



St. Matthew
Evangelical Lutheran Church

THE ACTS...of God's People

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~July 2020~



In the ongoing effort to make the Thomas house seasonably well-decorated, the stars and stripes have taken over our home. They can be found on figurines, wall hangings, quilts, among other things.

That's a good thing! Seasons, traditions, decorations, holidays. These things are great. They shape identity, they deepen our roots, they add color and meaning to life. But symbols are only symbols, and it is way too easy to mistake symbols for what they represent. False devotion to symbols without actual attachment to what those symbols stand for gets us in trouble every time.

So we come to our annual celebration of the birth of this place we call home. Independence Day. The Fourth. We will be surrounded by the symbols of the day - stars and stripes, rocket's red glare, bombs bursting in sight. Hopefully some good barbeque. All the usual stuff that marks this annual observance. And will all of that make us more patriotic, or will it just make us feel more patriotic? That is not a question I can answer here.

However, it is a really fun and challenging question when we apply it to church.

Church is full of symbols too – liturgies, hymns, prayers, crosses, vestments. They matter too. They can center us, focus our attention, connect us to something much greater than us and the moment we occupy. But they can just as easily get in the way when they become an end in themselves, a barrier that keeps us from getting to the real stuff. And then instead of symbols or tools they become prison walls.

A lesson which we have learned the hard way in 2020.

You can hear it in the language we use. Can't go to church. The church is closed. There is no worship service today. We have deep, real feelings about this. We feel disconnected, abandoned, alone. Our routines have been disrupted and our spiritual life has disappeared. Our places are blockaded and so is our connection to God and Life and Hope and Joy.

You know that's wrong, right? You know there is more to church than place, more to worship than liturgy, more to community than coffee. More to hope than ... anything.

This is not a new truth. Reformations have been fought over it. The 16th century reformers tore down statues, burned artwork, smashed stained glass windows – not because they necessarily hated those things, but because those symbols had been held over their heads, used against the faith like weapons. They had been

~Continued on Next Page

Pastor continued



ordered by authorities and culture to worship those things, and finding them empty and meaningless, they determined to break through to the other side. To the real stuff. Maybe we should give that a try for ourselves.

Let's all say this: 2020 is not the year we lost it all. 2020 is the year we got it all back.

There will be in-person worship again, with all of the vestments and the hymns and the trimmings that we know and cherish. Not for all of us right away, but eventually, God willing, we will have the whole gang back together. As it should be. But as we look forward to that day, let's be clear and honest. If we think that will be the day when church starts again, we will have missed the whole and entire thing. And we will be less for it.

Church is not over, not closed, not done. And if we think that, even for an instant, then we are what is over, closed, done. If we are unable to worship God outside the walls of our church building, we are over. If we are unable to pray except by following appointed texts, then our hearts are closed. If we cannot sing out loud and well in our living room in our pajamas, then faith is done.

We can't do that. Especially now. The stressors of life are so immense now, the sickness widespread. The scab has been torn off of old, old wounds, and we are hemorrhaging life profusely. Complex problems that we have worked hard to suppress have broken free upon our hearts and into our world. We are in a dangerous place. We need faith now more than ever. And it must be actual faith, deep faith, true faith. We cannot afford anything less.

So this is my challenge to you. We are making plans now for a return to in-person worship. We have set a target date of August 2nd, pending a continued reduction of the spread of the virus. Not all will return then. Not all should! But if you have not found the Holy Spirit at work in your life in the last three months because you have not been in the church building, do yourself a favor: **DO NOT COME BACK!**

We are addicted to symbols. They are a comfort to us because they are easy, accessible. But they keep us from real faith, real questions, real growth. You know, hard stuff. Stuff that we need to do. And if you have not done that yet, if you have not spoken with God and experienced your calling and felt the Spirit without the symbols, then stay where you are. Let time do its magic. Wait on God. Be in the hard place and let it do its work.

You will be the better for it. We all will be.

And then we'll see you in church.

Update on Services



In Person Church Services?

The church council continues to carefully monitor the spread of the virus in the community and how it affects our planning going forward. While there has been some relaxing of the restrictions in some parts of the world, there is continued increase in others. We are well aware that worship services at churches carry a higher risk of spreading the infection. The Worship Ministry team has put together a very comprehensive checklist to help us prepare for a return to in-person gatherings that we will need to follow when we do gather in-person. At this time, the Council is working with a target date of August 2nd for possible return. They will review the situation again at the July Council meeting.

In the meantime, we pray that you will not forsake your spiritual life. There are many opportunities available, including Compline Prayers on Wednesday evenings at 8:00 pm. This brief prayer service happens on Zoom and includes a time of fellowship afterwards. The Thursday afternoon Bible Study is still meeting at 1:30 pm on Zoom. Pastor Glen is doing live personal reflections on the Facebook page every morning (Monday through Friday) at 8:00 am.

Not sure how to access any of that? Ask!

Sunday morning worship is posted on our website and Facebook page at 8:30 am and can be viewed any time afterwards. There is also coffee fellowship time on Zoom following the service (about 9:15 am.) Beginning soon, the worship service will actually be streaming live from the Sanctuary at 8:30 am!

As we prepare for the change in livestreaming and for a return to in-person gatherings, there will be training sessions for video technicians and ushers (and probably more). Please watch for information on training. If you are not currently serving as a worship assistant, we could surely use you!

Thank You

I appreciated all the prayers and get well wishes sent my way while recuperating.



Many Thanks,
Rogene Foy

☞ Don't Social Distance from Faith



No, we are not closed

There are many opportunities to connect with one another even as we are physically separated because of the pandemic. We are gathering on Zoom for Compline prayers on Wednesday evenings at 8:00 pm, followed by some fellowship time. Consider joining the Thursday Bible Study group via Zoom or telephone. Virtual Coffee Hour on Sunday mornings following the online worship service (about 9:15 am) Please don't let the technology shut you in - we can help you learn to take advantage of these great tools. *And if you would like to spend a little time with family and friends, let us help set up an online place for you.* Take advantage of these gatherings so we can help and encourage one another in faith.

Compline - Wednesday, 8:00 pm (via Zoom)

Bible Study (via Zoom) - Thursday, 1:30 pm

Online Worship - Sunday, 8:30 am (or anytime after). Link on church website www.smlutheran.com or on our Facebook page

Virtual Coffee & Fellowship Time - Sunday (about 9:15 am via Zoom)

☞ The “Wow” Factor



After the final notes concluded at a recent symphony performance in Boston, the conductor hadn't yet lowered his baton when a child exclaimed, “Wow!” The break in protocol, magnified by excellent acoustics, didn't upset the participants or audience, however. Instead, several later said it brought them great joy. One even called the moment life-changing.

The incident was especially meaningful because the child, a 9-year-old named Ronan, has autism and is generally nonverbal. Music, his family says, tends to attract his interest and make him happy. When symphony officials learned Ronan's identity, they arranged a private performance so he could meet some musicians.

How often do you shout “Wow!” — in a good way — at what you see and hear? You may tend to do so on vacation or while observing God's natural wonders, but what about during your day-to-day life? Think about the people you encounter and their talents — and your own. When have these sparked a “Wow!” of thanks to God?

Every blessing, large or small, is a wow-moment — a gift from God that warrants our praise.

—adapted from HomeTouch Ministry

Calendar of Events @ St. Matthew

JULY

All in-person worship services and events at St. Matthew are suspended until further notice. This calendar includes only days with events during this time.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 1

7:30 pm Children & Youth Team Mtg
8:00 pm Compline Prayer via Zoom

THURSDAY, JULY 2

1:30 pm Adult Study via Zoom

SATURDAY, JULY 4

HAPPY FOURTH OF JULY!



~SUNDAY, JULY 5~

WORSHIP LIVESTREAM 8:30

9:15 am Virtual Coffee Hour

TUESDAY, JULY 7

6:00 pm Worship Ministry Team

WEDNESDAY, JULY 8

8:00 pm Compline Prayer via Zoom

THURSDAY, JULY 9

1:30 pm Adult Study via Zoom

SATURDAY, JUNE 11

8:30 am Jochebed Circle

~SUNDAY, JULY 12~

WORSHIP LIVESTREAM 8:30

9:15 am Virtual Coffee Hour



WEDNESDAY, JULY 15

6:30 pm Training– Video Techs
8:00 pm Compline Prayer via Zoom

THURSDAY, JULY 16

1:30 pm Adult Study via Zoom

SATURDAY, JULY 18

10:00 am Loaves & Fishes Food Pantry

~SUNDAY, JULY 19~

WORSHIP LIVESTREAM 8:30

9:15 am Virtual Coffee Hour



MONDAY, JULY 20

ACTS Articles Due
7:00 pm Council Mtg

WEDNESDAY, JULY 22

6:30 pm Training– Video Techs/Ushers
8:00 pm Compline Prayer via Zoom

THURSDAY, JULY 23

1:30 pm Adult Study via Zoom

SATURDAY, JULY 25

9:30 am Deborah Circle

~SUNDAY, JULY 26~

WORSHIP LIVESTREAM 8:30

9:15 am Virtual Coffee Hour



TUESDAY, JULY 28

7:00 pm Phoebe Circle

WEDNESDAY, JULY 29

8:00 pm Compline Prayer via Zoom

THURSDAY, JULY 30

1:30 pm Adult Study via Zoom

Sunday Mornings



We are still church!

Sunday morning at 8:30 am– Worship
9:15 am– Virtual Coffee Hour

Online worship will be at 8:30 am via the church website
www.smlutheran.com or on our Facebook page or anytime afterwards.

Hope to "see" you!

Facebook

Like and Share our St Matthew Facebook page! You will find updates and news throughout the month– and find links to our remote services!



www.facebook.com/St-Matthew-Evangelical-Lutheran-Church-191409984237851/

Fleeting and Forever



After conversing and eating with two followers heading to Emmaus (Luke 24), Jesus disappears from their midst. According to theologian Ronald Goetz, that vanishing has special meaning for followers of the resurrected Lord. “Human love ... is spontaneous, fragile and fleeting,” he writes in *The Christian Century*. “Like the heavenly manna of the Exodus, love cannot be preserved and stored. We cannot manage it. We can only hope that it will be there for us when we most need it.” Those aren’t “melancholy thoughts,” though, “any more than the two disciples should have lamented the vanishing of the risen Christ.”

Goetz continues, “We know that Christ’s vanishing and the vanishing of every human moment ... serve to underscore the utter preciousness of life.” This, in turn, makes it a glorious mystery that the life we experience as fragile is, in fact, eternal.

Training– Ushers & Video Techs



Please join us for training on our new recording system:
July 15th 6:30 pm– Video Techs
July 22nd 6:30 pm– Video Techs & Ushers



~Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry~ Items Needed

Canned Veggies– beets, baked
beans, canned potatoes

Condiments– Ketchup, Mustard,
Salsa, BBQ Sauce

Pancake Mix

Cream of Mushroom Soup

Saltine Crackers

White– All Purpose Flour

White Sugar

Jelly

Corn Muffin Mix

Boxed Potatoes

The Desert Shall Blossom



Where there is need, God is always bringing new life, often working through the church but sometimes using Christians and others in the secular realm.

At England’s University of Sheffield, scientists have learned to grow gardens from discarded mattresses in refugee camps. In Jordan and other dry regions, the foam “soil” soaked with a nutrient solution lets vegetables, fruits and herbs grow with far less water than usual. Syrian refugees who were already farmers “have made the project their own, growing things we never thought ... possible in the desert,” says professor Tony Ryan.

But more than plants are flourishing! The greenery amid a barren landscape boosts mental health. The work experience will help people land jobs. Families learn new skills and eat more healthfully. And the gains go both ways, as scientists learn to apply research in the real world.

As God promises, “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert ... shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing” (Isaiah 35:1-2, ESV).

Worship Servants & Donations



As the Covid-19 virus spreads throughout our community and across the globe, we must make difficult and painful choices in order to respond to this situation appropriately.

All worship services and events at St. Matthew are suspended until further notice. This is at the recommendation of the civil authorities and of our Bishop.

Please join us for these online events:

Compline - Wednesday, 8:00 pm (via Zoom)

Bible Study (via Zoom) - Thursday, 1:30 pm

Online Worship - Sunday, 8:30 am (or anytime after). Link on church website www.smlutheran.com or on our Facebook page

Virtual Coffee & Fellowship Time - Sunday (about 9:15 am via Zoom)

Availability



Office hours will be erratic for a while. Pastor Glen will be reducing his time in public as much as possible without neglecting his call. **IF YOU ARE IN NEED OF A PASTORAL PRESENCE HE WILL BE THERE FOR YOU!** Call him and he will be there—of just call to talk!

Pastor Glen Cell (402)740-6395

As we enter July, both Pastor Glen and Carrie will be returning to the office. Pastor Glen will be in the office on Wednesdays and Carrie will be in the office on Thursdays. **PLEASE** call or email before coming into the office, as we will still be trying to limit our exposure to groups or anyone who is not feeling well.

Treasure the Present



Patience asks us to live the moment to the fullest ... to taste the here and now, to be where we are. When we are impatient, we try to get away from where we are. We behave as if the real thing will happen tomorrow, later, and somewhere else. Let's be patient and trust that the treasure we look for is hidden in the ground on which we stand.

—Henri Nouwen

Church Staff



Pastor ~ Glen Thomas
Administrative Assistant ~ Carrie Conley
Communications Coordinator~ Jacob York
Bookkeeper ~ Veda Keebler
Custodian ~ Jack Wiese
Music Director ~ Ric Swanson
Organist ~ Kim Hansen
JuBELLation Ringers Director ~ Ginger Britt

Church Council



Glen Thomas ~ *Pastor*
Brett Fuller—President
Bill Stott—Vice President
Randy Cramer— Secretary
Tammy Nelson—Treasurer

Teri Yeoman - Financial Secretary
Luke Compton— Faith Formation
Dave Sherwin— Community Care
John Hollenbeck— Property
Veda Keebler - Worship and Music

Church Office Information

OFFICE HOURS ~ Monday and Wednesday 9:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.,
Tuesday and Thursday 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, and Friday 9:30 am -
10:30 am. Occasionally staff will not be in the office during these times;
therefore, please call before coming to make sure we are available to assist
you as needed. If no one is available, leave a message and we will call you
back as soon as possible.



CALENDAR ~ All events, activities or meetings planned to be held at St. Matthew need to be placed on the church calendar. To schedule an event, activity or meeting call the church office and speak with Carrie.

WEEKLY BULLETIN ~ All information for announcements need to be in the church office by **Wednesday at noon.**

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER ~ All information for the monthly newsletter “The Acts” is due in the church office on the **second or third Monday of each month.** Specific date listed on the monthly newsletter calendar page.

PAPER RECYCLING ~ We collect all office related paper items, catalogs, and books for recycling. Cardboard products are not included in this recycling program. The recycling waste containers are located in the secretary’s office.

Financial Report

~May 2020~



General Fund Activity

Beginning			Transfers	Ending
Balance	Receipts	Payments	In (Out)	Balance
16,361.16	41,441.59	14,610.09		43,192.66

Benevolence Offerings

Hunger Offerings

Receipts	Dispersed	Receipts	Dispersed
1,491.00	1,385.00	105.00	105.00

Women of the ELCA

Service Project ~ Peanut Butter



~Daily Devotional “Daily Grace”~

Women of the ELCA website: www.womenoftheelca.org

You can go to the free site (above) to access short daily devotions as you wish, or subscribe for daily emails.

Electronic Giving

~Enjoy the convenience of electronic giving!



OUR church offers electronic giving, which allows you to make donations on a scheduled, automatic basis. It’s very convenient for you and provides much-needed donation consistency for our church. You will no longer need to write out checks and prepare envelopes every week. Even when travel, illness or other circumstances prevent you from attending services, your electronic contributions will continue to be received on an uninterrupted basis.

To set up electronic donations, simply complete the authorization form available at church and return it to the church office. Donations can be debited automatically from either a checking or savings account.



"Empowered by God as committed disciples, we boldly care for and serve our congregation, our community and our world."

St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church
1725 S 60th Street
Omaha, NE 68106-2149

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



~CONTACT INFORMATION~

Office Phone (402) 556-7030
Email: office@smllutheran.com
Web Site: www.smllutheran.com

~WORSHIP SCHEDULE~

Sunday @ 8:30 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.
Holy Communion Every Week

~SUNDAY COFFEE AND FELLOWSHIP~

9:30 a.m. in Fellowship Hall

~SUNDAY SCHOOL~

9:40 a.m. - 10:20 a.m.

A journey for everyone from 2—102!

This newsletter is now available on our church website and is emailed to our members and friends. To help decrease the cost of printing and postage, please notify the church office of your current email address. Thank you!

