



Coronavirus Update: 24 March, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the great Physician of both body and soul, grace be unto you and peace!

Governor Laura Kelly of the State of Kansas yesterday ordered a 10-person limit on all gatherings. We don't know yet if there's a religious exemption, but our intention is, while we can, to comply with the spirit of the law, and not find wiggle room according to the letter. We pray that our government will not force us ultimately to "obey God rather than man" (Acts 5.29).

To that end and until further notice, we have entirely reconfigured our Divine Service offerings.

A PLAN FOR 10-PERSON DIVINE SERVICES

- Divine Service will last no longer than half an hour.
- Only 9 parishioners at once will be able to attend the Divine Service. Sign-up is offered either by calling church (354.7132) or using the SignUpGenius link on the webpage. All registrations for Divine Service you made prior to this communication have been voided by the Governor's order. Please re-visit SignUpGenius to make another reservation.
- When you sign up for a Divine Service, if you are signing up multiple people within your family, please indicate how many of them are communicant
- Two Divine Services will be held simultaneously in two separate spaces with two separate ventilation systems: one in the nave, one in the Courtyard. Ingress and egress for each of the simultaneously-running Divine Services will be separated, prioritizing the ingress/egress in the Courtyard for those whose mobility is limited.
- PLEASE OBSERVE THE PROPER ENTRY AND EXIT, BELOW, FOR THE DIVINE SERVICES:
 - Entry for the nave Divine Service will be through the NE narthex door (corner of 9th & Fillmore); egress will be through north / tower / office door.
 - Entry for the Courtyard Divine Service will be through the south / glass / Luther Hall doors; egress will be through south east door.

- A total of at least 20 Divine Service time slots may be offered per week, with two Divine Services per slot.

CANCELLATIONS

- Midweek Lenten services, including that on 25 March, have been canceled.
- Sunday School and Adult Bible Study have been canceled until further notice.
- Sound Words Academy has been canceled until further notice. See below for further information on Youth and Adult Catechesis.
- Kantorei, Rhythm of Faith, and Ecclesia Bells are canceled until further notice.

TRANSFORMATIONS

- Holy Week Services will observe the new half-hour format, but Divine Services on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and in the Octave of Easter (the 8 days from Easter Sunday till the next Sunday) will use the Gospel and hymns appropriate for those days. A schedule will be developed to accommodate as many faithful on those days as possible.

PRECAUTIONS

- The Sacrament of the Altar will be administered in individual glasses only, appropriately spaced in the tray to minimize inadvertent contact. No more than 9 glasses will be in each tray.
- The Sacrament of the Altar will be administered in vessels properly cleaned and sanitized prior to each use (silver vessels will be cleaned with vinegar; glasses are sanitized in our commercial dishwasher).
- That pastors shall wash their hands immediately prior to preparing the Sacrament on the altar with a concentration of no less than 70% alcohol.
- The offering will be gathered at the end of every Divine Service in an offering plate on a stand. The pastor will direct you to where you can find that.
- The pastors will not greet the gathered congregation after the Divine service, but will be happy to set appointments to meet with parishioners. Please call the church office.

VIDEO SERVICES

- As soon as possible, we will offer a weekly video and audio of the Divine Service. You will be notified via email and our website when that will be available. We plan to have that Divine Service accessible from the Sermons page, where you'll also be able to get a copy of the sermon, listen to the service (without video), in addition to watching the service (<https://www.stjohnlcmstopeka.org/worship/sermons/>).
- The Chief Hymn for the Feast or Sunday will be sung in its proper place. It will be sent out electronically, posted on the website, and mailed, upon request, several days before the Divine Service for which it is intended.
- The shortened ordinary will be made available on the website, through an email blast, and by contacting the church office for a hard copy.

PROVISIONS FOR YOUTH CATECHESIS AND ADULT CATECHESIS

- The pastors will examine electronic delivery.
- Examination of the confirmands will take place in gatherings of less than 10 people, and include at least one pastor and an elder.

- Confirmation and First Communion Divine Services will take place during the week of 2 May, to be arranged at the families' desires.
- Because of the new demands of the governor's order of 23 March, no catechesis for adults or youth will be held on 25 March, with every attempt to have things up and running by 1 April. Holy Week (excluded on earlier schedule) likely needs to be used as an instructional week.

FUNERALS, WEDDINGS, AND BAPTISMS

1. Baptism will be administered at church, in small private gatherings of no more than 10 people, outside of any services of the church.
2. Small, private committal services at the graveside will be held immediately, and the pastors and survivors will plan a church funeral/memorial service that will take place once the restrictions have been lifted. Alternatively, very small, private family funerals may be requested, provided that no more than 10 people, including funeral home and church staff will be present.
3. Weddings will be adjusted either in number of total in attendance, including the pastor, to 10, or in date by the mutual consent of the wedding couple and the pastor assigned the wedding. One wedding has already been postponed by 2.5 months.

REMAIN INFORMED

Check our [Coronavirus page](#) frequently (stjohnlcmstopeka.org > + **Coronavirus Updates**).

HOMEBOUND VISITATION

Presently most of the nursing facilities in our community are shut down due to COVID-19. The pastors will be reaching out to all the homebound *not* in nursing facilities in the next weeks with the recommendation out of concern for the health of this particularly vulnerable population that we not come to visit, though we will let everyone know we're willing to come if they'd like us to. Of course, for those for whom death is imminent it is our plan to be with them provided we are granted access to them.

FROM GOD'S WORD: WHY WE'RE DOING WHAT WE'RE DOING

Our gracious Lord promises us that nothing in all creation—neither death nor life, nor angels nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth—will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. This firm promise stands not on vain, imagined wishes, but upon the *cardinal fact* of history, that God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up *for us all*. As certain as the incarnation, nativity, crucifixion, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus are, so certain are God's enduring love, providence, and care toward you (for your own devotional use, read Romans 8:31-39 together with Psalm 91).

Confident in our gracious God, no matter what circumstances we face, whether good times or bad, we continue in our daily lives to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light by living in love toward our neighbor and in faithfulness to our God.

As the elders and elected leadership of St. John's considered our path forward under our new circumstances, they applied three criteria to every decision taken.

- The 3rd Commandment—does our decision foster the piety of our congregation in gathering around God's Word and Sacrament, the very means by which the Lord calls us to the faith and keeps us in it?
- The 4th Commandment—does our decision obey the authorities whom God Himself has appointed?
- The 5th Commandment—does our decision protect life and the physical well-being of our neighbor and take reasonable precaution to minimize and mitigate harm?

In accord with those criteria, the elders and elected leadership have adopted the following extraordinary and temporary measures with a commitment fully to return to our normal, long-standing pattern of congregational life once the restrictions of the executive order have been lifted and the danger of COVID-19 has subsided. Their decisions have an impact on fellowship and educational gatherings in our congregation, as well as upon the Divine Service and midweek services. Please also bear in mind that as much we'd all love stability right now, things are changing on nearly a daily basis (though our Lord Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow!). We promise to keep you updated as best we can on how those changes affect St. John's.

PIETY AND LOVE TOWARD NEIGHBOR

Even as we have adopted the measures below, we ask each of you to take personal responsibility for your own piety under the 3rd Commandment as well as for your own love toward neighbor under the 4th and 5th Commandments.

If you have a reasonable suspicion that you may spread the virus or fear that you may contract it by attending church, please remain home.

The Sabbath was made *for man*, not *man* for the *Sabbath* (Mark 2.27). That means that slavish adherence to the 3rd Commandment without love for neighbor violates the spirit of the Law; it also means that slavish adherence to the 3rd Commandment that places your own life in danger also violates the spirit of the Law. You can always catch the Divine Service if you're unable to be present at:

<https://www.stjohnlcmstopeka.org/worship/sermons/>.

THE LORD'S ONGOING WORK

If not even the gates of hell can prevail against Christ's Church, neither can COVID-19. During these extraordinary times, the precious work of your congregation continues, and your support of that work with your prayers, your time, your talents, and your treasures is still dearly needed—perhaps even more so. If you can't make it to church to give your offering to the support of the Lord's work in this place, please consider mailing in your offering or using our [online giving platform](#) on the St. John's website (stjohnlcmstopeka.org > **Online Donations button**).

ST. JOHN'S ON-GOING VIGILANCE

The Board of Elders and President, Vice President and Secretary will meet in person at 5:15 PM every Monday to go over the current situation unless the restrictions are lifted and the danger passed.

"For I am certain that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8.38-39)

For more information from The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, check out the [COVID-19 resource page](#) at lcms.org.