



St John Evangelical Lutheran Church & School

March 13, 2020

OUR RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

After prayer and discussion among our congregation's pastor and leadership, the following are guidelines and decisions made to best care for all our members during this current outbreak. We understand that COVID-19 affects seniors and elderly with underlying health conditions more severely than other parts of our population. With our aging congregation, it is important to provide the best care we can. Please help us use "best-practices" to care for every person during this trying time.

AT ALL TIMES: Whether an outbreak is expected or not

- **If you're sick, stay home.** This always remains true, even if there is no immediate health threat. Again, if you're sick, **stay home.** Staying home is an act of caring for other people who may be more vulnerable than you to a disease and good self-care. "Love your neighbor as yourself."
- **Seek medical help** from your doctor or other health care facilities if you are sick – they will be the best source of information and help for you when you are sick.

Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines:

www.cdc.gov

- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- **If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medicine. A temperature of 100.4 and above is considered a fever.)**
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. After using a tissue, throw it in the trash and wash your hands immediately. If you don't have a tissue, cough in your elbow.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub (hand sanitizer).
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that may be contaminated with flu-like germs.

We will practice good hygiene as it is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of disease.

During this specific time of concern related to the Coronavirus and COVID-19

- **We will refrain from hugs/handshakes/fist bumps/etc. for a time.** Personal contact is very important, but for the time being, we will forego our typical greetings out of loving care for our neighbor. The pastor will still greet you at the door after services but won't make physical contact.
- **We will maintain a clean facility.** We have professional cleaning services for our church and school buildings. But during times of an outbreak, we will have volunteers provide more cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that are touched by many people. You can help by being more active in keeping clean the areas you use at St. John (we will try to have disinfectant wipes and more hand sanitizer available.)

- **Celebration of the Lord's Supper:** Pastor and communion preparers/distributors will exercise proper hand sanitation (we will use hand sanitizer before and after distribution). We will stop using the common cup during the time of the outbreak using only individual communion cups. We ask that you receive the bread/wafer only by hand (not directly to the mouth).
- **Offering plates will not be passed down the pew from person to person.** We will have collection plates in the lobby and as you go up to Communion to place your contribution/donation gift.
- **Pastoral visitation will continue but with these precautions:**
 - **In-person visits will be by member request, or prior arrangement ONLY** – No “surprise” visits by the pastor. This allows each person to decide the appropriateness of an in-person visit.
 - **If you would like a pastoral visit** (for any reason) please call the Church Office, 716-693-9677 and choose option 7 to leave a message for Pastor or email Pastor directly at pastormike@stjohnnt.com
 - **Visits to nursing homes/hospitals will follow the institution's policy.** As our homebound and sick members are most at risk for deadly complications, we need to trust our health care providers and not complicate their already stressful situation. That being said, if a pastoral visit is needed, all efforts will be made to arrange a visit.
- **Those who are at high risk** (Seniors, those with weakened immune systems, those with long term conditions such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, COPD) should consider staying home from worship. Our worship services are available at www.facebook.com/stjohnnt.com any time.

If local/state/national government call for suspension of large public gatherings

- **We will honor the fourth commandment and follow the request of our local government.**
- **All activities, gatherings, and services at St. John will be suspended until such time as the local government lifts the voluntary suspension.** The Elders and leaders of St. John will continue to monitor the situation and will make decisions that are appropriate for St. John.

We will *not* fear. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. **There's a time for concern and to take necessary precautions, but we refuse fear.** The stock market may crash, but we remain generous. Sickness may spread, but we remain faithful. Our trust in God is not dependent on circumstances. God is gracious in good and bad times and has conquered even death through Jesus Christ, so we need not fear.

And we will continue to go to people in need. Christ went toward lepers and the sick, not away from them. In plagues, Christians have been known to walk into the burning city, not away from it. **We take all necessary precautions but refuse to abandon our neighbors in need.** The call to “love your neighbor as yourself” always incurs a level of risk, but we know that God is with us as we serve the needy in all circumstances.

During the time of Luther, Europe was facing a deadly plague and many Christians were asking how they should respond. This is what Luther had to say, *“Therefore I shall ask God to mercifully protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it . . . If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me, and I have done what he expected of me. If my neighbor needs me, however, I shall not avoid person or place but will go freely.”* - Martin Luther, “Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague”

*Information for this letter has come from a variety of sources, thanks to others who have found the right words to say that I have borrowed. Also talk to your doctor for medical advice and seeking medical attention. The www.CDC.gov and www.health.ny.gov are good sources for general information about this and other public health concerns.