



April 28, 2020

The Honorable Steve Sisolak, Governor of Nevada  
State Capitol Building  
101 N. Carson Street  
Carson City, NV 89701

Dear Governor Sisolak,

We, the Nevada leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and The United Methodist Church, thank you for your leadership in handling the COVID-19 pandemic in the state of Nevada. Your clear press conferences, and especially the “Stay Home for Nevada” policy is flattening the curve and keeping the epidemic somewhat under control in our state. You are saving lives, especially lives of the most vulnerable citizens of our state, by your actions. As Christians, it is clear that in this season, to love our neighbors means to stay apart from our neighbors as much as possible.

We write now to encourage you to extend that order for our citizens to stay home and healthy until reliable testing is much more widely available to ensure that we do not suffer a much more significant outbreak. The statistics continue the upward increase of deaths and infections. We are clearly not ready to let down our guard. We do not want Las Vegas to be the next New York City, New Orleans, or Detroit. The economic costs of a few more weeks of staying at home are far outweighed by the potential costs in lives and subsequent economic shut-downs.

We know that you and your advisors are working on strategies and benchmarks for reopening casinos, resorts, businesses and organizations in Nevada. We would ask that you include religious leaders in those plans. We are a significant source of socialization and interaction for many elderly and vulnerable Nevadans, and we want to keep our people safe. Like all other small businesses and non-profits, we are bearing the economic costs of this shut-down; but we would not trade our members’ lives for premature re-opening.

The Sierra Pacific and Grand Canyon Synod of the ELCA comprises 275 worshipping communities and over 96,000 members in Arizona, Nevada and Northern California. We encouraged suspension of in person worship beginning March 15 and continuing through April. We hope you will support our recommendation to continue this suspension through May.

The Desert Southwest Conference of The United Methodist Church includes 117 congregations and 11 fellowships in Arizona and southern Nevada. Representing almost 26,000 members, these people of faith have suspended in-person gatherings indefinitely. This impacts an average attendance of almost 18,000 people.

The California Nevada Conference of The United Methodist Church has over 350 congregations representing more than 70,000 members serving in Northern California and Northern Nevada. Our pastors and churches in the Carson City, Reno, Sparks and Carson Valley areas have had a long-standing partnership with State of Nevada officials working together on matters that affect all citizens of Nevada. We have carefully followed the guidance of state and county officials, calling all our churches and related offices to postpone in-person gatherings until the end of May with the possibility of extending this call to shelter in place. Of highest value to us has been the safety of everyone in the communities where we serve.

A large percentage of all our members are elderly and have medical conditions that put them at risk for critical or fatal outcomes if they become infected. We have kept open our food pantries and emergency services as we are able, and many of our congregations have seen a curious increase in attendance at their live-streamed worship. It is difficult, but we are weathering the storm.

Thank you for your service to our nation and our citizens. We hold you in prayer as you lead the people of Nevada in this challenging time.

Gratefully,

The Rev. Deborah K. Hutterer  
Bishop, Grand Canyon Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Mark W. Holmerud  
Bishop, Sierra Pacific Synod  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Rev. Dr. Robert T. Hoshibata  
Resident Bishop  
The Desert Southwest Conference  
The United Methodist Church

The Rev. Dr. Minerva G. Carcaño  
Resident Bishop  
California-Nevada Conference  
The United Methodist Church