



Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church

a loving faith community making disciples for Jesus

April 9, 2020

Dear Bethel,

We've been through quite a lot over the last month. We've learned so much and had to make several significant decisions. As your pastor, I've faced a number of challenges myself such as dealing with my own emotions and concerns about coronavirus and its effects on our congregation while also helping to find ways for our ministries to continue through this time. The importance of gathering as a community of faith around certain values has become clearer than ever before.

Our primary value is loving God above all things (Great Commandment). You have done a *phenomenal* job of adjusting to online worship. This is not "virtual" worship. It is *real* worship because we are gathered together in the name of Jesus even though we are physically in separate places. We're learning a lot about how to interact and have meaningful worship. Recently, we added the ability to use your phone to dial in and participate in worship.

Relationships matter. This is another major value – loving our neighbors as ourselves (Great Commandment). Maundy Thursday drives this message home as Jesus gives the command to love one another the way He loves us (John 13). Here again, you've adjusted. People are finding ways to be in touch with one another, including using the Phone Shrub.

Loving our neighbor extends to everyone who uses our building. As you know, we have suspended all in-person gatherings at the church and closed the church office so all staff remain safe by working remotely. We have decided to allow the 12-step support groups to continue as the meetings provide such an essential service and we are the largest location for these groups in the Manassas area. They continue to abide by the safety guidelines and they are taking very good care of the building. Your generosity of spirit is helping Bethel remain a safe place for these important meetings. I regularly hear from group members expressing their thanks, and I wanted to share two recent quotes from a person new to sobriety and another who has been sober for many years.

I have been attending the AA meetings at Bethel for a few months now. Being newly sober, meetings are very important. I just want you to know how grateful I am that you have made space available to us so we can meet safely.

Thank you for continuing to allow recovery meetings at Bethel. One day recently, I really needed a meeting and was so glad there was one at Bethel. I just want you and the church to know how deeply grateful I am.

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People ask me what they can do to help me or the church. My answer is almost always about the **Phone Shrub**. This is a small version of a phone tree and is very simple. Open your church directory to the page where you are listed. If you aren't listed in the directory, pick a page or pick a few people. Then adopt them. Call them every week or so. Email them. Send them letters. I've heard people say that they don't know everyone on their page. That's ok ... call them anyway. We're making connections, maybe even new ones, and ensuring that people are connected to the news and worship of the church.

We have also had to adjust to be able to best steward the administrative side of the church. The Executive Committee and I have been meeting twice a week and all ministry leaders have begun meeting twice a month to ensure that we are all informed about what is happening throughout the congregation. The Christian Education and Youth & Family ministries have adjusted and continue to provide learning opportunities and fellowship.

We've identified **four phases** of our response and are working through them.

1. **Initial** - our initial decisions as we processed the volume of information.
2. **Positioning** - recovering from the initial phase and getting people and our congregational infrastructure prepared for ministry for an undetermined amount of time.
3. **Maintaining** - is about maintaining our energy, focus, and momentum.
4. **Reintegration** - At some point, we will be able to be together again. We will need to celebrate that as well as adjust to what ministry after COVID-19 looks like.

Our church finances are doing pretty well right now, but this is an uncertain time and we don't know how this will affect our families. Even so, your generosity has been astounding! In March, online giving, which accounts for about 1/3 of your monthly gifts, increased 35% over last year (\$8,910 in 2019 to \$12,026 in 2020). Envelope giving was very solid at the beginning of March with an average of \$6,304 per week, but reduced to an average of \$2,790 for the last three weeks of March. That represents an 18% decrease from last year (\$26,359.32 in 2019 to \$21,633.25 in 2020).

We feel that Bethel is well-positioned for the next few months. Many of our leaders and top givers have said that they will be able to continue giving at the level they pledged. We invite you to continue your generous giving as you are able.

We encourage online giving as an easy and secure way to give. A generous donor has offered a challenge gift to the church of \$50 for each household that enrolls in online giving for the first time. So far, 11 households have signed up for the first time and 7 existing Vanco households have switched over to the new system.

Please keep in touch! I am doing my best through Lent and Holy Week, but hope to reach out to more people after Easter. As always, if there is anything you need or Bethel can do please let us know.

Thank you again for your generosity of spirit, of your finances, and your adaptability.



Pastor Jeff Wilson

How to Sign Up for Online Giving

See the instructions below or contact Debbie Donahue (703-368-3943 ddonahue@bethelmanassas.org) for assistance.

To cancel your Vanco Simply Giving recurring contributions

1. To cancel your contributions to the Simply Giving program or online recurring contributions, log in to Vanco by going to <https://bit.ly/BELC-Vanco>.
2. Print out your transactions for the year, from January 1, 2020 through your last transaction.
3. Under "Profile" select "Cancel Profile" on the bottom left. A pop-up box will appear saying, "By canceling your profile, you will cancel all future scheduled transactions to this organization. Do you wish to continue?" Select "Yes". You will receive a confirmation that you have successfully canceled your profile.

To sign up for a new online giving account with Tithe.ly using our website

1. Go to <https://bit.ly/BELC-tithely>.
1. Click on "Sign up" in the top right corner of the screen.
2. Click "Create Account" in the middle of the screen.
3. Type first name, last name, and your email, create a password and a 4-digit pin, and then click "Submit".
4. You'll get a message saying, "Your account has been created successfully!" Click "OK".
5. Find a church ... type in Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church and select our church.
6. Create your payment method.
 - You can select credit/debit cards
 - You can select bank account
7. A reminder ... you have the ability to set your gift up as recurring and choose whether you would like to cover the transaction fees.

To sign up for a new online giving account with Tithe.ly using our app

1. Download the Tithe.ly App from the Apple App Store (iPhone) or Google Play Store (Android).
2. Once you've downloaded the app select your church by selecting "Find a church," typing in Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church, and selecting our church.
3. Since this is your first time giving with Tithe.ly you will be prompted to create an account that you can use for all future gifts.
4. The first time you will also need to add your credit/debit card or ACH/banking info.
5. Once your account has been created you won't need to enter your personal or payment information. Just enter your PIN to give!
6. A reminder ... you have the ability to set your gift up as recurring and choose whether you would like to cover the transaction fees.