH1YmhUHbydm2yQ==&c=HnPJE7YOV77rCgbonfiwtmEqVOaZv0WtujpWONb41Ki2fS2-ZF8kpQ==&ch=J3jY36qGVCbu94Lem3LoTxQXpeFV-RYKsh6U9pVk3DC1LGKLR2tyeA==) for more information.
* Those who feel their physical health could be compromised should avoid going out in public including worship.
* Congregational members could gather as families or individuals in their homes at the regular time of worship to pray, or to listen to a sermon from the pastor, or something similar. Offerings can still be made by mail or just bring it next time you attend worship as the normal congregational expenses will continue.
* In cases where a small number of people still choose to worship, please limit physical contact as much as possible, bow a little with your hands on your chest to greet one another even during the sharing of the Peace. Having no Holy Communion is fine during this time of emergency, and should you decide to do so, communing with the bread alone is a full communion as Christ is fully present. Pastors please avoid touching people’s hands. Offerings can be dropped in one place instead of passing the plate. No Coffee Hour please.
* Find responsible ways to live out your faith to help those who are in most need.

These recommendations are not intended for us to panic, but rather as best practices. We have gone through hurricanes and other disasters and know that we must take some preventative measures. And as we continue our journey through life, I would like you to know that I am praying for you. I leave you again with this prayer given by our ELCA Churchwide office.*Merciful God, we know that your heart overflows with compassion for your whole creation. Pour out your Spirit on all people living with this illness, or who are living with anxiety about this illness, for which there is not yet a cure. Be with those who tend to the needs of the sick. Strengthen us all in body and spirit, console us when anxious, comfort us in grief and hearten us in discouragement. Help to remind us that you claim us as your own and are with us wherever we go. Through Christ, our healer and Lord. Amen.*Yours in Christ, |

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| Bishop Pedro M. SuárezFlorida-Bahamas Synod, ELCA |

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| See what's happening on our social sites |
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