



# Southwestern Washington Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

The Rev. Richard E. Jaech, Bishop

25 March 2020

Dear Pastors, Deacons and Congregations,

I wish to respond to a question that a number of you have communicated to me:

“In light of the Stay Home, Stay Healthy Executive Order in the State of Washington, is it lawful for worship leaders in our Synod congregations to record or live stream a worship service that may be viewed by people in their homes?”

First of all, I want to state that I fully support the Stay Home, Stay Healthy Executive Order and I feel that we must follow this Executive Order in our congregations. We must do this not only in respect for the established law, but also because the purpose of this Executive Order is to guard against the spread of illness, which is certainly a part of Christ's teaching.

I am not a lawyer and am not authorized to give legal advice. However, in seeking to follow Stay Home, Stay Healthy Executive Order and in looking at the detailed statement of the Executive Order available through the Governor's Office, this is the conclusion that I have come to:

**While Governor Inslee's edict does not clearly state this, there is information in the detailed announcement by the State Government that brings me to the conclusion that it is legal and permissible for worship teams of under 10 people to record or live stream a worship service. Therefore, my advice to you is that you can continue doing this, if you wish. Each congregation should make its own choice about this.**

In the section of the Government announcement where it lists workers who are doing essential service and are, therefore, permitted to continue that work, there is a section entitled, **OTHER COMMUNITY-BASED GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS Essential Workforce**

In that section is listed: • Artists and musicians providing services through streaming or other technology.

In my mind, that group of workers can include preachers, readers and musicians gathered to record or live stream a worship service.

In the section of the report entitled **HEALTH**, one group of essential workers is described as:

• Workers who provide support to vulnerable populations to ensure their health and well-being, including family care providers.

That, too, could be interpreted as a worship team serving an audience that includes people over 60 years or who have other vulnerabilities, and serving their well-being.

Based on these definitions of essential workers, I consider it to be a legitimate interpretation of the Executive Order to say that congregations may continue to authorize their worship team to record

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*The mission of the Southwestern Washington Synod is to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ by empowering congregations and Church leaders to grow in worship, education, outreach, stewardship and other ministries.*

or live stream worship services. They must, of course, follow all of the other elements advised by State and health officials, especially:

- Less than 10 people (I would advise no more than 5-8).
- Everyone must be six feet apart.
- Every item and surface should be regularly disinfected.
- It is not allowed to gather the congregation for worship in the church building.

An additional note to consider is that the current Executive Order in the State of California specifically includes in its list of essential workers not only artists and musicians, but also faith and religious groups providing services through streaming or other technology.

The State of Washington Executive Order includes a process to petition the state to add new categories to its list of essential workers. I am investigating how to petition Washington State so that we can add the same wording as the State of California. When I find out how to best do that, I will pass that information on to you.

I welcome your questions or suggestions about this matter.

Blessings,



Bishop Rick Jaech

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Bishop Jaech,

I am writing to inform you of my resignation from the roster of the ELCA effective \_\_\_\_\_ .

In Christ,

Pastor Bob Sinclair