

St. John Congregational Update #3 3/23/2020

Dear Friends,

On Sunday, I was a little (LOT) intense right before we launched the worship video. I was excited yet worried. I had never done a virtual worship before. We worked hard at making it happen. I felt clumsy and slow, applying things that don't feel natural to me. I worried I would click the wrong button. I wondered if my computer would freeze.

I've led worship too many times to count, but felt like a novice once again. The only thing I knew was: I didn't know much.

But if it worked, *if* it worked, we would be able to gather for worship as a community.

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If you hang around contemplatives long enough, you'll hear the term *beginners mind*:

What is beginner's mind? It's dropping our expectations and preconceived ideas about something, and seeing things with an open mind, fresh eyes, just like a beginner. If you've ever learned something new, you can remember what that's like: you're probably confused, because you don't know how to do whatever you're learning, but you're also looking at everything as if it's brand new, perhaps with curiosity and wonder. That's beginner's mind. Leo Baubauta @ <https://zenhabits.net/beginner/>

These days, it seems we are all in a state of *beginners mind*. It's not always easy. It's not always filled with curiosity and wonder.

But it is always humbling.

As it turns out, "humbling" is a perfect place for the Holy Spirit to work. The Holy Spirit thrives in conditions of humility.

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At 10am, the worship videos began streaming. Computer screens and phones lit up with messages. *Hundreds* of people gathered under the sanctuary of God.

The Spirit of God doesn't seem to be interested in the physical boundaries of a building. God never goes by the playbook.

Even now, there are tears welling up in my eyes as I remember seeing all your names and comments as we worshiped: Amen! Hear our prayer! Peace be with you! The Psalmist said: I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD." I was glad, too.

A day of gratitude: For our worship and gathering, which was full of joy! For your patience, because not everything went right. For your care and concern for one another, which makes these days a wonder to me. And for God, which holds this whole thing together.

I have some Monday updates for you, some new, some repeated:

Worship

We'll do another virtual worship this weekend! Look for links in your inbox. Some asked if we might also be able to do a Wednesday night worship service. What a great idea! Truthfully, I'm not sure we can pull it off this week. We are very focused this week on something exceedingly important to us which will take our time: care of the congregation.

Care of Congregation

Pastors and other staff are dividing up the directory and contacting people, either in larger groups or individually. We are very concerned for those who were homebound or ill prior to the COVID-19 response. We want to be a spiritual support during these changing times.

We are going to enlist your help with creating "Disciple Groups" of 12 or more members who will keep in touch with one another and alert the pastors if someone needs pastoral care. We continue thinking through details and will move on plans this week.

Food Pantry

Still open, with changes: Saturday distribution only, from 9-1pm.

We modified distribution to a drive-thru style. Social distancing abounds. We changed our requirements for volunteering (sorry, no at-risk people volunteering). We will receive our food delivery on Wednesday. This is an evolving situation, so

make sure you keep updated by going to www.stjohnfood.org or [St. John Food Pantry](#) page for updates.

Members, if you need food, contact Dawn MacGregor (stjohnfood@gmail.com) or one of the pastors.

The Church Office is Closed but We Still Get Messages and Mail

We remotely check email and phone messages regularly throughout the day during "normal" office hours. We are gathering the mail.

Updates Not Getting into Your Inbox? Try This

We have a mass-emailing program to send you emails. Sometimes, mass emails end up in a spam/junk folder and not your inbox. It's frustrating, but we can't control it. You can do a few things that may help. Try adding stjohn2650@stjohnjoliet.org to your contact list so it's recognized. Or, ask a friend to help. Or, email Lisa Marshall (stjohnlisamarshall@gmail.com) and she will walk you through possible solutions.

Also, remember all updates are posted on our [Facebook](#) page and on our [website](#).

Giving...Because the Work of the Church Goes On

We appreciate your giving, as it keeps our church work going and our church bills paid on time. Gifts of all amounts are generous. We are a remarkable force of good in this world when we pool our offerings together for ministry!

If you are mailing offering envelopes or other correspondence to the church, we will receive them.

Now might be a time to try something new: online giving. You can make a one-time or recurring offering by going to our website: www.stjohnjoliet.org. Click the "give" button to begin.

This concludes Monday's update. The sun is melting the snow. I'm going out for a walk.

"See" you in church!

Pastor Jen

Responses to this email can be sent to stjohn2650@gmail.com

St. John Congregational Update #2 3/16/2020

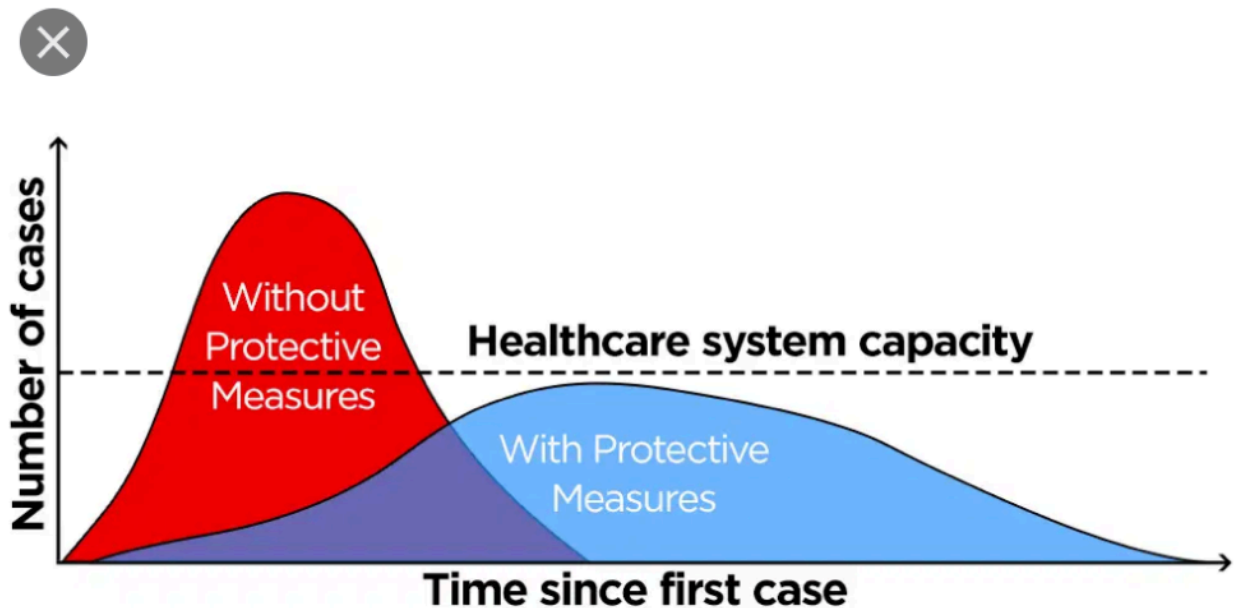
Dear Friends,

A few weeks ago, I told you I was practicing “letting go” for the season of Lent. It started with small things, and it seems to have moved to a different place entirely! And, it looks like you get to join me in this practice.

Letting go helps me to remember the most important things: to look for God, to be about healing for the whole world, to be gentle with others and ourselves (everyone is learning, all at the same time, how to do this for ourselves and others), to breathe deeply and be carried by God, who can and will hold it all.

At around midnight, the CDC changed their guidelines, recommending that for the next 8 weeks, organizers cancel or postpone in-person events that consist of 50 people or more throughout the US.

What we're being asked to do has a purpose: we need to spread the rate of viral infection over several weeks, rather than have everyone get sick over a few weeks. This allows health care facilities and hospitals to meet demands and care for people who have a particularly severe case of the virus. This makes sense to me. It's meant to [“flatten the curve.”](#) Adhering to CDC guidelines helps our healers save lives. So, we've got to work together to help them do their work.



Adapted from CDC / The Economist

Having said that, it's very human to have a range of emotions and reactions as the COVID-19 response unfolds. Some will feel relieved to have guidance, while others will feel frustrated by the recommendations. It will be easy to be distracted by the changes in routine, the economic impact many will feel, concern for our loved ones, founded and unfounded fears, and the one zillion opinions of those around you.

We have the capacity to choose how to be mindful in the days ahead. This includes being mindful of our own needs (watch that media diet, dear friends!), and trusting the power of community in times of uncertainty. At St. John, that means serving God and caring for our neighbors. And, it means caring for one another, because we need each other. This will not change. We belong to God, and we belong to one another.

We are making decisions, step-by-step (my new mantra!), and I want you to know what to expect at St. John, Monday edition:

In-Person Worship Cancelled for Short-Term Future

We are suspending worship services for the foreseeable short-term future to work with our communities to [“flatten the curve”](#) and adhere to the purpose of the CDC recommendations. There's no way to predict our numbers for worship, and to do so is an unnecessary risk to others.

You've probably counted this out...Easter is in four weeks. Unless things change drastically, our reality of suspending worship will extend past Easter. I'm going to tell you what I told myself at midnight last night: take a breath; it's only a date on the calendar; God is not overly concerned with calendars, and we can celebrate Easter anytime we want. Let's keep the big picture in mind. We will plan a BIG FATTY CHURCH SERVICE AND PARTY when we can safely return to in-person gatherings!

I'm not going to lie to you, though: the thought of having no in-person worship brought tears to my eyes. I also know the day we worship in-person again will be one of the sweetest days of the year. God's got it all.

Food Pantry “Bagging Days” Cancelled; Food Pantry Stays Open

The Food Pantry will stay open, but the bagging events (previously referred to in congregational update #1) are cancelled. A different method was implemented last Saturday, and it is effective and efficient, and follows social distancing

guidelines. To volunteer for Food Pantry over the interim period, [click here](#). If you are willing to be a person who can get groceries or essential items for members who are homebound or in need, [click here](#).

Use of Building this Week

We'll send you a Monday morning update on building use for the week on our [website](#), [Facebook page](#), and via email.

Office Hours: Office hours remain the same this week. Please keep this in mind: if it's not ESSENTIAL (i.e. you have to get a key for the Food Pantry freezer/cooler; you are a requested volunteer in the office, etc.) then we ask you communicate via [email](#), stjohn2650@gmail.com. If you want to talk, then we ask you to communicate via phone or email. If you are wondering if you should drop something off, then we ask you to communicate via phone or email. You get the picture.

In the building this week: The state primary is Tuesday, and we are a polling place, and that is still the plan. Our Food Pantry stays open with [large modifications](#) to support social distancing.

What is **NOT** going on this week in the building: All St. John in-person ministry groups held in the building (*with exception of Food Pantry*) are cancelled for this week. All non-essential community use of our building (*with exception of AA*) is suspended for the next few weeks and will then be managed on a week-by-week basis.

Pastors and staff will be working with ministry leaders mid-week in regards to the week of March 22nd. We will be postponing or modifying the way we meet (i.e. virtual). Everyone together now: "we are making decisions, step-by-step..."

What's Next?

We've got to take care of one another. We are planning to do virtual worship experiences, which may include livestreaming, meditation snippets, musical offerings, etc. We are making plans with the goal of providing things by end of week or for the weekend. It will take a few days to get our ducks in a row, but we are getting there, step-by-step...

What I do know: we will focus on spiritual care and encouragement of members utilizing phone and digital/virtual media; arranging/assigning our congregation into smaller "groups" that can be cared for and connected during this interim time, serving our members and neighbors who are vulnerable (includes Food pantry, and those who are homebound, etc).

We will be in contact with the congregation on how this will work later this week.

That's all for now. My love and appreciation for you all. May your day have moments of goodness, check on your neighbors (use the phone) and keep your body, mind, and spirit well. God be with you, friends.

Pastor Jen

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CONGREGATIONAL UPDATE #1 3/13/2020

Dear Friends,

As you know, we're in a situation none of us have been in before and things are changing day by day. We've seen some churches deciding to cancel worship and activities, while others are not. And both are options. I know what comes in the next days and weeks will pass, and we will remain the loving faith community we are known for throughout Joliet. I know some will choose to stay home, while others will feel frustrated with any changes made to our schedule. However, we are going to make decisions based on the most at-risk in our church and community, because that is at the heart of St. John.

We are making decisions step-by-step. We are calm, and not afraid, and we are working together with other communities around the world to manage the spread of [COVID-19](#). Here's how it will work:

Staying Connected

You will primarily receive St. John updates via email, Facebook, and the church [website](#). Some people do not use digital communication, so please give them a call and be the messenger. We'll be checking in with our homebound folks and those in assisted living facilities. We'll need good connections to reduce isolation.

We'll be providing online resources to stay connected, such as weekly readings and reflections to your inbox. Our new website will be updated frequently. We'll try a few new things and perhaps we'll find new ways of entering the virtual world

(Livestreaming worship! Facebook Bible studies! Insert your idea here!)...let's see what happens.

Worship Still Planned for this Weekend; Women's Retreat; Lenten Worship

We are listening to guidelines given to us by the CDC and Illinois Department of Health. At this point, we are not cancelling worship this weekend. We are adapting our communion practices and the way we receive offerings (you can also [give online here](#); we still want to have a church when this is over). We will refrain from the Sharing of the Peace. The nursery will be closed. Sunday School is also cancelled. Perhaps you've heard this before (!) but wash your hands, stay home if you are sick (even a sniffle), and we'll need to practice [social distancing](#) for a bit. This too shall pass. It's a short term sacrifice. For more information, check the [CDC guidelines](#).

Women's Retreat: It is up to individuals to make this decision, our leaders are already at the location and ready to receive you.

Lenten Worship: As of now, it's on. Making decisions step-by-step. Check your email and the website on Monday/Tuesday. We'll be recording stuff either way and posting to our website. The Lenten Meal is cancelled for this week (but we'll be using the space to prep for serving our community, see Food Pantry updates below).

Food Pantry will remain open; Other Programming Cancellations

Add to your cancellation list for this week: Sunday School and other programming, including choirs.

How long will things be suspended?: Don't know yet, stay tuned. Making decisions step-by-step, and we'll keep you updated.

Meetings and Community Groups: We are in conversation with ministries and community groups who are using our building for meetings, including Parents Day Out; decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis between the ministry/community contacts and staff liaison.

The Food Pantry is OPEN: We are concerned for those who have to weather changes and decreases in work hours with little money to spare. Already, we've seen a noticeable uptick in people coming to receive food. People will need our Food Pantry, now more than ever. We will adapt to fit recommendations for "social distancing" by creating a drive-through style distribution. We need many healthy volunteers to help bag items on Monday at 5:30pm and Wednesday at 5:30pm. To help, [click here](#). To give, [click here](#).

Keep calm, be patient, and check on one another. Try kindness instead of frustration, and help people around you. With mindfulness and grace, we will be able to serve God and each other. And in case you haven't heard, wash your hands.

Pastor Jen