

# Stream of Information



**Upper Susquehanna Synod**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

## Pandemic Flu and Its Implications for the Church

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The World Health Organization has raised the threat warning of a pandemic flu to "imminent." While such a threat remains difficult to comprehend, especially in the United States where few cases have been confirmed, the American government continues to warn us that this is a matter of "grave concern." Some scientists suggest that this round of the flu may subside only to reemerge even more strongly in the autumn.

The 1918 "Spanish flu" had a devastating effect on the world's health and seemingly "permanent" effects on the church. The "little glasses" many of our congregations use for Holy Communion were introduced in many places in response to the "Spanish flu." Few today could say how they were introduced. They simply have become a part of our congregational lives, and attempts to return to the common cup have been difficult if not impossible.

Congregations have been urged to develop contingency plans in preparation for any potential disaster including a pandemic flu. Pr. Sarah Hershberger has met with the conferences of the Upper Susquehanna Synod to share this concern with pastors, and she continues to be available. Allow me to raise some serious questions, however, that I think you need to consider:

If a flu outbreak occurred in our communities and people were advised to avoid places where people gather (e.g. places of worship and schools),

- How would the vital ministries of the congregation be affected?
  - Would worship services be cancelled, especially by larger congregations?
  - Would people be encouraged to attend wearing masks?
  - Would pastors continue to visit the sick and hospitalized?  
Would telephone calls to the sick be sufficient? How does a pastor weigh personal risk vs. the call the servant ministry?

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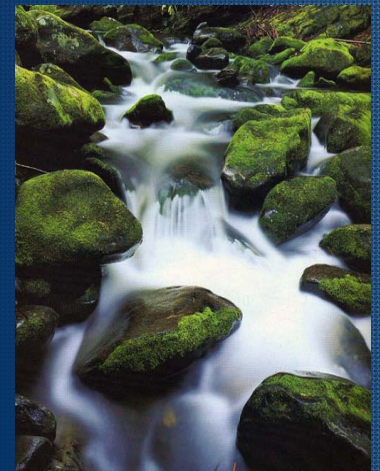
How would you and your congregation respond to a widespread flu outbreak in your congregation and/or its community?

*"In response to an intensifying outbreak in the United States and internationally ... the World Health Organization raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 5 on April 29, 2009."*

*"A Phase 5 alert is a strong signal that a pandemic is imminent and that the time to finalize the organization, communication, and implementation of the planned mitigation measures is short."*

*Centers for Disease Control*

*"The time is now upon us for planning and concern but not panic."*



## Pandemic Flu.....continued from previous page.

- What would happen if the pastor became ill?
  - Do you know to whom you would turn? Guidelines for emergency coverage will be on the Synod's new website which is expected to launch May 1 ([www.uss-elca.org](http://www.uss-elca.org)).
  - What if so many became ill that the needs of the church could not be met through normal channels?
  - Could lay people be trained to lead Services of the Word and/or Prayer?
  - Might an emergency Service(s) be prepared in advance, that could be used by others?
  - Would your family physician or State Health Center consider clergy to be a necessary caregiver who would receive anti-virals when supplies are limited?
- What effect would a pandemic flu have on our liturgical practices? Surely questions would be raised by concerned members.
  - What about the exchange of peace? Would it be temporarily eliminated? Would bowing (nodding) replace shaking hands, hugging, and kissing?
  - What about intinction? Would some be frightened to receive even in this manner out of fear that others hands have contaminated the wine? Most scientists seem to believe that hands are a greater means of transmittance than drinking alcohol from a gold or silver cup, but would anyone believe it?
  - What about the distribution of glasses? Would people need to pick their own from the tray rather it being handed to them by another?
  - What about greeting people at the door?
- If ministries were canceled how would people be notified?
  - Posting a notice on the church doors?
  - Creating a telephone and/or email "chain"?
  - Using local media?
- How would weddings or funerals be affected? Even with a moderate outbreak funeral homes, caterers and halls will be affected.
- Might the congregation find ways to care for those affected other than bringing people into mass gatherings?
  - Might people be prepared to assist elderly members who become ill?
  - What about parents who need to work but for whom their children's schools have been closed?

Clearly many questions be asked, but how should we respond? I encourage you to enter into a conversation about these things by joining the Upper Susquehanna Synod at ning.com (<http://uss-elca.ning.com>). In the meantime, pray for all those currently infected and their caregivers.

*Bishop Robert L. Driesen*

***This Stream  
of Information  
is intended to  
generate  
thought and  
conversation.***

<http://uss-elca.ning.com>

***Should we  
temporarily  
eliminate  
the  
exchange of  
peace?***

