



The Sounds of St. Stephen's

St. Stephen's United Church of Christ

110 N. Sixth Street - Perkasio, PA 18944

Phone: 215.257.6460

www.thessperkasio.org office@thessperkasio.org

August 2020

From the Pastor's Desk...

"Jesus Christ is the same: yesterday, today and forever."

--Hebrews 13:8 NRSV

Dear Members and Friends in Christ,

So much has changed since our last "Sounds of St. Stephen's" in March/April 2020. In many ways we are living in a different world filled with the nomenclatures of masks, infection mitigation, pandemic surges and so on. These last four months have brought societal fear, anxiety, lockdown, loneliness, irritation, longing, civil protest, unrest, a reconsidering of our nation's history surrounding systemic and overt racism, clashes over the use of excessive force in police actions, demonstrations, crackdowns and so on...

For us, it has meant an exile of sorts from our church building in order to minimize risks of COVID-19 infection. This has spurred the church into a new cyber form of worship that has introduced many of us to the concepts of ZOOM meetings, Facebook Live!, Facebook itself, Cyber Worship, and new and creative ways of connecting over the Internet waves. We have experienced laughter, tears, anger, loss, and blessings. We have had families in the church experience the blessings of new life through the birth of children. And, we have felt the pain and loss of many of our families who have experienced grief over the death of a loved one in these days.

And, yet, through it all, one truism has remained: "Jesus Christ is the same: yesterday, today and forever."

Our understanding of church has shifted from a place where we go to the reality of who we are and how we live and relate with one another and the stranger among us. Our schedules have changed in relation to meetings and ministries. Our missions have been rerouted into the financial support of institutions already working to meet the needs of those in the community who know financial hardships in these times. Our Christian Education has become an online weekly check in with our children, activity bags and activities for them to share, and a real time learning about keeping faith in a time of loss and struggle.

And, yet, through it all : "Jesus Christ is the same: yesterday, today and forever."

The church building may not be used at the present. But the church has never closed. Over these last four months, it has instead been transformed. For those who have not been able to join us

online, a new initiative is underway to bring the worship service to you via the Worship Tablets program being guided by Heather and Mark Nogami. This wonderful new program allows us to bring the service of worship into the homes of those without internet connectivity or the personal technology to engage the congregation.

As August rolls in, I will be engaging in Pastoral Porch Visits for those who may like them (Social Distancing and Masks Required). I also hope to have a weekly check in on the parking lot with devotions and a chance to be together as we anticipate returning to in-person worship on Sunday, September 13th.

I am grateful to all of you for your prayers, support, and care for one another during these months that have passed. You have kept church and are church. Your stewardship has been a blessing that has allowed us to continue to keep our pastoral and support staff in place as well as keep up with our financial obligations and reach out to those in need. (And, yes, I remember that I have a few FISH to kiss when we get back in the sanctuary—another story for another time). I also want to thank you for your care for my family and me through these weeks.

The last months have brought a change in ministry for my wife, Stephanie Anne, as she becomes designated pastor for St. Luke's UCC in Ottsville, We have, like others, been navigating the online learning process with our son and have difficult decisions to make with and for him for the fall. I have appreciated your prayers and check ins through this time. And, I was deeply humbled at the parade of appreciation on the evening of July 12th. I am blessed to serve you and have found these months to be a test of creativity, new technologies, and a crash course in all things that they did not prepare you for in seminary.

I look forward to continue serving the church and the Christ that we all follow. A Christ who came to care for us; to show us God's love and to call us to love God and our neighbor—even when it is difficult. We worship the Christ who would go out of his way for the vulnerable and the least in order to affirm their dignity; preserve their life; and lift them in their faith. As disciples, we are called to do our part to help others feel God's love; God's blessings; and God's presence even in times of social distancing, illness and unrest.

The world and the church may look much different in July 2020 than it did in March. But, Jesus Christ is the same; as is the call to discipleship and be the church. And it will be thus as it has been: yesterday, today and forever.

See you in church,
Pastor Jeff

FROM THE CONSISTORY PRESIDENT...

August 4, 2020

Dear Members and Friends of St. Stephen's,

I hope this message finds you all in good health, good spirits, and managing to cope well during these challenging times.

I am writing to share with you updates on some of the church's various projects, including where we stand regarding the opening of the church building. I have no illusions that the past several months have not been difficult for so many of you. But, like many people, churches and organizations have had to change the way we do things. St. Stephen's is no exception. As people of faith we continue to *Gather to Know, Show and Grow God's Love*.

The following are updates on some of our current projects:

Worship Tablet Pilot Program – This project has proven to be a huge success. Six members of the congregation are now able to watch the weekly cyber worship service, and as often as they would like. In addition, all the previous cyber worship services were uploaded to each tablet. Many thanks to Heather and Mark Nogami for all their work in making this project a success. And, thanks to everyone who donated. Nine hundred and fifty (\$950) dollars were raised. This will allow us to expand the program. If you or someone you know would like to be part of this exciting program please contact Heather Nogami.

Deacon's Fund – Each year \$250 is budgeted for the Deacon's Fund. The Deacon's Fund is used by the pastor to assist individuals who are in need for support with things such as: a meal, gas, lodging or other necessities. In May, the PA Southeast Conference graciously gave a \$1,000 gift to each church in the Conference to help them during these difficult times. Consistory authorized the \$1,000 we received to be transferred to the Deacon's Fund. Since the church received an SBA/PPP (Small Business Association/Payroll Protection Program) loan of \$29,407, the Consistory thought there may be individuals in our church family who may be experiencing financial difficulty and could benefit from this fund. The fund is confidential. That is, only Pastor Jeff would know the name of the person requesting assistance. Pastor Jeff will update the Spiritual Council on the number and amount of funds requested –but, no names are provided. If you or someone you know needs some assistance, please call the church office and leave a message for Pastor Jeff.

Stained Glass Window Project – Work on the windows began last week with a completion expected by early September – if the weather cooperates. The *Envelope Fund Raiser*, netted over \$15,000 (little more than half of the cost of \$26,800). The Stewardship Ministries will make a recommendation to Consistory about where the additional funds may come from. As you can imagine, it is difficult to have a fund raiser when people are staying at home and the church building is closed. If you have any fund raising ideas, please let me know and I'll share them with Stewardship and Consistory. Also, please consider making a donation to the Stained Glass Window fund.

Church Keys – If you have any keys to the church building please let Jerry Holzerman know.

Re-opening the Church Building – We are hopeful that the church building will open for Sunday worship service on September 13. Members of Facilities & Operations and Worship & Music ministries have worked very hard on developing a safety plan on how to safely re-open the church building. We will continue to monitor and adhere to the recommendations of the PA Department of Health and the CDC. As it gets closer to opening the church building you will receive information about what to expect when you enter the church building.

In closing, I know that the uncertainty of the future makes us all a little anxious. But I can assure you that Consistory in collaboration with Pastor Jeff and various ministries are working to make everyone as safe and comfortable as we can in our new and challenging environment. Sending a virtual elbow bump, and above-the-mask smiling eyes.

God Bless each of us as we continue to pray for each other as we travel together on this unknown journey.

Bev

STEWARDSHIP AND CYBER CHURCH

It is amazing how quickly the church adapted to a new form of being church. We want to thank everyone who took advantage of the Cyber Options available since March for ZOOM meetings and Check In Experiences. If you have not explored ZOOM before or do not have access to it, it is a great platform that allows folks to see each other and talk to each other, or just to phone in and be a voice and listen—all from your own home, phone or place of work.

If you are interested in learning how to ZOOM but have not done so yet, please call the Pastor and he would be willing to walk you through the process of calling in or setting up your phone, tablet or computer to participate.

We are also grateful to all those who have signed up for Stewardship to the church through VANCO online donations. Access to the VANCO site is through our website and you maintain full control over your account information and donation amount and frequency. If you do not have technology access and would like to set this up as a donation to the church, one of our stewardship team can help you do it. Simply reach out to Terry Weirback, Stewardship Chair, or Sharon Argue and one of them can resource you as you need.

COMING BACK TO A NEW FORM OF WORSHIP AND CHURCH

The situation continues to be fluid daily as the COVID-19 Pandemic continues to ebb and surge in places around the country. As I write this, health experts are calling for a new national shutdown even as schools are beginning to roll out plans for the fall and many of our national pastimes are finding their activities cancelled, altered or postponed this year.

Yet, we at St. Stephen's, for the moment, are planning a return to in-person worship on Sunday, September 13th at 9:30 am.

The Facilities and Operations and Worship and Music Ministries Team have been in close discussion with the Spiritual Council and Consistory to formulate a plan for re-opening. The plan is now being finalized but, in an effort to keep you informed, here is a brief overview:

*Face Masks and social distancing will be required to participate in in-person worship in the building. There will be no exceptions to this. The service will continue to be live streamed for those who choose to worship online without these guidelines.

*Hand Sanitizing Stations will be installed outside the sanctuary, inside the Arch St. door and outside each Restroom.

*Access to the church will be limited to the Arch St. Parking Lot door only.

*Bathrooms will be limited to 1 person at a time via a bar lock on the inside of the bathroom door. Children will have to be accompanied by a guardian or adult.

*Bulletins will be prepared in the office and will be handled by the Office Administrator and Greeter only. Gloves will be worn.

*Greeting will be verbal and no-touch will be the church's guidance.

*Attendance will be recorded during worship for Contact Tracing and a record.

*There will be no Circle of Sharing or Fellowship in the building.

- *Ministries will be encouraged to continue meeting online via ZOOM when that is a valid option.

- * Children's Chat will be included in worship but masks and distancing will be required.

- *Sanctuary seating will be determined by first come; first served with social distancing across the sanctuary. Ushers will escort you to available seating. Your traditional seat may not be where you end up sitting for worship. Please be aware of this important change.

- *Hymnals and Bibles will be removed from the pews: All the information for worship will be either printed or projected for the service.

- *Singing and Group Responses are discouraged. These will be replaced by music for reflection, music videos, and silently reading or praying along with the worship leader.

- *The Offering Plate will be located on a table outside the sanctuary and will be collected as you leave worship—again via the Arch St. parking lot door only.

- *Communion, when celebrated, will be shared for the moment by individual cups and wafers but trays will not be passed.

- *Congregants will be asked not to socialize in the building but to exit following worship.

- *The Service will continue to be live streamed for those who are still more comfortable remaining at home.

FAITH FORMATION FOR OUR KIDS: FALL 2020

Covid-19 has definitely changed our approach to many things in the life of the church. Faith Formation for our kids is one of those. This fall, our Faith Formation ministries is seeking to provide a faith-based educational experience for our kids that still honors mask wearing and social distancing.

Sunday mornings, kids will be welcomed to worship and will sit with their families. They will be invited to participate in Kids' Chat with a virtual mystery bag; children taking turns bringing in something from home in their own container. Kids will be spaced across the front pews and children's chat will proceed as normal.

In place of in-person Church School for the fall, each child will have a clear plastic tote of supplies with their name on it stored on the windowsills in the sanctuary. Inside will be appropriate supplies needed to 'complete' Faith Formation lessons each week, along with a Children's worship bulletin full of Bible-based activities which will parallel the lesson being shared in worship.

The box will also contain a take home component of an activity to complete through the week based on the theme of worship for that Sunday.

The plastic container will be returned to the windowsill after worship while the bulletin and activity will be taken home by the children each week.

After worship each week, the boxes will be opened and disinfected so that they are ready for the coming week.

Children's Chat and Crafts via ZOOM will continue through the first quarter of the fall two times per month.

FALL BIBLE STUDY/ADULT EDUCATION:

Pastor Jeff is exploring two Adult Education programs for the Fall:

1. A book study on *Waking Up White* by Debbie Irving. A timely subject for the cultural times in which we are living. The plan would be a section by section reading with ZOOM discussion every other week beginning in September. If you are interested in being part of this study, please let Pastor Jeff know. You can also call in to be part of the conversation if you do not have a computer. Time TBD.
2. A Traditional Bible Study on the Book of Daniel via ZOOM. If you are interested, please let Pastor Jeff know.

MISSION COLLECTION:

On Saturday, August 22, 2020, from 9 am to 11 am, St. Stephen's UCC will host a nonperishable food and back to school items drive through collection in the church parking lot. Please mark your items and place them in a bag in your back seat or trunk. A volunteer will remove the items from the car when you pull up. You will not need to get out of the car. Suggested items for school are pencils, pens, erasers, markers, dry erase markers, portable pencil sharpeners, highlighters. Please wear masks when pulling up to the dropoff.

DRIVE BY BACKPACK BLESSINGS

On Saturday, August 22, 2020, during the FISH collection, there will be a Drive Thru, no touch, Backpack Blessing for our children. Children are invited to bring their backpacks to be blessed whether returning to in person school or cyber school for the coming year. The blessings are from 9 am to 11 am. Please wear masks when pulling up for a blessing.

August Birthdays

08/02 Nancy Trinkle, Alice Wesley
08/03 Joshua Strohm, Leah Boytin
08/05 Stephanie Kingsbauer
08/09 Kenneth Schaefer
08/14 Lawrence Grim, Brian Godshall
08/15 Doris Godshall
08/17 Richard Bosco
08/19 Benjamin Holzerman,
Jacob Holzerman, Rebecca Holzerman
08/20 Jane Strohm
08/23 Donna Pope
08/24 Michael Boytin
08/25 Michelle Erdman, Lauren Seachrist
08/26 Cindy Miller
08/27 Jeffrey Boughter
08/29 Edward Donahue

***Happy Birthday and
God's Blessings***

St. Stephen's United Church of Christ

110 N. Sixth Street
Perkasie PA 18944

Return Service Requested

Time Sensitive Materials

Mailed:

Please visit our [website](http://www.thessperkasie.org) at
www.thessperkasie.org
for the latest information from St.
Stephen's UCC.

St. Stephen's United Church of Christ
110 N. Sixth Street, Perkasie, PA 18944
215-257-6460

www.thessperkasie.org

Facebook: *Saint Stephens UCC, Perkasie PA*

Instagram: *StStephensucc*

Twitter: *@Stephensuccperk*

Email: *office@thessperkasie.org*

Rev. Jeffrey A. Wargo - Pastor

Email: pastor@thessperkasie.org

Patricia Kimbel – Office Administrator

John Binde – Director of Music

Email: *johnbinde49@gmail.com*

610-554-3320

Eileen Ericsson – Handbell Director

Email: *e388keys@comcast.net*

267-463-3671

