

www.ststephenburnaby.ca

August 31, 2020

Dear Friends,

Like all of us, I sometimes wish I knew what the future holds for us. And certainly the COVID-19 pandemic has made that desire stronger. But we don't, as much as we long for it, get a crystal ball to predict the future. Instead, we get a God who promises us that we will never be left alone with the hard and difficult burdens, with the uncertainties of the future. We also get the stories of our faith's ancient and more modern believers who experienced that promise made real: the Israelites being led out of Egypt, wandering in the wilderness but guided and cared for by God; the early church's discovery of the resurrected Christ and the way that Christ continues to be made present in bread and wine; the stories of believers facing impossible trial after impossible trial, but able to hold fast to goodness and truth and love because of their experience of God's presence.

At St Stephen's, we are working hard to follow in the footsteps of those whose faith and trust in God inspire us. We are carefully and thoughtfully embracing Phase Three of the Diocesan Guidelines for Re-Opening Churches. So far, I have been impressed with our willingness to commit to the basic protocols for being together (distancing, mask-wearing, hand hygiene) and grateful for everyone's patience as we learn and re-learn technology, movement in our space, and how we find the presence of Christ in a modified form of Holy Eucharist.

I know we are tired of being in this crisis mode and I believe this September is the time we transition from "immediate crisis" to living long-term with this new reality. Phase Three of the Diocesan Guidelines are as permissive as they get - until the pandemic is over. So, unless we are forced to move backwards to an earlier stage or new more restrictive guides come



out, what we do this September will become our “new normal.” We continue to believe that you know your risk-levels best – both in terms of the risks to you and yours if you were to contract COVID-19 and your capacity and comfort with taking risks. We want no one to feel pressured to take risks they aren’t comfortable with. At the same time, we believe that now is our time to settle in and get comfortable with our “new normal.” If you have avoided worship waiting for things to go “back to normal,” this is your time to embrace in-person worship even though it isn’t quite like it was before. Or, if you are continuing to limit your contacts, but haven’t figured out Zoom yet, then this is your time to embrace Zoom – by video or by phone.

Your generosity of spirit, of care, and of resources continues to make a great deal of difference. I am so grateful to those who have taken on phoning others as a ministry of care. I believe our

prayers are effective in calming our own anxieties and in encouraging and upholding those we pray for. Some of you have been able to go above and beyond in your financial contributions – helping us continue to pay all the bills during this time. What we need from you now is your continued work in these areas: your financial commitment as you are able, your prayers, and your efforts at reaching out to one another.

Elsewhere in this update, you’ll find more information on our financial situation and a prayer or two. Here I want to close with an encouragement that

you do reach out. We are doing our best to reach many people in many different circumstances and degrees of comfort with the risks that COVID-19 poses to us. Over the next few weeks, we may adapt some of our communication strategies. So it is even more vital that you reach out to us if you think you’re missing something, want to check in, or learn more about how you can stay connected during our “new normal.”



PASTOR
RUTH

\$ FINANCIAL NEWS \$

In order to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted St Stephen's, it helps to understand where we were aiming to be before the pandemic. In 2017, the Parish felt the need for the support of a full-time priest to lead and guide its efforts to meet the spiritual needs of Northeast Burnaby. We see a growing, diverse neighbourhood hungry for connection to one another and to what we name as God. We know we offer that neighbourhood a community of believers that creates a feeling of "home" for many diverse people.

The plan was (and remains) that with the support of a full-time priest, the parish would be able to increase in membership and in the spiritual discipline of stewardship so that our income from donations and rentals would be enough for general parish operations and the additional costs of a full-time priest. We have committed \$135,000 from our investments in the Consolidated Trust Fund (CTF).

We entered 2020 with new programming designed to respond to the neighbourhood's hunger for connection. We also entered 2020 still struggling to close the gap between our costs and our income. We passed a budget that anticipated a deficit. We saw a dip in our "average Sunday attendance" in the early part of the year. And then, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and we had to close our building. Our rental income, a significant portion of our total income, was nearly all gone.

We were blessed with generous support from the Diocese of New Westminster. Diocesan funds covered the costs of our priest's salary and benefits for 2 months and Diocesan Council suspended the payment of our Fair Share Assessment (our contributions to the work and ministry of the Diocese) for 5 months. Diocesan staff worked to ensure that parishes were eligible for federal relief as employers and we have received some wage subsidy.

Where does all this leave us, financially? Well, that depends. IF we are able to have most of our user groups from September to December and IF we don't have any unexpected building costs and IF our CTF investment does not lose significant value, we may be able to end 2020 reasonably close to where we anticipated being.

However, we have lost some momentum on our goals to reach out to our neighbours and build connection. And while we had several newcomers from March stick with us through the early and uncertain days of the pandemic, we have also had some members make life decisions taking them away from us. And we still need to make significant progress increasing our annual giving to close the gap between our income and our expenses without relying on the Consolidated Trust Fund.

Three things you can do in light of this financial update are:

1. Consider who you know who needs what you receive at St. Stephen's. We know that the most effective evangelism happens when someone we know invites us to join them at church.
2. Review your own plan for giving this year - have you given what you intended to? Are your intentions still reasonable for you?
3. Pray that we will find the abundance that God provides to do the work that God has given us to do.

BY THE NUMBERS: 2020

Attendance Statistics

Average Sunday Attendance in 2019: 59

Average Sunday Attendance in 2020 Before COVID-19 Closure: 51

Average Sunday Attendance After COVID-19 Closure (Zoom & In-Person, combined): 38

Consolidated Trust Fund Withdrawals

Through July 2020, we have withdrawn \$30,000 of the \$55,000 budgeted for withdrawal this year. We had always hoped to not need the full amount. Amazingly, with the support from the Diocese, our lower-than-anticipated expenses, and the return of our user groups, our hope might actually be realized. The CTF has performed fairly well so far this year. The balance as of July 2020 was \$194,941 (\$89,160 of our total CTF fund is a restricted asset that can not be used without Diocesan approval).

While there is good news here, for the last 3 years, we have relied on the CTF for approximately \$30,000 each year. This is an unsustainable draw on our total investment. We must increase our donations and other sources of income within the next two years if we want to sustain the ministry of a full-time priest.

A Simplified Financial Report January through July 2020

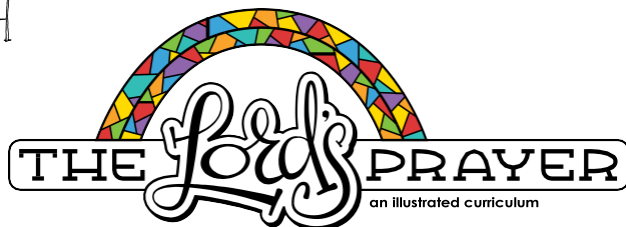
	Year to Date	Year to Date Budget
Income		
Donations (Envelopes, Open)	\$ 48,893.76	\$ 59,423.08
Rental Income (daycare)	\$ 12,293.47	\$ 11,921.69
Rental Donations (user groups)	\$ 18,037.75	\$ 31,208.31
Thrift Shop Donation	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 3,500.00
Fundraising	\$ 2,458.07	\$ 5,112.00
All Other Income	\$ 9,874.37	\$ 42,725.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$ 93,557.42	\$ 153,890.08
Expenses		
Rector Expenses	\$ 42,011.47	\$ 58,286.69
Other Staff (Office, Music)	\$ 19,914.47	\$ 20,761.62
Diocesan Fair Share Assessment	\$ 6,548.49	\$ 15,283.31
Building Operations	\$ 21,898.30	\$ 34,821.34
Office Expenses	\$ 5,179.37	\$ 4,571.44
Capital Expenses	\$ 2,700.04	\$ 10,500.00
All Other Expenses	\$ 8,844.94	\$ 21,664.43
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 107,097.08	\$ 165,888.83
Excess Income/Expenses	-\$ 13,539.66	-\$ 11,998.75

Detailed financial reports are reviewed by Parish Council and available to any member of the parish upon request.

Ways to Learn & Grow in Faith This Autumn

SUNDAY SCHOOL AND YOUTH PROGRAMMING

Starting Sunday, September 6, our Sunday School teachers are ready to welcome back our children and youth for programming during the 10am worship service. Careful COVID-19 protocols have been developed to help our young people maintain physical distancing and good hand hygiene. We have a program on The Lord's Prayer prepared for the first six weeks of the Fall. Our youth may continue to meet with youth from St Laurence and nearby Lutheran churches for some online formation as well. Please be in touch with Betty Schellenberg for more details.



ZOOM BIBLE STUDY OPTIONS



Right now, both our weekly Bible Study groups are opting to continue meeting on Zoom. If you would prefer an in-person option, please contact Pastor Ruth.



UPCOMING OPPORTUNITY

Later this autumn, we will be engaging in conversation about money. These conversations will be guided by a sermon series and ways for folks to respond to those sermons. "We all have a money story, whether we recognize it or not. Perhaps we are living from a story of fear or shame. Or a story that our actions won't have an impact. Or a story that we don't have enough. Where might God be speaking a new narrative into the limited ones we have told ourselves? These conversations invite us to discover and tell our money stories in light of God's money story of liberation and justice. Money and possessions are one of the most common topics in scripture, and Jesus talked about money more than faith and prayer. Our money story, therefore, is a spiritual story. Thinking about God's money story should be liberating, inviting, and transformative."





**St Stephen's Pet
Memorial Garden**

Archbishop Melissa Skelton will celebrate our
"grand opening" and offer a blessing on the
garden.

Tuesday, October 20, at 4pm

Please let Pastor Ruth know by email if you have the ashes of a pet you would
like placed in the garden during the opening liturgy.



*The Saint Stephen
Social Hour*
*a Zoom chat
for members & friends to connect*

WEDNESDAYS AT 7PM
STARTING SEPTEMBER 9
ZOOM LINKS BY EMAIL
CONTACT THE PARISH
OFFICE



O God,

where hearts are
fearful and constricted,
grant courage and hope. Where
anxiety is infectious and widening, grant peace
and reassurance. Where impossibilities close
every door and window, grant imagination and
resistance. Where distrust twists our thinking,
grant healing and illumination. Where spirits are
daunted and weakened, grant soaring wings and
strengthened dreams. All these things we ask in
the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.
Amen.

[A prayer for times of conflict, crisis, or disaster
from *Occasional Services for the Assembly*]

Merciful God, your healing power is everywhere about us. Strengthen those who work
among the sick; give them courage and confidence in all they do. Encourage them when
they are overwhelmed with many pressing needs or when their efforts seem futile. Increase
their trust in your power to bring life and wholeness even in the midst of death and pain and
crying. May they be thankful for every sign of health you give, and humble before the
mystery of your healing grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A Prayer for Healthcare Workers from Occasional Services for the Assembly.