

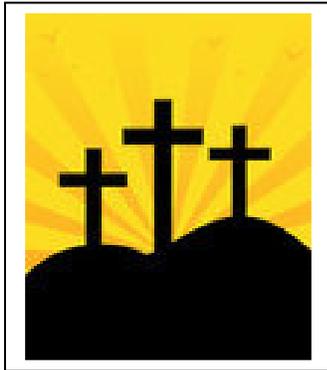
Well, we are cruising our way through the winter already. A small group of people who feel safe to do so are gathering on Sundays while the rest of us worship with the virtual service through our website: www.salemlc-oxford.org. If you haven't checked it out yet, do so; go to the website, find the virtual service banner across the top of the homepage, and click on it. You will find linked the weekly Scripture passages, songs, and audio recordings of my opening comments and sermon.



We have now entered the season of **Lent** - the time of the year when we ready ourselves to better receive God's graces through Christ's death and resurrection; we pray and celebrate our way to Good Friday and Easter morning. If you would like some help doing this (in addition to the Sunday services), feel free to use one the resources linked here:

- The Daily Bread (booklet of daily scripture readings available at Salem)
- weekly Children's bulletins (available at Salem and on our virtual service page)
- order from LCMC (the association to which Salem belongs): <https://blogs.lcms.org/2020/lcms-worship-lenten-resources/>
- order from Concordia Publishing House (local, Lutheran company): <https://search.cph.org/search#w=lenten%20resources>

We are planning to have a **Good Friday service**, offered in both the in-person and the on-line/virtual formats. **Easter Sunday service** is also planned to be offered under both formats and with contract-free communion. We will not be able to have our annual Easter Sunday potluck brunch this year, due to COVID precautions. Remember, if you choose to worship in-person, please plan on wearing a mask, keeping social distanced, and not sharing contact with people outside of your own circle. We still need to be careful.



In general, we want to still practice these **precautions** when in the public sphere even as numbers (cases, hospitalizations, deaths, positivity rates, and vaccination numbers) are all moving in the right direction. Until we have around 70% of our community carrying the antibodies (either through having contracted **COVID** or having received their vaccinations), we still need to be aware that we can contract, carry, and spread the virus among those who haven't been infected or vaccinated.

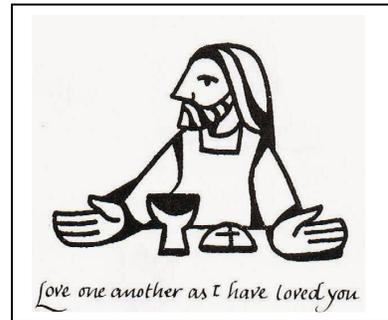
As such, we will still not have large-group, indoor gatherings at Salem until we reach that level. We plan on gathering again outside for services and meetings once it the air is warm enough and the ground is dry enough (middle/end of April??). When we do have **outdoor worship services** - like we did last summer and fall - we will still practice precautions; we simply must until we reach a safe level. At least we will be able to more in number and be more sure of our safety. We will get there, but we need to be patient and diligent!

As we have moved through this last year, many people have **stepped up to help Salem** continue to function. Nicholas Williams has put in much time coordinating the indoor services,

along with Paul & Becky Fiske and Ellen & Hans Erdman. Jerry Youngquist has put in many hours each week keeping our website and virtual services current (and archive all the sermons and bulletins – also on the web-site). Thanks to all these generous people.

We choose to cancel our **Annual Meeting** this year due to the inability to have a parish-wide gathering. If you would like to read my pastors report, please let me know and I will get it to you. The council members all agreed to extend their terms one year. Kevin Almendinger had to step down due to other obligations; Deb Deitner will complete his term on the council. Nicholas Williams is now serving as president while Joan Butler and Deb Stenberg agreed to continue as VP and secretary. Erin Pearson volunteered to take on the treasurer's responsibilities after the passing of Jim Elmquist. Jim Arboe and Duane Bengtson have taken on the responsibilities that Lee Debele carried before his passing. Thanks to these faithful people!

We also have not had a Sunday School Program this last year due to several obvious factors. We are hoping to offer **first communion** this spring, though. I will be reaching out to the families I know who have children who are in at least 2nd grade and who have not yet shared at the Lord's Table to discuss the details of how and when this might happen. If you have such a child (or grandchild) and don't hear from me by the beginning of March, please contact me.



Salem also has several adults connected to the parish who have never confirmed their faith and some who were never baptized. An **adult confirmation process** will start on Tues, Feb 23rd. We will be meeting on-line from 7-8:30 pm every Tues night of the month except the 2nd Tuesdays (when we have a council meeting). Besides those that want to confirm their faith, all are welcome to meet with us to have a systematic refresher of your faith. Contact me for further details or join our Google-Meet session through this link: meet.google.com/gaq-aufk-xxe. Again, anyone is welcome. The sessions will also be recorded, so a person may be able to watch them after-the-fact or easily make-up a session if he/she misses one. I will archive them, and they will be archived on the parish web-site as well.

Looking further ahead, we hope to have our annual Heritage Day celebration in June; if this can – indeed – happen, you will receive more information. We are also hoping we can have Vacation Bible School this summer along with our parish picnic – we'll see!

So, though we have had to curtail some of our activities this last winter, we have not shut down completely. We also have not gone away 😊. One might consider that we were simply in a pro-longed Lenten season while waiting the glories of the resurrection. We are moving in that direction...along with moving in the direction of the Kingdom of God. Until the day we arrive, we will continue to stay in touch with, minister to, journey alongside, and serve one-another at Salem. I am – we all are – blessed to be a part of this faithful and generous community.

In Christ, I remain.

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