



# THE VOICE

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH, AVON, CT April 2024

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



224 Lovely Street, Avon, CT 06001-4018  
(860) 673-3301 [www.stmatthewavon.org](http://www.stmatthewavon.org)

### APRIL WORSHIP SCHEDULE

#### April 7-28:

9:00 a.m. Sanctuary Communion Service  
10:20 a.m. Sunday School & Adult Forum

#### COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Meg Kraft, President	Greg Boyd
Rick Hanson, Vice President	Erica Connors
Ellen Ericson, Secretary	Fred Fenn
Pastor Brian Rajcok	Perry Hasson
	George Reider
	Ben Wright

#### STAFF:

Brian Rajcok, Pastor  
Sarah Schiener-Redenz, Director of Music  
Ryan Heckman, Director of Christian Ed.  
Paul Martin, Church Administrator  
Roy Zurell, Sexton  
Steven Smolnik, Publisher



**We Are Here For You** A reminder that your pastor is here for you whenever you have a pastoral need. The pastor is fully vaccinated and is making in-person visits. He can also talk and pray with you over the phone, in a Zoom meeting, outside, or socially distanced indoors at church. Please call the office if you have a pastoral need.

### A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

It has been a year now since I was officially called as Lead Pastor at St. Matthew. In some ways it feels like it's been longer, especially considering my time as Associate Pastor and serving during the interim. In other ways it feels like less time has passed, perhaps because I only just finished moving all my things into the senior pastor office a few months ago! This past year has been a year of rebounding and growth. We are blessed with new members, rising worship attendance, and expanding Sunday School ministries. We are blessed by the involvement of current members, the deepening of our relationships with one other and with God, and the ministry we are doing for our community and the world. At a time when many churches are struggling, St. Matthew is growing and making a positive impact in the lives of our members and our neighbors.

One exciting opportunity God has presented us with is the opportunity to discern extending a call to our Director of Christian Education Ryan Heckman to serve St. Matthew as an ordained pastor. Ryan graduated seminary last May and is geographically restricted to Connecticut, so he has been awaiting his first call to be an ordained pastor. In the meantime, we have been blessed to have Ryan serving as our Director of Christian Education; and now we have the chance to consider the blessing it might be to have him transition to a new role as Associate Pastor.

This coming month we will have several meetings to discuss this possibility of offering Ryan a half-time call as an ordained pastor. First, on Sunday April 21 during Adult Forum, St. Matthew's Church Council and I will answer questions about our process, financial impacts, and job description. The following Sunday April 28 during Adult Forum, we will have a meet & greet reception for a time of fellowship and informal conversations with Ryan. Then on Sunday May 5 we will have a call vote Sunday: Ryan will preach and the congregation will vote on whether or not to offer him a call to be Associate Pastor.

We hope you will join us on these important dates and prayerfully consider if this is where God is calling our congregation. I look forward to discerning this together!

Blessings,

Pastor Brian



### **STEWARDSHIP: THRIVENT ACTIONS TEAMS!**

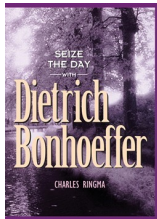
The Stewardship Committee would like to remind you about \$250 Thrivent action team cards. Every member of Thrivent is eligible for two separate action team cards worth \$250 each year. During an Adult Forum in March, our Thrivent speaker encouraged us to use these action teams for everything we can. He said anytime there's food at an event, use a Thrivent card. Anytime you're making donations of food or clothing or store-bought items, use a Thrivent card. Anytime you're doing an educational activity or a service project, use a Thrivent card. Many Thrivent members aren't even aware of this untapped resource that can help churches and other non-profit organizations. If you are a Thrivent member please email the church office and we will teach you how to apply for action teams in ways that can help St. Matthew (or any other non-profit that you love).

### **EARTH DAY EXTRAVAGANZA!**

The Lutheran churches of the Greater Hartford Conference will be joining together on Sunday April 21st 3:00 p.m.— 5:00 p.m. for a time of education and fellowship at Emanuel Lutheran Church in Hartford. The address is 311 Capitol Ave, Hartford, CT 06106. If you would like to carpool from St. Matthew, we will be leaving our church parking lot at 2:30 p.m.

During this gathering, we will watch a video and Pastor Darrell Urban and Nancy Urban will lead us in a discussion. We will then share a meal together which will be a "cool dish" potluck. A cool dish is a dish that has as little impact on the environment as possible. Each congregation is encouraged to bring at least one cool dish to share. If you are willing to try your hand in preparing a cool dish for St. Matthew please contact the church office or let Pastor Brian know.

A sign up sheet for this event will be available in the gathering space, where you can also sign up for carpool arrangements. We look forward to joining together with other Lutheran churches in our conference for this special Earth Day event!



### **MEN'S GROUP**

April's men's breakfast will be the third Saturday of the month, April 20th at 8:30 a.m. We'll continue our discussion of [Seize the Day with Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#), a 365 daily devotional with excerpts from Bonhoeffer's writings.

**RSVP by Thursday April 18th** so we know how many to prepare for. Hope to see you there—newcomers are always welcome!

### **MARCH COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS**

- \* Council voted to recommend to the congregation that we **extend a half time call to Ryan Heckman**. A congregational call meeting will be held on May 5.
- \* **Ministry Fair will be held on June 9** in the Hall of the Evangelists enroute to the picnic.
- \* Stewardship Committee proposed **distribution of Thrivent Choice dollars to:**
  - ELCA National Youth Gathering
  - Guest Speaker, Dr. Eben Alexander
  - Various food reimbursements

### **ST. MATTHEW CHOIR:**

After a well-earned week off, the choir will resume its usual Wednesday evening rehearsal schedule on April 10th. Please join us from 7:00-8:00 p.m. in the choir room for a time of musical fellowship and learning.



### **BIBLE STUDY**

Bible Study will meet at 10:00 a.m. in the conference room on the first and third Thursdays of the month: April 4th and April 18th. Ryan Heckman will be leading Bible Study on April 4th and Pastor Brian will lead on April 18th. We hope you'll join us; newcomers are always welcome!

### **CENTERING PRAYER**

Centering Prayer group meets on Zoom, Thursdays at 2:00 p.m. Join us for a time of silent contemplative prayer followed by a time of *lectio divina* and conversation. All are welcome!



**ADULT FORUM**

Adult Forum meets 10:20-11:20 a.m. on Sunday mornings after worship. Grab some coffee and refreshments and join us for forum. Here's a look at what's coming up in April:

- ⇒ April 7: The 'Things' of Worship by Ryan Heckman & Deb Brodeur
- ⇒ April 14: The Christian Call to Environmental Stewardship by Pastor Darrell Urban
- ⇒ April 21: Q&A with Council about Associate Pastor Call
- ⇒ April 28: Meet & Greet with Pastoral Candidate Ryan Heckman

**FROM THE DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**

Alleluia, Christ is Risen!

We have just heard the choruses of "Alleluia" and have stuffed ourselves to the brim with Cadbury eggs, marshmallow peeps, and possibly had to deal with a pet getting into all that shredded Easter basket grass.

The shine of Easter Sunday seems to somehow dim as we head back into regular routines that are quieter than the trumpet blasts heralding Christ's resurrection. And yet... Easter is an entire 50 day period of feasting and celebration!

That's right, we're called to celebrate Christ's Resurrection every day for 50 days, a time called "Eastertide." The season ends at Pentecost on Sunday, May 19.

How might you participate in this glorious 50 days of feast and celebration?

At church, you'll see the white altar cloth that is trimmed in gold remain on the altar, the Easter lilies will decorate the sanctuary for as long as they can, the Paschal Candle (the big tall one) will be lit each Sunday signifying the presence of Christ - alive and among us, and we'll continue to sing out "Alleluias" and "Glorias" in celebration of Christ's resurrection.

In ancient times, this was a period of great feasting after a long wintertime fast. For example, it is an ancient tradition to forgo meat during the 40 days of Lent and add it back into the diet during Eastertide. You can imagine this tradition arose, in part, out of necessity in the northern hemisphere. Winter is long and foodstuffs are short, so a period of fasting not only marks the 40 days of Lent but stretches the pantry a bit further into spring. At Easter, people celebrated Christ's resurrection and ate to their fill! They added rich meats back into their diets knowing that warm weather will, with God's help, bring new food to restore the pantry.

In my family, we had a tradition of having a giant Easter meal that we called a "Three Meat Meal." We would have ham, turkey and beef all available. It was a luxurious and extravagant meal that we only did once per year on Easter to celebrate Christ's victory over death and God's gift of grace and love to the world.

How does your family celebrate on Easter Sunday? How might you carry on throughout the other 50 days of Eastertide? Might you consider ways to invite others into your celebration through giving away some of the abundance of your table? Or perhaps you have skills, an art, or a talent that you can give to others "to the Glory of Christ's resurrection."




However you celebrate the 50 days of Eastertide, I hope you feel the very real presence of God's abundant grace and love for you throughout.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Easter blessings!

Ryan



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
<b>April 2024</b> 						
	1 Easter Monday Office Closed	2 10:00 A.A.	3 9:30 WW Meeting 5:15 WW Meeting	4 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer	5	6
7 9:00 Sanctuary Communion Service 10:20 Sunday School & Adult Forum 5:00 Confirmation Class	8	9 10:00 A.A. 7:00 Avon Land Trust Meeting 7:00 Finance Committee	10 9:30 WW Meeting 5:15 WW Meeting 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	11 VOICE Deadline 2:00 Centering Prayer	12 Confirmation Retreat Day (1 of 3)	13 Confirmation Retreat Day (2 of 3)
14 Confirmation Retreat Day (3 of 3) 9:00 Sanctuary Communion Service 10:20 Sunday School & Adult Forum	15	16 10:00 A.A. 7:00 Church Council	17 9:30 WW Meeting 5:15 WW Meeting 7:00 Overeater's Anonymous 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	18 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer	19 6:30 Divorce Support Group	20 8:30 Men's Breakfast
21 9:00 Sanctuary Communion Service 10:20 Church Council Q&A—A.P. Call 10:20 Sunday School 3:00 Earth Day Extravaganza	22	23 10:00 A.A.	24 9:30 WW Meeting 5:15 WW Meeting 7:00 Overeater's Anonymous 7:00 Choir Rehearsal	25 2:00 Centering Prayer	26	27
28 9:00 Sanctuary Communion Service 10:20 Sunday School 10:20 Meet & Greet—A.P. Call 5:00 Confirmation Class	29	30 10:00 A.A. 6:30 Marketing & Comm. Mtg.				

April 2024

Non-Profit Organization

SAINT MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH  
224 Lovely Street, Avon, Connecticut 06001-4018





Dear St. Matthew Lutheran Church,

One year ago this week, members of St. Matthew voted overwhelmingly to extend a call to Pastor Brian as Senior Pastor. Identifying a leader was a vital step to rekindle our church family as we emerged from a worldwide pandemic.



During our process of discernment, we identified three goals via our congregational survey:

1. Provide more opportunities for Christian education and spiritual formation at every age and stage of life.
2. Create more opportunities for people to form meaningful relationships within the congregation.
3. Adapt the opportunities provided by the church, making them more accessible given the pace and schedule of life.

Shortly after this, the Church Council set about to identify a lay leader to spearhead an effort to invigorate our Christian education programs. After many months of prayer and patience, Pastor Brian was contacted by Ryan Heckman, a recent graduate of Luther Seminary with a Master of Divinity and a candidate for ordained ministry. During the past five months, Ryan has quickly made a positive impact. His presence in Sunday school, children's sermons, confirmation and high school youth group is establishing a solid foundation for growth.

At the March 19 meeting, the Church Council, acting as the Call Committee and in consultation with the finance committee and the synod office, voted to recommend that the congregation extend a half-time call to Ryan Heckman as Associate Pastor beginning September 1, 2024.

Please note the following steps moving forward:

- Sunday, April 21 - Pastor Brian and the Church Council will hold a Q&A during Adult Forum. We will discuss our process, financial impacts, and job description, as well as answer any questions.
- Sunday, April 28 - Meet & Greet reception with pastoral candidate Ryan Heckman during Adult Forum.

#### NOTICE OF SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Date: Sunday, May 5, 2024

Time: Immediately following the worship service

Purpose: To vote on extending a half-time call to Ryan Heckman as Associate Pastor

- Pastor Sara Anderson, Associate to the Bishop, will preside over the meeting.
- A two-thirds vote of confirmed members is required.
- An additional vote on a compensation package will take place.
- No other business will be conducted at the meeting.

We are in a period of revitalization, focused on the goals the congregation identified. We invite you to prayerfully consider this next step with us as we discern where God is leading St. Matthew.

Sincerely,

Meg Kraft, Council President

The Rev. Dr. Brian R. Rajcok, Lead Pastor

DIGGING DEEP • REACHING OUT • CHANGING LIVES

224 Lovely Street • Avon, CT • 06001-4018 • 860-673-3301 • stmatthewavon.org