

CHIMES Newsletter

APRIL 2020 VOLUME 82, ISSUE 4

MESSAGE FROM PASTOR JEN...

I just read the latest information from the CDC (3-15-2020) that recommends all gatherings of over 50 people be looked upon with great caution. They are extending this caution well past our traditional Holy Week and Easter observances.

To be sure, in our biblical narratives Holy Week featured large gatherings. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem comes immediately to mind. But when we look to Easter morning, our traditional ways of observing the day in our time bear little resemblance to what we find in scripture. Our traditions have us with worship attendance on Easter Sunday skewing the norm for every other day besides Mother's Day and Christmas Eve. We then go to our homes after worship to dining rooms set up with extra chairs at the main table, and card tables set up for the little ones as we gather for our Easter meals.

Don't get me wrong; I cherish these times and traditions! I have fond memories of past times and anticipate new celebrations with my own family. I especially look forward to gatherings as our children bring their children to the table. However, as we look to the ways in which the day was experienced on that First Easter we see a different picture.

At the tomb the gospels each have a slightly different story to share, but each of them feature a small, quiet gathering. They meet at the tomb, which is disturbingly empty. Only a few are gathered, and they do so to care for the body of Jesus, their (supposedly) dead friend and teacher. At the tomb they encounter the Risen Christ, not in a big celebration but an intimate encounter.

It looks like, with the recommendations from the CDC, that we are in a perfect position to not recreate that situation, but be open to intimate encounters with the Risen Christ this year.

As we practice social distancing we will still come together online to join in worship. Together we will continue to be the Body of Christ, gathered to experience and receive the means of grace in a new way. We will hear the Word of God shared and proclaimed. We will share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion with our homemade elements. We will experience fellowship in a new way. And in this new way, in our changing and uncertain times, the changeless certainty of the Triune God is with us.

Amen, amen, amen!

Pastor Jen



UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 5

Holy Week

APRIL 12

Easter Sunday



“ Kindness is realizing that we're all in this together. ”

- RAKtivist

OUR CHURCH

CANCELLATIONS DUE TO COVID-19 VIRUS

The Covid-19 situation and Governor Evers' "Safer at Home" Executive Order, has put us in a situation where we have not been able to gather together in our church building. All activities and events for the month of April have been cancelled or postponed. This includes the following:

Regularly Scheduled Events Cancelled:

Wednesday & Sunday Worship services (Sundays now Facebook Live)

Sunday school

Confirmation

Lenten suppers

Monday night euchre

Tai Chi

Zumba

Bible Study

Quilters

Women's Group

Committee meetings (now meeting virtually)

Special Events Cancelled:

Middle School Lock-in & breakfast (originally scheduled 4/4 & 4/5)

First Communion (postponed until further notice)

Follow Where Jesus Walked drama & dinner

Good Friday Jesus Christ Superstar movie showing

Easter brunch

Earth Day Cleanup (originally scheduled 4/19)

Women's Tea (originally scheduled 4/25)

Also, with the new order by the Governor, this now means that the church office will not be open. Staff have been directed to work from home. Julie and Janice are reachable via email (bethluch15@gmail.com). And Pastor Jen is reachable via email (bethlehemELCA.pastor@gmail.com) and phone (608-485-3976).

HOLY WEEK SERVICES

Even though we cannot meet in person for worship during Holy Week, Pastor Jen will be on Facebook Live the following days and times:



April 5th – Palm Sunday Worship, 9am

April 9th – Maundy Thursday, 5:30 pm

April 10th – Good Friday, 1 pm

April 12th – Easter Sunday, 9am

OFFERINGS REQUEST

Thank you to all of you who have mailed in your offerings or have signed up to contribute electronically this past week. Our offerings from electronic giving (Simply Giving and Bill Pay) is only 20% of the monthly offerings BLC receives. The weekly envelope offerings from services are so important and are needed to make budget. They total approximately \$19,500 monthly.

For those of you who are able, please prayerfully consider being generous with your offerings while you are unable to spend discretionary money elsewhere. We know many of you are impacted by the financial crisis caused by Covid-19. We understand this may change your ability to give. For those less impacted, maybe you could help more. As a Council, we have started and are exploring ways that we can reduce our expenses while still doing the Lord's work and our church's mission.

To help the office staff out during this time, we are encouraging you to think about electronic giving in any of the following ways.

- **Bill Pay:** This is something you can do directly with your banking institution or credit union. It is usually free of charge, but you will want to check with your bank/credit union on their policies. The money comes directly out of your chosen account, the bank/credit union then writes a check to the church and mails it for you. You can have it set up as a one time payment or a reoccurring payment.
- **Simply Giving:** This option is similar to bill pay, but it is meant for automatic reoccurring payments, not one time offerings. You fill out a Simply Giving form, a copy is enclosed in this newsletter for your convenience and can also be found on our website on the Offerings page by clicking [here](#), and send it to the church office for Julie Saalsaa to set it up. With this option, you would notify the office with any changes or updates.
- **Paypal:** We have set up a Paypal account as another option for electronic giving. It is recommended that this only be used for one-time payments and not for regular reoccurring offerings. Visit the [Offerings page](#) on our website to make an offering via Paypal.

If you choose to mail in your offering envelope, we ask that you do mail it and not drop it off since the office will be closed. Here is our address: W8267 Hwy 33 E, Portage, WI 53901. Staff will be picking up mail daily. If you are able and would like to adopt a bill, please contact the church office. Thank you again, for your generosity and your help as we continue to do the Lord's work during this difficult time.

THANK YOU TO KRIS SODERMAN

It is with sad hearts that we were not able to give Kris Soderman a proper farewell party, as she has done so much for us here at BLC. Kris has been our choir director since 2013 and has been such a blessing to us. She has touched the lives of so many with her music and talents, not just here, but in Portage and the surrounding communities. We wish her well in her new endeavors. The Council presented Kris with windchimes for her to take with her to her new home, so when she hears them she will think of our BLC family. Below are some pictures of the beautiful quilt, pillows and other items that were made for her by Barb Rothwell, Cloe Rehdantz and Betty Biech. Some of the squares were signed by the members of the choir. Thank you Kris! God's Blessings to you!



RENEWAL TEAM UPDATE

Greetings!

Last month, Melissa Bradbury provided you with a summary about what the Renewal Team has been up to since it began. I, however, will give you a much shorter update about what has been going on over the last month.

We truly enjoyed meeting Rev. Walter Baires at our lunch meeting on Ash Wednesday. About a dozen of us attended, along with Pr. Jen and Rev. Steve Kottke from the synod offices. We learned more about the renewal process and Faithful Innovations, a program that compliments the renewal and something that we may implement with the congregation in the future.

We want to express our gratitude, again, to all of you for participating in the listening sessions. We were able to gather a lot of important feedback about the direction that you envision for BLC. From the feedback that you gave to us, it seems like the priorities for BLC fall under three main categories:

- Christian Education (all ages)
- Fellowship and Outreach
- Worship

How do we move forward? Do we stop certain outdated ministries? Do we change what we are doing? Or, do we strengthen the programs that we currently have? In order to provide a balanced conversation about all of this, we decided to find out what innovative things other churches are doing in our synod. We did have a field trip planned to New Heights Church in Black Earth for Wednesday, March 11th, but unfortunately they had to cancel due to illness. We will continue our relationship with them and hopefully set up a conference call or video conference meeting to ask them questions about how they developed their Wednesday night Family Faith Night. We are listening to all of your suggestions about worship services, and possibly incorporating more contemporary music platforms for certain services. We are looking into new ideas for fellowship, fundraising and outreach to encourage the growth of our community at BLC, in-side and outside of our walls. We are also considering the idea of becoming involved with local prison ministries.

We will be planning the next series of listening sessions, starting in May/June, based upon the progression of COVID-19 in Wisconsin. We are postponing these meetings until we know that it is safe to schedule them, but we look forward to hearing from you all again in the near future. We may look into other options of videoconferencing, if necessary.

Pr. Jen's virtual "door" remains open during this unprecedented time. If you have any questions or concerns about the renewal process thus far or the next steps, please reach out to her via phone call or email.

Respectfully submitted,
Tania Anderson



CONTACT US

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Office Hours:

9am-3pm Monday-Wednesday;

9am-12 Thursday & Friday

NEWS FROM THE CHURCH OFFICE

The weekly news emails will continue to be sent to keep you update to date on what is going on. Our church website is also being kept current with news, information, and the weekly bulletin. Pastor Jen is active on our Facebook page with psalm readings and posts, and this is where you will find our Sunday worship. If you are not receiving emails from the church and want to be on the mailing list, please email the church office.



Directions on how to access our Facebook page was sent outlast week in the weekly news. For those of you receiving this in the mail, I have enclosed those directions for you. You do not have to have a Facebook account to watch Sunday service, but do need to have a computer.

NEED HELP WITH PICKING UP YOUR GROCERIES

We want to make sure we take care of our most vulnerable members, so staff and members are working on reaching out to those members. If you are not able to get to the store and need help because you are at a high risk with the Covid-19 virus, please reach out to Pastor Jen via call or email.

EASTER FLOWERS



Now that we are under a “Safer at Home” order from the Governor, that means Pastor Jen will be at home when saying Easter worship and we will not need to order flower to decorate the Sanctuary. If you have already sent in an order, you’re money will be returned once staff are back in the office.

TORNADO & SEVERE WEATHER AWARENESS WEEK

The week of April 13-17, 2020, is Tornado and Severe Weather Awareness Week in Wisconsin. The National Weather Service in Wisconsin and Wisconsin Emergency Management are asking that everyone take time to go over their safety plans so that they will be ready when severe weather strikes. Having a weather radio will help notify you when severe weather is approaching.



CHOIR DIRECTOR & PRAISE TEAM LEADER POSITIONS AVAILABLE

BLC is looking to fill these positions. If you are someone you know is interested, please contact Pastor Jen or the office.



Wanted now: A Thrivent member to be in charge of Choice Dollars for our church.

I have done it for quite awhile and I am no longer a Thrivent member, so I pay a yearly fee. I am not able to continue doing it. It does not take a lot of time or work. Call Marj 742-3926 to volunteer.

