Siblings in Christ,

Many are writing with concern about a drop in financial giving during these days of sheltering in place. The concern is for staff, ministries, mortgage and sustainability of your call. All of it.

Generous people still want to be generous. Anxious people hoard toilet paper and their offering. (I struggle with both tendencies on different days.) Couple that with a pattern of people not giving unless they are in the pew and it is understandable that giving is low. For an example of a non-anxious reminder of how people can continue to give to and through their congregation see Lord of Life's website  [https://lordoflifeak.com](https://lordoflifeak.com/) March 22 worship. Thanks Amanda.

There is federal legislation that should be of assistance to congregations.

**Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.** ELCA General Counsel Tom Cunniff will send an update this week with the specificity we need as ELCA congregations.

<http://frontporchnewstexas.com/2020/03/27/cares-act-could-bring-financial-relief-to-churches-amidst-bans-on-large-gatherings-by-john-litzler/>

The **Families First Act** is also a possible resource for your lay employees. As with all new legislation, and especially legislation quickly drafted, the implementation and explanation of this is being developed.

From the **Mission Investment Fund**

"As the investment and lending ministry of the ELCA, the Mission Investment Fund has resources that can provide some much-needed help to congregations, ministries and members that may be experiencing financial hardship at this time. The Mission Investment Fund is able to provide assistance for the congregations and ministries that have MIF loans as well as individuals and congregations that invest with us."

Amelia Dawkins, MIF’s Vice President for Lending.  [Amelia.Dawkins@elca.org](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/aksynodbishop%40gmail.commailto:Amelia.Dawkins@elca.org).

**ELCA Federal Credit Union** is also prepared to offer assistance to its members at this time.  Contact the Credit Union by email at [info@elcacu.org](https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/aksynodbishop%40gmail.commailto:info@elcacu.org).

**Portico Benefits Services**is the self-funded benefits ministry of this church. Portico has always worked with congregations to address financial shortage but cannot waive payment.

PaymentServices@PorticoBenefits.org

The financial realities of sheltering in place touch each of us personally. Our God is a God of abundance. We are in a struggle for distribution of abundance in a time of fear. As Christians, each of us must pay attention to the needs of our neighborhood and neighbor. Give all that you can for the sake of what God wants to do in this world. As much as possible, do not make yourself a burden to your neighbor by not providing for your own family. Share. We will likely see a reconfiguration of congregational ministries during this pandemic. You are already doing so much to adapt and serve. Thank you. We don't have to know the destination to travel the journey well. Be kind to yourself. You, too live by grace.

And finally, a passage that has *always* made me uncomfortable because it challenges my presumed control. God continues to come into our ordinary, sheltered-in-place lives "even when steeples are falling."

**Matthew 6:24-34**“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Beloved you are.

Bishop Shelley Wickstrom