

October 9, 2020

Dear Members of St. Stephen's,

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ!

We hope this letter finds you and your family doing well as we continue to make our way through this unprecedented time. We'd like to share a scripture that has been meaningful to us over the last few months.

Romans 5:1-5

St. Paul writes to the believers in Rome ¹ "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

This reading from Romans is a great reflection of our life together as a congregation. We've persevered through a very tumultuous time and are showing our endurance as we move forward into an unforeseen but hope-filled future.

Some rays of hope are:

- The work of our SSLC COVID-19 Advisory Board and Church Council to evaluate, innovate, and create new opportunities for us to gather together in fellowship and worship
- The start of in-person worship back in early June and an intergenerational Sunday School class in September, both of which have continued to grow in attendance
- A devoted technical staff that is offering an unbelievably polished virtual worship opportunity for our members on Sundays and Wednesdays
- A musical staff that has worked to offer virtual anthems and hymns while we still worship without singing
- Youth events that have restarted
- The beginning of youth community groups that will meet regularly for fellowship and connection to each other and the church
- A successful "God's Work Our Hands" service day where we helped do yard work for a number of our members and also some beautification around our large parking lot
- An inspiring Lutheridge worship, picnic, and apple picking that was enjoyed by many
- Bible studies and confirmation classes being attended in-person and virtually, respectively

We are also excited to report the latest action taken by our Church Council at the recommendation of our SSLC COVID-19 Advisory Board. On Sunday, October 25th we will be adding a worship service in the Sanctuary and singing to our worship service in the gym. Here's the plan that was approved:

Worship will continue in the Gym with no singing on Sunday, October 18th.

Starting on Sunday, October 25th the worship schedule changes to:

8:30 - Worship in the Sanctuary with No Singing

9:45 - Worship in the Gym with No Singing

11:00 - Worship in the Gym with Singing (Masks Required)

Starting on Sunday, November 29th the worship schedule changes to:

8:30 - Worship in the Sanctuary with Singing (Masks Required)

9:45 - Worship in the Gym with No Singing

11:00 - Worship in the Gym with Singing (Masks Required)

ST. STEPHEN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
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Wednesday 12:30pm services will continue with no singing for the most vulnerable folks in our congregation.

This change is a direct reflection of the results of our latest congregational survey and current conditions. Virus infection rates will continue to be monitored, and if necessary, we reserve the right at any point to revert back to prior plans or practices for the safety and well-being of our church members.

Risk mitigation efforts will remain the same for our worship services in the gym. A very similar risk mitigation plan is being established for the worship service in the sanctuary. The biggest change to our risk mitigations will be the requirement of a mask for anyone who plans to attend a worship service with singing.

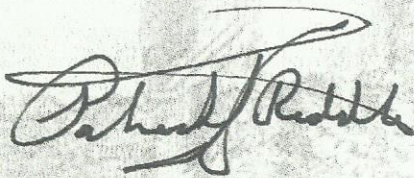
We are excited about this next step, and we are truly humbled and amazed at all the emails, phone calls, hand written letters, Facebook comments, and other messages that we have received expressing gratitude for the ministry that we are doing together. None of this would be possible without your love and support and for that we say a huge THANK YOU!

We are encouraged that many of you have remembered the church's ministry and supported it through electronic mediums like the Givelify app, online donations (sslc.org), and direct deposit giving. For more information on those giving opportunities, please contact our parish Administrator, Tonya Reynolds at tonya@sslc.org or (803) 359-6562. Many of you have mailed in your gifts or put them in the offering plates on Sundays and Wednesdays, which is also extremely helpful as we continue our mission and ministry. Here's the latest in terms of our financial status:

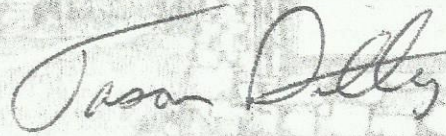
- At the start of the pandemic we were almost \$13,000 ahead of expenses. Now, as of the end of September, we have a combined general fund and building fund deficit of \$35,000. In comparison to many of our sister congregations we are fairing quite well, but there is no doubt that we've felt an effect on the life of our congregation due to COVID-19.
- Some additional expenses were incurred with buying equipment to boost our recording capabilities for worship. These expenses have come at the recommendation of our recording team and will help foster the commitment we are making to our online worship presence as a continued part of our ministry into the future.
- We have been working closely with our Preschool Director, Beth Haggard, to make sure that the preschool has what they need to thrive in the midst of this unusual time. The church is committed to supporting this vital and exceptional ministry they provide.

With hope we look forward thinking in terms of how we will progress as a congregation into the future. Be on the lookout for some exciting news about changes in our worshipping opportunities that we will share with you soon. Until that time, we continue to give thanks to God for our ministry here at St. Stephen's and also for all of YOU that make it possible with your generous gifts and offerings. May God bless you, your family, and this congregation as we persevere as "People of Christ Making a Difference!"

Yours in Christ,



Pastor Pat



Pastor Jason

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