



**SOUTHWESTERN
PENNSYLVANIA
SYNOD** EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH IN AMERICA

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Dear Synod Leaders,

The grace and peace of our Lord Jesus be with you all.

Three weeks ago I wrote to you with my strong encouragement to suspend all in-person gatherings in our ministry sites, including worship, because of the surge in new COVID-19 cases across our region. Today I am writing again to ask that you continue this practice through Christmas and into the new year until we see that the distribution of effective vaccines or other measures of restraint bring the daily new cases back down to a sustainable level.

The Church's witness to Christ consistently speaks of his self-giving love. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many," Jesus says of himself in Matthew's Gospel (20:28). The creed confesses that "for us and for our salvation he came down from heaven." The ancient hymn that St. Paul quoted in his letter of encouragement to the Philippians (2:6-11) sings of Jesus' act of self-emptying for the salvation of the world. Martin Luther's glorious Christmas hymn, *From Heaven Above*, expands on this same theme through 14 verses. Verse eight asks this pressing question:

Welcome to earth, O noble Guest,
through whom this sinful world is blest!
You turned not from our needs away;
how can our thanks such love repay?

This year, gathering for Christmas worship remotely may do just that.

If your ministry site provides opportunities for remote worship, please follow this link <https://www.swpasynod.org/synodnews/christmas2020> and share your online resources so that other ministry sites that do not have their own online ministry may be able to bless their people through the gifts you have provided. The love of Jesus invites us into his own pattern of self-giving love, by which the whole world is blessed. Thank you for living in the love of Jesus for the sake of others this year!

With you in Christ,

+ Kurt F. Kusserow, Bishop