

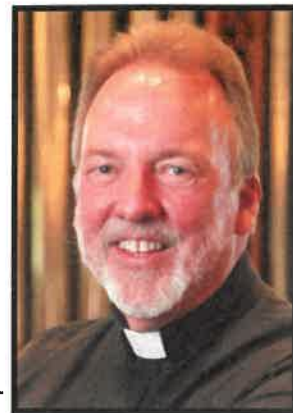
An Update from Pastor Jim

31 August 2020

Dear Fellow Members of St. Stephen Lutheran Church,

Greeting in Jesus' name.

"I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:3-6



Although many of us haven't seen each other for several months we, as staff, continue to remember you all in prayer, thankful for our partnership in the Gospel, and confident that God will continue to watch over us throughout this pandemic. We have been continuing to create as safe as possible opportunities to gather together, utilizing CDC guidelines to mitigate the spread of the Covid-19 virus: as often as possible we are meeting outdoors; all activities on Church property require masks and physical distancing; we encourage frequent hand washing and keep lists of participants so that physical tracing can be done, if necessary. We're continuing to offer small group communion services on Tuesday at noon and Thursday at 6:00 pm. Sign up ahead of time is required for these services. Wednesday mornings at 10:30 a senior/retirees coffee fellowship meets. If you'd like to attend contact Judee Bramscher at 651-269-6122. Wednesdays at 6:00 pm, GAP worship service happens weekly on our north lawn. On Sunday, August 16, we met for Sunday worship at 9:30 on our north lawn. **We are planning on having another outdoor Sunday morning worship service at 9:30 on September 20.** Our first on-site funeral with limited participation was held this past weekend. Neighbors Helping Neighbors will be opening on Tuesday, September 8 (new hours will be Tues.-Thurs, 10-4, and Sat. 10-1). Wednesday evening educational hour will resume in person on Sept. 23 for pre-school through grade 6. Beginning in September, Sunday School will be done online until Sunday indoor worship resumes. In addition we will continue to produce online worship each Sunday.

Our Covid-19 Response Team is continuing to monitor the extent of infections in Ramsey County, directives from the MDH and Governor Walz, as well as continually evolving information from the CDC. The next major step we'll recommend is when we can reasonably safely come indoors for worship gatherings. The metric we're using as a guide is when the "14-day Case Rate by County" (specifically Ramsey) stays steady or reduces for a period of four consecutive weeks; at that time we'll begin to work out details for indoor worship. It is possible that our initial services will take place in the Fellowship Hall, because of better access to fresh air and significantly more flexibility in arranging seating to maintain a six-foot distance between families and individuals. We're checking out options for increasing the air-flow in our indoor spaces. As we have requested outside, we may ask people to continue to bring their own lawn chairs to save time on disinfecting.

As summer has wound down we have spent less time in phone contact with members; we'd like to focus on that again, until this pandemic is past. I'd like to find 16 people who would be willing to call 20 families or individual members of St. Stephen sometime each month. We'll provide a calling list. If you'd be willing to take on this opportunity to be in touch with others at St. Stephen please leave a message in the church office (651-777-1107) or contact me at jamesawoodruff@ststephenwbl.org.

Finally, once again, **I would like to thank the whole congregation for your faithful financial support** during these unusual days. Through the end of August giving is almost exactly the same as it was at this time last year. While we will still see our usual need to "catch up" financially at the end of the year, I am confident we will meet this need as we have so many times before. As a staff we continue to seek ways we can serve this congregation both at a distance and as possible, in person; your gifts make this possible. As you continue your giving please keep in mind our "Cash Reserve Fund" as a special appeal. The goal is to raise \$90,000 in three years to act as a cushion when our current fund dips into deficit territory. When used, this fund needs to be repaid at the end of the year.

As I said in my last letter "please continue to care for each other, pray for the world, the USA, and our congregation, and be diligent in seeking to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus so that we can regularly gather together again, soon!"

In Christ's Service,

Pastor Jim