



Coronavirus Update: 14 April 2021

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

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

REDUCED-DISTANCE SEATING AT 11:00 AM

Many of you by now have noticed the cap on the 11:00 a.m. Divine Service this coming Sunday is set at 150 on SignUpGenius.

The St. John's Coronavirus Task Force met prior to Easter to begin taking into account the recent slackening of Shawnee County orders. Pursuant to the county dropping the significant social distancing requirements heretofore in place, the Task Force established the 11:00 a.m. Divine Service as a "reduced social distancing" Divine Service. This means the capacity can be higher, and those attending that Divine Service may sit where they'd like and maintain the distance they're comfortable with. The 11:00 a.m. Divine Service will continue like this till we take further steps.

REINTRODUCTION OF THE CHALICE

Starting Sunday, 18 April, we will be offering both the individual glasses and the chalice for communion at all Sunday and festival Divine Services, except on Mondays. We continue to wipe the lip of the chalice with a purificator soaked in Everclear between each administration of the chalice.

MOVING FORWARD

Not only did the Shawnee County commissioners drop social distancing requirements, they also made masking an option left up to individuals and organizations. As of this writing, the Coronavirus Task Force at St. John's has made no adjustments to St. John's mask policy: we ask, for the time being, that you continue to wear them at the Divine Service, Bible Study, etc.

That said, your pastors are working closely with the pastors of the other Topeka LCMS congregations to forge a common path "out of Covid." Together we are establishing goals for our congregations to achieve by certain dates. For example, it was a goal of the pastors to begin administering the chalice and to have at least one Divine Service per week on or before 18 April.

Just yesterday the LCMS pastors gathered again to establish goals for our congregations to achieve by 30 May. The St. John's pastors will meet with the Coronavirus Task Force soon to work out the details for our congregation. We hope shortly thereafter to be able to inform you of those plans.

For all the optimism of this moment, we also realize that we live in a fraught time. *Please read on.*

CHRIST IS NOT DIVIDED

A DEVOTIONAL REFLECTION ON THE LIFE IN CHRIST IN A DISCORDANT WORLD

Maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. —Ephesians 4:3

The difficulty of last March and April—and then the summer!—was logistical. How in the world could we do each of the following simultaneously?

- (a) Maintain the fullness of God's gifts publicly administered in our congregation (3rd Commandment)
- (b) Obey the governing authorities (4th Commandment)
- (c) Protect the life and health of our neighbor (5th Commandment)

Today the difficulty is different. The distancing and mask orders have been relaxed and effectively done away with in Shawnee County. In our highly charged political environment everyone has an opinion on what is the right thing to do; more frequently than not these opinions are at odds with one another—*even in the church.*

But Christ is not divided (1 Corinthians 1:13). The worst thing that could happen at St. John's in the next months would not be wearing masks through December or getting rid of them tomorrow. The worst that could happen would be for the political division in our country to find a happy home in our midst; for dissension and rivalry to be sown between brothers and sisters in Christ; and for the Body of Christ in this place to become divided.

So we ask your indulgence and trust. It may seem evident to you that requiring all to mask is foolish, useless, and contrary to your rights as an American. Your brother in Christ sees it differently. It may seem evident to you that more protections are better than fewer and that expert guidance trumps American individualism. Your sister in Christ hasn't arrived at the same conclusion.

What should be evident to everyone, however, is that somehow and at some time we have to go from extraordinary measures for extraordinary times to the ordinary things we do in ordinary times. As we communicated to you from the start, the measures adopted were never meant to be permanent, but for the moment. We also didn't pretend expertise and adopt a stricter or less stringent protocol than was mandated. We followed government orders into the lockdown. Now it's time to follow them out.

As we relax coronavirus polices at St. John's we know that we will not please everyone at each step. Even so, may it please everyone to extend charity to the leadership and your own brothers and sisters in Christ and not to allow such things to become a source of division in the congregation—much less to cause them to remove themselves from Christ by removing themselves from His Word and Sacraments.

Why? Three reasons.

- (1) Though all humanity be divided, Christ is not (1 Corinthians 1:13). The Body of Christ is created by Baptism, not by race, sex, age, social class, language, ideology, or political persuasion. We differ greatly in so many ways—but we are one in our Baptism into Christ.
- (2) Our American freedoms are nothing if we are not also free from sin, the curse of the Law, death, grave, and hell (Mark 8:36). Satan has a wonderful way of taking good things (like American freedoms) and turning them into idols, thereby enslaving us to himself. Christ alone sets truly free (Galatians 3:13).
- (3) All that masks and social-distancing can do is *prolong* life; they can't reverse death—only Christ can. Severing oneself from Christ means living a living death. Only Christ gives the life that, though we die, yet shall we live. Indeed, whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die (John 11:25-26).

During this confusing and fraught time, one thing remains constant: Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). May we cling to Him alone through holy Word and blessed Sacrament, that the good work He began in us in our ... Baptism! ... may be brought to completion in the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.