



THE VOICE

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH, AVON, CT

July 2020

"In Christ, we are digging deep, reaching out, changing lives."

STAFF:

Julie Reuning-Scherer, Lead Pastor
Brian Rajcok, Associate Pastor
Richard Silbereis, Director of Music
Cynthia Zakowski, Office Administrator
Steven Smolnik, Publisher

St. Matthew Lutheran Church
224 Lovely Street
Avon, CT 06001-4018
(860) 673-3301

Website: www.stmatthewavon.org

*The church building is closed at this time.
but you can mail contributions and commu-
nications to the church via USPS and drop
off donations for outside organizations in the
bins by the office door. Thank you!*

*Please join us on our website for virtual wor-
ship!*

DATES TO REMEMBER:

***The office will continue to be closed un-
til notice is otherwise given. All in-
person events are tentative and may be
changed.***

Tuesdays in July: Virtual Prayer, 10:00 a.m.

Fridays in July: Virtual Women's Fellowship,
9:30 a.m.

July 2: Virtual Bible Study, 10:00 a.m.

July 3: Independence Day, Observed

July 11: Virtual Youth Group, 10:00 a.m.

July 14: Virtual Centering Prayer, 7:00 p.m.

July 15: August VOICE submissions deadline

July 16: Virtual Bible Study, 10:00 a.m.

July 24: Fourth Friday at Grace, 5:00 p.m.

July 25: Men's Breakfast, 8:30 a.m.—*in per-
son or virtual, TBD.*

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

COMMUNION QUESTIONS

This period of quarantine has raised some interesting questions surrounding the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Before the quarantine began St. Matthew was starting a Care Teams ministry which would bring communion to our homebound members, providing another visit each month to homebound members in addition to the pastors' communion visits. Theologically speaking, lay people bringing communion to the homebound is an extension of the Table, a continuation of the Meal we share on Sundays. It does not involve reconsecrating the elements. Rather, it is delivering the elements prepared in Sunday worship to a person's home, like a communion assistant might bring the elements to someone's seat who is unable to physically walk up to the altar. Care Team ministry or "Eucharistic ministry" is common in many Lutheran churches and other Christian denominations.

During the pandemic some churches have considered the practice of "virtual communion." Pastor Julie and I led two sessions discussing the theology of Holy Communion two weeks in June. There are many pastors, bishops, and theologians weighing in on this issue, and there is a lot of diversity in perspectives. It is interesting to highlight theological arguments for and against such a practice, as well as explore the background of the Lutheran understanding of communion. As we learned in our zoom meetings on this topic, Lutherans believe in the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion, meaning the body and blood of Christ is truly present in the bread and wine in a way beyond just metaphor. Luther rejected Roman Catholicism's metaphysical explanation of how this occurs (called "transubstantiation") and adopted a simple "real presence" understanding, while other reformers argued for a more symbolic meaning. The Sacrament of Holy Communion did not have an emergency provision like the Sacrament of Holy Baptism in the Roman Church, nor did Luther adopt one because he didn't believe not receiving communion would jeopardize one's salvation. Luther also emphasized the priesthood of all believers and understood clergy as those set aside by the community to lead for the sake of good order. But he rejected the Roman idea of an ontological change in one's being at the time of ordination. He believed pastors were important because of the need to have educated leaders who were called to preach and preside for the community to have good order, but did not believe pastors had special powers necessary to consecrate the elements. Rather, it was always Jesus' promise to be present in communion which guaranteed His presence. In fact, Luther once suggested that if a group of Christians were stranded on a desert island without a priest, they could nominate one from among them to preach the gospel, perform baptisms, and distribute communion. That is because the Holy Spirit calls people through the community, not from the top of the church hierarchy.

Even if we aren't on a desert island, this period of quarantine may feel like an emergency situation. Recognizing we are all among the priesthood of all believers may sound like a green light to practice communion at home. However, it is also important to understand that the Sacrament of Holy Communion is about the community of believers being present together. It is not an individual practice, but one for the Gathered Assembly. Christians in Luther's time did not receive communion every week. There was actually a rule that Christians should commune at least once a year, so obviously people were not regular receivers in the medieval church. (continued...)



(...continued) Luther also warned against understanding Communion in an overly superstitious way, as well as it being understood in too casual a manner. Is virtual communion too superstitious? Is it too casual? Or is it taking seriously our call as the priesthood of all believers? Is it in line with Luther's desert island scenario? Or is it dismissing the need for community of the Gathered Assembly? During this time of extended absence from the church building, the church is faced with these questions. We invite you to contemplate, wonder, and pray about them.

Pastor Julie and I are interested in your thoughts as we consider communion practice recommendations for the Reopening Task Force and Church Council, and pray our community grows in faith as we wrestle with these issues. I look forward to seeing you again—hopefully soon!

Peace to you,

One Rev. Brian R. Rajrak

Pastor Brian

GHIAA

Recent events have inspired many to want to do something to confront systemic racism and social injustice. Yet, it can sometimes be difficult to find practical ways to initiate change. GHIAA (Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance) is a local faith-based organization which works for practical change on the local level with issues raised by members of its congregations. Some examples of change are last summer's "No More Slumlords" campaign (read more about it here: <https://www.wnpr.org/post/hartford-residents-claim-victory-against-slumlords-city-s-new-housing-codes>) and a recent initiative to provide Hartford's Civilian Police Review Board with subpoena power. GHIAA will be hosting a core team training for several weeks later this summer during the evening. If you are interested in learning more, email Pastor Brian or Pastor Julie and we will keep you informed as the training is scheduled.

Thanks for responding to the Holy Spirit's movement in your hearts!



REOPENING UPDATE

Thank you to everyone who filled out a survey to give our Council feedback on reopening worship in the sanctuary. We had 111 responses. The council will appoint a Reopening Task Force at their next meeting on July 7th. The task force will begin with the data from the survey to guide their discussion and decision making, as well as the best guidance from national and state government, and ELCA and New England Synod guidelines. The re-opening task force discussions will also include broad input from staff and committees with direct responsibility for ministries of worship, such as property and worship and music/altar guild. The task force recommendations will come to the Council for approval and return to these same committees for implementation.

We will keep you posted on the committee's work through email updates and at our reopening updates at our website.

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS:

- ◆ The Council discussed a variety of ways to reopen the sanctuary for services in the future; no date or particular plan was set as yet.
- ◆ The Council decided that a first step toward reopening would be to develop a survey for distribution to the congregation to get their input.
- ◆ St. Matthew will need a new Zoom Master as Kurt Saenger-Heyl is serving his chaplaincy this summer as part of his seminary training and will not have time to continue those duties on a weekly basis.
- ◆ Pastor Brian reported to the Council that the 5K and the Youth's Mission Trip have to be canceled this summer as a result of the virus.
- ◆ There will be no Vacation Bible School as Camp Calumet is closed this summer again because of the virus; they were to run the VBS program this year. Substitute plans are in the works
- ◆ The Council agreed that the pastors might schedule private, family-only funerals or baptisms, following state and church guidelines for safety.



YOUTH GROUP

Youth Group will meet via Zoom on Saturday, July 11th at 10 AM.

Zoom link: Please contact the office for login information.

PASTORS OFFER PORCH CHATS

Sign up for a 'porch chat' with Pastor Brian or Pastor Julie for a little in-person conversation and prayer! The pastor will sit outside on the porch by the office door and parishioners will sit, socially distanced, in the shade. Please wear a mask and, if desired, bring your own lawn chair.

Please reach out to Pastor Brian or Pastor Julie to schedule your chat.

HEALING PRAYER VIA PHONE ON JULY 30TH

The 5th Sunday healing prayer ministers are preparing a way for those who would like to have a one-on-one healing prayer time via phone in the evening on July 30th. We're working out the details. Stay tuned!

PASTOR BRIAN IS ELECTED TO SYNOD COUNCIL

The New England Synod has an elected body which guides and supports the work of the churches of the synod. Our very own Pastor Brian has been elected to a four-year term!

Recently, the Synod Council has been hard at work researching best practices for congregations during the pandemic and providing discussion for pastors and leaders on the theology and practice of Holy Communion during this time of pandemic.

We are grateful for your service in this important body, PB!

GOOD THINGS: God is good to us, even in the midst of struggle. We are grateful for the following in the month of June:

- ✠ Kurt Saenger-Heyl is training two members, Rick Hanson and Meg Kraft, to be Zoom masters for our online worship each week. We are grateful to our youth and adults who help lead on Sunday mornings!
- ✠ Sunday School finished up on May 31st. Thank you to our faithful teachers who staffed our classrooms through mid-March, and to Pastor Brian and Dick, who lead virtual Sunday school for the remainder. And a special thank you to the children who remind us of what it means to be the Body of Christ!
- ✠ Lynn Metz secured 30 free masks for Grace Lutheran's Friday night grab-and-go community meal from Sewing Face Masks in the Farmington Valley—a group that does what its name says!
- ✠ Online worship provides opportunities to connect with the larger church. This month, we shared a sermon from ELCA Bishop Elizabeth Eaton in our online worship on June 7th and worshipped with New England Synod Bishop Jim Hazelwood and the musicians from Emanuel Hartford on June 21st.
- ✠ Council leaders, worship and music members, and parishioners joined in a two-week study on Communion in Time of Pandemic, led by Pastor Brian and Pastor Julie. Being away from our usual practices raises a lot of questions! Good learning and discussion from all involved.
- ✠ Pastor Brian and Pastor Julie marched with 100 other Hartford area clergy on June 12th, demanding greater accountability and transparency from the police department. The faith-based community organizing group, Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, led the day, culminating in an agreement from Mayor Luke Bronin and the Hartford Police Chief to revamp the failing Civilian Police Review Board.

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
July 2020	Please join us on our website for virtual worship! The office will continue to be closed until notice is otherwise given. All in-person events are tentative and may be changed.		1	2 10:00 Bible Study	3	4
5 9:00 Virtual Worship live via Zoom	6	7 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 7:00 Church Council	8	9	10 9:30 Women's Fellowship via Zoom	11 10:00 Youth Zoom Meeting.
12 9:00 Virtual Worship live via Zoom	13	14 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 7:00 Virtual Centering Prayer	15 August VOICE Deadline	16 10:00 Bible Study	17 9:30 Women's Fellowship via Zoom	18
19 9:00 Virtual Worship live via Zoom	20	21 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.	22	23	24 9:30 Women's Fellowship via Zoom 5:00 Fourth Friday at Grace	25 8:30 Men's Breakfast via Zoom.
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Notes:						

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