

Churches across the diocese adapt as pandemic brought building closures

***Editor's note:** On the next eight pages you will read not only how churches of the diocese have responded during the closure of church buildings, but also some first-person stories of how the pandemic has affected people in some way. There also is a brief look at churches during the 1918 flu epidemic, as well as the mass Virtual Choir video that debuted on Easter.*

We hope all this helps to document the work and ministry of the diocese during this extraordinary time.

By Melodie Woerman

ON MARCH 16 Bishop Cathleen Bascom, heeding warnings of national local health officials about the spread of the never-before-seen coronavirus, informed the diocese that churches would be closed until early April.

Two days later Presiding Bishop Michael Curry encouraged churches to suspend in-person worship through May 17, and word went out from the bishop's office on March 20 that buildings would be closed for worship for eight weeks.

And even as it hit clergy and worshippers alike that this meant no one would be gathering for Holy Week and Easter services, many churches

pivoted in mere days to providing worship online.

A dozen congregations were broadcasting on Sunday, March 22, most via Facebook. By early May, that number had grown to 26 churches, out of 44, using Facebook, YouTube or even Zoom video conferencing for services of Morning

Prayer.

Meetings quickly moved online, too, for diocesan bodies as well as parishes. The Council of Trustees, which had offered online meeting opportunities in the past when bad weather hit, has met via Zoom since mid-March. The Commission on Ministry was able to interview can-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Rev. Marc McDonald offers an Easter Day blessing, in the rain, to parishioners driving by St. Andrew's in downtown Emporia, as his daughter Sarah waves an Easter streamer overhead. It was the first time he had seen many of his congregation in person since church buildings were closed across the diocese starting March 16.



SCREENSHOT COLLAGE BY MELODIE WOERMAN

Screens became the place of worship for people across the diocese as churches used Facebook, YouTube and Zoom to share services and messages when church buildings were closed to worshippers.

didates for Holy Orders online, and Vestries across the diocese have learned how to conduct business virtually.

The pandemic-caused closure also disrupted plans by three churches to mark important milestones. The 100th anniversary of St. James' Wichita, set for June, was postponed, as was the May observance of the 150th anniversary of St. Luke's, Wamego. St. Andrew's, Emporia, postponed some early activities related to its 150th anniversary, with hopes that the celebration itself still could proceed in November.

Staying connected while apart

Online services offered the chance for many to gather on Sunday mornings, or at other times, for worship. But churches also found ways to stay connected throughout the week. Many created teams of people, Vestry members or others, to reach out to parishioners on a regular basis by phone calls or emails.

The Rev. Mary Schrom Breese sent a weekly sermon by mail to members of Epiphany, Sedan, and reached out by phone or text to a portion of her congregation daily. The Rev. Kay Dagg, St. Paul's, Clay Center, mailed letters to everyone without email, along with a sermon, and parish children got a card from her each week.

The Rev. Mike Loyd, St. Andrew's, Derby, sent cards to elderly members and

Continued on page 10

Thoughts about liturgy online

By the Rev. Gar Demo
Rector of St. Thomas, Overland Park



In my mind liturgy feels like going to the opera: the room, aesthetics, clothing and ambience all contribute to the experience of the high art of opera. Without that, opera is just people standing around singing.

I don't think our liturgy translates well to video, at least not without effort and thoughtfulness to the

difference in the medium.

At St. Thomas' we have found a mixture of pre-recorded material (music, sermon, readings) with live participation still leaves us with some of the elements of communal worship.

We feel "together" on Facebook and YouTube as we participate together in our traditional services, but at the same time pre-recording allows for the sound and other elements to be done in a way that dignifies the services.

As each week has passed, we have tried new things with great success and a few bumps in the road. We had a virtual palm procession with photos of our members processing palm branches at home. We have offered time for virtual community prayer, and we had a virtual peace, with short videos from our members to each other.

We had two new members join and ask to be baptized.

Additionally, our children's ministry has put together amazing weekly teaching sessions and videos for Zoom with our kids. All our small groups are meeting online, and our youth continue to meet weekly as a group, online, as well.

All this said, we have no idea what we are doing or when this will end. However, we have found many creative and wonderful ways to connect with each other anyway — and some of that we will keep. ☉

I am a Covid-19 survivor

Note: The author is a member of an Episcopal church in Kansas who asked to remain anonymous to protect her family's privacy. This was written on April 29.

I am recovering from Covid-19. I was one of the lucky ones — I didn't have to be hospitalized, and my oxygen levels stayed within range. My husband and two sons never got sick. I still have a job and good health insurance.

But I still experienced two miserable weeks of fevers of up to 104, severe body aches, headaches, shortness of breath and chest pain. I wondered if my body was strong enough to fight off this new virus. I had panic attacks and had to face my own mortality. Calls to my priest helped me through those dark times.

Mine was the first identified case of coronavirus local transmission in my county. This means I did not have known contact with an infected person or traveled to a viral hot spot. I don't know when or how I contracted it, or how many people I unknowingly exposed to it before I developed symptoms.

In mid-March, some relatively mild but worrying symptoms sent me to my doctor's office, where they luckily had tests for Covid-19. They sent me home and told me to isolate (and my family to quarantine) while I waited for the results. That meant I had to use a bedroom and bathroom apart from the rest of my family. Two days later I found out I tested positive. My husband, donned in a mask and gloves, brought meals to me. When my fever caused me to sweat through the bed sheets, I had to change and launder them myself because of contamination risks.

I was in isolation for two weeks, not knowing each day if I would get better or worse, sleeping only 3-4 hours at a time before waking up gasping for breath. My family was not allowed to leave the house unless it was a medical emergency. My husband was relegated to the couch for close to four weeks.

My fevers began to subside after two weeks, and the health department cleared me from isolation protocols. My family was in quarantine for an additional two weeks.

For almost a full month, we relied on people from our church and community to help with grocery shopping, dropping off masks — anything we needed. We had so much help and support. It wasn't easy, but we did it.

I am recovering, but I wear out quickly. My stamina isn't great. My lungs aren't the same as before, and I sometimes have to use an asthma inhaler for the shortness of breath.

I want people to know how grateful I am for the sacrifices people are making right now — practicing social distancing, reducing their work hours, home-schooling their kids and missing the fellowship of church. I know it will help people not experience what I did.

I don't want my story to scare people but to say, "Be cautious." These are hard times with lots of sacrifices, and I am very grateful for those making them. ☺

Continued from page 9

"probably...more emails during this time than I've done in my life."

The Very Rev. Laurie Lewis recorded a weekly video reflection for her parishioners at Trinity, Arkansas City, and Grace, Winfield, and Grace Cathedral, Topeka, sent short daily meditations by email, from the Very Rev. Torey Lightcap and the Rev. Ashley Mather.

The Rev. Marc McDonald, St. Andrew's, Emporia, offered weekly office hours using Zoom, and the Rev. Jon Hullinger, Trinity, Atchison, said people often would stay online after Morning or Evening Prayer services, just to chat.

The Rev. Greg Doll, St. Mark's, Blue Rapids and St. Paul's, Marysville, said he texted and called people regularly. He said, "If anything I've become more pastoral" than before.

St. Paul's, Leavenworth was offering online services, but the Rev. Steve Lipscomb said he knew some members couldn't watch. So he sent them audio recordings of worship on CDs, and even provided CD players for those who needed one.

Some churches offered fun activities, too. Church of the Covenant, Junction City, hosted an acoustic music concert on its Facebook page April 17, and St. Paul's, Manhattan offered a daily "Noon Zoom," with offerings that included

coffee hour, prayers and music recitals by church members.

Going digital

While churches made a swift pivot to worship on screens in place of worship in person, it wasn't without its challenges. Lightcap, dean of Grace Cathedral, called the effort to create an online service "very time-consuming" and "outside the main areas of expertise of most clergy."

Leavenworth's Lipscomb called it "a trial and error process" that improved each week.

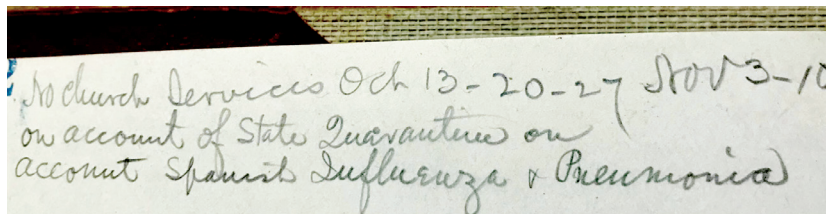
The Rev. Doreen Rice of Covenant, Junction City, said there was a learning curve to using Facebook Live, as well as dealing with Internet lapses during the broadcast. And, she added, "It is very odd to worship in front of an empty church."

McDonald said his Emporia church had begun streaming last October, but using it exclusively pointed out their need for better equipment and more robust streaming licenses, which came at a cost. Learning how to use all that, with little outside assistance, was a challenge, he said.

But clergy also said that all the effort was worth it, and that their churches plan to continue to offer some kind of online worship even after in-person services resume.

Lightcap said the cathedral's Morning Prayer service, pre-recorded on Zoom and posted to church YouTube and Facebook channels, along with live Compline every night, has provided "an expanded reach, new congregants, and a few donations from people impacted by this ministry."

Lipscomb said St. Paul's has seen some former members, who moved away or otherwise left the church, join in online services. McDonald said the extra reach provided by



A financial record book for 1918 belonging to the Church of the Covenant, Junction City, notes that the church was closed for five Sundays that fall because of quarantine caused by the Spanish flu pandemic.

The 1918 pandemic in Kansas

In the fall of 1918, while the United States was engaged in World War I in Europe, another foe began to sweep across the country. A new strain of influenza had first appeared in the spring among soldiers at Fort Riley, but it was mild and passed without much notice.

But by October it had mutated into a new and dangerous strain that resulted in a quarter of the country infected and 675,000 deaths. In Kansas, with a population of 1.7 million, 12,000 people died.

The state fared better than others in part because of the quick action of Dr. Samuel Crumbine, secretary of the state board of health, who was known for his "swat the fly" campaign to stop insect-borne illnesses. In October he issued a statewide call for a stop to public meetings. In Topeka, local officials went further, closing all public gatherings, theatre presentations and churches. Other cities soon followed.

School districts shut down classes, and some cities listed school assignments in the local post office or printed them in the newspaper.

By November many quarantine orders were lifted, but some cities kept them in place until January.

The flu returned in the spring of 1919, but fewer people fell ill, leading health officials to conclude the disease had come to an end.

Information comes from "Kansas in the 'Grippe,'" an article for the Spring 1992 issue of Kansas History by Judith R. Johnson, now Professor Emerita at Wichita State University. ©

online services "is too great not to continue."

Doll said he found that the "audience is much larger" than his two small congregations, and that using Facebook for services has prompted him to use it to reach out more to his parishioners in general. He plans to continue doing all of that.

Special Easter offerings

While Holy Week and Easter were

unlike anything before, the diocese and parish churches worked hard to provide special offerings.

In the first week without in-person worship, Bishop Bascom decided to create a diocesan Easter Vigil service, with the service booklet printed and mailed to members of every church.

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

The service itself was made up of video segments from 19 people or groups, including the bishop preaching her sermon via Zoom. There also was audio of an Easter hymn sung in 2016 at Grace Cathedral, accompanied by photos of Easter windows or Easter flowers from churches throughout the diocese. The 59-minute video was made available on the diocese's YouTube channel and garnered more than 1,500 views.

Churches also got creative with what they provided during Holy Week.

The Very Rev. Laurie Lewis and the Rev. Kathy Swain each recorded the Maundy Thursday Stripping of the Altar, Lewis at Grace, Winfield and Swain at Trinity, Arkansas City.

St. John's, Parsons offered an online Stations of the cross on Good Friday, while St. Paul's, Clay Center provided a Stations of the Cross slideshow of images and prayers.

St. Bartholomew's at St. Johns, Wichita, decided to record all the Holy Week services, with senior warden Gary Charter using his iPhone for videos of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday Stations of the Cross and Easter Day. The church also provided an audio recording of Deacon Terry Miescher leading a service of Tenebrae.

St. Andrew's, Emporia, asked parishioners to record themselves saying "Peace be with you. And also with you," with clips then edited into a video for Easter Day.



Gary Charter, senior warden at St. Bartholomew's at St. John's, Wichita, used duct tape to attach his iPhone to a tripod to record Holy Week services at the church.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Communion not available

In early April Bishop Bascom sent a pastoral letter to clergy, outlining her thoughts about the importance of the Eucharist to all Episcopalians but realizing that offering the sacrament to parishioners wasn't possible as church buildings remained closed.

She encouraged churches to continue to offer Daily Office services (Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer), or to provide a Spiritual Communion, where a Eucharist is celebrated but the sacrament isn't consumed, by the priest or anyone else present. Instead, worshippers pray

Virtual Choir included Topekans


During the Easter Day online service from Washington National Cathedral, a "virtual choir" of more than 600 people sang "The Strife is O'er," thanks to efforts to stitch together 777 video submissions into a seamless whole.

Among those included were three people from Grace Cathedral, Topeka: Jason Kingman, Deborah Barnes and Bobbi Athon.

Submissions were solicited during a short time frame in March via social media. The idea came from communicator Natalee Hill of Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in Philadelphia, with the technical side



overseen by Jeremy Tackett, the Episcopal Church's director of creative services.

The video can be viewed at episcopalchurch.org/virtual-choir 

that they will share in communion with Christ.

(The bishop describes spiritual communion in her column, on the inside front cover of this issue.)

Addressing food needs

One of the initial critical needs was to help churches with food ministries find ways, if possible, to continue to serve people in need. A letter from Bishop Bascom suspended food provided just for hospitality, like potlucks, but permitted food ministries to continue if it involved a to-go or drop-and-go format, what the bishop called “Feeding without Gathering.”

And as the number of people who lost jobs, were furloughed or had wages reduced grew, churches knew the work of feeding people was more important than ever — if they were able to keep it going.

Some larger community meals, including the Happy Kitchen at St. Paul’s, Manhattan and the CUFF dinner hosted by Epiphany, Independence, suspended operations because they either lost volunteers or their space made the new format unworkable.

The Saturday sandwich ministry of Grace Cathedral, Topeka, always had provided a to-go sack of sandwiches, so only the interaction with participants had to change.

The weekly Sharing Table at St. Luke’s, Wamego began to offer diners a hot to-go breakfast.

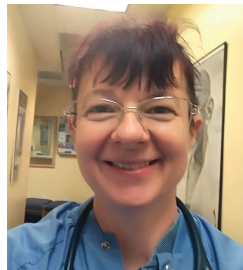
At Canterbury at K-State, program assistant Anastasia Cunningham has continued to cook food for students in the area who regularly ate a weekly meal at the house. Now, she delivers a hot, hearty meal in carry-out containers.

Continued on page 14

I am caring for Covid patients

By Yvonne Saunders-Teigeler, M.D.
Member of St. Andrew’s, Derby

Note: This reflection was written on April 20.



I moved to Kansas just under two years ago, when my active-duty husband got orders to move from Nevada, where I had my own medical practice. I am 51 with 3-year-old twins, and since January I’ve worked 24 hours a week at Newton Medical Center.

I am the main Covid-19 doctor at my clinic, North Amidon Family Physicians. I see patients in person and test them for the illness. The local health department isn’t doing contact tracing, or surveillance testing or retesting, so it is my responsibility alone to care for patients who are at home recovering from Covid-19. It has been nerve-racking for all concerned. I see the stricken look in my patients’ faces when they get the presumed Covid-19 diagnosis.

I have just enough personal protective equipment. My only N95 mask is sitting in a brown paper bag marked with the date it was issued — March 31, 2020.

I have a face shield and a surgical mask, but I have to make them last, too. I wear a plastic sheath on top of my scrubs (scrubs I have left over from decades ago when I did my training) and shoe covers (Covid-19 can spread on shoes).

But my skin is still not completely covered, and I see sick patients every day. I take a shower once I get home but am constantly worrying about what I have touched and what I have contaminated.

My dreams are not nightmarish but close. The other day I dreamed in detail what I would do if I were sick and how I would handle the logistics in my family. The next night I dreamed that I drowned in a Covid-19 ocean. I took my last breath and actually died in my dream. That has never happened to me before.

I am finding it hard to finish all my prayers each day. When I pray for people all over the world, I get overwhelmed and tense. The carnage and suffering is too much for me to empathize with, and I need to reset myself for a smaller vantage point. I sometimes only manage to pray for my husband and two kids, and then I stop.

Thank God for my church life and our priest, Father Mike Loyd. I stream the weekly service every Sunday morning, and that has given me the continuity and spiritual lift that has been keeping me going.

Prayers for all of you reading this. Be safe and carry on. ☉

More than 250 cars lined up on April 15 to get a box of food from the Mobile Food Pantry distribution offered by St. Paul's, Clay Center and the Evangelical Covenant Church.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



Continued from page 13

Only weeks before the church closed, Church of the Covenant, Junction City had begun a new weekly community dinner, with hearty fare like chili or lasagna, served on china with silverware and glassware. They had to shift to sack suppers with sandwiches, fruit, chips and snacks.

Rice, the church's rector, said that the program grew from serving 30 people its first week to more than 100 in mid-April. She said many of those they serve now are parents and young children.

St. John's, Wichita, has seen the number of people at their Sandwich Saturday ministry grow to 200 people or more, many of them homeless or near-homeless people in the downtown area. Senior warden Shirley Orr said they modified their outdoor delivery method so it's easier for volunteers and guests to keep a safe distance, and many guests have begun to wear a mask.

Breakthrough Episcopal Social Services has been providing about 100 hot sack breakfasts and 25 sack lunches every weekday.

The breakfast program at St. Paul's, Kansas City, has moved from eggs with biscuits and gravy to a bag that includes a microwavable container with a cold breakfast sandwich, fruit and a granola bar, along with coffee, juice and water. They also include health information about Covid-19, too.

Large-scale need

St. Paul's, Clay Center, for years has partnered with Harvesters, a large area food bank, to help feed people.

Harvester's Mobile Food Pantry makes large boxes of food available to anyone who drives up, with food placed in their trunk.

That no-contact distribution method continues to be used, but the change has come in the numbers being seen. According to Deacon Carolyn Garwood, who helps oversee the church's involvement, in January they served 196 families, and 197 in February.

There was no March distribution, but in April a line of 269 cars waited to pull into the parking lot of the Evangelical Covenant Church for a food box. "That was 23,000 pounds of food," Garwood said, to help feed more than 700 people in the receiving families. "We look for May to be up, also," she said.



PHOTO BY LARRY BUENING

Volunteers from St. David's, Topeka, prepare to check off names of students picking up food provided by the local school district from the church parking lot in early April.

The Trinity Interfaith Food Pantry is the largest food pantry operating in the diocese (the pantry at St. Paul's, Kansas City, remains on hiatus after its space was destroyed in a basement flood last year).

They also have had to move away from a shopper model of service to providing one bag of non-perishable goods and another bag of cold food per household. They are available on tables outside the office building that houses the pantry on Tuesday afternoons and Saturday mornings.

According to TIFP volunteer Barry Molineux, the number of pantry patrons in April was 208, which was 11 percent higher than April 2019. He said, "The growth rate has increased each week and we have no reason to think it won't continue."

One change is that upwards of 75 percent of people now arrive on foot or by bike. Molineux believes they now are serving more people who are homeless or live in transitional housing but can't get to larger food programs elsewhere in town.

Help for school children

When local school districts needed help in distributing food to students no longer in class, three churches in the diocese helped provide an answer.

The parking lot at Epiphany, Independence, became the place where food and curriculum items were available, and Covenant, Junction City, also was a delivery location.

For several years St. David's, Topeka, has been a recognized summer meal site, so it was natural that they served as a site for breakfast and lunch grab-and-go meals provided by Topeka Public Schools. They helped students during the district's first three weeks of work to keep school children well fed. ☺

My small business is hurting

By Todd Allison

Member of St. Peter's, Pittsburg and the Council of Trustees



Obviously, Covid-19 has been incredibly hard on the economy. It is having a devastating impact on small businesses. My small business is a little unusual in that it is a manufacturing company. While the pandemic has not shut us down, it will have a lasting effect.

Our company, Progressive Products, manufactures two distinctly different product lines. The first is industrial conveying equipment. On that side of the business, there has been a slight sales dip, but it is pretty much business as usual. We are observing all the required precautions for safe working conditions and some office people are working from home. But other than that, not much has changed.

However, the other side of the business builds mobile concert stages for the entertainment industry. The pandemic has all but eliminated the need for our product. Groups are now limited, crowds are banned, and all entertainment events have been cancelled indefinitely.

It has shut down the entire production industry. We still have some remaining production orders we are completing. But once we finish those units sometime this summer, we are not sure what we will do. We are facing the layoff of almost 20 people.

If this was not bad enough, we do not know when the industry will come back. It is clearly not safe to have crowds until a vaccine has been discovered. Only then will the live entertainment industry begin to rebound.

By the initial bookings we had into June, we were setting up for our best sales year to date. The pandemic has been an incredibly disheartening turn of events. It is a time that challenges faith.

Even so, I feel lucky. We are still working, and we still have jobs. We are all healthy and there has been only a few cases of Covid-19 in Southeast Kansas. Moreover, we were blessed enough to receive some funding through the Paycheck Protection Program.

I still have hope and faith in both God and science. I really think that the only way through this crisis is to pull together as a community and remain faithful to our beliefs as Christians.

God will give us the strength to get through this. I pray that God also gives us all the wisdom to do what we must to keep each other safe. ☺