



THE VOICE

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

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



APRIL HIGHLIGHTS

- ✚ Holy Week & Easter Services Schedule, insert
- ✚ Easter Egg Hunt, insert
- ✚ Youth Group mission trip update, page 2
- ✚ Reopening Task Force update, insert
- ✚ Message from our new Council president, insert

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Jason Lindquist, President	Kevin Reichler
Fred Fenn, Vice President	George Reider
Lanelle Gallo, Secretary	George Spoering
Debbie Steinberg, Asst. Treasurer	Dan Tuve
Bette McIntire	Ben Wright
Jack Pietrick	Pastor Julie Reuning-Scherer
Bill Parchen	Pastor Brian Rajcok

For contact information, our online church directory is available to all members. Please reach out to the office for the code to access the directory.

STAFF:

Julie Reuning-Scherer, Lead Pastor
 Brian Rajcok, Associate Pastor
 Richard Silbereis, Director of Music
 Diane Oates, Church Administrator
 Roy Zurell, Sexton
 Steven Smolnik, Publisher

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If you need to stop by the office, 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!

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

'F' for Editing, 'A' for Authenticity

If I were to grade the conclusion of the Gospel of Mark, I would give it an 'F' and an 'A'. The 'F' is for the editing—or lack thereof—because the Gospel actually has three endings: the original ending at verse 8a, the short ending at 8b, and the long ending which includes verses 9-20. What is going on here?

Part of what is going on is that the ancient world didn't have the same expectations around editing. In fact, the bible preserves multiple renditions of the same story, sometimes within the same text! In Mark, the bible preserves the earlier versions of the ending as well as additions that came from the other gospels, such as the resurrection appearances of Jesus to Mary Magdalene and two disciples on the road, and the ascension of Jesus.

The other thing that is going on is that these three endings lay out the human journey from doubt to belief. The original ending finishes the story with the women coming to the tomb on Easter morning, only to find it empty. They meet an angel who tells them that Jesus is raised, and that they should tell the disciples. But the women flee from the tomb in terror and amazement, and say nothing to anyone, "for they were afraid." The first step in this unknown world of resurrection, into life beyond death, is not liberation, not joy, but fear. The women have entered a completely unknown landscape, and they are afraid.

The longer ending then goes on to say that Mary Magdalene tells Peter and the disciples, but the disciples don't believe her. Finally, after Jesus appears to two other disciples and to the eleven, the disciples finally get it. They go out into the world to proclaim the good news that Jesus is alive, that death isn't the end, and that change doesn't have to be a bad thing—oftentimes it is God's way of transforming the world. **The resurrection is, after all, the biggest change there is—from death to life!**

I like the multiple endings of Mark, because this pattern of fear, doubt and finally embracing new life is so familiar to me. When faced with change, even a life giving one, I am often filled with fear. I remember preparing to go to college, and suddenly being terrified—"Where will I do my laundry???" The void of the unknown, even when promising territory, is frightening. Likewise, when I get beyond my fear, I often stall making the change, wondering if it is really worth letting go of what is, in order to embrace the new thing. **But once I have made the journey through fear and doubt, eventually, like the disciples, I open myself to the new thing God is doing.** When I do, I am invariably surprised at how good God is to me, blessing me in the change, opening up possibilities (continued...)

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) better than before. In these months as our world emerges from the pandemic, we have the opportunity to embrace the changes that will enlarge and enliven our ministry and lives. We are so grateful to have opportunities to gather in person, to resume group meetings, perhaps even to sing together! It has been such a long time. And at the same time, even as we are eager to return to our pre-pandemic patterns, we must recognize that a year has passed. We have changed. **We've suffered and learned, we've trusted and grown, and so we are not the same, and our community will not be the same. It is a resurrection change, a transformation to greater life.** We can expect moments of fear and doubt as we travel this journey into post-pandemic life. But we can also expect God's faithfulness. Jesus' life is stronger than death. God's love is stronger than fear and doubt. The resurrection is real, and we get to live it out, day by day.

Mark's gospel may not get high marks for editing, but for me, it gets an 'A' for authenticity. I look forward to seeing what God has in store for us, and embracing the resurrection reality together.

Pastor Julie

THANK YOU!

Thank you for the donations to Gifts of Love and the Pastoral Discretionary Fund this past Christmas time! Gifts of Love's philosophy is to foster neighbors helping neighbors, and as such provides assistance for the most pressing needs of the residents of the Farmington Valley—food and hope! Your gifts to the Pastoral Discretionary Fund provide for families in need, as well as support new ministries and hospitality in our own community.

We are deeply touched by your appreciation and generosity.

In Christ,

The St. Matthew Staff



YOUTH GROUP

Mission Trip Update! Youth group will be having an info session about the summer mission trip on Thursday April 8th at 6:00 p.m. on Zoom. The mission trip will be to North Carolina from July 31 – August 6 and we will be travelling with Emanuel Lutheran Church in Hartford. Registration for the trip is due May 1st, so come to the info session in April to learn more!



SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School will meet the second and fourth Sundays of the month at 10:00 a.m. That is, April 11th and 25th. We'll also be leading worship the third Sunday of the month, April 18th. Newcomers are always welcome—email Pastor Brian or the church office and we'll send you the Zoom link!



CENTERING PRAYER

Centering Prayer group meets every Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. and every Thursday at 2:00 p.m. on Zoom. Contact Pastor Brian at the church office and we'll send you the Zoom link!

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 April 24th at 8:30—9:30 a.m. We are 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.

BIBLE STUDY Bible Study meets every first and third Thursday at 10:00 a.m. on Zoom. This month we will meet on April 15th only. A link will appear in St. Matthew's weekly Constant Contact for all who wish to attend. Newcomers always welcome!

GHIAA

Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance recently accomplished a major goal: the elimination of welfare liens in the state of Connecticut. Connecticut was one of two states which hold public assistance (welfare) as a lifelong debt. This meant that people who worked their way out of poverty and no longer received public assistance, having achieved some means of financial success like owning a home, would need to pay back all that they received from the state or the state would claim their property. This led many people who had pulled themselves out of poverty to fall back into poverty and lose their homes and financial resources because of these welfare liens statutes.

After much hard work, advocacy, and education of lawmakers, GHIAA successfully gained bipartisan support for a bill that would eliminate welfare liens in the state of Connecticut. This marks a major achievement for GHIAA and is a perfect example of the work of justice we are called to as people of faith.

St. Matthew's GHIAA core team will be meeting with the core team from Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Simsbury via Zoom on Thursday April 15th at 7:00 p.m. If you are interested in attending this meeting or in learning more about GHIAA, contact Pastor Julie or Pastor Brian.

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS This past Council meeting was exciting in that a motion was passed to fill a vacant seat. We are happy to announce that George Spoering was approved to join the Council.

It was also exciting to discuss the re-opening of St. Matthew church. Our new President Jason Lindquist has asked Jack Pietrick to continue as the Council liaison to the Reopening Task Force. Together we continue to monitor the ongoing situation.

We are also exploring other avenues of expanding our ministry, such as considering the church grounds as a concert venue in the summer. More on this to follow in the future.

Lastly, we are moving into a new season of spring and the Easter season is upon us. With this in mind we revisited Pastor Julie's strategic plan which guides her work with the Council this year. The pilot group who has participated in the small group study Unbinding the Gospel shared their personal perspectives on the book and the impact the study has made in their lives. The Council is prayerfully considering how we can continue to work with this book by creating new groups to participate in the same work.

GOOD THINGS:

- ✠ The month of March included two midweek Lenten offerings: the first being a devotion posted on Facebook each Wednesday, and the second an adult education opportunity exploring Discipleship in a Democracy on Thursday evenings.
- ✠ Council members were installed at Zoom worship on Sunday March 14th—thank you to our congregation Council members for serving and to President Jason Lindquist, Vice President Fred Fenn, Secretary Lanelle Gallo, and Treasurers Debbie Steinberg and Dawne Ware for serving as officers this year.
- ✠ In March we had our first in-person worship service since the fall. Nineteen people attended our first service on March 14th.
- ✠ Seminarian Kurt Saenger-Heyl preached via Zoom and also offered a midweek devotion.
- ✠ GHIAA's initiative of eliminating welfare liens in the state of Connecticut was successful.
- ✠ David Kraft arranged an NCAA Tournament bracket group for members of St. Matthew to enjoy. Time will tell who wins!
- ✠ On Palm Sunday March 28th at 10:30AM we had a parking lot service that involved a procession of palm branches on foot outside and singing of "All Glory Laud and Honor!"
- ✠ Confirmation students packed plastic eggs and prepared for an Easter egg hunt for young children on Saturday April 3rd!

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
April 2021				1 MAUNDY THURSDAY 2:00 Centering Prayer 5:30 Drive-In Service of Holy Communion 7:00 Maundy Thursday Worship via Zoom	2 GOOD FRIDAY 7:00 Good Friday Worship via Zoom	3 10:00 Easter Egg Hunt 11:00 Private Prayer in Sanctuary 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
4 EASTER SUNDAY 9:00 Virtual Worship with Holy Communion via Zoom 10:30 Outdoor Worship Service with Holy Communion	5 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Finance Committee Meeting 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Small Catechism	6 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer 6:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Church Council	7	8 2:00 Centering Prayer 6:00 Youth Mission Trip Info Meeting	9	10 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
11 9:00 Virtual Worship via Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom	12 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Small Catechism	13 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer 6:00 Centering Prayer	14	15 VOICE Deadline 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 GHIAA w/ Shepherd of the Hills	16	17 10:00 Confirmation Spring Cleanup at Mosaic Group Home 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
18 9:00 Virtual Worship with Holy Communion via Zoom, led by Sunday School students	19 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Small Catechism	20 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer 6:00 Centering Prayer	21	22 2:00 Centering Prayer	23	24 8:30 Men's Breakfast via Zoom 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
25 9:00 Virtual Worship via Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom	26 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation: Zoom or In-Person Check-In	27 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer 6:00 Centering Prayer	28	29 2:00 Centering Prayer	30	

April 2021



SAINT MATTHEW LUTHERAN CHURCH
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COUNCIL PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings all! We continue to move forward into this new year with momentum on our side and a seasoned Council who is ready to roll up its sleeves, dig in, and help renew our ministries as we move toward a post-pandemic era. The payoff of our mortgage, along with a successful stewardship campaign, have provided a financial 'silver lining' in the midst of unprecedented times. Combined with the energy from our reopening task force, our small group gatherings, our youth activities, and vitality of virtual worship, we forge ahead, driven by the hope of once again gathering together in-person with one another in Christ. I look forward to the point in time when I can share fellowship (and that great cup of coffee) with you in-person. Until that time, should you have any questions or just want to chat, feel free to reach out to me anytime via email.

Jason Lindquist, Council President jasonlindquist19@gmail.com

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

- ⇒ Offering income was \$7K higher than budget, primarily due to prepayment of pledges. The total operating income was \$7.2K higher than budget.
- ⇒ Operating Expenses were \$7.2K lower than throughout all categories except Compensation accounts, which were on budget, and Property, which was near budget, with the note that we paid for some of the HVAC expenses that will eventually be reimbursed by the Endowment gift for COVID repairs.
- ⇒ The Year-to-Date Net Operating Fund activity was positive for the month at \$22K basically due to higher income as noted above and lower expenses.
- ⇒ The Endowment loan balance at 1/31/2021 is \$13.9K.

IN-PERSON WORSHIP OUTDOORS: A MESSAGE FROM THE REOPENING TASK FORCE

Due to the increasing rates of COVID-19 infection in our state, the Reopening Task Force has recommended offering in-person worship outdoors instead of inside the sanctuary in the coming weeks.

The Task Force monitors the weekly COVID-19 infection rates for four towns (Avon, Canton, Farmington, Simsbury). These four towns comprise the primary membership of SMLC. For the past two weeks, the COVID-19 infection rate for one or more of these towns has been in the "red zone" (15 positive cases or more per 100,000 per day). The benchmark determined by the Task Force and supported by the Council for worshipping in the sanctuary has been to have all four towns out of the "red zone."

Given the volatile nature of infection rates, as well as the improving weather conditions, the Task Force recommends outdoor worship as the safest in-person option. Outdoor worship has the added advantage of accommodating greater numbers of people as well. The Reopening Task Force will continue to monitor the situation and will recommend resuming in-person indoor worship when it is deemed safe to do so.

Holy Week services will be offered on Zoom and outdoors. The schedule for Sunday services following Easter will be based on the schedule used last fall: 9am worship on Zoom, and 11am worship outdoors.

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.*



CELEBRATING HOLY WEEK AND EASTER:
Walking with Christ from Death into Life

During Holy Week, we will offer a variety of worship formats including Zoom, on-demand, and outdoor worship.

April 1 MAUNDY THURSDAY

5:30 p.m. *In-Person*

A Drive-In Service of Holy Communion

Worshippers park facing the church and stay in their cars for a short service. Those who prefer to worship outside their vehicles may bring lawn chairs to set up by their bumper. *Registration required.*

7:00 p.m. *via Zoom*

A Solemn Celebration of the Lord's Last Supper

A Service of Holy Communion via Zoom.

April 2 GOOD FRIDAY

7:00 p.m. *via Zoom*

The Liturgy of the Lord's Passion

Via Zoom the community will gather in heart and mind around the cross of Jesus. Features St. John's story of Jesus's Death, Prayer, and Hymns of the Season.

April 3 HOLY SATURDAY

10:00 a.m.

Easter Egg Hunt

A celebration for the children of St Matthew and friends hosted by St. Matthew's Confirmation Class. *Registration appreciated.*

11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Private Prayer in the Sanctuary. *Registration required.*

April 4 EASTER SUNDAY

9:00 a.m. *via Zoom*

A Celebration of the Resurrection of Christ with Holy Communion

10:30 a.m. *In-Person*

Outdoor Worship Service with Holy Communion

Worshippers park facing the church and stay in their cars for a short service. Worship will move to the back yard of the church if weather conditions permit, so please bring a chair!

On Demand

Children's Sermon

Pre-recorded and available at our website Easter morning.

Sadly, due to higher COVID numbers, we do not meet our safety metrics for indoor worship. We will be offering outdoor worship on Sundays following Easter at 11am as a safer in-person option, along with Zoom at 9am.

+ + + May we have the mind of Christ who humbled himself, accepting death on a cross . . .

Therefore God has highly exalted him, and given him a name above every other name. + + +