

# *An Update from Pastor Jim*

11 February 2021

Dear Fellow Members of St. Stephen Lutheran Church,

Greeting in Jesus' name.

When we temporarily closed our doors to in-person worship on March 15, 2020 we envisioned a short-term impact on the life of St. Stephen. Now, eleven months later, we're still dealing with this global pandemic and carefully weighing our options for ministry and worship. Even as this pandemic continues I want to share some bits of Good News with you.



The first Good News is a reminder. We are not in this alone. God is with us throughout. The Good News; the Gospel of Jesus Christ; is that we are loved by God and belong to Him, now and always. The culmination of that Good News is: "...remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20b

Beyond that unwavering, universal Good News, I'd like to share what I hope you'll see as several bits of more local good news.

Many of you have read this already, but I want to reiterate that in 2020 we had an amazing year financially at St. Stephen. Congregational giving was faithful and generous throughout the year, supplemented by a PPP forgivable loan. Not only did we eliminate a \$22,631.93 deficit, with which we began the year, but we also ended the year with a positive cash balance of \$20,614.74. If we all continue that faithful, generous support in 2021, we'll have another good year. Thank you all for that support.

Our Annual Meeting, held by Zoom on January 31, went smoothly. A quorum was 44; there were 58 participants. We elected Church Officers, the 2021 Church Council, and approved our 2021 Budget. Serving on Church Council this year will be: Ken Smith, Mira Stearns, Betsy Clark, Paul Colaizy, Ted Schaff, Kristin Duffy, Marta Hohnstadt, Chris Sheldon, and Abby Ternus. Additional Church Officers include: Teri Cinis, Patsy Olson and Brad Wilm. Please keep all of them in your prayers. The 2021 Operational Budget approved at the Annual Meeting is \$430,668.57.

Many of you have said how anxious you are to gather together again in worship. I'm pleased to say that with the reduction of Covid infection numbers in Minnesota and increasing vaccinations, our leadership team has affirmed that beginning in Lent we may resume in-person worship. So, on Ash Wednesday, February 17 at 6:00 we will be returning to in-person worship in our Fellowship Hall. We will serve communion, but because of Covid concerns we will not be doing the imposition of ashes. The plan is to continue Wednesday Evening Lenten Services at 6:00, February 24 - March 24. We will be serving Take-home packages of homemade soup and bread following worship. If all continues in a good direction Sunday morning worship will resume on February 28 or March 7. There are two caveats to these decisions. First, if there is another significant spike in Covid infections we may have to once again halt in-person worship services. Second, all Covid safety precautions remain in effect; that is: doing a self health assessment before attending worship, wearing a mask, maintaining physical distancing, and appropriate hand washing. While we are also anxious to see the whole congregation again, I want to encourage everyone to only return to worship when you are comfortable doing so. We make every effort to make St. Stephen as safe a place to gather as possible, but each individual must determine where and when they believe it is safe. Hope it will soon be safe for all.

May God continue to bless you all, keep you safe, and create in you unwavering trust in our faithful God.

Happy Valentine's Day!

In Christ's Service,

*Pastor Jim*

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