

**PHOTO** Junior Sarah Golder's family and friends wave goodbye at the end of their online Passover Seder. **photo by | sarah golder**

# WORSHIPING FOR WELLNESS

*How places of worship are reacting to the pandemic*

by | catherine erickson

**A**fter finding it unrealistic to maintain the required 6-foot distance between church-goers, places of worship across the state have decided to discontinue in-person services. While not the same, many churches have started to offer virtual services and youth group meetings via websites and apps such as Facebook, YouTube and Zoom to help people maintain their faith.

Leawood Presbyterian Church youth group has continued to cover the Old Testament and are currently studying the book of Exodus, but they've spread it out throughout the week with daily devotionals via Instagram, live feeds of the study every Wednesday, Kahoots over fun-fact trivia every Friday and small groups on Sundays.

Village Presbyterian Church youth group has also continued with their current theme — the “six C’s of education” — by posting pre-recorded lessons on the youth website followed by small group Zoom meetings to discuss and check in on youth group members.

Junior David Crabb, a member of the Jacob’s Well Church youth group that is using similar methods to continue with youth group meetings, believes there are significant drawbacks to not having the face-to-face interaction.

Crabb believes the virtual youth group meetings hinders the message because only one person can speak at a time and the clashing background noises of siblings fighting and dads cheering to replays of sports games are distracting.

Village Presbyterian associate youth director Jenna Soltys also believes that meetings over programs like

Zoom are difficult because the group that was once able to freely discuss their religious beliefs while sitting next to each other on the couches of the youth loft is distracted by their home lives and the disconnect with the screen.

“[Virtual meetings] highlight how helpful social media is in keeping up with each other, but also how it’s not enough,” Soltys said. “Like we all really want to be able to see each other in person and spend time together face-to-face.”

However, even with these challenges, Soltys still thinks it is advantageous for youth to stay involved in the youth group to maintain a sense of normalcy and human connection.

“If you don’t [stay connected with others], not only might you feel like very much more alone, but you also just like, might slowly distance yourself from the things that you care about and enjoy without even really realizing that it’s happening,” Soltys said.

Along with continuing youth group meetings, local churches have started to stream services using platforms such as Facebook Live and YouTube. For Village Presbyterian, their services streamed on Facebook Live look very similar to traditional services, with the same start time, worship director and minister. Leawood Presbyterian Church youth director Sophie Casey believes that seeing the same few people perform the service in the church on the live stream helps church members maintain a sense of normalcy.

Although the services are similar to the usual services, junior and Leawood Presbyterian youth group member Ava Chinnock believes the biggest drawback is the missing

community aspect.

“You really sing similar songs and the sermon is still about the sermon series, but I think the big thing with technology is just lacking the community,” Chinnock said. “Like, yeah, you’re with your family, but it’s not necessarily the same as seeing, like, your friends or seeing little kids you help with or the leaders.”

Senior Kathleen Deedy, a member of the B’nai Jehudah temple who now streams events on Facebook Live, misses going to events at her temple because it was one of the only places she could connect with people who shared her beliefs.

“I miss seeing my friends [at B’nai Jehudah] who I don’t often see because they go to different schools, mostly in the Blue Valley district,” Deedy said. “It’s just nice because there’s not a lot of Jewish people at East, so I really like being able to go [to temple] and see like, ‘Yay! I’m not the only one.’”

However, since the online services started, Soltys says Village Presbyterian has seen an influx in the number of people attending service, possibly because people have more free time to watch the service. Casey also believes that more people have been following their online services.

“While people are in the comfort of their own home, they might feel more comfortable joining because they don’t have to step out,” Casey said. “I think we’re reaching people who don’t normally come which is definitely good to make connections so they are also hearing the messages.”

Chinnock said that online services have made it easier for her whole family to worship together.

With a mom who’s diagnosed with Neuromyelitis Optica, a disease that affects the spinal cord and eye nerves, and a dad who works irregular hours, it’s been difficult for them all to attend service together.

“It’s sometimes hard for my mom to get to church, and they’ve always streamed it, but not everyone’s joined in,” Chinnock said. “So it’s really just changed, like we’re together at service every week now because of the corona and because of us being quarantined.”

With Passover beginning April 8 and Easter on April 12, families are discovering that their traditions for these holidays will be adapted this year.

Deedy usually has a Seder, a ceremonial dinner, for Passover at a family member’s or friend’s house and is joined by her grandparents who fly in from Tucson, Ariz. Their Seder usually consists of traditional prayers and foods such as parsley, honey cakes and her favorite, matzah ball soup, which she usually brings to school to share with her friends.

However, this year her family will celebrate at home with immediate family, FaceTiming their grandparents in to virtually join the celebration.

“I’ll just miss being able to get together and see everyone and it’s just kind of like a nice holiday to celebrate with friends and family,” Deedy said. “It’s one of the few holidays that isn’t really sad. It’s definitely like a part of a celebration.”

Village Presbyterian Church, Leawood Presbyterian Church and Jacob’s Well Church are streaming Easter services with the traditional songs and Biblical passages to give viewers a chance to spiritually connect even through these stressful times.

## COMMUNITY HELP

*A few religious groups in the Kansas City area organizing specific projects to help the community*

### VILLAGE PRESBYTERIAN



#### MASKS

THE MISSION SEWING GROUP HAS DONATED OVER 70 MASKS TO KU MEDICAL CENTER AND SAINT LUKE’S.

### JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES



#### FOOD PANTRY

THEY HAVE A FOOD BANK AT THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER RAISING MONEY FOR PEOPLE THAT ARE INFECTED.

### COUNTRY CLUB CHRISTIAN



#### OFFERINGS

THE EASTER OFFERING WILL GO TO KC CARE HEALTH CENTER AND CARE BEYOND THE BOULEVARD.