

An Update from President Fondow

May 20, 2020

Dear fellow disciples of our Lord Jesus in the Minnesota North District:

Two weeks ago, President Lucas Woodford (Minnesota South District) and I sent a letter to Governor Walz asking that the ministry of the Church be acknowledged as essential and that we be treated in the same way other essential entities are treated. Namely, that we would be allowed to meet corporately for worship and other activities, provided we make the same good faith efforts at social distancing and other recommended mitigation practices as are currently practiced in other entities designated as essential, such as grocery stores and pharmacies. We did not receive a response from the Governor.

Through the efforts of Rev. Fred Hinz, our Public Policy Advocate, President Woodford and I became participants of a coalition comprised of confessional Lutheran leaders along with the Roman Catholic Bishops and sent a letter on May 7 along with protocols, requesting that Governor Walz endorse a return to some Worship Services in a limited way. We proposed beginning with groups not to exceed 1/3 of the seating capacity of the worship space and we would offer more Services if necessary and encourage people to come on other days of the week instead of Sunday, in order to spread them out. Once again, we did not receive a response. His May 13th Executive Order continued to limit faith-based communities to no more than 10.

Today, May 20, 2020, the Governor allowed restaurants and bars to open with prescribed protocols. However, churches are still limited to a maximum of 10. After 9 weeks, now it is time to attend to the spiritual health of our community as well. This afternoon with the help of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty a letter has been sent by President Woodford and myself to the Governor and the State Attorney General urging them to treat churches equally with businesses and retailers, and announcing to them that beginning on May 26, in advance of Pentecost Sunday, we will begin holding in-person Worship Services and ministering to our community. The Minnesota Catholic Conference has also sent a letter to the Governor and Attorney General as well as a letter to their parishes indicating that May 26th they would begin holding in-person Worship Services.

The attached letter to you the Pastors and congregations of the Minnesota North District as well as those of the Minnesota South District, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, explains our plans along with a copy of proposed safety protocols. Our LCMS polity leaves the decision to open according to the suggested date and protocols, or to continue only with virtual Services, with each congregation. The District is advisory. I cannot dictate what you do in the oversight of your flock and any considerations or plans for reopening. I simply ask that you prayerfully review what we are sharing with you.

Please contact me if you have questions, ideas, or concerns.

**“Let him who lives in the shelter of the Most High and stays in the shadow of the Almighty, say to the LORD, ‘My Refuge and my Fortress, my God whom I trust!’ He is the One who will rescue you from the snare and from the deadly plague” (Psalm 91:1-2).**

Serving Christ with you,

Rev. Don Fondow

President

