



## Coronavirus Update: 8 June 2020

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

This coming Sunday is an old favorite. The Gospel, Luke 16:19-31, sets the tone for the entire Trinity Season. In it both Lazarus and an unnamed rich man die. Lazarus is taken to heaven; the rich man suffers in the place of torment for unbelievers. When the rich man asks Father Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn the rich man's brothers about the dangers of unbelief, Abraham responds, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them!" That's the whole Christian life, really—receiving the Lord's gifts, His Word and His Word connected to the Sacraments. Responding to that Gospel, the hymn of the day sings, "Lord, Thee I love with all my heart; I pray Thee ne'er from me depart, / With tender mercy cheer me. / Earth has no pleasure I would share, / Yea, heav'n itself were void and bare / If Thou, Lord, wert not near me." This gives expression to the Christian heart's thirst and desire for Christ and His Word. May we as a congregation take to heart Abraham's words to the rich man—we, too, have Moses and the prophets, not to mention the Evangelists and Apostles! May those words of the hymn of the day be our constant prayer. And may our own lives and piety be shaped by the weekly rhythm of receiving the Lord's gifts in His house and then living lives of love toward neighbor, especially now as the coronavirus restrictions are being lifted.

### IN-PERSON SERVICES

Services in groups of not more than 45 faithful + church workers are offered beginning 14 June, with some services capped as low as 15 faithful.

### NEW DIVINE SERVICE SCHEDULE STARTS 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, 14 JUNE

Our congregation's leadership continues to operate according to the Governor's recommendations for "large gatherings" in her *Ad astra* plan on a phase by phase basis. The Shawnee County Health Department on Friday announced moving to "Phase 3"—a cap of 45, excluding church workers, for "large gatherings." As many of you are already aware, beginning this Sunday, 14 June, the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Trinity, we'll be offering three 45-person Divine Services in the nave, and two (up to three) 40-person Divine Services in the courtyard:

7:45—nave—45-person cap ("white pews": 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> rows)

8:30—courtyard—40-person cap

9:15—nave—45-person cap ("yellow pews": 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> rows)

10:00—courtyard—40-person cap

10:45—nave—45-person cap ("blue pews": 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> rows)

[11:30—courtyard—40-person cap; opened as needed]

We'll also continue to offer a noon and 5:15 p.m. Monday Divine Service in the courtyard capped at 15 for those who'd be more comfortable in that setting. In total we'll be able to accommodate 285 faithful over a weekend of Divine Services. You may sign up for any of these Divine Services either by accessing our [SignUpGenius](#) (St. John's homepage → SignUpGenius button) or by calling the church office and requesting to be added to the roster for one of those services. *Please be sure to select the quantity of those in your party. This is critical for us as we monitor attendance to maintain proper social distancing.*

## **ENTRY AND EXIT**

If you are signed up to attend a nave service, please enter by any of the nave doors—either the center narthex doors or the northeast narthex door. If you are signed up to attend a courtyard service, you may enter either by the southeast wooden doors into the breezeway or by the south glass doors next to Luther Hall. For those attending in the courtyard, we ask that you be prepared to help sanitize chairs after the service you attend.

## **PRIVATE COMMUNION**

For those desiring the Sacrament but still feeling uncomfortable in either setting, please receive this as an invitation to call us at church to set up a private communion either at home or at church.

## **CONTINUING PRECAUTIONS**

We want to assure everyone that we take your safety very seriously. The Altar Guild continues to use the sanitation practices in preparing the Sacrament that we adopted at the start of this. The pastors continue to wash their hands just prior to the administration of the Sacrament in a 70%+ alcohol concentration. Communion trays hold only 10 well-spaced glasses. The glasses are disposed of in a basket after use, not back into the trays. The host may be received only in the hand, not in the mouth. Seating in both nave and courtyard observes due social distancing. Without sanitation, the virus can last on surfaces up to 72 hours. To protect the congregation, seats in the nave that have been occupied will not be occupied for another week (hence the elaborate color-and-time coordinated seating), while in the courtyard all seats are wiped down with Clorox wipes between uses. In the nave, families larger than three people may, of course, occupy one pew. But we will maintain a six-foot distance between families. Social distancing is observed also during the distribution of the Sacrament, and ushers will be trained to facilitate both this as well as care in ingress and egress from each Divine Service.

All of these precautions are in place due to commitments made early on by our congregation's leadership, drawing our guidance from the Holy Scriptures:

- 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 state and county orders and use CDC-recommended precautions to mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus, and we pray that the precautions we've adopted based upon the recommendation of the authorities will continue to serve that end well.

## PIETY AND LOVE TOWARD NEIGHBOR

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

## HOME RESOURCES

### St. JOHN'S VIDEO SERVICES

For the duration of the pandemic, recordings of the Divine Service will be mounted on the web on our Sermons page ([stjohnlcmstopeka.org](http://stjohnlcmstopeka.org) > [Worship](#) > [Sermons](#)). Sunday Divine Services are generally available by early afternoon. This depends on the time it takes to edit, download, connect, etc. We continue to work to improve the quality of those recordings.

### HOME DEVOTIONS

On our [Coronavirus Updates page](#) you can find a resource we put together a few weeks ago for home devotions. We hope you'll make use of it. The next installment of *Portals of Prayer* for July—September is now available, as well. 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!

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*"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 [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic Resources](#) at [lcms.org](http://lcms.org).