



HOPE

Evangelical Lutheran Church

**PASTORAL LETTER
COVID-19 RESPONSE AT HOPE
Wednesday of Lent 3 (Oculi)
March 18, 2020**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ at Hope,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

These words from St. Peter provide great comfort, peace and hope for a time such as this! While we rejoice in being born again through our Lord's resurrection, we still must endure various trials in this fallen, sin-infected world. The current COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic is one such trial. No doubt our Lord Jesus is using this to test the genuineness of our faith in Him.

Due to recent guidelines given by our governing and medical authorities, we at Hope are voluntarily making some major changes to our life together – worship and other activities – for the coming weeks. As your pastor, I really wish we did not have to do this, but this topsy-turvy time is what it is and we receive it as an opportunity from our faithful God and Savior to continue bearing witness to Him. We will continue to proclaim and hear the Gospel. We will continue to receive His forgiveness, life and salvation in Holy Communion. And we will continue to love one another and be His witnesses in our community. How we do that now will simply look different for a time.

WALTZING WITH THREE COMMANDMENTS

Right now our Lord is leading us to waltz (a dance in triple time) with three of His commandments at once. In the Third Commandment, God calls us to hold His Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it. We will continue to do this, though in different ways for a time. In the Fourth Commandment, He calls us to honor our authorities, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. God has graciously given us our current governing and medical authorities for our good (Rom. 13:1-4). And in the Fifth Commandment our Lord calls us to help and support our neighbor in every physical need. This includes protecting those at high risk from the coronavirus.

Our governing authorities are *not* taking away our First Amendment rights, nor are they forbidding us from proclaiming Jesus. This is not an Acts 5:29 situation in which we must obey God rather than men. Our authorities are working to stem the tide of this novel virus and exposure to it. The temporary changes we are making are largely driven by our love for neighbor, especially those in the high-risk category in this pandemic.

WHAT IS CHANGING?

The changes we are making, in faithfulness to our Savior and out of love for our neighbors, are being planned through at least April 5. We also must be prepared to continue with these arrangements if they are needed for longer than a few weeks. Realistically, these measures may even be necessary

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well into the summer or beyond. Only God knows how long we will need to hunker down to fight against the spread of this coronavirus. Yet however long it does take, we are confident that our Savior Jesus is with us, protecting us, and giving us the healing balm of His Word and Sacraments.

By unanimous decision of the Board of Elders on March 17, the following changes will take place effective immediately:

1. **Lent Evening Prayer services**— March 18, 25, and April 1— are cancelled. Since Holy Week and Easter services fall outside the 15-day period specified by the CDC, no decision has yet been made for those times. I will post my homilies for the Lent services online (Hope’s website and my blog) and can make printed copies available as desired.
2. **All non-Divine Service activities** (Sunday School, Bible Class, choir rehearsals, and Youth Catechism Class) are suspended until further notice. ThriVe Parent University has also cancelled its sessions for March 19 & 26 and will notify us of further developments.
3. For **the Sunday morning Divine Service**, we will *not* gather as a whole congregation, but we will stream the Service of the Word online on Hope’s Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/hopelutheranstl/>). We must ask everyone to stay home on Sunday mornings in keeping with the “rule of 10” guideline. We will assemble a small group for conducting the Service of the Word. You may still hear and be fed on God’s Word by watching the service online. Bulletins will be prepared and made available on Hope’s website for you to use as you watch.
4. For **the Service of the Sacrament (Holy Communion)**, each week we will offer a series of 30-minute time blocks when up to 10 people (including Pastor and Kantor, as available) may sign up to attend. The service will be a brief, spoken liturgy of Communion with opportunity to be fed on Christ’s Body and Blood. These 30-minute time slots will be available:
 - a. Sunday mornings after the Service of the Word live-stream— beginning at 10:00 am, ending at 12:00 noon;
 - b. Wednesday afternoons— beginning at 12:00 noon, ending at 2:00 pm;
 - c. Wednesday evenings— beginning at 7:00 pm, ending at 8:30 pm.

Each week you are asked to sign up either online or by calling the church office so that we can ensure no more than 10 people (including non-communing children) in the sanctuary at one time. Those who are unsure or uncomfortable with signing up online are encouraged to call the church office. We will make those details available as soon as we have a system set up.

After each brief Communion service, communicants will exit, elements will be refreshed, and the Communion rail will be cleaned and disinfected prior to the next group attending.

5. Other times to receive Holy Communion, as well as Individual Absolution, may be made by appointment with Pastor Asbury (314-352-0014 or rasbury@hopelutheranstl.org).

IF YOU HAVE NEEDS

During this time of uncertainty, we want to look out for and care for each other in the body of Christ. This is an excellent time to grow in our life together and mercy work in our midst. We are assembling a team of volunteers to reach out and visit by phone with those who cannot get out or get to church. Hope member Deaconess Cara Patton is organizing this effort. This care team will call to check on our homebound members and others as we all continue to stay home and ride out this pandemic. If you have needs— such as prescription refills, groceries, etc. — please contact either Cara, Pastor Asbury, or one of our elders:

- Dcs. Cara Patton (406) 533-9950 cmtpatton@gmail.com
- Pr. Randy Asburry (314) 853-4714 rasburry@hopelutheranstl.org
- Jeff Nielsen (314) 440-1727 jeffrey.nielsen@hotmail.com
- Tom Egger (314) 489-8106 eggert@csl.edu
- Kevin Robson (314) 604-4281 kevin.robson@lcms.org
- Chad Rolland (314) 261-8969 chrol_86@hotmail.com

ONGOING STEWARDSHIP

Even though we will not be gathering as normal on Sunday mornings to receive our Lord's gifts, the gifts of your offerings and financial support are still very much needed, perhaps now more than ever. As much as possible, we will continue to do the work our Lord has given us in this place and at this time – proclaiming the Gospel and caring for those in need. We still depend on your stewardship to support the Gospel both at home and abroad. The church staff must still be supported, utilities and bills must still be paid, and we may need to increase our aid to those impacted by this pandemic, both in our congregation and in our community.

We do ask you to send your regular offerings to church as frequently as you would give them in the offering basket. Simply stick your offering envelope in a regular mail envelope and address it to:

Hope Lutheran Church
5218 Neosho Street
St. Louis, MO 63109

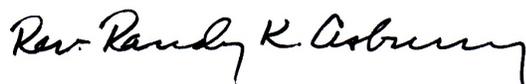
You may also arrange with your bank to automatically send a check for your offering, as several members already do.

GOD IS FAITHFUL!

Jesus said, *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me."* (John 14:1). By His grace we will get through this uncertain time, and He promises to strengthen our faith in Him and our love for one another. Please use this time of staying home to read God's Word and pray, thus staying strong in our Lord's promises. I plan to make more devotional resources available soon. Please keep checking our website (<https://www.hopelutheranstl.org>) and our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/hopelutheranstl/>) for additional updates and information.

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:13)

+ In Christ's service, +



Rev Randy K. Asburry
Pastor