

# ST. STEPHEN'S EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

## Church Council Meeting

May 17, 2020

Class of 2020	Class of 2021	Class of 2022	Youth Reps
Chris Bernard	Ivan Black	Stephanie Jones	Alex Burnett
Tripp Brunson	Steve Fowler	Craig McFarland	Jack Hayes
Ralph Haggard	Sandy Dawkins	Brian Paeth	
Brant Taylor	Paulette Shealy	Karen Spilker	
Christy Wenzel	Mary Elizabeth Windham	Evelyn Temple	

### Executive Committee:

President	Vice-President	Secretary	Treasurer
Brant Taylor	Tripp Brunson	Karen Spilker	Mary Keisler

Pastors: The Reverend Dr. Patrick W. Riddle, The Reverend Jason Antley,  
The Reverend Dr. Dennis Bolton

Staff: Shannon Burnett, Tonya Reynolds, Beth Haggard, Bailey Parker, Matthew Ganong,

Absent: Ivan Black, Craig McFarland, Christy Wenzel, Jack Hayes

The May meeting of the St. Stephen's Evangelical Lutheran Church Council was held on May 17, 2020 and was called to order at 1:05 pm by Brant Taylor. The meeting was held via Zoom.

**Devotion:** The council participated in a Leadership for Faithful Innovation devotional activity entitled "Dwelling in the Word" facilitated by Pastor Jason.

Tripp Brunson made a motion to approve the April minutes and Evelyn Temple seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

### Staff Reports (Please see attached reports)

Pastor Pat's report as submitted

Pastor Jason's report as submitted

Pastor Jason asked for approval of new members Larry and Bonnie Long, and Jim and Nancy Herritage. Due to the current lack of in-person worship due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Pastor Jason requested that we vote on approval of the prospective new members postponing their

Affirmation of Baptism to a later date. A motion was made by Evelyn Temple and seconded by Steve Fowler to approve the new members as requested. The motion passed unanimously.

Pastor Jason reported that Mike Ward of Stewardship For All Seasons will be contacting each member of the council to conduct a feasibility study regarding a capital campaign to eliminate the current building debt over a three-year period.

Pastor Dennis' report as submitted

Shannon Burnett's report as submitted

Shannon reported that Lutheridge Day Camp is tentatively scheduled for July. Currently 23 campers plan to attend, with several undecided. The format will be different due to current social distancing measures, and no off-site trips will be included. The American Camp Association will provide recommendations for appropriate changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Shannon indicated that it remains uncertain as to whether Vacation Bible School will be held this year. If it is held, it will take place on 5 Wednesdays in July.

Beth Haggard – No Report

Beth reported that graduation was held for the 4 year olds in a drive through process in the parking lot. The decision has been made not to have camp this summer due to safety concerns. Beth will advertise a "Stock the Preschool" event with church members in the fall.

Bailey Parker – No Report

Bailey described the difficulty of singing opportunities due to the Covid-19 pandemic. She invited choir and orchestra members to participate in a virtual choir and orchestra project that is occurring across the country, with plans to release the finished product on May 31 for Pentecost.

Mary Keisler's report as submitted

Mary reported that she has renegotiated the loan at a rate of 3.5% guaranteed over a period of 10 years. The process is almost completed. Mary also reported that the amount of funds received by the church has diminished during the past several months since services have been held only online. There was no Narthex Report prepared this month.

**Committee Reports:** No reports

**Old Business:**

Appreciation was expressed for all those who continue to assist the congregation with the production of online services. Paul Rouillard, Brant Taylor, and Cooper Reynolds have been doing an excellent job to provide this service to congregants. They are going to transition to live streaming services which will automatically post to YouTube, so people will have the option of watching the service live.

Brant reported that the bathroom renovation is underway. Demolition has been completed, and installers are now working on the tile. The project is estimated to be completed in two to three weeks.

### **New Business:**

Pastor Jason explained that a Covid-19 Task Force has been convened to discuss how and when to resume services in person at St. Stephen's. This group is made up of staff, the executive council, and some members of the congregation with specific expertise that could be helpful in decision making regarding the resumption of services. The Task Force recommended resuming services on May 31. Several days later the synod made recommendations that in-person services in South Carolina not resume until June. The first potential date in June is Wednesday, June 3. A motion was made by Evelyn Temple and seconded by Karen Spilker to amend the Task Force recommendation for a start date of June 3 instead of May 31. The motion passed with one dissenting vote.

The provisions included in the reopening recommendations include the following:

Services will be held in the gym.

Services will be held on Sundays at 8:30 and 11:00 am.

Services will be held on Wednesdays at 12:30 pm. This service will hopefully be limited to those in the congregation at greater levels of risk.

Chairs shall be arranged in 40 pods of 6 to allow for social distancing of 6 feet.

Family groups will be seated together.

Ushers will seat all in attendance, and will release one group at a time to maintain social distancing.

There will be separate routes for entering and exiting the gym.

Parking will be in the large lot, except for the handicapped parking in the smaller lot. People will be asked not to park around the fountain so that space may be used for drop off and pick up of persons.

The gym will be cleaned and disinfected between services.

Virtual services will continue to be offered for those wishing to continue worship in this fashion.

No other church activities will take place in the building with the exception of AA, which will be allowed to continue in the social hall.

Tonya and Shannon will continue to prepare DVDs for those with no internet, and Pastor Pat will deliver them.

Congregants who are at risk will be encouraged to stay home. It is viewed as a faithful response to remain home if one so chooses.

There will be no nursery during services.

Children will stay in their seats during the children's sermon.

Elements of communion will be made available in packaged form with disposable packaging.

Communion will be taken by communicants in their seats.

People will be encouraged to wear masks.

There will be no congregational or choir singing.

There will be no hand shaking or passing of the peace. Instead there will be a moment of silence during which participants will be asked to pray for those in need of prayer.

Offering plates will be located at the entrance/exit doors.

Doors will remain propped open.

There may be socially distanced vocal solos or duets as a possibility.

If safety dictates, there may be a need to return to online services.

notify                      Congregants will be encouraged to self-quarantine if they test positive to Covid-19, and the church if they test positive to the virus after attending a church service.

Congregants will be asked to stay at home if they are ill.

We will continue to follow all synod and governor's recommendations.

A motion was made by Evelyn Temple and seconded by Steve Fowler to open the church to the amended date of June 3<sup>rd</sup> with all of the provisions as discussed. The motion was passed unanimously.

Pastors' SSLC COVID-19 Response Letter:

May 20, 2020

Dear Members of St. Stephen's,

Grace and peace from God, our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

As you know, these last couple of months have been a tumultuous time as all of us have tried to carefully navigate our way through the changes in our landscape due to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). There is still much fear, worry, and anxiety about the virus and what it means for our everyday lives. Maybe the greatest part of the anxiety is the unknown, not to mention all the information and misinformation that leaves many of us wondering what to believe and what are the best practices to keep ourselves and those that we love safe. This issue has become highly divisive as people have started to take sides and cast judgment on those that have differing feelings about the virus, proper precautions, and how to live in the midst of this pandemic.

As the church, we have done our best to help in these chaotic times by offering worship, devotions, and various gatherings through electronic means. Congregational communication has increased as we've tried to keep in contact and offer as much help as we can in a properly distanced way. We thank the congregation for all the ways that they have continued to participate, support the church financially and otherwise, support one another, and be "People of Christ Making a Difference" to a world around us where many are in need.

A few weeks ago conversations started about the possibility and appropriateness of reopening businesses and society at large. Countries, states, counties, businesses and individuals have all taken part in these conversations with many different outcomes. All of this has led to more confusion, leaving many to wonder what is the appropriate response? At St. Stephen's, we convened a COVID-19 Advisory Board consisting of our church staff, executive committee, and a few other congregational members with expertise in business, medical practice, law, and law enforcement to help navigate this delicate subject of reopening. After meeting multiple times the board felt it appropriate to recommend a plan of reopening to the church council. This plan, which was formed based upon the recommendations of our Synod, the Governor, SCDHEC, and the CDC, was introduced at our May 17<sup>th</sup> Church Council meeting. After much discussion and prayerful consideration the plan was approved unanimously by the council members. Here are the details of the plan:

#### Timeline:

- In-person worship services will begin in June in the gym, starting with our Wednesday Eucharist service on Wednesday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> at 12:30pm.
- Worship services will be held in the gym on Sundays at 8:30am and 11:00am and on Wednesdays at 12:30pm. Worshipping in the gym offers a more conducive context for social distancing, multiple entrances and exits where people can properly space themselves coming and going from worship, and an easier space to clean and disinfect between services.

#### Special Request:

- We request that the Wednesday Eucharist services (12:30pm each Wednesday) be reserved for those who are considered at-risk.

#### Virtual Worship Services:

- Virtual worship options will continue for those that do not feel safe or cannot attend in-person services.
- The Sunday 8:30am and Wednesday 12:30pm worship services will be live-streamed and then made available to view on our YouTube channel at [tinyurl.com/SSLCWorship](http://tinyurl.com/SSLCWorship).
- Please don't forget that you can download the weekly bulletin from our website ([www.sslc.org](http://www.sslc.org)) to help follow along with the service. This may be especially important as we move from recording to live streaming the services because when we live stream we won't have an opportunity to include as many graphics of the worship liturgy.
- If you don't have the ability to access our worship services online and would like to request a dvd of the service and/or a bulletin please contact the church office and let us know. We can make it available for pickup, mail it, or drop it off at your house.

#### Other Church Activities:

- There will be no other church activities allowed on campus at this time including Sunday School, Bible Studies, fellowship times or events, civic groups, small group meetings, choir practices, etc. until further notice.

#### Social Distancing and Other Recommendations:

- Please keep yourselves socially distanced at all times while on campus, especially as you proceed to and from worship.
- Hugging, handshaking, and any other physical contact are strongly discouraged.
- It is highly recommended that each worshipper wear a mask and keep it on for the duration of their time on campus.
- If you are one of those that are most at-risk of detrimental effects from contracting the virus, you are encouraged to stay home. Staying home is a faithful response. God will still be with you. God will still love you. Your fellow congregation members will still love and be here for you.
- If you or a member of your household are sick, please stay home and take the proper precautions before going out in public and/or returning to worship.
- If you have been exposed to the virus, please stay home and take the proper precautions before going out in public and/or returning to worship.
- Please wash your hands, avoid touching your face when out in public, cough into your elbow or a tissue, throw away the tissue immediately, bring hand sanitizer with you and use it frequently, and do anything else that can help keep from spreading germs.

#### Parking:

- If you are able, please park in the big parking lot adjacent to the cemetery.
- Handicapped parking and a drop-off for those with limited mobility will be offered in the small parking lot and circle drive, respectively.
- We ask that no one park in the circle around the fountain so that it may be used for dropping off those that have limited mobility.

#### Worship Seating:

- Socially distanced pods of chairs have already been arranged in the gym.
- Ushers will be strategically positioned to help parishioners from their cars to their appropriate seating.
- Each family will be seated in a separate pod of chairs.
- The nursery will not be available so children are asked to remain seated with their families.

#### Changes to Worship:

- The sharing of the peace will be replaced with a moment of silence to pray for those who are in need of God's presence and peace.
- There will be no congregational singing (hymns or liturgy), as the action of singing has been deemed a "super spreader" by the medical community at large. Musical interludes and anthems will be offered throughout the service in place of congregational hymns.
- Children will stay seated with their families during the Children's Sermon.
- Offering plates will be positioned at the entrance and exit doors of the gym.
- We are still working to try and make Holy Communion a part of our worship services.
- At the end of worship, each pod of seats will be excused individually at appropriate socially distanced intervals to proceed to their vehicle. Please do not stop and socialize in the hallways so we can keep contact to a minimum and social distancing a priority.

#### Cleaning and Sanitizing the Building:

- All doors will be propped open. Please refrain from touching surfaces unless absolutely necessary.
- After each worship service the gym, all chairs, all bathrooms, all frequently touched surfaces including water fountains and door handles, etc. will be cleaned with CDC recommended agents to disinfect the facility before the next group of worshippers arrives.
- To ensure that all areas being used are properly cleaned and disinfected, we will be limiting access to the rest of our campus by either locking or blocking doors to certain areas. Please be mindful of this and help us by only accessing those areas that are open and made available.

#### What if Someone Who Attended Worship is Diagnosed with COVID-19:

- The church will notify the congregation about potential exposure while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- We will be taking a picture of the congregation at the beginning of each service so that we can inform those who were in close proximity of the person infected. We would ask those persons to stay home and self-monitor for symptoms and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- We would advise sick staff or congregants not to return to the facility until they have met the CDC's criteria to discontinue home isolation, as found here:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/steps-when-sick.html>

- The church will close off areas used by the sick person and will not use that area until after cleaning and disinfecting, hopefully waiting 24 hours to clean and disinfect to reduce the risk to individuals cleaning. If it is not possible to wait 24 hours, we will wait as long as possible before cleaning and disinfecting.

#### Understanding The Risk and Making Your Own Decision:

- A part of living with COVID-19 in our world means we have to understand the risk that we take when we leave our homes and go out into public. The same risks apply as we gather for worship.
- Please be aware that we cannot guarantee you a risk free environment while worshipping with us. We can try to mitigate those risks as much as possible, but without fail there is still a risk.
- Each person has to make their own decision about what risk or risks they are comfortable with. Please understand that if you believe the risk is too great to return to worship that this is also a faithful response. God will still be with you. God will still love you. Your congregational members, those attending and staying home, will still love and be here for you as well. There will be no shame or judgement in deciding to stay home. Please make the best decision for you/your family.

#### The Future:

- If and/or when it is appropriate, decisions will be made about taking further steps to return to a more normal worship routine including returning to the sanctuary, reintroducing congregational singing, etc.
- If at any time the virus starts to make a resurgence, please understand that for the safety of its members the church leadership may elect to return to an electronic only worship platform.

We know that there is no way to please everyone when developing a plan of this nature, especially when thoughts and feelings about what is “right” are so personally and passionately held. With that said, we believe this to be our most appropriate way forward at this time. The leadership of St. Stephen’s will continue to keep watch and make adjustments with the safety and well-being of our members as our number one priority.

As always, if you have any questions or need anything during this time please don’t hesitate to contact us by calling the church office (803-359-6562), emailing one of the pastors ([pat@ssl.org](mailto:pat@ssl.org) and/or [jason@ssl.org](mailto:jason@ssl.org)), or calling the crisis care line (803-808-6471).

In closing, we want to share with you something that we wrote in one of our earlier letters that remains true today, especially as we take a big step in learning how to live a more public life with the health and safety of ourselves, our families, and our neighbors on our minds:

There is no doubt that all these changes are scary and unsettling. In the midst of such turmoil we are called to remember that God is with us. No virus can change that. We are reminded that even in the chaos that we have a purpose and a mission. Jesus proclaimed that the two greatest commandments are to love God and love our neighbor. One way to love our neighbor is to do what we can to prevent the spread of this virus. Another way we can love our neighbor is to check on them, pray for them, and help them as we all are trying to navigate uncharted waters. Together we will pray and persist, trusting that God is with us always and remains the ultimate source of our hope and peace as we live to be “People of Christ Making a Difference”.

In Christ's Love,  
Pastor Pat and Pastor Jason

**Council Person of the Month:** Steve Fowler

**Next meeting will be held on June 14, 2020 at 1:00 pm. A brief meeting will be held on May 31, 2020 at 1:00 pm prior to the reopening of the church on June 3, 2020.**

Respectfully submitted on May 27, 2020 by Karen Spilker