

Dear friends in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! In Romans, chapter 8, the apostle Paul proclaims the certain hope he has by the faith given him through God's means of grace in Word and Sacrament: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (**Romans 8:38-39**). We also are given to receive and rejoice in that same comfort and confidence, trusting in the same Lord, for "His love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations" (**Psalms 100:5**).

On Monday, March 23, Indiana Governor Holcomb issued Executive Order 20-08, directing Hoosiers to stay at home. Governor Holcomb's order becomes effective at 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, March 24, 2020, and remains in full force and effect until 11:59 p.m. on Monday, April 6, 2020. Baptized in Christ Jesus and Him crucified and risen again, we are given His righteousness that fears and loves God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, including the governing authorities of our land instituted by God for our good to serve His creation. (**Romans 13:1-7**) Rather, we honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. We also give them our prayers and our patience as they seek to serve those for whom their public office was instituted. Insofar as the recommendations and mandates given at this time by our government and health officials, particularly regarding precautions intended to slow the spread of infection, do not violate God's Word or encroach upon our conscience, we are given to heed and obey them with patient endurance. According to the Lord's wise, gracious, and merciful command, we at St. John, Bingen will submit to Governor Holcomb's order.

Effective immediately, and until April 6 unless otherwise updated, all regularly scheduled corporate worship at St. John, Bingen is suspended. Still, the Lord's Divine Service to you, His baptized faithful, is not and never will be cancelled or closed (see paragraph below). Videos of appropriate Prayer Offices will be posted to our website and Facebook page at the ordinary times appointed for these services (Sundays at 8 and 10:30 a.m. and Wednesdays at 1 and 7 p.m.). Even, perhaps especially, in this moment of suffering which is not worth comparing to the eternal glory that will be revealed to us (**Romans 8:18**), I encourage individuals and families to continue at home their usual schedule and practice for worship as much as possible. The Lord has blessed us with an opportunity for catechesis, and heads of families should consider how to teach the Lord's loving will and ways, at this time as always, in a simple way to their households. That is, please consider getting up with your family when you normally would, dressing to receive the Lord's Divine Service as you normally would, and using your hymnal to respond and sing throughout the Prayer Office as you normally would in God's holy house.

Nevertheless, we realize and remember that this is not normal, nor is listening to and even participating in an on-line Prayer Office the same as being gathered by and around Word and Sacrament in corporate worship. "Lord, I love the habitation of Your house, and the place where Your glory dwells...for a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere" (**Psalms 26:8 & 84:10a**). Thus, please do not hesitate to contact me to establish a time when I may visit and serve you with the Lord's Divine Service in Word and Sacrament. Please also know that you and your conscience are free in Christ Jesus, and you may also, for this brief time, faithfully and responsibly decide to keep to yourself and your family, trusting that the Lord "will never leave you nor forsake you" (**Hebrews 13:5b**). In the meantime, I will begin calling you, the Lord's people in this place, checking in and offering to serve you with the Lord's appointed means of grace that grant forgiveness, life, and salvation. If you want to jump to the top of my list, then please contact me at any time.

We pray: O most loving Father, You want us to give thanks for all things, to fear nothing except losing You, and to lay all our cares on You, knowing that You care for us. Strengthen us in faith toward You. Give us grace to trust You during this time of illness and distress. In mercy put an end to the epidemic that afflicts us. Grant relief to those who suffer, and comfort all that mourn. Sustain in their labors all medical personnel and all whose vocations serve our bodily needs, and cause Your people ever to serve You in righteousness and holiness. Grant that the fears and anxieties of this mortal life may not separate us from Your love shown to us in Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.