

The *intercom* In Church and Community



From the Senior Pastor Joys and Burdens: A Time for Hope



Dear friends in Christ,

I cannot remember a time in my 32 years of ministry when both the joys and the burdens of ministry have been as intense as they are right now as I serve at Our Savior's. It is not uncommon these days for my prayers to include exuberance and delight as well as lament and cries of "Lord, have mercy."

- As more and more of you return to in-person worship, the smiles on your faces and your spontaneous applause reveal how happy you are to be moving beyond the necessary restrictions of the pandemic. The positive vibe in worship these days is palpable and good medicine for COVID-weary souls. Worship at OSL remains a highlight of my life each week.
 - o At the same time, several members have let me know that being part of this community of faith no longer brings them joy but rather pain and heartache. This grieves my heart deeply. I want to believe there is a way for us to work through our differences by remaining united in our mission and purpose, but I'm learning that some among us feel our differences are irreconcilable.

- When I consider the ministry that is taking shape for the fall, I get goosebumps and find myself leaning toward Kickoff Weekend (September 11–12) with great anticipation. We're planning a huge Welcome Back celebration with a return to our normal Sunday worship schedule (Celebrate and Festive worship both at 8:45 and 11:00 A.M.), with Sunday School between services. Breakfast will be served in The Gathering Place, choirs will grace us with beautiful harmonies, and the sounds of fellowship and friendship will again fill this hallowed place.
 - o At the same time, the response to our stewardship appeal this past spring is leaving our leadership team wondering if we will be able to fully support ministry plans as they stand or if we'll need to make adjustments. I am convinced that God is calling us to continue serving this region with a bold mission of proclaiming Christ and nurturing faith that connects to everyday life but it's not yet clear what the shape and scope of ministry will be given apparent financial uncertainties.
- I value greatly that we are becoming a congregation that demonstrates an openness to engage difficult but important conversations on matters of faith and life. It is our faith that ultimately compels us to wrestle with such things, and

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to me, a church is at its best when its members and friends are invested in living a faith that is both relevant and authentic.

- o At the same time, I don't think we've landed on the best way to have some of these conversations. Nevertheless we press on as faithfully as we can in our attempts to foster true dialog among people who can at times be fiercely divided, people who are well-meaning and want the best for their personal lives, their church, and their community. As a result, I pray for unity even as I give thanks for diversity of thought and expression.
- I also get very excited about entering into a season of strategic planning in the next six to twelve months with the entire congregation. The pandemic has positioned us to ask some really important questions about the future direction of the ministry we share, and discerning together what that will be will surely help us further develop our sense of purpose and identity.
- o At the same time, the future seems more uncertain than ever as we emerge from a pandemic knowing that "normal" may very well be a "new normal," and change is always hard on some level. I pray that the Holy Spirit will provide the energy and resources we will need to be the church God is calling us to be.

We are living through an extraordinary chapter in OSL's history, and at times the challenges before us may appear to be canceling the joy of being church together. I believe, however, that now more than ever is when our prayers must especially be laced with the expectation that God, who is always faithful, will in fact provide the way forward, perhaps in ways that will surprise us but always in ways that will bring the Reign of God's amazing grace to bear on our broken world and on us. So we live in hope.

Forever grateful for your partnership,

Randy

Pr. Randy Gehring

Screenshots: OSL's YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/c/Oslchurchsf) and Facebook page (facebook.com/oslchurchsf/)

Ministry Spotlight Communications

Say what you will about the COVID-19 pandemic that is (hopefully) in our rear-view mirror, the experience has taught us more than a few things. It's taught us that we can adapt and improvise. It's taught us that "we've always done it that way" does not mean we must always do it that way. And it's taught us the importance of *connectedness*.

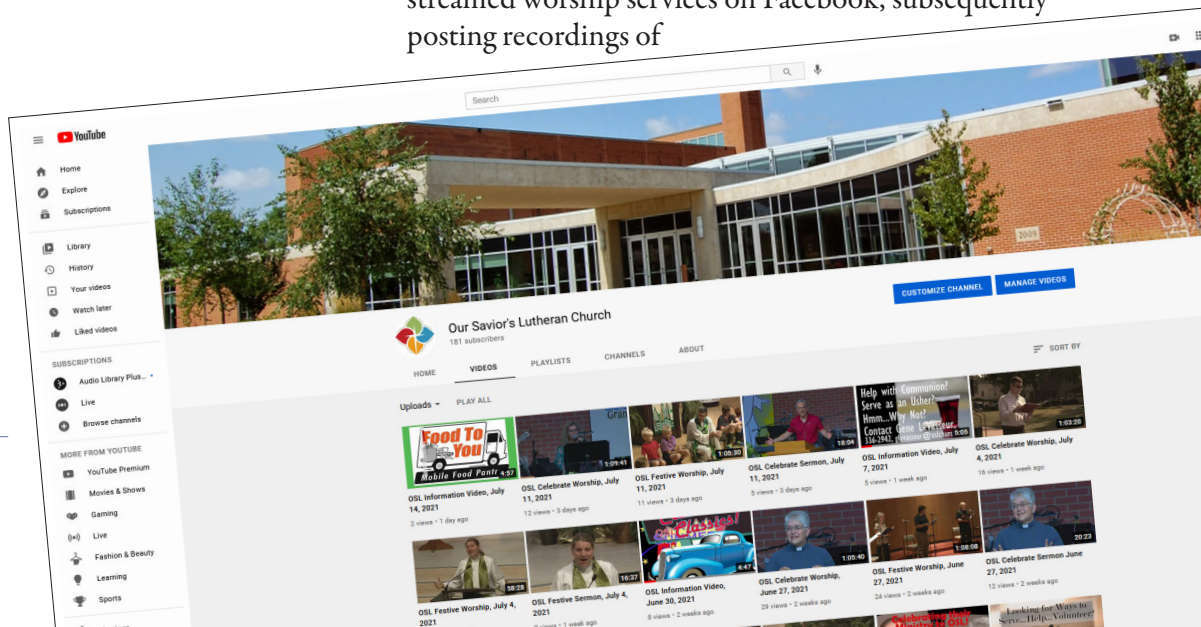
A little more than a year ago, our sense of connectedness was shaken. We were encouraged to stay home as much as possible. In-person gatherings were discouraged; in some cases, they were made impossible, as various businesses and agencies locked their doors—indeed, Our Savior's campus was closed for several months in early 2020.

How can we remain connected when a deadly virus insists we keep our distance, shelter in place, work from home?

The answer: *Communication*. Using every tool, every channel, every idea we can think of to keep the connection alive, striving to hold the community together and maintain some semblance of the physical connectedness we so missed.

Fortunately, OSL already had in place a strong, vital communications ministry team: Pr. Justin Kosec, Pastor of Outreach and Communication; Bill Reynolds, Director of Communications; and Melissa Nesdahl, Director of Faith Formation and Facebook virtuoso. Additionally, every member of the OSL staff, whether working from home or the office, stepped in and stepped up, redoubling their outreach in their respective ministry areas.

Perhaps most visible, as the worsening pandemic made it clear that in-person worship was imprudent, was OSL's emphasis on worshipping from home. Fortunately, Our Savior's has long had a presence on broadcast television, and more recently has streamed worship services on Facebook, subsequently posting recordings of



them at oslchurch.com. A certain amount of creative rethinking was required, though, since of course the worship spaces would be empty of worshipers, but OSL's dedicated TV Ministry team was more than up to the challenge of reconfiguring video shots, and the pastors quickly adjusted to leading an invisible, far-flung congregation in worship. Socially distant musicians and vocalists made for a full, rich experience for all.

Of course, worshiping from home meant no hymnals. So a couple adjustments had to be made to the bulletins: First, they were retooled to be more digital-friendly, the idea being that folks would follow along on their phones or tablets as they worshiped via TV or livestream. For Festive services, Gene LeVasseur, Director of Worship and Music, provided hymn graphics for Bill to incorporate in the digital publications... since it seemed cruel to direct people to a hymnal they didn't have!

Bulletins for the Celebrate services expanded as well, with song lyrics included every week—just like with outdoor worship bulletins—since the usual habit of putting lyrics on the screens in the Celebrate Center would not be too helpful.

And bulletin announcements? With nothing being printed, those moved into the digital world, too. *Coming up at OSL*, the weekly website post about OSL events and activities, expanded to include items that previously would have appeared in the printed announcements. To be sure, there were fewer such announcements last spring, when activities and events were canceled, but nevertheless, the expanded *Coming up at OSL* was another way to keep folks connected to their church community, and an uptick in both the email's subscriptions and open rate indicate it was a useful channel.

In that same vein, Melissa made sure OSL's Facebook page was continuously updated with relevant information and inspiration, sparking ever-increasing engagement with this popular medium.

The OSL website was pressed into service like never before, too, receiving more than 19,000 visits in calendar year 2020. Frequent—sometimes daily—updates to Our Savior's pandemic policy were posted, along with all sorts of information and resources from the Centers for Disease Control and other agencies, as well as advice on coping with pandemic stress and helping others do so as well. Of course, the website also was and is the home of OSL's digital publications.

Early in the pandemic, the pastoral staff inaugurated a Pastor Letter, weekly at first, less frequent as the pandemic eased. These letters were printed and mailed to every OSL household and emailed to everyone on Our Savior's list. As of this writing, 45 Pastoral



Letters have gone out since March 18, 2020. All are archived on the OSL website.

The website also began to host an increasing number of videos—another communication channel that grew exponentially in the past year. Our Savior's YouTube channel increased by nearly 50 subscribers during the year, and more than 200 videos were posted in that time, with more added weekly. These include recordings of Sunday worship services, weekly Information Video updates of various goings-on, and such special videos as OSL Generosity Stories; Music Devotions; Freddy and His Faith-full Friends; Behind-the Scenes of Easter; God's Work. Our Hands; 2020 Easter Vigil Readings by the Hours; and so on.

Now—with the return of in-person worship services, an ever-growing schedule of events and activities, and a general feeling that a corner has been turned in this health crisis—creativity is directed toward what communication changes will be kept permanently, what will be scaled back toward pre-COVID models, and what will continue to be nurtured and grown into the future.

One thing is certain, though: The OSL community has proven itself strong, compassionate, and adaptable, and through the long, difficult COVID-19 experience, has maintained a level of connectedness that never flagged. ♦



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Worship Services

Saturday Evening – 5:00 P.M., Sanctuary

Sunday Morning

Celebrate Worship – 8:45 A.M., Celebrate Center

*Outdoor worship on the first and third Sundays
of the month, weather permitting*

Festive Worship – 10:15 A.M., Sanctuary

Television and Internet

Celebrate: 9:00 A.M., KTTW (cable channel 9; channel 7.1)

Festive: 1:00 P.M., KSCB (cable channel 30; channel 53),

Facebook Live, 8:45 and 10:15 A.M.

Website: oslchurch.com

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