

**Corona Virus Update** – Since the beginning of the Corona virus epidemic, Zion has continued to honor the liturgical calendar, and has celebrated Mass and continued with Prayer Offices, Bible class and studies according to our normal schedule. We have put in place a number of safeguards to keep our members safe, following to the recommendation of the medical officials of our state and country.

This morning at 11:00 a.m. Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued Executive Order 2020-21 (Covid-19), imposing a “stay at home” restriction for all Michigan residents not employed in “essential” positions. Further, the Order continues “...all public and private gatherings of any number of people occurring among persons not part of a single household are prohibited.” The listed exemptions in section 7 of the Governor’s order does not include Pastors or churches. The duration of the Order is for three weeks, ending April 13, 2020.

This Order is especially difficult for the Christian because Holy Week begins on Palm Sunday, April 5, and the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Easter, is April 12. According to the Governor’s Order, no Christian church in the state of Michigan will be allowed, under civil law, and under threat of civil punishment, to observe the most holy Feast of the Church’s Year of Grace.

We do not believe that Governor Whitmer’s Order has as its motive the persecution of Christians. The increasingly stringent civil restrictions the state has imposed have been quite general. The state is obviously concerned with the temporal, not the eternal, and has no concern for the wellbeing of the souls of its citizens. Unto Caesar is rendered what is Caesar’s. Our souls are rendered unto God, not Governor. (Matthew 22:21)

We read in the Book of Acts, when ordered by the civil authorities to discontinue the public preaching of Christ, that we “must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29) As Christians, our lives are centered in love for our God, the only True God, the Triune God, and love for neighbor. If the civil authorities issued such an Order for the purpose of persecution of the Christian Church, we would be compelled to disobey the order. It is our belief that this is not the case.

With regards to love for God, we know that the Third Commandment instructs us that we should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and the Word of God, but hold it sacred, and gladly hear and learn it. We also know that online and virtual communication can never bring to the Christian the benefits of the Holy Mass. For this reason, Zion has continued steadfast in our receipt of Christ’s Gifts given exclusively in the Divine Service.

Saving faith compels us to love our neighbor. The Epistle to the Hebrews instructs “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25) True love for neighbor is manifest in gathering to receive the Gifts of God.

At the same time, it is clear that in the present situation, love for neighbor includes protecting our more susceptible neighbors, and our brothers and sisters in Christ, from the current epidemic.

According to the nation's best scientific and medical minds, that protection comes in the form of physically separating ourselves from one another. The Governor's Order codifies this.

As Lutheran Christians we know that we have biological parents, as well as civil and ecclesiastical parents. The keeping of the Fourth Commandment includes obeying secular authority, which God has placed, or allowed to be placed, over us. This would compel us to abide by the strictures of the Governor's Order.

The current situation is changing by the hour. A few days ago we couldn't have imagined such civil restrictions being imposed. A few weeks ago such a situation was inconceivable. Only the Lord knows if the epidemic will quickly pass, or will grow worse. In taking any action, Zion's Pastor and her Church Council commend all things into God's hands, knowing that His good and gracious will is done indeed without our prayer, and asking that His will be done among us.

We believe, after prayerful consideration, that the best course of action at this time is to suspend all Services for the time being. We also believe that this suspension should include all regularly scheduled meetings of the congregation and all classes and studies. This will put Zion into conformity with the Order of the Governor and serve to protect our members from the spread of the virus through person-to-person contact.

At the same time, we believe that this decision should be revisited well before the three-week end date proposed by the state. It is our sincere hope that this will pass quickly, and that we will be able to gather to receive the Gifts of God in the Divine Service for Holy Week. Zion's Pastor and her Church Council will daily monitor the situation and will prayerfully reconsider our path forward as the situation changes.

Zion will not be holding any "virtual services" or Masses for the purpose of broadcasting them via the Internet. Father Braden will remain available by phone and by email throughout the coming week. He will continue to visit those who are seriously ill if they will receive his visit. He will continue to hear Private Confession and give Christ's Absolution to those who seek it. This can be done by appointment in the Zion Chapel, confidentially, with sufficient space between Pastor and Penitent to honor the "social distancing" restrictions that have been suggested.

Our Lord foretold the strife and suffering that the fall in Eden wrought: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:33-36)

May His Words comfort and encourage you until you once again kneel at Zion's altar to receive His Body and Blood with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Fr. Braden and the Zion Church Council