Friends,

Some of you know I served as the Executive of Lutheran Disaster Response of NY at Ground Zero following my incredible time as ELCA National Director for Schools. One of our big lessons in schools at that time was the need to administer the business of the school from a remote location. Schools who have experienced hurricanes and other disasters may have learned that lesson as well. I think it is fair to assume in many places in our nation that you won’t be able, and shouldn’t be able, to get to the school and office. This is no time to be a martyr or hero. You are too important to your family, friends, and school to take unnecessary risks – and it is a risk.

TO LUTHERAN SCHOOL PERSONNEL

You are education leaders first and foremost. Many of you, I believe, in this group are also school administrators. It’s fair to assume school may not resume this school year in some areas. How will you answer these questions?

- Will the school provide tuition refunds to families? Most “business interruption” clauses in insurance contracts exclude pandemic events.
- If you receive tuition monthly, can this be done online via credit card or e-check?
- How will staff be paid? Is this done in-house or by an outside agency (which I always recommend).
- How will hourly staff be paid if they are not working? Will your school be “the church?”
- Do you have a conference call or video conference call capability for your staff? They will want to hear from you! There are free options.
- How will the bills be paid? Who is picking up the bills? Do you have online payment capabilities?
- The recruitment season for next year may be coming to an end, or the tours were in process. What’s the 20/21 plan when we emerge from the pandemic?
- Communicate, communicate, communicate. Probably the three most important words in response to disaster.

A FEW THOUGHTS FOR CONGREGATIONAL STAFF

Colleagues, These are challenging times. I believe to this day God does not give us challenges we are not able to wrestle down to the ground. By this, I don’t mean curing the virus. I do mean taking care of OUR business as medical professionals use their gifts on our behalf.

- Pray
- This isn’t about YOU (unless you are ill). Members are worried about their health, jobs, income, children, older parents, food supplies. In ministry, make this about them!
- Shut down the physical plant! Pray there is clarity by Easter, but even the Vatican is shutting down to all visitors on Holy Week.
- Have a definitive list of “shut-ins.” Who will reach out to them? Basic essentials, like groceries, may become an issue. Contact them now and regularly!
● Have a definitive list of members 60+ as they are among the most vulnerable. Stay in contact with them regularly.
● Have a definitive list of families with children. With schools closed, they are going to need support and a healing voice.
● Consider who might be isolated with no computer communication. Reach out to them. Call them – regularly!
● If you have a ministry to a high-risk population, i.e. homeless or the working poor, know how they will be served and cared for. Advocate for them.
● Communicate regularly (more than weekly) with all members through existing methods. Consider a daily prayer and message of hope.
● Pay all staff their customary weekly wage. There will be time enough to sort this out. Generally speaking, our hourly employees need their regular paycheck the most.
● Pray and repeat

Be the leaders you are. This isn’t a blizzard when the snow will be gone in a couple of days. I pray for you and all that will be asked of you. Luther’s Evening Prayer gives me comfort:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen

Communicate with one another, support one another just as you communicate and support your local community.

Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me if I can be helpful, or you just want to talk. You are in my heart and prayers.

John
ELEA Region 7 Ambassador

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