



St. John Lutheran Church  
P.O. Box 318  
Alma, Kansas 66401  
Phone: 785-765-3632

Friday, May 8, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters of St. John Lutheran Church,

These have been two tumultuous months of waiting and wondering, challenge and change, penitence, hesitance, and remembrance. Our lives have been disrupted by that which is unseen, but not unknown. Yet we are encouraged by God's Holy Word: *"So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal,"* I Corinthians 4.

Our purpose at St. John Lutheran Church remains as always, to remember God's love and proclaim His goodness in Christ Jesus. We are, as our founding documents declare:

*"A family united by faith in Jesus Christ, gathering around God's Word and sacraments,  
To reach out in Christ-borne love and Christ-like concern to each other and to those without Christ"*

**Thank you for your support** by prayers, offerings, commitment, and service to Jesus Christ through our congregation. Our plans are still adapting to the changing conditions we see in the world around us. Just as through all this we continue as a church to proclaim hope in Jesus Christ, we desire personally to continue to honor God above all else. We find consolation in His promises of care and keeping, both in the promises of this life, and in His promises for the life to come. We still have some perplexing questions before us, and we are tempted by unwise answers. Thoughtful considerations of potential risks and alternatives are necessary.

When we began this time of testing in March, as something which affected us modestly by news reports from China, and then, more ominously, from within the U.S.A., leading to presidential and gubernatorial edicts, we changed our worship patterns, and shifted to an online presence. That presence, along with the use of an FM transmitter, has allowed us to preach and proclaim, but it has not been possible for us to gather as we are accustomed, so that we might neither create fear from this pandemic, nor spread this contagion. Fewer personal interactions have slowed the pandemic, but has not solved the COVID 19 dilemma. However, governmental mandates have changed.

Just as we had levels of restraint when we transitioned our worship *in-house* to worship *on-line* back in March, so now also, we will have levels of restraint as we transition back to worshipping together in the sanctuary that is our church home. There are many considerations for us, not the least of which is the fact that the numbers of Wabaunsee County COVID 19 cases is growing, with Alma becoming a focal point. There is reason for concern, and the leadership at St. John acknowledges that we must proceed with wisdom and care. We desire to gather as a people of God while respecting the potential benefits of social distancing. We recognize the inherent dangers of the virus, and we desire fellowship with God *and* His people.

The home is the best place to honor God. Daily prayers and Scripture readings are most important. Yet home is not the only place to worship. In fact, we are to honor our Lord wherever and whenever He has need of us. We are told in Hebrews 10: *“let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,<sup>25</sup> not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”* We have chosen to refrain from congregational worship for a time in order to protect the weak, and strengthen the strong. It is not neglect when we care for another. We seek to show love for God also in love for our neighbor. God commands in Matthew 5: *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,<sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”* And so, you see, true worship cannot ignore the people around us.

In deference to these concerns to gather and to protect the people of God during this pandemic, we are returning to the church sanctuary in stages. Please understand that we are not denying all risk, but seeking to manage it in a godly manner. These are the guidelines we will follow for the next few weeks.

#### Worship guidelines:

We will continue to live stream on Face book and post videos of the service on our website.

The 9:30 Divine Service on Sunday will be the worship service we will place online.

We will limit numbers in the sanctuary to about 50 people, using social distancing of at least six feet.

We will allow home-dwelling families to sit as a group. Those planning to worship in the sanctuary shall contact the church office beforehand to reserve a place. (When we cannot maintain safe social distancing, we will ask them to attend a different service.)

We will limit entry to the south door of Memorial Hall, so that a nurse can be there to record the temperature of those who enter. Anyone who has a temperature of 100.0<sup>0</sup>F or more will be asked to leave, in order to protect others. Those who feel ill should worship online only.

We will use ushers to slow the exit of people after worship, to maintain space between people.

We will refrain from gatherings around the hall and doorways, and we will not shake hands.

We will offer multiple services each weekend to accommodate those who wish to come.

Beginning May 16 and 17: Saturday 6:00 pm, Sunday 9:30 am, and Sunday 4:00pm.

We will use the projection screen. You may also bring a hymnal from home to use.

We will use worship helpers for webcasting the 9:30 Sunday service. Worship helpers (but not singers or pastor, except for the time of communion) will wear masks, and congregation members are encouraged, but not required to wear masks.

Offering plates will be stationed near doorways, and we will not pass them among parishioners.

Bathrooms, pews and other surfaces will be disinfected between services.

Hand Sanitizer will be available in multiple locations.

#### Communion procedures:

Processional communion will be offered both inside and outside for the May 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> services, that is, we will continue drive through communion in addition to in-house processional communion.

Servers will continue to use gloves, masks, and disinfectant. When inadvertent contact has occurred during the distribution, helpers will disinfect their gloved hands before continuing.

#### Other notes:

Vacation Bible School is postponed to a later date, which has not been determined.

Confirmation has been postponed until a later date, which has not been determined.

Questioning of the confirmands will be May 29, with procedures still undetermined.

Voter's meeting procedures will be determine May 18 for the May 24<sup>th</sup> meeting, if we believe we can safely conduct church business.

On Sunday 31<sup>st</sup>, we will follow our normal fifth Sunday routine of worship without Holy Communion.

It will be a “Noisy Sunday.”

The revised calendar is on the reverse of this page.

In summary, we will have worship services in this manner:

May 10	Online only	
May 16-17	Online and sanctuary (limited)	Multiple service times: Saturday 6:00 pm, Sunday 9:30 am, Sunday 4:00 pm
May 24	Online and sanctuary (limited)	Multiple service times: Saturday 6:00 pm, Sunday 9:30 am, Sunday 4:00 pm
May 31	Online and sanctuary(TBD)	number of services to be determined May 18

Worship is not an option! God commands us to honor him.

“Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.”

Yet, in this time of pandemic, we are giving options of how and where we worship. If you are compromised in health, or fearful of being a carrier of this virus to someone who is compromised in health, we encourage you to worship online for a while longer. If you do not have those risks in your home or among your family, you may worship in the sanctuary.

We invite you to commune, either by drive-through or in the sanctuary at our communion services. St. John wants to promote godliness as well as cleanliness.

In order to prepare for worship inside the church building, we want people to call ahead to reserve a time they can attend. We will limit numbers to about 50, depending upon family size and pew spacing, so that we may protect others around us. **To reserve space for attendance, please call the church office: 765-3632.**

The Board of Elders plans to meet again on May 18 to consider how these changes are working, and to plan how God’s people may best be served with the Gospel at St. John Lutheran Church.

Blessings in Christ, the eternal, unchanging Redeemer,

Pastor Grimm