



# St. John's

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## Ev. Lutheran Church

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OCTOBER 2020

### TIME TO GET BACK TO CHURCH

The pandemic has been a shock to the system, for sure. At first there were so many unknowns. We weren't even certain how it spread. We had no idea of its mortality rate. The uncertainty, coupled with increasing infection rates, brought about successively higher levels of restrictions. Within just a couple weeks of its arrival—by Holy Week—we went from having two Divine Services on Sunday to accommodate everyone in the congregation to 20-some Divine Services with only 10 faithful apiece. People were afraid. Many sent just one person in the family to the store to buy weeks and weeks worth of food; doctors' and dentists' offices closed; physical therapy had the brakes slammed on; some workplaces shut down; commerce came to a screeching halt. But that was back in March and April.

Since then we've come to understand much more. Mask wearing has been shown to be one of the most effective means of arresting the spread. We keep our distance. Wash hands frequently. Maybe, like me, you carry around Handi-Wipes in your car console. And so the big-box home-oriented retail stores are busier than ever; the grocery stores are teeming with customers and haven't missed a beat. Walmart's doing banner business. The sports fields that were empty are now crowded—shoulder to shoulder. The schools that were closed are open, albeit sometimes in a “hybrid” fashion. Restaurants are seating customers and doing a healthy business, as are coffee shops, custard stands, and the like. People have returned to their workplaces. Doctors are seeing patients; crooked teeth are getting long overdue brace tightenings; surgeries are being performed; trips are being taken; the stock market—*mirabile dictu!*—is recovering.

While so much has come roaring back to life, the church continues to be winnowed (see Matthew 3:12). We're glad to report that St. John's attendance is much better than most. We're now averaging around 270 faithful over a weekend. When we subtract the faithful homebound (those in nursing homes, etc.) from our regular weekly attendance (the pastors visit them regularly—that's their “church”) in 2019 we averaged around 310 per week. So we're down only 12%. We can speak only of the churches we know in our area, but next best has around 70% attendance. Most remain at or below 50%. Some have shut and not yet reopened. Lord, have mercy!

But the 12% down is, believe me, cold comfort. The 270 I'm talking about is, well, pretty much the same 270 every week—and that out of roughly 700 in our congregation. In other words, we haven't seen *most* of our parishioners for over 6 months. Maybe even you. In fact—do the math—*probably* you.

Here's the tragedy of it all: the Lord who adopted you as His children in your Baptism did that in all earnestness. There He applied the death and resurrection of His Son to you—you!—, and its fruit. He gave a new life that lives by faith in the Son of God. This life sustains itself by claiming the gifts given in Baptism—the forgiveness, life, and salvation in His preached Word and in His Sacrament of the Altar.

During the height of the pandemic, you wouldn't have dared to say, “I'll not go to the grocery store so I won't die. I won't even *send* for my groceries.” But now, Christian friend, let's be honest: you outgrew your fear. You knew there were no excuses not to have food on your table. So you made yourself comfortable with and accommodated the pandemic in myriad ways so you could get your groceries and, well, you got on with life. You wear your mask. You don't blob together in crowds. But you do go to the soccer field. And to the pool. And to school. And to the doctor's office. You probably even go to Walmart.

What happens in winnowing is that the lighter-weight chaff gets blown away; the heavier seed falls on the winnowing floor—unscathed and steadfast. It is kept. Now make the spiritual switch. The baptized Christian who refuses to eat grows light. The wind blows. The chaff is carried off by the wind, disconnected from Christ because disconnected from Baptism and His Word and Supper. The most terrible thing to happen to a Christian is to be winnowed.

But now is the time of grace. The Lord meant it when He baptized you: He wanted to save you then. He wants to save you now. That's why, when you were confirmed, you promised before God, the pastor, and the whole congregation that you would "continue steadfast in this confession and Church and suffer all, *even death*, rather than fall away from it." You made that promise trusting not yourself and your doing to save you, but God and what He has done and continues to do for you in Christ alone.

*In Christ alone.*

But Christ doesn't work apart from means. He doesn't save apart from His Baptism. He doesn't save apart from His Word. He doesn't save apart from His Sacrament of the Altar. Instead, He uses those things like "food for a Christian." He fattens you up on them. So that when the winnowing fork of COVID—or whatever—tosses the harvested grain into the air the fattened seed falls on the winnowing floor, safe in the kingdom of God, while the chaff blows away.

Seven months is a long time to go without food. You're getting too light. It's time to get back to church.

*Pastor J. S. Bruss*

**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, Andrea Kosmicki**

### **ONGOING SAFETY PRECAUTIONS AT ST. JOHN'S**

- Congregants and pastors are masked
- Communion ware is sanitized after every use
- Pastors wash their hands in rubbing alcohol immediately before administering communion
- Seating observes social distancing
- Seating in nave is staggered from one Divine Service to the next to reduce surface contamination; seating in courtyard is sanitized between uses
- The hymnbook you use in the Divine Service you attend hasn't been touched for an entire week; COVID dies after 72 hours
- Courtyard uses only bulletins
- SignUpGenius and multiple Divine Services ensure attendance at each Divine Service at or below social-distancing maximum
- Divine Service is shortened
- Ingress and egress is expedited—no gathering in confined spaces

By God's providential grace, these measures have prevented a single instance of the spread of COVID at St. John's. God be praised!

### **SOUND WORDS ACADEMY AND YOUTH & ADULT CATECHESIS 2020-2021**

For the foreseeable future we'll have to continue to focus on just core functions—and that has an impact on Sound Words Academy. We are with regrets unable to have our regular dinner, Rhythm of Faith, Jr. Lutherans, the adult Bible study and Young Adults & College students (YACS / LCMS-U).

That said, we continue to use Wednesday evenings for Youth and Adult Catechesis. The schedule for Wednesday evenings begins at 5:55 and ends around 7:35. In the 5:55-6:50 period YCat I meets separately,

YCat II meets separately, and Adult Catechesis meets separately. From 7:00 till 7:35 catechesis for all catechumens (YCat I, YCat II, and Adult Catechesis) will meet together in the nave for Evening Prayer. Evening Prayer is also open to other members of the congregation who'd like to attend. With a six-foot-social-distancing capacity of 72, we hope that others in the congregation will look forward to this opportunity to gather with all the catechumens.

Catechesis and Evening Prayer began on Wednesday evening, 16 September, but it is still not too late to sign up for these sessions. Please enter by the south / aka glass / aka Luther Hall doors and arrive by 5:50 so that we can start classes on time.

We look forward to seeing catechumens at 5:50 and other congregation members at 7:00 for Evening Prayer.

## **HYMN OF THE MONTH FOR OCTOBER**

*By Bethany Johnson*

### **LSB 694 “Thee Will I Love My Strength, My Tower”**

In the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, we confess that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him. Our sinful condition is likened to being blind and living in darkness. Yet we as baptized Christians have been called out of the darkness of sin into God's marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9) of salvation and life. We cling to our Savior, Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world and who leads us through death's dark vale into the glories of eternal life.

The hymn, “Thee Will I Love My Strength, My Tower,” is a beautiful expression of the Christian's clinging love to our Savior. The title is likened to Psalm 18:1, “I love You, O Lord, my strength.” The author, John Scheffler (1624-77), also gave this title to the hymn: “it (the soul) promises to love Him until death.” John Scheffler became a Christian later in life and gave thanks to God that though he didn't find God, God found him.

This hymn, therefore, is the response of the Christian having been given faith. Stanza 1 looks to Christ as our strength and tower. The German word for strength includes other meanings such as power, fortitude, and towering height (hence, the title of this hymn). Psalm 61:3 refers to God as a “refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.” Other titles attributed to God in this stanza are “hope,” “joy,” and “Light divine,” in whom we place all trust “as long as life is mine” (until death).

Stanza 2 looks to Christ as our “best and truest friend” who sacrificed His life for us. This stanza contains a phrase similar to the title of another hymn, “Lord Thee I Love with All My Heart.” Only through faith in Christ can we love our Redeemer with our whole heart – the heart of faith that receives Christ and shares Christ's love to God and our neighbor. We thank God that He is our light, salvation, and “Sun from

heaven” (stanza 3). Through His lips His healing Word gives us life, and this healing comes to us by physical means through His Word and Sacrament. Stanza 4 is a prayer that we would resist temptation. We pray that God would “permit us nevermore to stray,” just as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, “and lead us not into temptation.” Because of sin, our feet stumble, and we are lost in the darkness of our sinful life. We give thanks to God that He fills our life with Himself, “O Radiance strong and bright,” through His Word.

While we pray that God would keep us humble in stanza 4, we continue that hope in stanza 5 by vowing that we would love God not for our own sake or for “high reward” but for Christ's sake, because He is our “crown of gladness” who saves us from the deepest depths of sadness, sin, and despair. We love God because He first loved us in His saving work on the cross. All glory be to Him alone, and all thanks and praise for the life that He has given to us in Christ!

## **ST. JOHN'S FINANCIAL REPORT THRU AUGUST 2020**

	<u>Budgeted</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Difference</u>
YTD Income	\$424,423	\$393,322*	-\$31,101
YTD Expense	\$434,808	\$424,784	-\$10,024
YTD Income-Expense (\$10,385)		(\$31,462)	

\*Does not include the Payroll Protection Loan the church received.

## **ST. JOHN'S WOMEN'S LEAGUE**

Due to COVID-19 and the uncertainty in the next few months, St. John's Women's League will not have our annual Christmas Bazaar Luncheon. This past year we were able to distribute over \$9,300.00 to charities and missions from Bazaar proceeds. We would like to be able to support some of these causes again this year even though we can't have a luncheon. We are asking our church members for monetary donations to our non-luncheon to help us fund these needs. If you bought tickets, provided a pie, or donated in the past, please consider contributing the cost of the pie or tickets to help us fund worthy causes. All contributions will be given to a charity or mission.

We also plan to have a smaller version of the Bazaar on Sunday, December 6 in Luther Hall. To help us prepare, we are asking our church members to let us know what craft or baked items they expect be able to bring for the bazaar. We will plan to solicit pre-orders for some items before the Bazaar. We thank you for your generous support in the past and for whatever contributions you can make this year. St. John's members will be able to either pick up pre-ordered items or shop after each worship service. We will have items available for sale. Watch for more details in the next newsletter and inserts in the bulletins.

### **ADULT AND HIGH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDIES: THE BIG BIBLE BRUSH UP**

We have just begun the Big Bible Brush-Up—so it's not too late to join in! Our goal is to take adults and high school students through every major story and event of the Bible, tracing the work of God from beginning to end. Using *A Bible History* published by Concordia Publishing House, Pr. Bruss and Pr. Kerns work through the essential episodes of the Old and New Testaments in chronological order. These stories are essential for knowing your Bible and allow one to, "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it"...as well as making those who come to these classes, "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (see 2 Timothy 3:24). Sunday School for all ages is held at the 10:00 a.m. time slot. The adult class meets in Luther Hall while High School students meet in Rm. 202.

Dennis Hintz continues his study of Romans, which meets in the elevator vestibule on the lowermost level.

If you have any questions, contact the church office or speak with Pastor Bruss, Pastor Kerns, or Dennis Hintz, or Mrs. Kosmicki.

### **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED**

Looking ahead, winter will be here before we know it. Ugh! (if you're Pr. Kerns) Hurray! (if you're Pr. Bruss) St. John's is looking for volunteers to help shovel snow on Sunday mornings if needed. If you would be willing to help contact Jeff LaCrone at the church office at 354-7132.

### **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: October 31; November 26; and December 27.

### **DOORSTEP NEWS**

Doorstep's Fall Fundraiser, Neighbor Helping Neighbor Walk/5K Fun Run has transitioned into a Virtual Event due to COVID-19. It is Sunday, October 4th at Lake Shawnee. Packet Pick-Up and Late Registration will be from 1:00pm - 2:30pm in Shelter Houses 1 & 2. Your packet will contain drinks, snacks, your event t-shirt and sponsor information. Chris Fisher from WIBW is our honorary celebrity starter. You can choose when and where to walk/run this year to be socially distanced from others. Please plan to join them on October 4th. If you haven't already signed up, you can register at [www.DoorstepTopeka.org](http://www.DoorstepTopeka.org) or at the Walk/Run on October 4th. \$30 per person, children 10 and under can walk for Free with a paid adult!

Of course, 2020 has become the year of COVID-19, and with that everyone is having to do things in new ways, or not at all. Doorstep will still have a Christmas Store, and they will still adopt families and individuals. This

year there will be changes, such as those they adopt will not shop for themselves. Doorstep will have volunteers do the shopping, and the families will pick up their item. There will be other changes as they figure this all out.

But, they will still need our help with donations of new winter clothing for all ages, blankets, other gift items, and money for food. As Doorstep gets more changes figured out, they will start to get volunteer information out, as well as their needs list. Keep your eyes open for this information in November, and sales!

### **ADULT AND HIGH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDIES: THE BIG BIBLE BRUSH-UP**

The Bible is a most unusual book. Covering thousands of years of human history and written by more than 40 human authors, the Bible is not simply a collection of writings but one book with amazing continuity. Its unusual character is due to the fact that it is indeed the Word of God even though written by human authors. **The Big Bible Brush-Up** takes adults and high school students through every major story and event of the Bible, tracing the work of God from beginning to end. Taking our outline from *A Bible History* published by Concordia Publishing House, Pr. Bruss and Pr. Kerns will work through the essential episodes of the Old and New Testaments in chronological order. These stories are essential to knowing your Bible and will keep the child of God from being *tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine* (Ephesians 4:14) and “*prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you* (1 Peter 3:15). Sunday School for all ages begins on September 6 at the 10:00 a.m. time slot. The adult class will meet in Luther Hall while High School students will meet in Rm. 202.

### **SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES HAVE RESUMED**

We have worked hard and used out-of-the-box thinking in order to create a schedule that would allow Sunday School to resume in person. We are offering our regular Sunday School classes through 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the 10:00 – 10:45 period. If you have any questions, contact the church office or speak with Pastor Bruss, Pastor Kerns, or Mrs. Kosmicki.

### **TLS NEWS**

#### **TLS Maintenance Position**

A part time maintenance position is now available at Topeka Lutheran School. Hours vary and tasks are completed on an as-needed basis. 10-15 hours is an average weekly amount of time needed for this position. Please contact Chris Francik for a full job description and more information.

#### **CYC POSITIONS AVAILABLE**

Topeka Lutheran School Center for Young Children is in need of responsible individuals that love to work with young children. They have part time positions in our infant room, toddler rooms, and preschool rooms. Pick up an application at 1732 SW Gage Blvd. The person will have to meet licensing requirements. They are also in need of disinfecting wipes. Many stores are limiting the number an individual can buy at one time, so it makes it difficult to keep wipes on hand. We would appreciate it if you see wipes, pick some up for CYC.

#### **PRINCE OF PEACE POSITION AVAILABLE**

Prince of Peace is looking for an Administrative Assistant. If you have a dedication to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, a love for people and a desire to serve others this position is just right for you. If you are interested in applying for this position, send Resume to: Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 3625 SW Wanamaker Road, Topeka, Kansas 66614

# **Time To Come Back To Church!**

# Campaign Newsletter October 2020



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

## A PRAYER

Lord God, Heavenly Father, you freely gave Your Son, Jesus Christ as a substitute for our sins that we grievously and without thought commit each and every day so that we will be able to live you forever in heaven. We are grateful that you do not treat us like we deserve, but show us mercy daily and are so thankful for it. We ask now that You would continue to guide and direct our Grow God's Children campaign as we attempt to raise funds to pay back the loans made to keep Topeka Lutheran School functioning and teaching the children entrusted to us. All this we ask in Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

## TOTAL COMMITMENTS

### Capital Campaign (GGC) Fund

**Total Amount Committed: \$818,945 Total**

**Pledged Gifts Received: \$458,253** Thank you to all who faithfully continue to make your pledged gift to this important campaign!

To those who have not yet submitted your pledged gift, we would love to hear from you. And thank you to the TLS alum and family whose new pledge was received mid-September!

**Grant-in-Aid (Tuition Assistance) Fund:** Thank you to those families who generously responded to the recent appeal for

Grant-in-Aid gifts, as approximately \$40,000 has been received (as of mid-September).

## WELCOME PASTOR HEINE

Welcome to Pastor Jacob and Theresa Heine and their daughters Hannah and Paiget to the TLS family. Pastor Heine will be in the office starting October 1st with installation on October 24th as the new pastor at Faith Lutheran Church. Their daughter Paige will be joining the TLS Kindergarten class during mid-October.

## TLS UPDATE

**Picnic Tables** The tables have arrived! Thank you to everyone who has contributed funds for this project. Every little bit helps. Donations are still welcome.

Tables will be installed soon!

**Outdoor Classroom** We are excited for another TLS edition with an outdoor learning space. This special outdoor classroom is just getting started and we could use your help!

**Donations for Special Projects** Contact Principal Francik for details and donation inquiries on both projects.

## SUPPORT TOPEKA LUTHERAN TODAY! CLICK TO DONATE.

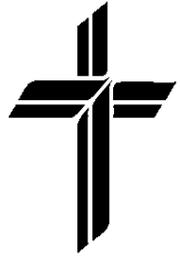
<https://www.topek Lutheran.org/pledge-tracker>

## THANK YOU AND FAREWELL: BYRON JONES

Byron Jones announced his resignation as facilities manager for Topeka Lutheran School and the Center for Young Children effective October 23, 2020. His selfless service of 35 years and his expertise in many technical areas is second-to-none!

Join us at Topeka Lutheran School on Saturday, October 10 from

3:00 to 5:00 p.m at his farewell Open House as we thank Byron and wish him God's blessings!



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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)