



THE VOICE

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH, AVON, CT February 2021

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

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DATES TO REMEMBER:

February 2, 9, 16, & 23:

- Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom, 10 a.m.
- Centering Prayer via Zoom, 6 p.m.

February 4, 11, 18, & 25: Centering Prayer via Zoom, 2 p.m.

February 4, 11, & 18: Unbinding the Gospel via Zoom, 6 p.m.

February 4 & 18: Bible Study via Zoom, 10 a.m.

February 7: Community Conversation led by the Reopening Task Force via Zoom, 10 a.m.

February 6: Confirmation Class - Church by the Pond, Bushnell Park, 1-3 p.m.

February 14: Sunday School via Zoom, 10 a.m.

February 15: March VOICE submissions deadline

February 17: Ash Wednesday:

- Drive-thru imposition of ashes, 4:30-5:30 p.m.
- Worship led by Confirmation Class via Zoom, 7 p.m.

February 25: Discipleship in Democracy study, 7 p.m.

February 27: Men's Breakfast via Zoom, 8:30 a.m.

February 28: Sunday School via Zoom, 10 a.m.

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

St. Paul Sings a "Golden Oldie"

Do you have a favorite old hymn? One passed down to you from generations past? St. Paul seems to have one. He quotes it in his letter to the Philippians, in what many scholars believe to be the oldest hymn of the Christian church. In chapter 2, Paul urges the Christian community he founded in Philippi to 'be of the same mind as Christ Jesus.' What follows is a poetic summary of Jesus' saving work known as "the Christ hymn". Jesus is praised as pouring himself out in love for humanity, and humanity's response of humility and worship: "[Jesus] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.... He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death... therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend."

Our Lenten theme this year, "**At the Name of Jesus,**" comes from this golden oldie of Paul in Philippians 2. Our Lenten observation begins on **Ash Wednesday, February 17.** We offer two options for worship on this day: **a drive-thru imposition of ashes in our church parking lot from 4:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m. and Zoom worship at 7 p.m.** A liturgy including a confession that worshippers can do individually will be sent out prior to Ash Wednesday, and those who wish to receive ashes may drive through the church parking lot at any time within the designated hour. The Zoom worship will incorporate confession, prayer, scripture, and song, as well as preaching. It is appropriate to partake in either or both services as desired. If an in-person service is possible, we will announce it closer to the date. The ashes are a powerful symbol of our limitations and mortality, as well as an ancient sign of mourning. Whether you receive the ashes or not, Ash Wednesday is a time to empty and humble ourselves, confessing where we have fallen short, and opening ourselves to the healing grace of God.

This year **midweek Lenten worship will be a series of short video devotions** created by Pastors Brian and Julie based on the Philippians Christ hymn. We will share the following themes:

- ✦ Week 1 - Christ emptied and humbled himself
- ✦ Week 2 - Christ became obedient
- ✦ Week 3 - At the name of Jesus all knees shall bow
- ✦ Week 4 - Every tongue confesses Jesus
- ✦ Week 5 - Let the same mind be in you

The devotions will be posted on the church's Facebook page and homepage of the website, as well as sent in a midweek

We Are Here For You A reminder that your pastors are here for you whenever you have a pastoral need. We can talk and pray with you over the phone, in a Zoom meeting, or socially distanced in the Hall of the Evangelists. It is easy to feel disconnected during this time of increased social isolation, so feel free to call the office or the pastors directly to set up a time.

(...continued) Constant Contact email. Our worship on Sunday mornings will focus on our new life in Christ in baptism and feature the leadership of our confirmation students.

We look forward to sharing St. Paul's "golden oldie" with you and pray that you will be strengthened and blessed in this season.

Pastor Julie
Pastor Julie

LENTEN STUDY OPPORTUNITY: DISCIPLESHIP IN DEMOCRACY

Pastor Brian and Pastor Julie invite you to a study on the ELCA's social message entitled "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy," Thursday evenings in Lent, starting February 25 at 7 p.m. Zoom login information will be shared in weekly Constant Contact emails.

"Pastor, I was really upset by Sunday's sermon. You're meddling in politics, which you have no business doing. I also hear that you participated in those recent protests. Don't you understand the separation of church and state?"

"Some of us are frustrated that our church won't take a stand. Aren't we named for a protester, Martin Luther? Don't we point with reverence to martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who took a very political stance?"

"As a young person, I am deeply concerned about social justice, and I find little to no support for my convictions in my church."

"I don't want my church to tell me how to vote, but I would welcome some guidance on how to prayerfully cast my ballot."

Each of these wide-ranging views represents the stance of some members in a typical ELCA congregation. It's little wonder, then, that much of the conflict we experience in the church today is generated by differing views about the proper relationship between church and state, faith and politics.

Prompted by increasing polarization over the appropriate role of government and by the conflict such divisions are causing in congregations, the ELCA has developed a social message on the role of government, the nature of civic engagement, and the relationship of church and state.

The social message offers guidance on considering scripture, Lutheran theology and tradition, in connection with public life, and an opportunity to hear from one another in a spirit of dialogue.

Session topics include:

- ◇ SESSION 1: HOW SHOULD LUTHERANS BE INVOLVED IN POLITICS? AN OVERVIEW
- ◇ SESSION 2: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM TODAY AND WHAT HAVE LUTHERANS TAUGHT ABOUT GOVERNMENT?
- ◇ SESSION 3: GOD'S TWO WAYS OF GOVERNING
- ◇ SESSION 4: GOVERNMENT ROLES AND FUNCTIONS: IS THE NEIGHBOR BEING SERVED?
- ◇ SESSION 5: CALLED TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

You can find the Living Lutheran article for session one here <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/10/discipleship-in-a-democracy/> and the social statement here https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Government_and_Civic_Engagement_Social_Message.pdf?ga=2.170302822.795868743.1611086926-56195097.1597846357. We hope to see you there!

JANUARY 2021 CHURCH COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

- Pastor Brian reported that the Stewardship Committee has received \$301,000 in pledges to date.
- Pastor Julie said that a small group has begun to study the book “Unbinding the Gospel” as a first step in the strategic plan for St. Matthew after the pandemic and things open up once more.
- Debbie Steinberg, the Asst. Treasurer, reported that St. Matthew finished 2020 in good financial condition due in part to the PPP loan it received and the faithfulness of its congregation.
- Dawne Ware, Treasurer, presented the 2021 budget for Council approval before it is presented at the Annual Meeting.
- George Reider presented the Endowment gift recommendations for 2020 for Council approval; they will be presented for final approval at the Annual Meeting.



SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School will meet the second and fourth Sundays of the month (February 14 and 28) at 10 a.m. We will continue to cover themes in the Apostle's Creed and sing songs led by Dick. Newcomers are always welcome!

Sunday School will not be leading worship in February or March, as the Confirmation class is leading worship during Lent. Sunday School will be back on for leading on the third Sunday of April and May.



YOUTH GROUP!

Mark your calendars for the North Carolina mission trip the week of July 31—August 7. We are still planning on it, praying and hoping that the pandemic will be behind us at that point!



CENTERING PRAYER

Centering Prayer group will meet every Tuesday at 6 p.m. and every Thursday at 2 p.m. this month. We are reading Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart* and will cover Chapters 10 & 11 in February. Our meetings will continue to be on Zoom. Newcomers are always welcome! Contact Pastor Brian if you'd like to join.

BIBLE STUDY Bible Study meets every first and third Thursday at 10 a.m. on Zoom. This month that will be February 4th and 18th. A link will appear in St. Matthew's weekly Constant Contact for all who wish to attend. Newcomers always welcome!

GOOD THINGS: The month of January saw many good things happening at St. Matthew!

- † St. Matthew held our annual meeting via Zoom on Sunday January 24th. 76 people attended!
- † Pastor Julie and Pastor Brian started leading a small group study of *Unbinding the Gospel*, a resource for growing our outreach and evangelism.
- † Tuesdays Together started reading Bishop Hazelwood's *Everyday Spirituality* together.
- † The Men's Group started reading Richard Rohr's *On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditations for Men* together.
- † Centering Prayer started meeting on a weekly basis and is reading Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart*.
- † Sunday School led Zoom worship on January 17th and met for class on January 10th and 31st.
- † Confirmation met both in-person and virtually, and the class made personal care kits to take to people in need in Bushnell Park.

God is good, all the time!

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<h1>February 2021</h1>						
	1 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Ruth	2 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom 6:00 Centering Prayer	3 7:00 Reopening Task Force	4 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer 6:00 Unbinding the Gospel	5	6 1:00 Confirmation—Church by the Pond, Bushnell Park. 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
7 9:00 Virtual Worship with Holy Communion live on Zoom 10:00 Community Conversation: Reopening on Zoom	8 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: 1st Samuel 7:00 Finance Committee	9 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 6:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Church Council	10	11 2:00 Centering Prayer 6:00 Unbinding the Gospel	12	13 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
14 9:00 Virtual Worship live via Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom	15 VOICE Deadline 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: 1st & 2nd Kings	16 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 6:00 Centering Prayer	17 Ash Wednesday 4:30 Drive-thru imposition of ashes. 7:00 Worship via Zoom	18 Hulme Sweeney Piano Work 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer 6:00 Unbinding the Gospel	19	20 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
21 9:00 Virtual Worship with Holy Communion live on Zoom	22 1:00 Staff Meeting 6:00 Worship and Music 7:00 Confirmation-Zoom Check-in	23 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom 6:00 Centering Prayer	24	25 2:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Discipleship in Democracy Study	26	27 8:30 Men's Breakfast via Zoom 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
28 9:00 Virtual Worship live on Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom	<p><i>If you need to stop by the office for any reason, please call (860) 673-3301 and Diane will be happy to receive you. You can mail contributions and communications to the church via USPS and drop off donations for outside organizations in the bins by the office door. Thank you!</i></p>					

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224 Lovely Street, Avon, Connecticut 06001-4018

Non-Profit Organization



TUESDAYS TOGETHER

Tuesdays Together continues to meet every Tuesday morning 10:00-10:30 a.m. on Zoom. We are currently reading Bishop Hazelwood's book *Everyday Spirituality*. Contact the office or Pastor Brian if you would like a copy. And even if you aren't reading the book, you are always welcome to join us any Tuesday!



MEN'S GROUP

Men's group will meet on Zoom Saturday, February 27th at 8:30 a.m. During 2021 we will be reading Richard Rohr's *On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditations for Men*. Copies of this daily meditation book are available for free to anyone who would like one, just come to church and pick up a copy. This book will be the basis of our discussions this year. We look forward to journeying through Rohr's work together.

Reopening Task Force Answers... Because You Asked!

The Reopening Task Force welcomes your questions and concerns. Below are a few of the questions that have come up, and the responses from the Task Force.

Q: *Is the church closed right now?*

A: The church is closed to the general public right now, but open to parishioners. If you need to stop by the office or meet with a staff person, please call ahead and let us know you will be stopping by. In addition, the pastors are available for in-person conversation and prayer. This is done masked, socially distanced in a large room.

Q: *I know St Matthew is not offering in-person worship in the sanctuary right now. Are any ministries happening in the church building at this time?*

A: Select ministries are taking place within the church building at this time. This includes small groups of volunteers (usually 2-3 at a time), and a once-a-month in-person event for the confirmation class. Each in-person event is evaluated for safety protocols, and provisions are made for those who choose to participate virtually.

In addition, small funerals and baptisms continue to be held in the sanctuary.

Q: *We did all that work on the HVAC system this fall; why can't we gather in the sanctuary for worship on Sunday mornings?*

A: The current elevated rate of Covid-19 community infection impacts our safety, even though we have made HVAC system upgrades for better ventilation and air filtration. If there is a greater rate of Covid-19 infection in the community, there is a greater possibility that an individual with Covid-19 may enter our sanctuary during worship. There are many people with Covid-19 that are asymptomatic, yet can still carry and transmit the infection.

Our model depends on diluting the virus in the space, thereby decreasing the viral load that any person might inhale. We have a mathematical model of the HVAC dilution that we can use to illustrate the risks. In general, the risk is very low. We use the rate/100,000 in our model to give us a baseline estimate of the potential chance of someone being infected. But if there **was** a person who was infected, then the risk goes up 100X over what it was.

Increased community spread coupled with mutant viral strains that are becoming more prevalent and more easily transmissible continues to increase a potential serious risk to our parishioners by introducing a greater risk of exposure and infection. For these reasons, the Reopening Task Force has been conservative in their recommendations, prioritizing safe ways to meet the spiritual needs of parishioners, and advocating reopening the worship space when the infection rate drops below the "Red Zone," which is an infection rate of fewer than 15 positive cases per 100,000 people per day.

We invite you to bring your questions and thoughts to a Community Conversation led by the Reopening Task Force on February 7, 2021, at 10 a.m., following Zoom worship. Login information will be the same as worship, and will be sent out via constant contact email. We look forward to hearing from you!

ST. MATTHEW MISSION STATEMENT: *St. Matthew Lutheran Church is a worshipping community called to proclaim God's love for all and to grow spiritually together. Challenged by Jesus' example, we strive to connect people of all ages, abilities, and needs, and to nurture them to be disciples of Christ. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we reach out to the wider community and welcome our neighbors to a life of worship, preaching, teaching, Christian care, service, and spiritual growth.*