



# St. John's

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## Ev. Lutheran Church

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MAY 2020

### THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE DIGITIZATION OF THE CHURCH

by Fr. Alexey Streltsov

In 2020 A.D., the Church of God throughout all the world encountered a special trial that especially fell in the time of Lent, and now it looks like it will continue also through the Easter season, and perhaps beyond. The rapidly growing threat of a dangerous viral contagion (or a declaration of such threat) has put the usual conduct of regular church services in jeopardy.

Practically every day brings additional news. We do not know what will happen tomorrow. In this context, the churches are likely to react ad hoc by making decisions spontaneously, or at least without serious preliminary reflection.

What do we do in the case that it's no longer possible to conduct services, or if most people can't get to them because of unforeseen circumstances even if the services do continue? In many cases, a workaround has been implemented by means of a temporary transfer of services to a digital format. A few people are trying to conduct sacraments over the Internet. Such cases, though rare and extreme, have become widely discussed and, as a rule, are getting a very negative reaction.

Are such decisions concerning the temporary "digitalization" of the Church correct? It depends on how one understands the Church herself, that is, what the Church actually is. According to the universally recognized definition of the Church among Lutherans (*Augsburg Confession 7*), the Church is the gathering of the faithful, among whom the Word of God is preached purely and the Holy Sacraments are distributed rightly, according to the ordinances of God's Word. This gathering happens in a specific location where people are physically present in one and the same place.

Specific place matters. Before the Incarnation, the special place of God's presence was Israel, and within Israel: Jerusalem, and then the Temple, within which there was the Holy place, and, finally, the Holy of Holies, where as it was proclaimed in divine revelation that Yahweh (the Lord) was present between the horns of the altar. Today, there is no single place in the geographical sense for the faithful to receive the grace of God. Nevertheless, in every case, it is a particular and concrete place where the Word is pronounced and the Sacraments are distributed.

So what happens when Church and the church gathering are transferred to a digital mode? At a minimum, there is a loss of significance of particularity of place in people's perception, a loss of the concreteness of liturgical space, and a detriment of understanding by the faithful of the way of God's presence in the world.

In the early Church, Gnostics and Manichaeans claimed the presence of a "divine spark" within them that made services unnecessary. Gnostics ridiculed the Eucharist. In the early Medieval times, Neoplatonism invited man to ascend to God in his soul instead of meeting Him in the means of salvation as the incarnate God who came to earth and bound Himself to His presence in particular places for the salvation of the people, and in excesses of monastic asceticism monks fled to the desert alone to sense the divine presence in their lives by way of strict spiritual discipline. Later, during the Reformation Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli held that for heavenly things happen in the absence of any earthly representation, and earthly things have no inherent significance. "The flesh is of no help at all." Luther considered this "spiritualistic" teaching of Zwingli to be the fruit of the devil.

Today's temptation comes from the world of digital technology. When we disrupt liturgical space, when we deprive specific sacred place of its sacred nature, when we try to represent the Divine Service as a kind of theater or circus, or as a function that can be reduced to the sound vibrations of the air, or to a footage sequence, we consciously or unconsciously change our perception of what the Church is.

Now, to be sure, modern digital technology is a great blessing that the Church has at her disposal. However, is it used *along with* the traditional service, or *instead* of the traditional service? This is a very important question.

If it is impossible to conduct a service, then it cannot be done. One cannot perform something instead of a common liturgy and just call it "liturgy" anyway. If at least "two or three" cannot gather in one place, then Christ cannot be there in the sense in which He promised to be present in a Eucharistic gathering. So in this case, one cannot pretend that everything is (almost like) normal, and that it is possible by a slight adjustment to conduct services in a digital mode as though everything were just fine.

A digital service becomes a surrogate of the church service. A danger of such Internet services is that people would come up with a valid question: "Was it a viable option after all?" And if it were a fine opportunity to pursue, what would prevent anyone from continuing to do it in the future?

A number of areas of human activity are already being transferred, or will be transferred, whether fully or partially, into a digital mode. Perhaps the COVID-19 situation will serve as a trigger for these further changes. *The Church, however, cannot be subject to digitalization due to her non-digital nature.*

Rather, being bereft of an opportunity to attend regular church services, let us experience true spiritual hunger for the Divine Service, for the gathering of faithful brothers and sisters, where we might have a living connection with God through the gifts that God himself has appointed to be used in a particular place. God grant us to forsake false spiritual satiety and any sense that God owes something to us, and that the Church owes something to us! As a faithful bride to her Lord, the Church acts according to her calling. She can't simply stop being the Church. She can't act in an unchurchly way. That would be an obvious contradiction, an impossibility. God, however, promised not to leave His faithful. Even in the absence (temporary absence!) of church services, He will not leave the faithful!

If it's possible for you to move about, get in touch with your priest and request communion to be administered to you. He will come. You will get Word and Sacrament in a home-service format. If, for whatever reason, that's not possible, there will always be the prescribed readings according to the Church's calendar, as well as home prayers [see [sanctus.org](http://sanctus.org)]. You can also ask the priest to send a text of a sermon. The reading of such a sermon (whether privately or read aloud by the head of the household) would be instructive for the soul. If you are currently conducting readings of Scripture and joint prayers in the family setting, then you may keep on doing the same, perhaps, with some additions in view of the absence of the main services. If not, now is the time to learn such spiritual discipline and prayer practice!

This time of quarantine, this time of external limitations, may continue for a while. Perhaps, it will last longer than we hoped for. However, it will not last forever. And at first opportunity, the doors of the Church will be opened once again, and the priests will conduct services just as they were doing before!

*This piece, adapted here for length, was composed in Russian by Fr. Alexey Streltsov, with whom our congregation is eminently familiar through his many visits to us over the years, for his own situation—not very different from ours—in Novosibirsk. The English translation appears on [Gottesblog](http://Gottesblog).*

—The pastors and the elders

**Senior Pastor - Rev. J. S. Bruss, ext. 104**

**Associate Pastor – Rev. D. M. Kerns, ext. 101**

**Kantor - Bethany M. Johnson**

**TLS Teachers – Erin Grass, Josh Grass, Edith Kerns, Andrea Kosmicki**

## ASCENSION DAY SERVICE

Thursday, 21 May, 7 p.m.

The Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord is one of the five major festivals of the church year: Christmas, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, and the Holy Trinity. Christ's Ascension took place 40 days after His Resurrection. Do the math, and you quickly realize that Ascension Day *always falls on a Thursday*.

This year Ascension falls on Thursday, 21 May, and, God willing and restrictions have been sufficiently lifted, we will be celebrating it at a 7:00 p.m. Divine Service. As in past years we plan on special music and will have this Divine Service in the Courtyard at the "old" St. John's altar, with its painting of Christ ascending.

Mark your calendars now. We look forward to seeing you there.

### HYMN OF THE MONTH FOR MAY

LSB 556 "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice"

What is one thing that we all have in common? In order to answer this question, we must look at our human condition. We were all conceived and born in sin, and "we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment" (*Small Catechism*, Fifth Petition). Luther asks in the *Small Catechism*, *which are these [sins that we should confess]?* and he responds with a series of questions (*LSB* p. 326) in order for the reader to reflect on the sins that he has committed through his various vocations. Each of us can answer these questions with a resounding "yes."

Martin Luther wrote "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice" for it to be sung in a congregational setting in worship. Although it is written in the first person, it is not just a personal story of Luther's state of sin and his saving faith in Christ, but it is the story of every Christian, "one and all," who is born in sin and saved by Christ. Thus, this hymn is not just from an individual perspective but also from a collective one. It is to be sung by the congregation of sinners and saints who gather together in the same confession and praise.

The first stanza is an introduction that urges Christians to unite together in "heart and voice and holy rapture singing" in order to proclaim God's victory over sin, death, and the devil. Stanzas 2 and 3 describe the sinner's condition – his birth in original sin, his life possessed and tormented by sin, and his despair over the inability to save himself. Stanzas 4-6 describe God's salvific mercy to us poor sinners. God, our Father, had mercy on us "before the world's foundation" by giving us His dearest treasure, His Son, to set us free from all "sin and sorrow." This Word became flesh and was "born of virgin mother" in order to suffer and die on the cross and "lead the devil captive."

The center of the entire hymn, stanza 7, paints a beautiful picture of the joyous exchange we have with Christ. We are the Bride, and He is the Bridegroom. What is His is ours, too. In Christ we are made righteous, and the "foe shall not divide us." The faith given to us in Christ receives the benefits from the cross, as stanza 8 puts it: "all this I suffer for your good; Be steadfast and believing." We receive the life that Christ accomplished for us when He defeated death in victory.

Stanzas 9 and 10 point us to what is to come in the liturgical calendar, when we remember Christ's ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit to deliver the means of grace to us. He will comfort us and guide us into the way of truth. We pray that we remain steadfast in the faith and guard against the devil and his worldly teachings, as he seeks to destroy the treasure we have in Christ. May we, together with the saints in heaven and on earth, boldly sing and "proclaim the wonders God has done, / How is right arm the vict'ry won. / What price our ransom cost Him!"

*Bethany M Johnson*

### TUNE IN TO THE LUTHERAN HOUR IN TOPEKA

The Lutheran Hour is broadcast here in Topeka on FM 92.5 KCTV on Sundays at 8:00 a.m.  
and on AM 580 WIBW on Sundays at 7:30 a.m.

## 2020 FLOWER CALENDAR

Please check the Flower Calendar on the bulletin board outside of the church offices. If you would like to provide flowers for a particular service this coming year, sign your name and phone number by the date of your choice. Upcoming available dates include: May 3 & 24, June 14, 21 & 28, July 5&26.

### NO SOUND WORDS ACADEMY

For Now Until Next Fall

### MONTHLY BREAKFAST IN MAY

There will be no monthly breakfast in May, as the usual Sunday is Mother's Day.  
The Lord's richest blessings to all mothers as they live out their vocations in Christ.

*We pray with the Lord willing, that come June, we will be joined once again for our monthly breakfast.*

### ADULT & YOUTH CATECHESIS—SEE 24 MARCH COVID-19 UPDATE

#### Adult Catechesis

**Adult Catechesis (8 January – 6 May 7:45-8:40 p.m.; Bruss)** The central teachings of the Christian faith. What does God say *about* me in His Law? What does God say *to* me in His Gospel? How am I to relate to God? And where can I find Christ and what He wants to give to me? This September through May course, with breaks scattered throughout those 8 months, weaves together the teachings of Scripture and *The Small Catechism* and shows how God encounters you in the Divine Service. For those interested in becoming members of St. John's or those seeking a refresher in the guts of Lutheran theology.

#### Youth Catechesis

**YCat I (Wednesdays – 6 May, 5:55-6:50 p.m.; Kinnett)** Typically for 6<sup>th</sup> graders. 1 year long.

**YCat II (Wednesdays – 6 May, 5:55-6:50 p.m.; Bruss & Kerns)** Typically for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. 2 years long.

### RHYTHM OF FAITH MUSIC CAMP

#### “God's Own Child I Gladly Say It”

**What?** This music camp is a week-long opportunity to use your voice and hands to sing and play music, while learning more about music technique, hymnody, theology, architecture, and more. This year's theme is Baptism. Snacks, games, and fun with friends included!

**Who?** Children entering grades K-8<sup>th</sup>. Whether you have been in choir or not, all are welcome!

**When?** Monday-Friday, June 15-19, 2020, 9:00 – 11:30 a.m. We will be singing in nursing homes on Friday, June 19.

**Where?** St. John's Ev. Lutheran Church (901 SW Fillmore, Topeka)

**What now?** Fill out the Google Form (<https://forms.gle/RugtXDELf6FsRMCq7>) by June 14 or contact Bethany Johnson for registration. Payments by cash or check can be made prior to or on the first day, June 15.

**Cost?** \$10 per child

**Questions?** Please contact Bethany Johnson at [bjohnson@stjlcms.org](mailto:bjohnson@stjlcms.org) or 469-400-4382.

### HELP SPREAD THE LIGHT OF GOD'S WORD TO THE VISION-IMPAIRED

Lutheran Braille Workers #31 (housed at St. John's) requests your prayerful consideration of giving of your time to a great cause of bring the word of our Lord to the vision impaired around the world. We do not meet every month only when we have a project to either put a book of the bible together or pull orders to send out. If you are interested in this great cause, please contact me Eileen Klumpp at 633-3870. Thank you.

## CAN ST. JOHN'S BECOME A ZERO-WASTE FACILITY IN 2020?

I know this has been posted in the last few newsletters, but we felt it was worth posting at least one more time.

Well - - maybe. Nobody's perfect.

Encouraging, though, are these member comments: "We set out on the curb more recycling than trash since we compost," and "I've been recycling since Shawnee County began the service," and "Your supermarket or Let's Help or Doorstep probably takes plastic shopping bags for recycling or reuse."

You can find online that Shawnee County landfill gladly accepts recyclables as they minimize the size of our dump, postponing the need for new landfill sites. The website claims that ALL numbered plastic containers, rinsed of food particles, are re-formed into new plastic items. Lids from all types of clean plastic containers go in the trash. Styrofoam is another issue - not recyclable locally and with 50 year+ decomposition rate, harmful to our God-given Earth. We are looking for answers.

Your comments are welcomed in person to Marilyn Bahr or on email: [mmarbahr@gmail.com](mailto:mmarbahr@gmail.com)

### 2020 WORSHIP CONFERENCE AT SJELC

Saturday, August 22

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Keynote speaker: Dr. Paul Grime,  
from Concordia Theological Seminary

More information to come!

### DOORSTEP NEWS

#### For May 2020

This Spring has been crazy! With the corona virus everything has changed! At this point, Doorstep isn't sure when the 'stay at home' orders will be lifted, and when they are, what life will look like at that point.

Doorstep has continued to provide services to our neighbors in need through phone intakes. They have been assisting with food, rent, utilities, prescriptions, dental and gas vouchers. They will continue to see more people in need as this continues and will try to get back to 'normal'. Doorstep appreciate those who have donated food and/or money during this time to help. The staff and food room volunteers have continued working to help our neighbors.

The **Doorstep Annual Banquet and Quilt Drawing** has been postponed for now. They hope to have this event later in the year as it is a celebration of their volunteers! Doorstep will still have their **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Summer Cash Bash**, but maybe in July this year to correspond with their Christmas in July collection.

Other dates to remember are:

Doorstep will have one food sale fundraiser this year! They plan to take orders for **Cinnamon Rolls and Tamales September 11 – 27**, with delivery the weekend of October 16. Mark your calendars to stock your freezers!

**Doorstep's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Neighbor Helping Neighbor Walk/5K Run is Sunday, October 4 at 2pm** at Lake Shawnee. Plan to join them in getting some exercise around the lake, and raise funds for Doorstep this October. The walk/run has been moved to a Sunday afternoon this year in the hopes of competing less with other events during that time of year. Mark your calendars!!

### ST. JOHN'S 150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

In 2024, SJELC will be celebrating our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but it's not too early to get started with compiling the congregational history. Like most congregations, we will most likely put together a memento history book or booklet, but we may also create a video history. Pastor Goetz has graciously agreed to be an honorary chairperson and we have three additional volunteers, but we could use additional people to sort through our history and develop our final products. Please contact the church office if you are interested in volunteering particularly if you have some video editing skills, writing or editing skills, photography skills, an interest in history or you just want to help in any way and be involved with this once in a lifetime opportunity.

## COLLEGE CARE TEAM

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church is wanting to initiate a "College Care Team". The purpose of this team is for our members to care both for our own students who are away at college as well as those who come to us through Washburn and KU. Some duties of the team members will be:

- sending a card on their birthday
- mailing a card on their baptism birthday
- sending a "finals care package"
- praying for them
- serving as a "home away from home" for those at Washburn and KU.

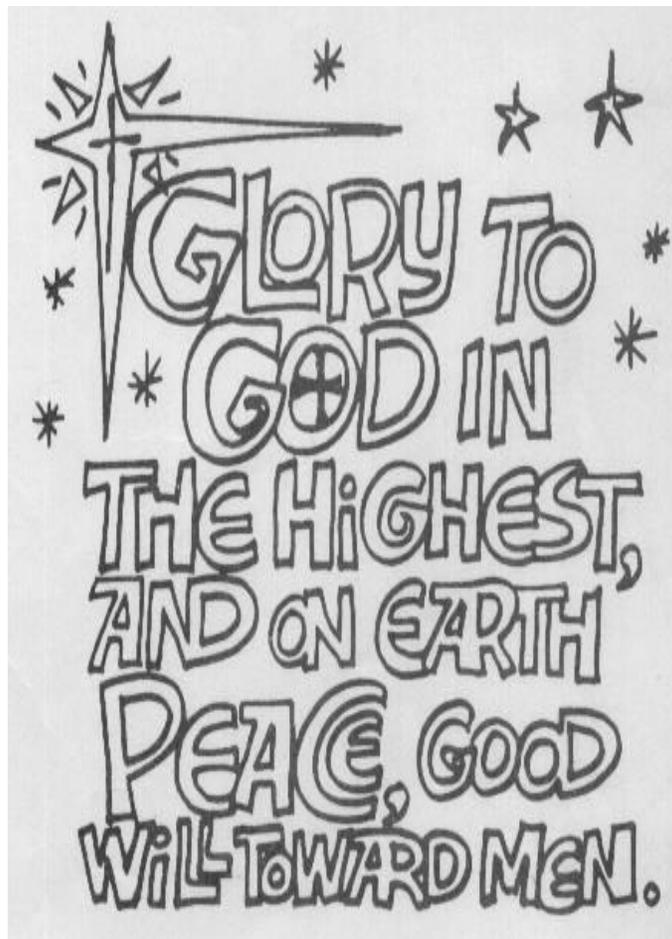
Please contact Pam Harms in the church office if interested.

## WOMEN'S LEAGUE NEWS

The Women's League is still collecting Best Choice labels. Ask you friends and family to save them for you. You may put them in the box in the labeled "stamps", along with any stamps you also collect. We recommended that St. John's members sign up on Dillon's Food Store's website for their community program, Circle Chairs may remind members of the Dillon's program to help St. John's or TLS.

## SUNDAY SCHOOL NEWS FOR MAY 2020

We are not there yet, but watch for email notices and mailings if restrictions do open-up more during the month May.





*Growing God's Children*  
for generations to come  
Topeka Lutheran School

## A PRAYER

Lord God, Heavenly Father, whose we are and whom we serve. Once again, we come before You to ask your help and blessings on Topeka Lutheran School so it may continue in educating our children about You and the forgiveness of sins that You freely offer us, your servants. Keep us safe in Your care.

All this we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

## TOTAL COMMITMENTS

### ***Capital Campaign***

Total Amount Committed: \$811,243

Total Pledged Gifts Received: \$401,783

### **Thrivent CHOICE Dollars**

Approximately \$8,000 was received January - March 2020.

This is an additional resource for the school's tuition assistance program. Thank you to our faithful participating members and to our ten new participants!

### ***Burglary Recovery Fund***

Total Special Gifts Received: \$9,144

## TLS UPDATES

- ◆ New TLS Billboard!  
Look out for the new TLS billboard at 17th & Topeka Blvd starting May 4.
- ◆ TLS Virtual Tour  
During this time teachers are constantly looking for ways to reach their students and the community. Look for a new virtual tour of TLS to keep recruitment efforts moving!
- ◆ ABC Summer countdown on social media Everyone is invited to join! Look to Instagram and Facebook.

**SUPPORT TOPEKA LUTHERAN TODAY! CLICK TO DONATE.**

**<https://www.topekalutheran.org/pledge-tracker>**

## TLS UPDATE: TEACHERS AND STAFF AT WORK

What an interesting time in our history. The Kansas Stay-At-Home order has quickly impacted how schools, teachers and administrators educate their students. Over the last month, the staff at Topeka Lutheran School has really stepped up to the challenge of online continuous learning!

Here are a few highlights.

- ◆ Each teacher is continually evolving teaching strategies to fit the needs of their students.
- ◆ Weekly input from parents and students.
- ◆ Daily social media posts to keep families inspired.
- ◆ The energy each staff member brings to the table, it keeps the kids motivated!
- ◆ Weekly and sometimes daily virtual meetups (zoom calls!) to keep kids and their classes connected. And finally, and most importantly, giving each other grace. This time is hard. We all need grace, especially our TLS students and staff. Please keep everyone in your prayers at this time.



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## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:19–20a)*  
So that we may obtain faith in Christ, God instituted the ministry of teaching the gospel and administering the sacraments. Through the gospel and sacraments, as through means, God gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when He wills, in those who hear the gospel. (*Augsburg Confession*, Article 5)