

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church
Parish Council Meeting November 18, 2020
7:15 PM – 8:15 PM – through Zoom

Attendees (Absent):

Pastor John Snider, Pastor Tim Thompson, Gary Westman, Merrill Zieman, Sue Clark, Debbie Pirkel, Joy Stenhaug, Mary Molumby, Teresa Tschida, Sara Ruff, Joanna Mead, Beth Hostager, Diane Meyers, Dave Paton, Eric Donahue, Jessica Donahue, Kim Richter, Lori Ritt, John Anderson, Annette Youness, Tracy Westman, Ali Schloesser-Brecht, Mark Rogosheske

AGENDA

1) Opening prayer / Devotional (Pastor John)

2) Minutes approved – October 21, 2020 meeting (Gary)

3) Updates from Executive Committee

- a) Pastor Tim's Settled Call –
 - i) Past Sunday we had 82 participate on Zoom call / 81 were able to vote.
 - ii) 81 votes received / unanimously vote in favor of "settled call".
- b) Cell Phone Tower Lease
 - i) Advised we will not renegotiate a lease.
- c) Coronavirus Response – Safety Committee – Merrill
 - i) Committee meets every 2 weeks
 - ii) Decided there **will not** be in-person (inside the Sanctuary) worship until the committee reviews information and determines the status in January, 2021.
 - iii) All other St. Stephen's services will continue with the awareness to follow established protocols, and determine methods by which safety can be further promoted, e.g. meetings by zoom, consider decreasing group meeting time.

4) Committee Reports/Updates – Please email updates in advance of meeting

- a) Pastor Reports - See pages 4-6
- b) Property & Maintenance – no report

c) Christian Education: Mary

- I. Our attendance has been about 82% this year in faith formation.
- II. Some members of the education committee met in small groups to prepare and stuff envelopes for the month of December. We are doing advent lessons in the month of December.
- III. Tracy has been sending emails (once a week) to our faith formation families regarding the topic of prayer, it has been well received as she has been getting emails back thanking her for them.
- IV. Tracy / Reverse Advent Calendar. Challenges council to participate in this.

d) Youth & Family – no update

e) Finance: Diane/Beth

- I. On a year-to-date basis, total income and total expense are both approximately \$35,000 and \$37,000, respectfully, below budget.
- II. As a result, the YTD deficit is \$37,874.56.
- III. The main driver of the unfavorable YTD income variance is general envelope contributions which are \$21,000 lower than budget.
- IV. The main driver of the favorable YTD expense variance is Property & Maintenance expenses which are \$24,000 lower than budget.

f) Stewardship – Kim

Busy this month with our many mailing and working on communication processes! It's a LOT of info to get out there (we know). But we have had three amazing temple talks down per each of our priorities; now onto Intention Sunday!

Key initiatives:

- 1.) Intention forms (formerly pledge form) and brochures are mailed out this week with an "ask" letter - the "ask" being a pledge to increase giving in 2021.
- 2) Receipt of pledges is so important! If we receive 100 pledges, we will receive a \$20,000 challenge gift!
 - **We hope our council can be counted on to complete an intention!** Also would appreciate help to spread the word and check in on people who might need assistance with the process?
 - Emphasis is on joyful giving - we are grateful for all contributions
 - Goal is to see giving rates increase overall by 15% to help us achieve our goals
- 3.) Pledges can be completed online or by completing the form and turning it in during the Drive Thru Altar Walk after church this Sunday.
- 4.) We will be following up with parishioners to encourage receipt
- 5.) Anyone want to help out with handwritten thank yous for those who turned in a pledge? (If you saw my handwriting, you would understand. My mother had hoped I might be a doctor....)
- 4.) We are noting "lessons" learned for next year so feedback is welcome.

g) Missions: Dave

- I. Your Missions committee had planned on having some Neighbors Inc. packing events to coincide with what we had hoped would be a reengagement of sorts. Alas and as you know, recent Covid statistics suggest/MANDATE a more cautious stance.
- II. Loaves & Fishes \$ balances should be higher so keep your eyes open for a virtual event to that end though if the Spirit moves you...

h) Worship & Music

i) Inviting

j) Fellowship – Sara

- i) Continue Zoom for fellowship after 9:30am service.

k) Nominating – need to add 3 new members

5) **Important Dates**

Next Council Meeting – Wednesday, December 16, 7:15 PM

6) **Adjourn**

**Pastor John's Report
November 18, 2020**

“Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” Isaiah 64:8

Challenging days these. Challenging to everyone. We know the list...let alone the details of our personal lives and the Minnesota winter bearing down on us! We are all facing lots of challenges.

What sustains us through them all is our trust in God. We do not face a single challenge alone and we believe God uses each of them to call from us our best and to shape our character. These efforts and struggles are neither pointless nor meaningless. They shape us, like clay into the image of Christ.

I remain really encouraged by the way God is at work in our midst at St. Stephen's. How we are here for each other and for the world. Just when fatigue or despair would come near, we see God coming nearer still.

Here are some of the places and people God used to strengthened my faith this month:

- **Let's Talk.** It is heartwarming to meet as friends with people of different faiths and races, each facing struggles and celebrations, helped by each other.
- **Worship Planning.** The excitement, creativity and synergy around our Sundays is really developing within our worship team. The music is wonderful!
- **Confirmation Service.** Having our confirmands and their families standing in the falling snow while so many of our members drive by in a reverse parade was so joyful! Our **Faith Formation Team** is inspired!
- **Stewardship Efforts:** Kim Richter, Debbie Pirkel, temple talks, our anonymous donor offering \$20,000.00 additional dollars if we secure 100 intentions. What a blessings! (Please be sure yours is one of them!)
- **New Member Class,** Saturday, Dec. 5 10 a.m. People want to join in the midst of all of this!
- **Congregational Special Meeting** to call Pastor Tim. 81 people on the Zoom call, 81 votes received at church, 81 votes in the affirmative. That was the most of us together since Covid began.
- **Contemplation Prayer and Study Group** starting a new class in January. An introduction to this Christian prayer practice. A perfect time to learn about praying.
- **Pastor Tim's new initiatives:** Spiritual Friends, Virtual Home Groups, Home Ministry all opportunities for healing and joy!
- **All the efforts,** large and small, which help sustain our connections to God, each other and the world.

These are not easy times, but we are not alone. The Potter is able to use these times to shape us into the vessels he wants.

Hang on, God is not finished with us yet!

Pastor John

Pastor Tim

Report to Council – Nov. 17, 2020

Settled Call – I am delighted that the congregation voted to extend a settled call to me! It has been a great blessing to me in many ways to serve at St. Stephens, and I look forward to continuing our ministry together. Now... where do I sign? ;)

Spiritual Friends – I currently have a group of 8 people in a four-week group on nurturing spiritual friendships. I'm training them in using the Listening Prayer Check-in tool which they can use in any small group setting. I believe that several of them will be starting groups when we finish in another week.

Virtual Home Groups – I have begun meeting with a group of four people exploring together how to host a "home group" type experience online. We are looking at content options and taking notes on all the little technical details to make it easy to learn and do. Once we've got things running smoothly we'll run a few short-term trial groups to test drive the idea. If that goes well, then I expect some of the four explorers will be starting groups.

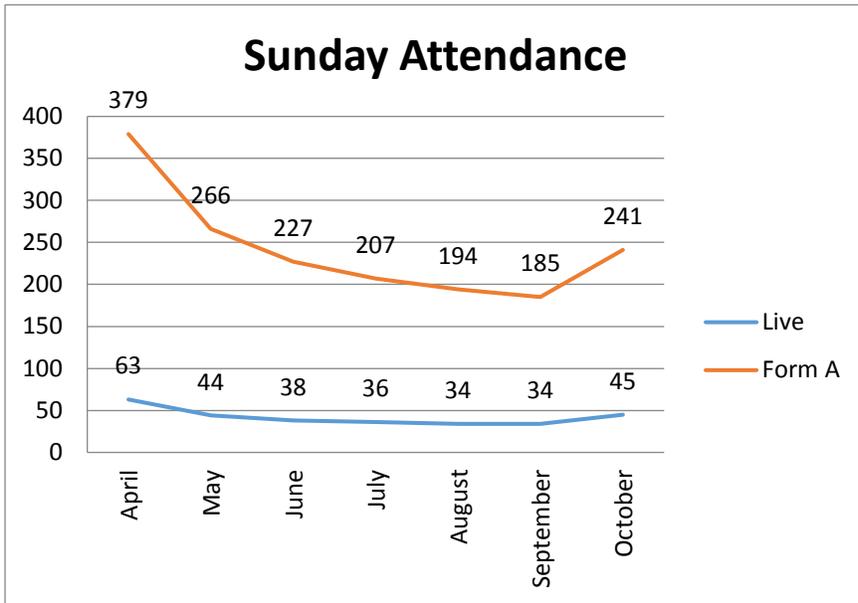
Homebound Ministry – Sara Ruff and I are looking into possibilities for using Zoom as a platform to connect our homebound members, even if they are not very comfortable with technology or are limited to connecting by phone. At its simplest, we think we can offer something that will be like an old-time "party line." It may also be a way for people to listen to the worship service together and even take communion at home along with the rest of the congregation. As we explore the tech side of this, we will also be conferring with some of the homebound folks to see if this is actually something that they would want to take advantage of.

Preaching, helping in Faith Formation, and video production work is ongoing.

Blessings!

Pastor Tim

Facebook Metrics through October 2020



NOTE: The “Form A” figure is the number that the ELCA has asked us to report for the online services in lieu of head-count attendance in worship. It is based on a formula that counts both live views as well as views in the first week after a service is live. However, I believe that the formula is double-counting the live viewers and thus providing an overestimate of the number of people actually viewing a service. Without getting into the details of the formula, I’d suggest that the “Average Weekly Sunday Attendance” for August is actually closer to 126 rather than the Form A number of 194. This does not include people attending the second, parking lot service.

