

Dear Friends,

An increasing number of companies, like Nationwide Insurance, for example, are moving away from the model of employees working in office buildings to the model of asking them to work remotely from home. What had previously seemed like a risky experiment has now become mainstream in just a few months. Sure, many people have been working remotely for decades, but they weren't the norm. After a few months of being forced into the remote-work model, many companies have discovered that their employees are just as productive when working at home as they were in the pricey office spaces that they previously occupied. Company after company has been announcing that they are going to shrink the physical footprint that they occupy and move more of their operations online. That is how disruption is distinguished from interruption. In an interruption, something that we were previously doing is put on hold and then resumes after a period of time. In a disruption, the resumption of "business as usual" doesn't happen or at least not in a way that anyone would recognize.

We are living in a time of disruption. While many of the pre-COVID activities that we enjoy will return, the pre-COVID world is not going to return. When I say this, I am not talking about distancing protocols and masks - I am speaking about our society's shift from physical to digital. In the pre-COVID world, much of life occurred in the physical world with a lot of things also happening online. During the shutdown, nearly all of life moved online to the digital world. Many people and organizations found the digital world to be quite homey and sometimes preferable to the physical world of long commutes, traffic, and difficult weather. In fact, to their surprise, many companies who were previously skeptical about the remote-work model found that their worst fears of this scenario were not realized. Consequently, many companies are eliminating their physical office presence or downsizing the spaces that they lease. In the post-COVID world, it appears that much of life is going to continue to occur in the digital world while a lot of things will also happen in the physical world. That's the shift that is emerging - a movement from "physical with some digital" to "digital with some physical."

How will this shift affect the Church? We could say that it won't - just as the shopping mall owners argued in the early days of Amazon and other online retailers. They argued that people still want to see items in person before making significant purchases. Have you been to the malls lately? Many shopping malls across the country are going to close following the loss of business during the shut-down. However, the shut-down is not the cause of their demise - it simply accelerated the trends that were already occurring, and have been occurring for many years. The bankruptcies of anchor stores and the loss of many chain boutiques over the years have left many vacant spaces in our shopping malls. This trend was not reversing course but was plodding along in the same direction. The shutdown, unfortunately, pushed these trends into warp speed.

Are there long-term trends in the Church that we can identify? Will they too be hastened along by the shutdown? If we're honest, worship attendance has been declining in many congregations for decades. When I was ordained 18 years ago, a family who attended worship once per month were considered infrequent worship attendees. In recent years, those same families are now considered active members because such patterns of attendance have become relatively normal among us. Fifteen years ago, almost every congregation was posting good numbers in their Sunday Schools and Bible Classes. Today, many congregations scramble to maintain some offering in each of these areas out of a sense of duty. It would be rather foolish for congregations to look around at all of the signs of disruption in our society and conclude that the Church will be unaffected.

Fortunately, we have choices. We can ignore the inevitable shifts that are occurring and hope that the previous trends will reverse themselves. That's the approach that the shopping malls have taken. Or, we can see this as a time of opportunity for the mission of the Gospel. We can complain about those younger generations who "are always on their phones" or dream of how to get the Gospel onto those screens. We can eagerly await the return of the 1950s when families had multiple children and raised them to love the Lord and His Church - or - we can figure out how to connect the people around us with the God Who has died in their place and answered for their sins. I hope to remain in active ministry for at least 20 more years and so following the approach of the shopping malls is not an option for me.

Before I describe the wonderful opportunities for the mission of Christ that the digital world holds for congregations who do the hard work of learning to do ministry there, I want to clarify that I do not anticipate the physical presence of the Church going away - ever. I have every reason to believe that when my retirement comes in 2040 or so, that I will still be leading in-person worship services and Bible classes. God has chosen to work through the means of grace - Word and Sacrament - and while we are finding new ways to communicate the Word digitally this will never be the case with the Sacraments. By their very nature physical presence is required for there to be a Sacrament and all of the technological advances in the world aren't going to change that.

One of the first places I stop when disembarking from the train in Chicago is the Amazon store. That's right - "the Amazon store." This is not something I do on my phone, but something that I do with my feet. I pull up the Amazon Go app on my phone, scan it at the turnstile, and enter the store where I typically purchase a small package of Lindt white chocolate. Why would Amazon who mainstreamed online shopping open brick-and-mortar stores? Because there will always be things that cannot be done online. And so it goes with the Church. Baptism and the Lord's Supper will always be administered among God's people. Human touch which encourages and comforts will always be sought by people in the fellowship of congregations. The beauty and joy of congregational singing cannot be replaced by professional artists who do our singing for us. The need for people to gather in face-to-face worship and fellowship are not going away - and in fact, in the digital world, they may become more urgent. The Church will always have a physical presence, but woe to those congregations who think that they are going to thrive in our present/future reality while focusing exclusively on their physical presence.

The digital world is no longer a frontier for the brave and the bold, an increasing number of Americans are not only doing their shopping there but also their banking, entertainment viewing, insurance needs, transportation arrangements, and ordering delivery food from McDonald's (there's an app for that). Given these shifts, it is unreasonable to think that people's engagement with the Church will remain unchanged. It has been changing - changing for decades - but as long as congregations have maintained a critical mass of attendees to support what they are doing, change did not seem necessary. For thirty years or more, congregations have grown accustomed to disciplining fewer and fewer people and just hoping that the people will come back. The other day, I was looking up someone's baptismal record from the 1970s. While looking in the records, I stumbled upon the attendance record of a special service that was held that year. Five-hundred and eighteen worshipers attended that service, and it was not uncommon for St. John's to average 400 or more worshipers a Sunday at that time. Our average worship attendance today hovers around 72 to 73 worshipers. While this is a respectable number for an urban congregation today, the number of souls that we are reaching for the Kingdom is significantly lower than it used to be. The people who no longer frequent the shopping malls are still getting their stuff, but are those who no longer frequent congregations receiving what is needed for their souls?

If you are online, please visit the following sites.

SJ homepage - <https://www.stjohnsbeloit.com>

SJ Facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/stjohnslutheranbeloit>

SJ Youtube channel - <https://tinyurl.com/stjohnsbeloit>

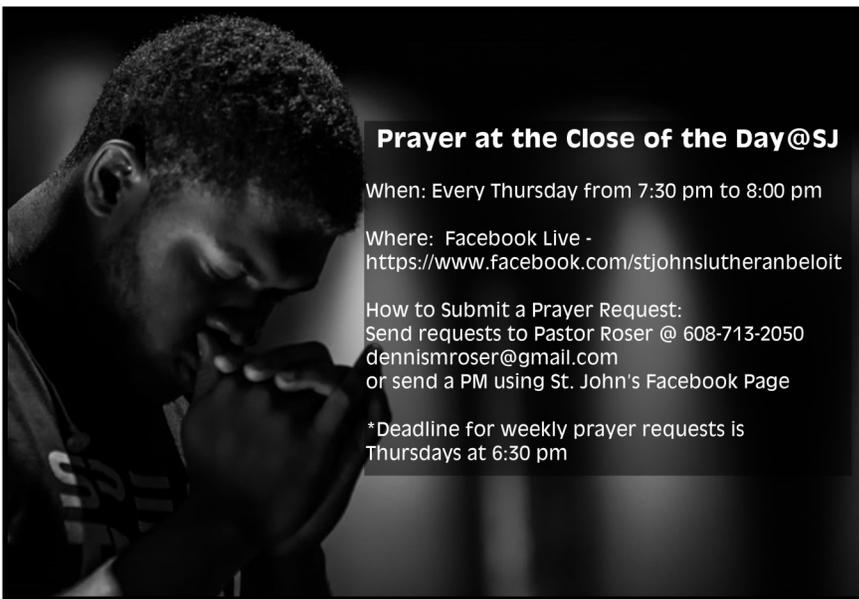
SJ Podcast channel - <https://stjohnbeloitmedia.podbean.com>

These four sites are at the heart of what we are doing digitally to reach people for Christ. However, we need your help in order to be successful. Please take some time to share this content with your friends, family, colleagues, neighbors, etc. We are working hard to upload solid content, but the people in your life will most likely never see it unless you share it with them. Please consider forwarding my emails that contain links to our programming. If you know how to start a watch party on Facebook, please host watch parties around our weekly services. If you don't know how to host a watch party, this video can show you: <https://youtu.be/EJSnOIE5FEI>. Please also consider sharing links to our content on your social media accounts on a regular basis. In the 1970s, St. John's members used to gather one evening per week to knock on doors throughout Beloit in order to share the good news of Jesus with our neighbors. Knocking on doors in the neighborhoods is no longer as effective as it once was. Perhaps it is because the front doors of people's lives have changed. The front doors are now online and God is calling us to work in His harvest.

*I am indebted to Carey Nieuwhof for his analogy of the shopping malls during the rise of Amazon. You can read his excellent article by going to <https://careynieuwhof.com/are-churches-behaving-like-malls-in-the-age-of-amazon-just-hoping-for-people-to-shop-again>.

In Christ Jesus,

Pastor



Prayer at the Close of the Day@SJ

When: Every Thursday from 7:30 pm to 8:00 pm

Where: Facebook Live - <https://www.facebook.com/stjohnslutheranbeloit>

How to Submit a Prayer Request:
Send requests to Pastor Roser @ 608-713-2050
dennismroser@gmail.com
or send a PM using St. John's Facebook Page

*Deadline for weekly prayer requests is Thursdays at 6:30 pm



Altar flowers are a special way to mark important events and remember those we love. St. John's members and friends are invited to bring in flowers for placement behind the altar. They can be fresh-cut or purchased. If you would like to have a notice placed in the bulletin regarding your flowers, please let Berta know at least one week prior to their placement. You

can also feel welcome to bring in flowers for no particular reason, and we will be delighted to place them behind the altar. We have a number of flower stands available and so space is not necessarily limited. We invite you to take your flowers with you after the service as we do not have a place to keep them. In former times, altar flowers were a more common thing and florists would have standing orders for these arrangements and deliver them each week right to the chancel - as each congregation would give them a building key. As you can imagine, like many things, this has changed over the years. Many thanks to Doris Rindfleisch for her work over the years in taking vases to the florist and delivering the flowers to St. John's! One final note: while Pastor really cannot tell the difference between silk flowers and those which are real - we may only present real flowers before our God in worship. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to Pastor.

Prayers for those in need of physical or spiritual healing:

The family and friends of Lester Nyborg, the family and friends of Jeremy Pearson (Bill and Betty Pearson's grandson,) all those whom we have named on our prayer list, and those we now name in the thoughts of our hearts, Pastor Bill Wagner, Darlene Willing, Lee Stewart, Beverly Bottoms, Carol Lowry, Roger Nelson, Ruth Peterson, Karen Nohr, Brad Carter, Paula Devlin, Keith Stowers, Ed Spychalski, Jon Turner, Bobbie Reynolds, Mike Papini, Tom Wulf, Doris Rindfleisch, Carl Colby, Joaquin, Sandy Smith, Marcie Moore, Laura Jo Pearson, Cayden Krueger, Janice Hemerley, Lauren Mae, and all of our members who are homebound, those who serve in the military (particularly Pastor Keith GeRue, Kyle Summers and Logan Davies), emergency services, and all who work for the common good.

Regarding 2020 Easter flowers...

Our Easter service did not occur in the fashion that anyone could have anticipated. Consequently, members ordered Easter flowers that were not able to be purchased. If you would like to have your flower money refunded to you, please let Monica know. Any Easter flower monies that are not refunded will be added to that person's giving statement for 2020.

Our congratulations and prayers to Andrew Bartz and Brittany Radish who married on June 20 in Muskego. May God bless them in their new life together.



Win Delicious Culver's Food!

We have a number of avenues we use to keep you apprised of the opportunities and events here at St. John's: The monthly Messenger, the weekly Communicator, the Facebook page, the Web page, the Sunday Bulletin, and (first and foremost) the Worship service. Many times we will repeat the information in more than one of the venues in an effort to make sure the information is reaching everyone. We'd like to know if the announcements we're providing are getting through and being remembered.

And so, the last weekend of the month, we'll have a list of four questions whose answers can be found in the one or more of the Messenger, Communicator, Sunday Bulletin, Facebook page, Web page, or during the Worship Service during the previous month. Submit the answers either in writing or by email to the church's Administrative Assistant by noon the following Friday, and a winner will be drawn from the entries with the correct answers. The winner gets a gift card for some delicious Culver's food!

officestjohnsbeloit@gmail.com

ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS!

- 1.) List two of our in-person health guidelines
- 2.) What has Pastor Roser asked us to contemplate during Wednesday fasts?
- 3.) On what date did St. John's resume limited in-person worship?
- 4.) There are now three worship services available on Sundays. What times are they offered?

Answers need to be submitted by noon, July 3, 2020

Registration for St. John's 2020-2021 School Year

It is my privilege to serve as the principal of St. John's Lutheran School.

We are in preparation for the 20-21 school year, and we're adding a grade! Seats are still open in grades 4K-5th grade. Please consider following our facebook page and sharing information with families looking for a Christian education. The WI choice program enrollment has ended but we are still accepting families that are interested through scholarships. For more information please contact our school office at 608-713-1400 or email me, Isiah King, at king@luminschools.org.

Mark your calendars!!

Women's Bible Study resumes **IN PERSON**
1:00 pm Monday, September 14, 2020.

This week's worship service bulletin is available for you on our website on the Digital church page.



The CD ministry this week is sponsored by Don and Nancy Nohr in celebration of their anniversary.