

# THE SPOKESMAN



May 22, 2020

## **Bishops' Joint Letter Against Re-opening for Public Worship**

Dear People of God of the congregations of the Sierra Pacific Synod, the Southwest California Synod, and the Pacifica Synod:

Grace and peace to you, in the name of the risen and ascended Christ!

It is with concern that we reach out to you today, on the eve of Memorial Day weekend and the last Sunday of Easter, having just witnessed in a televised message by the President of the United States a statement declaring that the nation's churches should open for public worship this weekend. We understand the strong desire of our people to worship together, particularly on a meaningful weekend like this one. We wish to state for the sake of our church and its people that we believe the advice to re-open this weekend is at odds with the prevailing medical understanding of the course of this virus and the ways to prevent its spread.

We call on you to continue to listen to those state and local public health experts who, using the best medical and scientific information available, have already given us sensible guidelines to follow in our states and in the counties of our synods. Churches remain places of particularly high risk for contagion, and recent cases in many states have confirmed that opening prematurely can be catastrophic. We cannot ensure, in all our congregations, the sanitation and distancing requirements necessary to be together for worship. Nor has the risk of infection decreased in many parts of our synods—and both a reduction in infections and effective measures to block contagion will be needed before we will be able to gather in person again.

This is not a question of religious liberty. Nothing earthly—no government, indeed no virus—can come between us and the love of God. The decision to quarantine us for a time is a public health decision, and we are obligated, for our own good and the good of our neighbor, to do the right thing—which in this case is to refrain from non-essential gatherings. Our faith is not optional—indeed it is “essential” to us as Christians—but it does not override our higher duty to consider our neighbor's welfare in a time of medical emergency.

Though in normal times people of faith gather every week for praise and proclamation on the day of Christ's resurrection, we are not absolutely required to do so in spite of every obstacle. We have alternatives right now; we do not need to be able to gather together physically in order to worship God—for God hears our prayers wherever we are and whenever we are. We may pray, we may hear the proclamation of the Word, and we may read and study the scriptures—we may even assemble in digital communities on Sundays—without endangering ourselves and others by gathering together in our church buildings.

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Lutherans, in particular, know that there is nothing sacred about a church building except as our sentiment makes it so, and that God is as accessible to us in personal intercession as in corporate prayer. Again, we say, this time of separation is not a time of separation from God. You may cultivate and even expand and intensify your faith in this time of sheltering at home. God is with us in each of our homes right now as surely as God is with us anywhere. And at the appropriate, safe time, we will gather again for the face-to-face worship we so miss and for which we ardently long. We share a hope that will come soon.

Again, we do not think resuming in-person worship ahead of the public health advisories is a good choice. It would be neither wise nor faithful for us to endanger our elders and those communities of poverty and color who have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Nor would it be faithful to expose ourselves and our friends to contagion, or to rush into gatherings that are more likely to harm us than to bring us the peace we desire.

We call on the pastors, deacons, and lay leadership of our synods to comply with the standing public health directives in their localities. We recognize that as these directives continue to change, we will stay in dialogue with you. Our faithfulness to God is shown by our love of our neighbors, and in this situation there is a clear witness to be made—the one that best shows care for others.

May God bless and protect us all.

Bishop Mark W. Holmerud

Bishop R. Guy Erwin

Bishop Andy Taylor



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## COVID-19 response

With the outbreaks of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the United States and around the world, our church and its leaders continue to minister to its members, to those who are hurting and searching for peace, and to those in need. You can help the ministries of the ELCA by supporting your local congregation and making a gift to the ELCA's [COVID-19 Response Fund](#). Your donation will provide funds to the ministries of the ELCA most in need and best positioned to help. This includes our congregations as well as local and churchwide ministries capable of reaching and assisting those in need. Additional resources for congregations and members regarding worship, stewardship and assistance programs are available at [ELCA.org/PublicHealth](https://www.elca.org/PublicHealth).

We have received many letters from members, new visitors, local businesses and more as we Worship in Place. We are so thankful for the tremendous love and support as we continue to worship in community. Please see below for some of the many notes that we have received in the last few weeks.



*"It is a tremendous blessing for us to be able to see and hear from each one of you every Sunday, although only virtual. We love you and God bless you, always."*



*"I fully agree and support this decision to continue our worship in place. We continue to be a community even in the absence of physical proximity. Thank you to all of our church leaders and staff for making this tough, but important decision to keep ourselves and the community safe."*



*"Thank you for continued, prayerful care of your flock."*

## With Gratitude for the Show-Up Shower Ministry

We give thanks that St. John's was able to host the Show-Up Shower operated by Mark Lytal and Bayside. For 65 days, nearly 7 days a week unhoused neighbors were offered a place to wash their hands, shower, and get a meal. The numbers of meals are over 20,000 and showers over 4,000. In order to continue to serve where most needed, Mark and Bayside have decided to make the showers mobile and are taking them out to other locations around Sacramento. While they will not be in our parking lot in the near future, we are grateful that we were part of the larger working of the Body of Christ for the sake of our neighbors in Sacramento. Thank you to those of you who have given financial support, made sandwich bags or stopped by to volunteer for a day while it was at St. John's. You can continue to follow and support the ministry by going to [showupsac.ca](http://showupsac.ca).

THANK YOU to all that logged into Servant Keeper and updated your family information! As we know, it is critically important in these times and we stay connected, and this helps us to do that.

HAVEN'T LOGGED IN YET? The original email invitation link expired after 4 weeks. I will be going through to see who has not yet entered their profile and resend invitations to those members.

ONLINE DIRECTORY - another reason to log in! Once in your profile you can click the Directory button and enter password **Directory1701**. You will be able to find all members that have opted in to the directory online.



## WORSHIP IN PLACE BREAKDOWN

44

Total number of states that have had website visitors log onto stjohnc.org

17,175

Total number of website visitors (stjohnc.org) since March 22, 2020.

11,275

Number of views on our YouTube Channel since March 22, 2020.

3,422

Total number of views of our Virtual Coffee Hour on Facebook Live since March 22, 2020.

## FROM THE SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

### *The William and Donna Morgan Award*

Named for William (1928-2009) and Donna (1932-2010) Morgan, long-time members of St. John's Lutheran Church. During his career as an educator, Bill served as principal of McClatchy High School and devoted himself to the education of Sacramento's young people. He and Donna supported the Scholarship Fund from its infancy, and Bill served as the Scholarship Committee's chair for many years.



2019 Recipients

The William and Donna Morgan Award will be presented in their memory to graduating high school seniors as chosen by the Scholarship Committee.

These awards will be:

- Presented to two of St. John's Lutheran church's graduating high school seniors
- Nominated by members of St. John's and selected by members of the Scholarship Committee
- Based on community service both within St. John's and in the community and the individual's commitment to St. John's mission of Living God's Love in the World
- Awarded a gift (blanket, bible, etc.) and a small honorarium (\$100)

The deadline to submit nominations is June 19th, and can be sent directly to Scholarship Committee member Chris Dawson at [caloso89@gmail.com](mailto:caloso89@gmail.com).

## LIFE TOGETHER AS THE CHURCH

May 17, 2020

Here at St. John's, we're into our 3rd month responding to the Covid-19 pandemic threat and it has changed our current Life Together as the Church in serious and significant ways. In cancelling in-person live Sunday morning worship experiences, taking worship online, along with Christian formation for adults and children, Confirmation and Luminaria; the basics of what we do at St. John's (preaching, teaching, proclaiming good news and serving our neighbor in need), all are being accomplished in new and/or still developing ways.

One of the most impacted ways life has changed for us is in the way we at St. John's are able to walk with people at the end of life. Of course this is the ultimate concern of Covid-19 specifically, but the necessary response to this national emergency has also changed our ability to walk with people in all life-threatening and end-of-life circumstances. The same impacts we are feeling as communities of faith are being felt as significantly by families and loved ones. I am talking about things like not being able to visit/stay with loved ones in hospitals, pastoral or "here-to-cheer-you-up-and pray-with-you" visits, and our inability to gather soon after death for funerals or memorial services. Our people have felt all of these things - and it hurts. Specifically, I am thinking of the families of Gil Grothier, Billie Blankenship, Myrt Hellam & Sandra Fernandez, who received most of their pastoral care remotely from us in their homes these last couple months, and whose lives we have not been able to memorialize or raise publicly to God in thanksgiving. I am also thinking of other members, Bethany Davis and Laura-Lynne Powell, whose mothers died and because of Covid-19, our ability to walk with them and their families was significantly impacted. It hurt them, their families, and all of us who love them, and walk with them in faith. It's a loss, and it is unwise not to reflect on the full cost of such losses.

That is why on Sunday morning, May 17th, I was so blessed to read a lead story on the Forum Page of the Sacramento Bee, an article by St. John's member, Laura-Lynne Powell. Laura Lynne's mother contracted and died of Covid-19 in her home State of Connecticut on April 20th last month. Please find attached Laura-Lynne's most poignant article about the cost of this disease that took her Mother. Laura-Lynne's reflection is an honest and faithful assessment that restores my soul and strengthens my resolve in these difficult times. Indeed, the article written for general publication is a most significant work of eloquent mourning. You will be blessed to hear what she has to say.

[I lost my mother to COVID-19. Here's why we must face the coronavirus threat honestly.](#)

May the God of all consolation hold us in the certainty of divine love in uncertain times. May we not take anything for granted or underestimate the toll of life does sometimes find us. May God ready us to see the truth of our day, and also celebrate all gifts given. We, the Church, St. John's, your pastors and parish nurses and Stephen Ministers and spiritual friends; we are all here for you, no matter what stage of life you are at, even and perhaps especially including the darkest hours of life's night. We may not be able to do everything as we have before, but we are still here to walk with you, even if it is virtually, from death into life. Indeed, that is the fundamental promise of our journey.

Sincerely,



PASTOR FRANK ESPERSEN

# HAS IT REALLY BEEN 24 YEARS?

**By Cindy Carroll**

Sometimes a book is just a book.

Sometimes a book changes a life.

Twenty-five years ago, my aunt gave me Granger Westberg's book *The Parish Nurse*. She said this could be an area of nursing I might want to pursue and that she thought I would be good at it. At the time I was working as an office nurse with a large cardiology practice in Sacramento and had no plans to make a change, since I loved working with and caring for people with cardiovascular disease.

Then I read the book. It was intriguing, enough so that I asked then-Senior Pastor Carlos Schneider if he was aware of the book and if he knew anything about parish nursing. I learned, as I have many times in my life, that God was already at work. Pastor Carlos had already read the book, knew of Granger Westberg, and was interested in having a parish nurse at St. John's.

So began my journey.

Sadly, that journey is coming to an end. After many wonderful years, I will be retiring as your parish nurse on June 15.

So I was honored when Pastor Jon and Linda Baldwin asked me to share what it has meant to me to be a parish nurse at St. John's for the past 24 years. I think the best way for me to do that is to share some stories that have touched me deeply and molded my faith, making me the person I am today.

Working with St. John's members over the years has been a joy and a blessing. It has been wonderful to be able to get to know so many members and their families, even when the circumstances were not the best.

I was humbled to be asked to bring communion to a dying member, and to sit with that member's family as they gathered around his bed and shared stories. I gave them all communion and prayed with them. A few minutes after I left their home he passed away.

I learned the true meaning of faithfulness, love of family, and a community of faith as I assisted a family whose infant child was dying of a rare genetic disease. I saw the face of God and the love of community as over 30 members came together to assist in a Share the Care group for this family. They helped with grocery shopping, play dates for the family's other child, giving the parents the respite of a date night, and were there to help them care for their dying child.

I learned about strength, perseverance, faith and the will to survive as a member was badly beaten during a home invasion robbery only 6 weeks after her husband had passed away. She fought back to protect herself and suffered serious injuries she had to overcome. She overcame those injuries and moved into a senior living facility, where she did well.

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i learned about a strong conviction and love of God from one of our former pastors who returned to the Sacramento area to be with her daughter who was dying of cancer. She faced challenges of her own at the same time, as she was suffering from early dementia. The parish nurses and others involved in congregational care at St. John's were able to assemble a care team who visited her on a regular basis and helped her through the time her daughter was dying.

I also worked with another member who was at one time the St. John's wedding coordinator. I visited and walked with her through the time she lived with her daughter, as her dementia progressed until her daughter could no longer care for her mother. I was able to help her daughter find different places for her to live as her dementia worsened. I felt privileged to be able to visit her up until she passed away, and I am still in touch with her daughter.

One of my favorite things to do as a parish nurse was visiting many of our homebound members, many on a long term basis. I developed close friendships with many of these members. We had many thoughtful and thought-provoking conversations about church and faith. But the smaller things were a privilege too: just being present with them or sharing communion.

In fact, there are many small things with as much meaning as the momentous ones: meeting and learning about members and their families, and talking before or after nearly every church service with a member who wanted to share a concern or inquire about another member's status or graciously thank me for something the parish nurses had helped with. I have really missed that during the recent time of worshipping in place.

I give thanks for all the wonderful pastors and staff that I have worked with over the past 24 years. I will be forever grateful for Pastor Schneider being open to and advocating for a parish nurse at St. John's. I am also forever grateful to my friend and fellow parish nurse, Suzi Taylor. Together we have developed and improved our role as your parish nurses the past 24 years and I will greatly miss working with her every week.

Finally, to the members of St. John's, I want to say thank you for your support and love over the years. Thank you for letting me into your hearts. I will miss spending time with each and every one of you as your parish nurse, but I will still get to see you at church when we can once again worship in person together.

Blessings to you all!



Parents are encouraged to join us Saturday, June 13th at 7:00pm to 8:00pm for a time in fellowship and conversation about the coming summer. This is a time to reconnect and find inspiration or maybe just lay down some of your stress that we are all managing being parents during pandemic.

Please email [Katie.Smith@stjohnslc.org](mailto:Katie.Smith@stjohnslc.org) for the zoom info.



Return Service Requested

**Postmaster:** Dated Material

**Mailed on:** June 1, 2020



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