



## Coronavirus Update: 8 April 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ at St. John's,

This week we write again with great encouragement. For this week, Holy Week, strange as it is, we are taken into the great mystery of the Holy Christian Faith: that deathless God was made man in order to suffer, die, and rise so that mortal men might have immortality. What beautiful news that is to us who now more than ever have those words of Luther's great funeral hymn ringing in our ears, "Though in midst of life we be, snares of death surround us. Where shall we for succor flee? Who, oh who, can help us? Thou only canst, Lord Jesus!"

Jesus Christ has suffered, died, and risen, never to die again. For you. Victory over the grave, eternal life, and heaven belong to you through faith in Him. There's nothing confusing about that. May the good Lord bless your faithful meditation on Christ's suffering, death, and glorious resurrection.

But there is great confusion in our city and state—about just what the governor has ordered churches, and how the churches should conform to the governor's order. As we've been attempting to do, we'd like to bring clarity to that once more, along with the Lord's perspective on all of this.

The Governor's latest order goes into effect at 12:01 p.m. today (8 April 2020). It removes the former carte-blanche religious exemption and now imposes upon churches the same restrictions which we have observed at St. John's the last two weeks. Specifically, Governor Kelly's order reads: "With regard to churches or other religious services or activities, this order prohibits gatherings of more than ten congregants or parishioners in the same building or confined or enclosed space. However, the number of individuals—such as preachers, lay readers, choir or musical performers, or liturgists—conducting or performing a religious service may exceed ten as long as those individuals follow appropriate safety protocols, including maintaining a six-foot distance between individuals and following other directives regarding social distancing, hygiene, and other efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19." (Executive Order No. 20-18, 1.c.)

At the start of this entire thing, the St. John's leadership recognized that three commandments of the Lord applied to our decision making in this situation:

- The 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment—does our decision obey the authorities whom God Himself has appointed?
- The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment—does our decision protect life and the physical well-being of our neighbor and take reasonable precaution to minimize and mitigate harm?

To date, by God's grace, we have been able to maintain face-to-face Divine Services that comply with the Governor's orders and use CDC-recommended precautions to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Our Holy Week services will continue to do the same.

Please receive this latest communication as an invitation to take advantage of one of the many at-church and at-home resources below.

## IN-PERSON SERVICES

Services in groups of no more than 9 faithful at a time + the pastor take place in the courtyard and the nave.

We ask the congregation to sign up to attend those services so that we can assure our brothers and sisters in Christ of gatherings of 10 or less. Register your attendance at [stjohnlcmstopeka.org](http://stjohnlcmstopeka.org) > [SignUpGenius](#) (upper right of the homepage). If you register for yourself *and an additional person* please make sure to give the total number in your party. You can also call us during normal business hours (M-Th, 8 AM – 5 PM) at 354.7132. *Please also indicate the number of communicants in your party.*

We encourage those with mobility issues to select a Courtyard Divine Service so that you can enter and exit at grade.

On our [SignUpGenius](#) we're attempting to make available the number of services we think we'll need. As those fill up, we will be adding additional ones. If you attempt to sign up for a service and are unable to do so, please let us know at church ([secretary@stjlcms.org](mailto:secretary@stjlcms.org) or 354.7132) and we'll be glad to "release" more services.

**Compelled by love for neighbor, 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.**

## TRIDUUM THROUGH EASTER TUESDAY

**Maunder Thursday.** We are making 14 Divine Services initially available on Maundy Thursday, starting as early as 8:30 a.m. and running through the latest start at 7:45 p.m. The altar will be stripped in the 4:45 p.m. courtyard Divine Service and in the 7:45 nave Divine Service.

**Good Friday.** There will also be an initial 14 Good Friday Offices (non-sacramental) on Good Friday. They start at 8:30 a.m. and run through the latest start at 7:45.

**Vigil of Easter.** Unfortunately, we will not be able to hold the Vigil this year. We look forward to resuming it with great attendance in 2021, *deo volente*.

**Easter Sunday.** 19 Easter Sunday Divine Services are offered starting as early as 7:00 a.m. and running through the latest start of 1:45 p.m. Due to the physical demands these will place on the pastors and musicians and the organizational demands they'll place on the altar guild, additional Easter Divine Services will be opened, based upon demand, on Easter Monday, 13 April, and Easter Tuesday, 14 April.

## "REGULAR" SCHEDULE—starts Sunday, 19 April

**Sunday Divine Service.** There will be up to 15 Divine Services each Sunday (depending on who's preaching at Christ), but no fewer than 13. And additional 14 Divine Services using the Gospel, sermon, and hymn from that Sunday will be held early morning and in the evening on Mondays and mid-day on Tuesdays. Again, if we discover a great deal of pressure on those services, we will open others up.

**Private Communion.** The pastors are willing to commune members who'd like to receive the Lord's Body and Blood either at their home or here at church but are concerned about attending the 10-person Divine Services. These private communions will last no more than 10 minutes.

## HOME RESOURCES

### ST. JOHN'S VIDEO SERVICES

For the duration of the pandemic, recordings of all "new" Divine Services and Offices will be mounted on the web on our Sermons page ([stjohnlcmstopeka.org](http://stjohnlcmstopeka.org) > Worship > Sermons = <https://www.stjohnlcmstopeka.org/worship/sermons/>). We make every effort to mount them as soon as possible. Please be patient with us as we edit them to make them as useful as possible and upload them to our YouTube channel. We hope to have the Maundy Thursday Divine Service and the Good Friday Office up as soon as possible. We continue to work to improve the quality of those recordings.

## FACEBOOK

We're also publishing daily, during the work week, a photo of one of our many beautiful stained glass windows in the nave, all of which themselves preach the faith, along with a short collect. If you haven't visited our FB site for a while, check them out, and join your prayers with your brothers' and sisters' in Christ:

<https://www.facebook.com/stjohnstopeka/>.

## HOME DEVOTIONS

On our [COVID-19](#) page you can find a [resource](#) we put together a few weeks ago for home devotions. We hope you'll make use of it. We also recognize that COVID-19 showed up in Shawnee County just as we were putting out the next installment of *Portals of Prayer* for April – June. If you're homebound for whatever reason and would like a copy, please contact us at the office and we'll send one your way.

## GENERAL

As we strive to continue to provide pastoral care for the congregation through the ongoing gathering of the faithful around the Word preached and the Sacraments administered, as well as through our recommended home resources, we pray that you will all be kept firm and steadfast in the Faith and at last come to everlasting life. During this stressful and perilous time, keep your brothers and sisters in Christ in your prayers, along with our congregation, community, and the world. May the good Lord strengthen the faithful and bring those in error and unbelief to repentance and faith. Amen!

---

*"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](http://lcms.org).