

APRIL 2020

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The Evangel

A TIME TO LISTEN

I had a conversation this past week with two different people at two different times, both of whom expressed polar opposite viewpoints about the state of the world right now in the shadow of COVID-19. One person was angry that people were being “stupid”, as she said, in leaving their house at all. The other was angry that the government was controlling everything, the media was spreading fear, and that the individual rights of people were being taken away. For both people, there was no middle ground. People should absolutely not be getting near each other on the one hand; on the other, the country and the world will be doomed if people stop doing business and engaging with each other as normally as possible. I realized in both cases that my own temptation was to jump in, offer my own “informed” opinion, and continue these conversations into simultaneous ranting and debating sessions. In the end, those kind of ranting and raving conversations (or diatribes, more appropriately) accomplish nothing. They certainly don’t create any solutions for dealing with COVID-19 or the economic fallout so many are experiencing, and perhaps even worse, they continue to bitterly divide people in a time when seeking out authentic community in any form and working to find ways to help are becoming perhaps the most precious commodity we can exchange.

I realized that my best alternative was simply to LISTEN. There was a deep well of anxiety and fear within both people. If we can recognize that, we can realize that, to varying depths, we all have our own wells of anxiety bubbling and overflowing within us as well. Ignoring an erupting volcano, whether it is ours or someone else’s, is not particularly wise. Telling people that they are worried for nothing is akin to telling them that their own feelings are either an illusion, or worse, not important. Conversely, tossing more embers into the well of anxiety – working each other up into a frenzy – diminishes our humanity just as much as dismissing another’s feelings. While feelings are a significant part of our makeup, we are not fashioned in God’s image simply to exist in the state of emotions in which we find ourselves this day. We are very much allowed to have doubts and trepidations and unease at our own situation and at the world, but one of the most important messages we can hear is that, no matter how frightening or scary something is, our humanity is grounded on existing and hoping in things which are not changing and often not seen.



*Photo by Emiliano
Vittoriosi on Unsplash*

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God's love, the love of our family and friends, and the communities that strengthen and bind us are things which nothing, not even death, can take away. Oh yes, they can look very different as we are learning rapidly these days. But COVID-19, like many great terrors that have come and gone, give us opportunity to remind us of the foundations of our existence. And among the bedrock of that foundation is our ability to listen to one another, live with one another, and encourage one another. These things give us the eyes to see that faith is not an illusion to make ourselves feel better, but a real and active belief in a real and active God.

My first month with you at St. Stephen's has been a LITTLE different than I had imagined. I still get jokes and comments from people who haven't actually seen me yet that I am some sort of digital avatar that the Search Committee and Vestry have programmed and now incorporated onto a YouTube channel! I can't visit with you at this point as I had hoped, and my initial goals and priorities have essentially been mothballed to figure out on the fly ways for us to be together and take care of one another during this time. But what has not changed from my expectations is the work of listening. Especially before mandated social distancing, but even beyond it, I have spent a great deal of time listening to the stories of so many people.



Stories of how much this church has meant to them. Stories that have had me rolling on the floor laughing, stories of hardship due to health, job issues, or relationships failing. Stories of people whose experience of St. Stephen's and/or of the wider church have not always been positive. The two Sharing our Faith dinners which we held before postponing the rest were opportunities for this, but also casual conversations in the halls, phone calls, and even e-mails and text messages have given me such great opportunities to hear YOU. And it has given me a greater context and wisdom for discerning ways in which we can live into these eternal truths – again, God's love, the love of our neighbors, and the community that binds us - TOGETHER. What does true community look like? What does it mean to be people who proclaim and exemplify God's love in every way possible?

As we continue to move forward in our new digital community, these same questions apply as they would for our "normal" existence together. At this point, it is important for me to let you know that Bishop Cole's current instructions to the clergy in East TN is that virtual communities need to carry on indefinitely at this point. THIS ALSO MEANS THAT SERVICES FOR HOLY WEEK AND EASTER WILL NEED TO BE DONE VIRTUALLY. I suspect that, in addition to seeing what other dioceses are doing, the Bishop is following the lead of the schools, who just recently announced that they are remaining closed until April 24. What about beyond that? I cannot give you that answer. Here comes that feeling of anxiety and disappointment in me, both that I cannot give you an answer and that I am anxious as you are to return to a semblance of familiarity. We have to recognize and accept this but we also cannot be paralyzed by it. So we will continue to move forward with God's help.

The following is a summary of how our life continues to grow and evolve under the current circumstances:

- We will continue to offer Compline each night (which, by the way, I am SO proud of the work that this team is doing in leading this. They all have different styles, but they all are so gifted in leading us in this wonderful service to close out our day).
- We will continue to livestream Morning Prayer each Sunday at 10 AM. This past Sunday was our first time doing this, and so we are still learning! Our Communications Team is meeting this week to figure out ways in which we can improve the quality of the presentation. We deeply appreciate your feedback to help us make it better and accessible to everyone. Please continue to offer that feedback to us, whether directly to me or to one of the members of that committee (Adam Ballintoy, Elizabeth Pack, Jim Ball, Sandi Robertson). If you are interested in helping with a liturgical and/or technical role in the production, please let me know!
- We will be offering other videos periodically, whether it's other forms of office prayer, Stations of the Cross, or videos that offer other resources for you to worship at home. In addition, we are looking at opportunities to have interactive Zoom meetings. I know our Contemplative Prayer Group will be experimenting to see how they can continue to be in community virtually. The Vestry, along with the Finance and Outreach Committees, are also engaging in Zoom. But I would love to offer additional opportunities for the entire parish to gather in these interactive chats, whether it is through an existing ministry or Bible study or whether we develop something new. Zoom offers ways not simply to watch but to engage. If you feel so moved to offer

your gifts, or you have some requests for ways in which you would like to engage, please let me know.

- I am just now figuring out what Holy Week and Easter will look like, but I have a crazy idea about how we might actually have communion on Easter Sunday without us physically gathering together. Please stay tuned for updates to come soon!
- Your Pastoral Care Team is working on creating a series of phone trees within the parish. We have started initially establishing contacts with people we know who either have some needs or are isolated (particularly those in facilities that are locked down). Sometime next week, you will get an announcement from me asking for more volunteers as we add some new layers to this phone tree. My ultimate goal is to create a phone tree that encompasses everyone in the parish – i.e., everyone in the parish would have someone responsible for calling and checking on them. This is not to intrude or pester. This is a very important way in which we can remain in community, both now but also on the other side of COVID-19. In addition, it is a great way for the pastoral leadership to make sure that special pastoral needs or issues do not fall through the cracks. There will be a message going out from me next week, but do let me know if you are interested in making calls.
- If you do have a pastoral emergency, it is especially important that you contact me or Steve Herbes, our Pastoral Care Team chair, directly. Please do not call the office. Call me directly at 251-604-1705. If you are already being contacted by someone from church, you may also let them know, and they can pass that along to me or Steve.
- If you have a financial need, do not hesitate to call me. I am aware of only a couple of you that are being impacted financially right now, but I expect that there are others out there. Whatever we can do to help you during this time, we will do. But we cannot help if you do let me know. Any request for help remains in the strictest confidence with me; no one else needs to know. From the beginning of its existence, the Church has existed to help with the material needs of its members whenever one was in need. So please, know that I will help you to whatever extent I can.
- For others, I remind you to please continue your faithfulness in maintaining your pledge to the church. You may mail your checks to the office. You may also make payments online – go to our website www.ststephensor.com and you will see the tab off to the right side of the homepage that says “Onlive Giving”. I hope it is evident to you that the church continues to carry out its ministry fully, and as such, for those who are able, please continue your generous and faithful support during this time.
- Finally, please be aware that our dedicated staff is transitioning to a work-from-home model as much as possible. This is why I mention in the last item not to call the office. Our staff will still come in as needed, but as such, they will not be manning the phones regularly or checking messages on the office phones as consistently as before. Our parish secretary, Elizabeth Pack is providing a contact number that will allow you to reach her directly if you need her assistance.
- In all of these things, stop and pay attention to the people with whom you are interacting. Anxiety is not going anywhere for a while. All of us are uncertain of what is to come. Listen first and foremost. Share stories in relationship, not in a desire to feed the fear frenzy or squash someone else’s feelings. Most importantly, listen for where God is. All of the many things I listed above are ways to be reminded that God rules over this anxiety. Our community continues to do amazing things in this context, helping all of us to see that we can endure this together, we can still worship together, and we can still be thankful together. Try to stay away from the dense undergrowth of hysteria in which it is easy to become lost while remaining smart and diligent in taking care of yourselves. While Easter won’t be the same this year, I think we are all going to experience the resurrection of our Lord in a profoundly new and transformative way. Prepare your hearts by listening for the small whisper of God, so that your heart may overflow with hope and confidence in God’s goodness and presence

*Christ's peace and love be with all of you,
Father Bailey +*

HOLY WEEK & EASTER

The Bishop of East Tennessee has declared that all public worship be suspended **INDEFINITELY** due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic.

No public worship services on Sundays or mid-week will be held until further notice.

This also includes Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Easter.

We recognize that this is a highly unusual circumstance, but for the health and well-being of all, please follow all directions for social-distancing and self-quarantine.



WHEN SHOULD I CALL A PRIEST?

(Adapted from the same-named document authored by the Rev. David A. Powers)

We live in an **EXTREMELY** fast-moving society, which means that St. Stephen's and its clergy are deeply reliant upon our parish individuals and families to communicate their need of pastoral care. One cannot assume that we always know the situations of our parishioners, most especially **YOUR** needs.

It is also true that our frenetic pace makes it even more important for **YOU** to have access to the vast amount of resources and care that St. Stephen's is able to provide directly and indirectly. You not only have a right to the ministry and sacraments of the church, but also an obligation to nourish your spiritual health at certain times of crisis or stress in your life. The ministrations and intercessions of the Body of Christ are for you just as much as anyone else. Take advantage of them – call your priest at any of the following times:

1) BEFORE GOING TO THE HOSPITAL – It makes no difference whether you are going to the hospital for major surgery or for a routine checkup – call before you go. One of the major duties of your priest and pastoral leadership is to make regular calls to offer prayers for the sick and to bring them the Sacrament of Holy Communion (administered both by our clergy and by the Eucharistic Visitors). The laying on of hands and anointing is also appropriate before surgery (Book of Common Prayer (BCP), p. 453, Ministration to the Sick). At the very least, your clergy would like to offer prayer and support to and for you and your family during your time of need. And, while it is common for hospital stays and pastoral needs to be known throughout the parish, you may request these needs to be confidential to the priest only or to a select few leaders. We will gladly honor this request. Above all, please give your priest the ability to share the Church's resources of sacraments and prayers in some form.

2) BEFORE YOU ENGAGE A LAWYER CONCERNING DIVORCE – This does not mean before you get an attorney for any purpose, but when you are considering marital separation or divorce. If you take the Christian view of marriage seriously, you will wish to talk through your situation with your priest long before matters proceed to the point of seeking legal counsel. The priest may offer advice on his/her own, part of which may include referring you to a counselor specifically trained in marriage and family relationships. Whatever the circumstance, the priest gently reminds that, when we take marriage vows, we ask God's blessing upon our marriage. In times of difficulty, the clergy will provide you resources in seeking God's help when those blessings may be difficult to find.

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ST. STEPHEN'S: ZOOM & SOCIAL MEDIA

As you may be aware by now, **big changes** have come to St. Stephen's in how we worship, hold meetings and communicate with the parish. Instead of gently rolling out communications via social media, we are jumping feet first into livestreaming worship on Sunday mornings on YouTube, holding ministry meetings via Zoom, posting frequently on Facebook and sharing images on Instagram. We realize this might be overwhelming to you, and we are doing our best to reach everyone, without bombarding you with emails and notifications.

We appreciate your kind and tolerant patience with us as we learn these (new-to-us) technologies, and the best ways to implement them for St. Stephen's.

*I learned that we can do anything,
but we can't do everything...
at least not at the same time.*

*So think of your priorities
not in terms of what activities
you do, but when you do them.
Timing is everything.*

~ Dan Millman



WHERE TO FIND ST. STEPHEN'S ONLINE

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/ststephensor/>

YouTube:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/
UCBthaKMaITbebM7gyg97TiQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBthaKMaITbebM7gyg97TiQ)

Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/ststephensepiscopalchurch/>

3) WHEN THERE ARE FAMILY DIFFICULTIES – These can be the most difficult matters to talk about with anyone. These can include struggles with taking care of aging parents, internal family disagreements, problems with children, or any number of other personal issues in which it is often hard to find a discrete person with whom to confide, let alone find answers to these circumstances. Your confidence will be treated with utmost respect. You may find that resource or insight that can help in the stress of family living. Above all else, you will know that you are never alone, either before God or within the church, in dealing with these matters.

4) WHEN A BABY IS BORN OR ADOPTED – This is a good opportunity not only to rejoice and give thanks as you ask God's blessing upon the child, but also to make preliminary arrangements for the child's Baptism. Let your priest share the joys and anxieties of the miracle of childbirth with you in this most spiritual event. If you are adopting a child, there is a wonderful service that celebrates the beauty of this event once the adoption is finalized that is very appropriate to have as part of a principal Sunday service (BCP, p. 440).

a. WHEN COMPLICATIONS HAPPEN IN PREGNANCY OR ADOPTION – Unfortunately an unspoken but sadly too common reality are the struggles of having children, which include (but are not limited to) infertility, miscarriage, premature birth, congenital health issues, failed adoption attempts, etc. While these are obviously not celebrated, it is just as crucial for families to have the support of their church in a quiet yet equally substantive way. Please let your priest know if you are struggling through any of these realities.

5) WHEN YOU WOULD LIKE TO TALK OR PRAY ABOUT A DIFFICULT DECISION – The big decisions in life are so important that they should be "talked out and prayed through". Your work or vocation, perhaps getting married, a change of jobs, retirement, are all included. God never intended us to make these decisions alone, and while your priest will not give you THE answers, he/she can often bring new insights and resources into thinking and praying through the problem. At any rate, he/she stands ready to discuss the matter with you in confidence, friendship, and prayer.

6) WHEN YOU KNOW SOMEONE IN NEED OF SPIRITUAL HELP – It is part of our Christian responsibility to be alert to the needs of others. If you know of someone who needs help, do not hesitate to call. Together we may be able to find a way to minister to those in need or lighten their burden.

7) AT THE TIME OF DEATH IN YOUR FAMILY – No matter what the hour of the day or night, your priest should be called at once. "When a person is near death, the Minister of the Congregation should be notified, in order that the ministrations of the Church may be provided." (BCP, 462) The priest will be helpful to you and your family in times of extreme stress. Please call the priest BEFORE you call the funeral home when death has occurred. The priest will encourage you to plan funeral services held in the Church or through the Church.

8) WHEN THERE IS A GRADUATION, CELEBRATION, OR MAJOR EVENT IN THE LIFE OF ONE OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE – One of the greatest callings of the Church is to raise up our young people in the joy and love of the Lord. And one of the greatest ways we can help with this is to be present and aware of special moments in the life of our youth and children. If your child is nearing a graduation, being recognized for a special achievement, or has something significant to celebrate, your priest and the Church want to know! Whether it is recognized within the liturgy, as a special announcement, or with a simple letter or phone call, the Church should be a place in which those special life events should be lifted up, affirmed, and given to God and to the community of the faithful in thanksgiving.

9) WHEN THERE IS A SPECIAL MILESTONE OR CELEBRATION FOR ANY OF OUR MEMBERS – It is not just our youth who deserve special recognition. If a parishioner is nearing a special birthday, anniversary, retirement, or celebration of any sort, the priest would love to know! It is always a good and worthy thing to offer thanks for the blessings that God has given our parishioners. Your priest – and your brothers and sisters in Christ at St. Stephen's – want to have an opportunity to celebrate and recognize these blessings with you!

10) BEFORE ANYONE ENTERS THE ARMED FORCES, LEAVES FOR COLLEGE, OR MOVES FOR A JOB AWAY FROM HOME – For our youth, the time at the end of high school and/or college is an exciting but anxious time of transition. Not only will the priest want to know their address away from home, but he/she would like to offer prayers of support for changes in the lives of the Church's people, in addition to encouraging support from other members of the congregation.

11) BEFORE YOU CHANGE ADDRESSES – EITHER IN TOWN OR ANOTHER TOWN – People often quit attending church for no other reason than they simply moved to a new address and their church life never picked up again. Let your priest know when you expect to move so your church can stay in touch. Also, the church office has a directory of churches throughout the country and the rest of the world. Let us help you make the connection with churches in your new location.

12) WHEN THERE IS A MARRIAGE TO BE PLANNED – As soon as an engagement is seriously considered (and before it is announced publicly!), call your priest and speak with him/her about ways in which the Church can support you, not only in planning your wedding, but in providing you with encouragement and resources in guiding you ahead into the exciting future God has in store for you!

13) WHEN YOU ARE UPSET ABOUT SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED IN CHURCH OR IN THE CONGREGATION – Your concerns should be expressed to the priest before other members. He/she can help you gain perspective on the problem and its pastoral implications for the whole congregation.

14) WHEN YOU FEEL DEEPLY BURDENED WITH GUILT OR YOUR FAITH IN GOD BEGINS TO WAVER, OR LIFE IN THE CHURCH SEEMS TO HAVE LOST ITS MEANING FOR YOU – We all go through dry periods or “the dark night of the soul” in our pilgrimages in faith. Your priest is here to help you find forgiveness and depth in faith, to listen to you and examine difficult questions with you, not to cast stones or condemn.

15) WHEN YOU ARE THANKFUL FOR ANY REASON AND WANT TO SHARE YOUR JOY! – Your private thanksgivings can be offered in the prayers of the people or in the silent prayers of your priest. Sharing thanksgivings and joys increases not only your pleasure but also that of the one who rejoices with you. All of us like to know when another senses that God is in Heaven and yet also dwelling with us, for our faith is affirmed also!

Compiled by The Rev. Bailey Norman with acknowledgment and gratitude to the work of The Rev. David A. Powers

April Celebrations

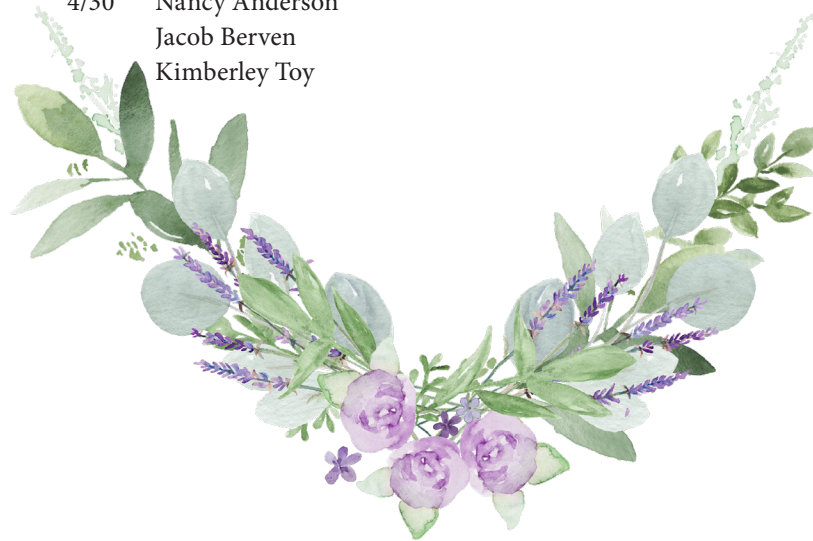
BIRTHDAYS

4/1 Caroline Swilley
4/2 Chris Kirk
4/6 Margaret Baldauf
Gaving Madgett
4/7 Marcia Todkill
4/11 Noah Baker
4/12 Vicky White
4/14 Mary Anne King
Jack Campbell
4/15 Doug Aaron
Carol Slusher

4/17 Carey Land
4/18 Lill Hise
4/20 Fay Martin
4/21 Lynn Giuliano
4/25 Don Nalls
4/26 Drew Shane
4/30 Nancy Anderson
Jacob Berven
Kimberley Toy

ANNIVERSARIES

4/1 Kay Brookshire & Tom Beehan
4/9 Peggy & Lou Volk
4/11 Frances & Jim Hodges?
4/14 Carol & Walt Gardner
4/18 Beth & Ed Stickle
4/20 Christine & Richard Gammage



Where God is seen, love is felt, lives are changed!