



Coronavirus Update: 28 December 2020

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

Please take a moment to read this Coronavirus Update letter in its entirety and with care.

A BRIEF DEVOTION

In the middle of the night 2,000 years ago there was a sudden burst of light—heavenly light. Imagine going from pitch black with a few twinkling stars to the kind of light that leaves no shadows. That's what it was like. Scary.

But the first words of the angel were, "Fear not." For this light didn't come with danger, but salvation. And the message of the angels wasn't a threat, but the gracious fulfillment of a divine promise—not something dreadful but joyful.

The joy? That that night in Bethlehem, the city of David, the sin-forgiving, death-destroying, life-giving Savior of the world had been born. God's goodness and grace wasn't just a notion—it was real. You could touch it. It was a little Baby. God's salvation didn't have to be mentally cobbled together from the circumstances of life like some exercise in wish fulfillment, it lay in a manger. God's defeat of death wasn't a "Well, let's see" proposition, but with His divine life He had now touched and enlivened dying human flesh.

In confidence and faith in a God who does *that*, the shepherds left the very flocks who fed them, the very sheep whose wool put bread on their tables, and they went—to Bethlehem ("House of Bread"), where lay the very Bread of Life. For what was life without Him who is the Life? What their course without Him who is the Way? What their daily bread without Him who is the Bread from heaven? What their coming in and going out without Him who is the Door? And what the truths they lived by without Him who is the very Truth?

As we enter this new calendar year of God's grace, may we—all of us—with the shepherds cast aside all fear. Many courses are set before us. Many truths seek our attention. Living has received new value, and we all have renewed joy in pleasures as simple as eating. But they are nothing without Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. In their way is fear, not boldness and confidence; dread, and not the joy the Lord has brought to the world in the birth of His Son.

May God's perfect love toward you cast out all your fears; and may you, like the shepherds, with all boldness and confidence come to where He has promised to meet you—in His holy Word and Blessed Sacraments.

Amen.

NEW DIVINE SERVICE SCHEDULE BEGINNING THE 1ST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY, 10 JANUARY 2021

Beginning 10 January 2021, Sunday/Monday schedule will be as follows:

8:00 a.m.-8:45/8:50—DS in nave, cap of 90

9:00 a.m.-9:45/9:50—DS in nave, cap of 90

10:00 a.m. -10:45/10:50—SS and Bible classes in normal C-19 venues

11:00 a.m.-11:45/11:50—DS in nave, cap of 90

Monday, 12:00 noon—DS in courtyard, cap of 20

SignUpGenius has been modified to reflect this change in schedule.

The Shawnee County regulations pertinent to our Divine Services say that we must observe a capacity of 50% or 100 people, whichever is lower, while maintaining masking and social distancing (6' between family units with no interruption for greater than 10 minutes). In raw numbers, 50% capacity in the nave is over 200 people. The 90-faithful Divine Services we're planning is well below that number, and even below the absolute cap of 100. So by the book our plan to have 90 faithful in each Divine Service is within the requirements of the mandate.

The question we've devoted our time to answering is whether we can *safely* accommodate those 90. We can.

We have noticed that our present cap leaves two to three pews unoccupied and the seating in numerous other pews unmaximized; we have also not been using the bell choir loft for seating.

Starting on 10 January, we'll offer seating in the bell choir loft. After each Divine Service the surfaces will be sanitized. Hymnbooks used in one Divine Service will not be used in the remaining ones scheduled for that day. Having been in there numerous times to check it out it strikes me as highly desirable real estate. Our hope is that families of 4 or more will choose to sit there, which will allow us to seat 16 or more people in that space. Remember to observe social distancing between family units.

In the nave proper we'll make a concerted effort between your own good judgment and the guidance of the ushers to use the pews as efficiently as possible. I'm enclosing a diagram that will help you as you think about this.

Least Preferable	Seats 3	Single-Single-Single	X				X				X
	Seats 3	Single-Couple	X								X X
	Seats 3	Couple-Single	X X								X
	Seats 4	Couple-Couple	X X								X X
	Seats 4	Threesome-Single	X X X								X
	Seats 4	Single-Threesome	X								X X X
	Seats 5	Threesome-Couple	X X X								X X
	Seats up to 9	Family of Four or More (Pews seat up to 8 or 9 if there are children)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Most Preferable											

Every pew should have minimally three people in it evenly spaced. It's helpful, for example, if you come to church alone, to sit in a pew already occupied by another single, another two singles, another couple, or even a family of three—just make sure to observe social distancing. What's not helpful is when, say, a couple passes up on a pew with another couple in it and takes their own. That effectively eliminates one pew as possible seating for a family of 5. If that happens just a few times in every Divine Service, real problems begin. Please

be aware that in the first few weeks of this new schedule the ushers have been asked to actually guide you to a seat.

To avoid cross-contamination, those who attend at 8:00 a.m. will be ushered out through the archway near the office and out the tower door. This will allow those coming to 9:00 a.m. Divine Service to enter through the narthex. Even if the exit changes, the entry to the nave will remain consistent—through the narthex. The 10-15 minute gap between Divine Services will ensure that traffic in the narthex will be one-way only. Although winter is (sort of) setting in, conversations with your brothers and sisters in Christ are best conducted outside.

The Lord has blessed our efforts to maintain the preaching of His Word (3rd Commandment), obey the governing authorities (4th Commandment), and protect our neighbors' bodily life (5th Commandment) with the result that we have had no spread of the virus within our congregation due to our gatherings. Thankful for the Lord's blessing, we continue to observe all the safety precautions that have helped us maintain a vigorous ministry of Word and Sacrament: The pastors and communion assistants remain masked and wash their hands in 70%+ alcohol prior to administering the Sacrament; approach to and recession from communion is carefully monitored by the ushers to maintain social distancing; the glass and antiseptic sterling silver communion ware is sanitized with care between each use; the faithful are masked and observe social distancing; and all surfaces that will be reused within 72 hours are regularly sanitized after each use.

OUR PRAYERS

Pray that the Lord would continue to bless us in this way—Lord, have mercy!

Pray also

that the Lord through the Word of life would overcome the fears of those afraid of death and give confidence to all our brothers and sisters in Christ in His gracious and providential care—Lord, have mercy!

that the Lord would comfort our brothers and sisters in Christ through their personal devotions whose situation prevents them from attending the services of His house or receiving His gifts through visits by the pastors—Lord, have mercy!

that all affected by the pandemic would be brought to repentance and to seek mercy from the Lord—Lord, have mercy!

that, having brought about through the pandemic what He has desired to bring about, our heavenly Father would soon deliver us from this plague—Lord, have mercy!

Amen, amen. Yes, yes, it shall be so!