

JUNE 2020

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# The Evangel

## THE ESSENCE OF WHO WE ARE

You may have seen this meme that has become popular over Facebook and other social media outlets. I am a visual learner, so graphs not only help me gain information but also help me in expressing my own state of mind! I have to say that I do not feel stuck in the middle at all as your pastor, but I certainly do as a husband, dad, and a human being as I try to make sense of how to “resume” life. Even though your thoughts and opinions have been MUCH kinder and gracious than the tone of those above, I can say that I’ve heard nearly all of these statements in some form or another from all corners of people at St. Stephen’s, in our diocese, and among my colleagues in ministry.



It all comes down to two things – everyone wants to be able to gather together as community, and the vast majority of St. Stephen’s parishioners are justifiably concerned about resuming our previous patterns of life. Some of us are LOVING the home life perhaps a little too much (“I might just make watching church from my bed a weekly habit in perpetuity,” joked one parishioner to me). Some desperately want to know how soon we can reopen – the dates, times, logistics, and methods - but you are doing it with respect and passion for your spiritual home. But all of you, like me, are ready to get back to the place that feeds you, nourishes you – and you are so done with staying within the bounds of your property!

Over the last two weeks I have had numerous conversations with the Vestry, the Bishop, colleagues in our diocese and in other places, and numerous individuals within and without the parish about “next steps”. **THE FACT IS, NO ONE AGREES.** Some people are ready to open their churches yesterday; some might not come back until there is a vaccine. Many fall somewhere in that wide middle between these two poles. The vast majority of our Vestry (including me) leans toward caution. Whatever I prescribe as your priest may not be your preferred way. But I hope you will see the prayer, listening, and time I have spent with countless people in summarizing our next steps.

## Next Steps for June 2020

With the Vestry's support and blessing, here are our next steps forward for the month of June:

1. Sunday services will continue to be live-streamed with minimal numbers of people in physical attendance. Beginning June 7, we will encourage all worship participants (lectors, acolytes, etc), as well as members of our Communications team, to be present for worship. This will limit the number of participants to 15 or less. Everyone will be required to wear a mask when they are not speaking. All who are in attendance will be spread out appropriately. Until we are able to purchase new broadcast equipment (which hopefully will happen over the summer), our talented and very adaptable organist/choirmaster Simon Ballintoy will continue to prerecord much of the music, as our current microphone equipment gets overwhelmed with too many voices. One of the tough parts of this is that we must refrain from live singing for a bit longer. Several studies I've seen have shown that singing does further spread droplets, particularly the powerful and high-ranging hymns and anthems we are used to singing. So even for our people in attendance, recorded music will be played. Simon is working hard to make sure we have outstanding music each week, but I ask all of you to understand that he is having to be extremely adaptable while simultaneously working with much fewer resources than usual at his disposal.
2. The parish staff will begin returning to the office more or less beginning June 1. However the parish office will remain closed to general access for the month of June. While many of you have keys, we ask that you come for **essential business only**. If you would like to meet with me or any of our staff, please do so by appointment so we can have control over the number of people who are here at one time. Some committees have already asked about meeting in the building. As long as the members on the committees are willing or, if not, are able to meet through Zoom, FaceTime, or another communication venue that is agreed to amongst the committee members ahead of time, these meetings may take place. Again, please e-mail Elizabeth to let us know if/when you would like to meet so we can set up and also know where and when to clean up. Any time you come into the building, we will ask you to wear a mask. Please be thoughtful to our staff and the increasing number of folks who will be coming in and out of the building.
3. Beginning in late June or early July, we will have an outdoor service, weather permitting. For this service, we will allow larger attendance up to the amount of people we feel it is safe to have in the grove or, if weather interferes, in the church itself. We are still working out some protocol on both of these scenarios, but this will be our method of beginning to ease back into larger groups in worship. For these outdoor services, we will record them and post them onto YouTube immediately afterwards (we cannot livestream outdoors because of a lack of reliable wi-fi in the grove). You will see more information coming out about this in the weeks to come, including how many people we can plan on having here at once. I also imagine that, from these services, we will be sending communion out as we have done Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday via those in attendance to those who are watching so all may continue to feel included until the day when we can all be under the same roof or same place together.

Please keep in mind that, as we move into June, we are already beginning to look at ways that will take more small steps forward in bringing us a little closer to allowing everyone to attend (**but we are nowhere near that just yet, for the record**). COVID-19 has required us all to be adaptable, and this adaptability will play out in our plans at St. Stephen's. We will continue to try to expand participation in every single way. But we are also prepared to scale back down again if the virus spikes in our area. **The companion of adaptability throughout all of this is caution.**

I state the obvious, but it is important for all of us to be reminded that a large majority of our congregation falls into the “high risk” range due to age or illness. A large number of people not in this group are also hesitant to jump back in too quickly. We want to move forward in gathering together physically, but we also do not want to put pressure on anyone to feel compelled or pressured to come to church yet because everyone else is doing it.

Throughout all of this, our next steps are more than simply promoting good health and trying to return to our physical gatherings. Our steps are intended to promote a healthy and faithful CULTURE not just at St. Stephen’s but for others to see. The place of feeling stuck that I mentioned before comes from hearing so many mixed messages from experts and leaders. The church, when it is at its best, has always been about promoting a culture, or a way of life, that respects the law of the land and the dignity of every person. It also reminds us that God is calling us to be faithful and courageous. Taking precautions based on science is using our reason to respect the laws and requests of our civic leaders. Even when we are healthy, refraining from physical gatherings except when necessary protects the vulnerable among us. Ultimately God does not call us to a life of hiding and seclusion but one of sharing ourselves. We have found a myriad of ways to share ourselves through our virtual worship, online prayer services, interactive education lessons, Sunday school teachers making busy boxes and delivering them to our children, the sharing of gift cards for our food basket recipients instead of receiving actual baskets, faithful members regularly calling and checking on each other, discussions about organizing Clearfork camp in a safe and appropriate way, and your parish leadership dreaming of ways in which we can grow in our presence in the community in spite of circumstances.

During these weeks ahead, I strongly encourage and urge you to reach out to me with thoughts, questions, prayer requests, assurances – whatever I can do to help you. This too is part of creating that Christ-like culture – we engage, interact, hold each other accountable gently, and in so doing, grow in our love for one another and for God. The ways in which we will do this will continue to change, and I might say that we will be continuing to learn these new ways for a long time. Change, while hard, is not the enemy of faith. The enemies we fight are apathy, anger, fear, and intolerance for those who see anything differently than we do. Love is patient, love is kind – it is not envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Paul said these words not to couples getting ready to be married (which is when we often hear this lesson read) but to Christians in Corinth who were in disagreement as to what their common life and their worship should look like.

As we move forward, be patient with me, be patient with one another, and know that what we are doing is NOT seeking to return to the way things were. Rather, let us use this opportunity as a way to seek new and transformed ways in which God is calling us to live together, to proclaim the good news, and to establish a culture in which all people who see us may long to join and find the refreshment and life of the Holy Spirit that is burning brightly in this gathered group of disciples known as St. Stephen’s.

*Christ’s Peace, Bailey*

## ECUMENICAL STOREHOUSE

Visit the Storehouse website: [thestorehouseinc.org](http://thestorehouseinc.org) for more information.

The Storehouse Board of Directors had a ZOOM meeting on Thursday, May 28, 2020, to tweak plans for the future safe operation of the Storehouse.

In June, Kern Memorial Methodist and Grace Lutheran will operate the Storehouse.

In July, St. Stephen's Episcopal and First Christian will operate the Storehouse.

The Storehouse is now open to serve clients on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., by appointment.

How it works: Clients are served by appointment by phone, at 865-481-0274, are asked to leave a message on the answering machine, with their name and phone number. We get back with them to confirm the details of their needs or see if we are able to make a pickup.

We are limited in the number of clients we can help. We can schedule four appointments on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m., and 1:00 p.m. When clients call us we will fill out our "blue card" with all the necessary information we need to document the items you are requesting. We try to serve the "most needy" first. When we schedule an appointment be sure to bring (1) a referral from a social service agency that assists those in need. (2) a picture ID or drivers license. (3) a vehicle or trailer to load the items along with 2 or 3 people that can assist in loading the items. If we have the items you requested, they will be placed by one of the large bay doors ready for you to load. Clients will NOT be able to enter the storehouse for safety reasons. Clients must wear a face mask (we can give you one if necessary). Please remain a safe distance from our storehouse volunteers.

The Storehouse is open from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. on Saturdays to receive donations from the community for those that are able to bring household items to us and save trying to schedule a pickup since they are limited for the present.

We have many local volunteers that assist every time we are open, but we can use others that show up when we are open. We will gladly assist you in helping us and hope you will return often.

## OUTREACH ONGOINGS

### FOOD BASKETS

Due to the coronavirus, food baskets were not distributed on the scheduled May distribution. Instead, Aldi's gift cards were given to 26 families and 4 HOPE Houses on May 30, 2020. Each family was also given a detailed list of organizations that can offer support and resources to them.

### MISCELLANEOUS

The Vestry approved supporting breakfast and lunch distribution to eligible students during this summer. More details will be coming soon!



## BLANKETS+ CAMPAIGN

To aid struggling communities in the U.S. and abroad during the pandemic, St. Stephen's is collecting contributions for the Blankets+ campaign run by Church Women United through July. Donations will go toward rent and food assistance, clean water and sanitation, hygiene supplies, blankets, and livelihood programs. Our Outreach Committee will match up to \$300 in donations. You may mail a check written to St. Stephen's with "Blankets+" on the memo line, or you can call the office ahead to schedule a time to drop off the check.



## CAMP CLEARFORK

Due to the coronavirus situation, our Clearfork effort is taking a different approach. Since we can't run programs in person we are planning to send up activity boxes.

The isolation of the kids in the Clearfork area is a big problem. Therefore, activity boxes are being prepared for each household which will contain crafts, games, activities, and a selected book for each kid. Final determination of the content is in progress. These boxes will be delivered to our Clearfork contact for distribution. It is expected that this effort will serve approximately 30 kids. At least two distributions are planned for this summer. We are looking at a couple options that involve:

1. Ways to actually go to Clearfork (one or two individual visits)
2. Possible ways to present a "normal" week long program in the July/August timeframe.

Anyone willing to volunteer to help put together the activities, offer ideas, or donate materials would be greatly appreciated. We will be following safer at home guidelines as much as possible. Some activities would be assembling all the craft components into individual bags, or sorting books to include in the boxes. This can be done in your own home and we can arrange drop off and pick up the completed boxes.

We also need materials such as **oatmeal containers, magazines, and gently used Legos.**

I know that some of you have developed relationships with the children and if you would like to include a personal note in any of the boxes just let me know.

If you would like to help please email Linda Twohig at [twohiglinda@gmail.com](mailto:twohiglinda@gmail.com) or call at 865-748-7580. If you let us know how you would like to help we can put your name on our volunteer list and contact you as we need help.

Thanks for all your support.

*~ Linda Twohig*

## COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Hello everyone! It has been around 11 weeks since we started virtual worship and what a journey it has been! Thank you to everyone for your patience and cooperation as we have adjusted to being the church in a new way. Since this started, we have produced **108** prerecorded videos, including Morning Prayer, Compline, Noonday Prayer, children's activities, and the various services from Holy Week. We have also broadcast **12** live services, bringing our video total to a staggering **120** videos since March 15. Our YouTube channel has been viewed **8,749** times and cumulatively people have spent more than **1,400** hours watching our content. Those are some impressive numbers!



The communications committee has several large projects for this year. We have had discussions over the long term needs for our parish and are in the process of eliciting quotes for new audio and visual equipment. Our next project will be a complete rebuild of our parish website. We have other small projects on the list as well.

We would like to offer a very special thank you to each parishioner who has graciously agreed to record a Compline service. Our core group has expanded to allow more people in our parish the opportunity to record a service. If you are interested in joining this ministry, please contact Adam Ballintoy.

Additionally, we would like to offer our assistance to anyone who needs help connecting with our virtual worship services. We are happy to answer your questions to the best of our ability. Please contact Elizabeth or Adam. Thank you for your prayers and grace as we navigate uncertain times.

Peace to you all from the communications committee,

*~ Adam Ballintoy*

# June Celebrations

## BIRTHDAYS

- |      |                               |      |   |
|------|-------------------------------|------|---|
| 6/1  | Emily Cooper<br>Chi Kirk      | 6/22 | Murray Martin<br>Mary Rhoades<br>Tom Beehan |
| 6/5  | Michael Potter                | 6/23 | Tommy Meredith<br>Chris Dollman             |
| 6/7  | Stella Schramm<br>Jeff Cooper | 6/24 | Roni Boyd                                   |
| 6/8  | Bill Schramm                  | 6/26 | Jo Kelley                                   |
| 6/11 | John Cox                      | 6/27 | Judy DiGregorio                             |
| 6/13 | Bob Reuss                     | 6/28 | Barbara Steele                              |
| 6/17 | Barbara Lopes                 | 6/29 | Cheryl Scappaticci<br>Penny Neal            |
| 6/18 | Sharon Frost                  | 6/30 | Jim Hodges                                  |
| 6/19 | Earl Eversole                 |      |   |

## ANNIVERSARIES

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| 6/2  | Elissa & Doug Aaron<br>Melinda & Chuck Beach<br>Liz & Steve Herbes |
| 6/9  | Susan & Cyril Meredith, Jr.  |
| 6/11 | Sharon & Arthur Frost, III<br>Kim & Bob Warther                    |
| 6/13 | Robin & Jeff Thurston  |
| 6/14 | Barbara & Rob Steele   |
| 6/15 | Pat & Bob Reuss  |
| 6/16 | Lynn & Dominic Giuliano<br>Horia & Shafik Iskander                 |
| 6/17 | Carol Ann & Gene Lane  |
| 6/18 | Kathy & Scott Chippendale  |
| 6/20 | Samantha & Matt Berven   |
| 6/25 | Ann & Scott Aaron  |



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

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