



THE VOICE

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

March 2021

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

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

St. Matthew Lutheran Church
224 Lovely Street
Avon, CT 06001-4018
(860) 673-3301

Website: www.stmatthewavon.org

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!

DATES TO REMEMBER:

March 2, 9, 16, 23, & 30: Tuesdays Together in March: Virtual Prayer: 10 a.m.

Centering Prayer via Zoom: 6 p.m.

March 3: Choir Zoom Fest: 7 p.m.

March 4, 11, 18, & 25: Centering Prayer via Zoom: 2 p.m.

Discipleship in a Democracy study: 7 p.m.

March 4 & 18: Bible Study via Zoom: 10 a.m.

March 14: Sunday School via Zoom: 10 a.m.

March 15: April VOICE submissions deadline

March 22: Worship & Music: 6 p.m.

March 27: Men's Breakfast via Zoom: 8:30 a.m.

March 28: PALM SUNDAY

Worship via Zoom: 9 a.m.

Sunday School via Zoom: 10 a.m.

Drive-In Palm Sunday Processional: 11 a.m.

March 29: Confirmation Class Zoom Check-In: 7 p.m.



A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

This month it will be one year since the coronavirus quarantine began. We have been through a lot this past year, and while there is still a long way to go, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Human civilization has been through a wilderness of sorts, and we are about to enter **the spiritual wilderness of Lent**. This holy season is the time we remember Jesus' forty days in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry, and honor the time leading up to his death and resurrection at the end of his ministry. It is a time for reflection, reverence, and spiritual devotion.

This Lent I encourage us all to think of a spiritual discipline to take up or give up during Lent. In the group study of the book *Unbinding the Gospel*, participants spent a day fasting from something. For some it was actual food. For others it was screen time or excessive time on the internet. Others gave up worrying or the need to always be doing something productive. It was a phenomenal exercise which was inspiring to many. If you would like to do a similar fast, the key is to first think and pray about what distracts you from your relationship with God, then pray for the courage and motivation to give that up for a certain period of time. You can try it for one day or forty days or anything in between. Such fasting can be a wonderful opportunity to grow in our relationship with God. Another option is to take up a spiritual practice for forty days. Maybe it'll be simply praying once a day for 5 minutes every morning or evening. Reading a chapter of the Bible for a few minutes each day. Singing a hymn at the beginning of each new day. Or sitting in silence for 10 or 20 minutes once or twice a day. There are so many options and what's most meaningful will be different for everyone.

The important thing is to ask the Spirit to guide you in your discernment and do your practice with the intention of growing a deeper connection with God. It is always good to challenge yourself, to find your edge. It's what helps us grow in anything—physical activities like weightlifting or running, mental abilities like the challenge of learning something new or training for a new job. Finding your edge and pushing yourself is the key to growth in any discipline, and in terms of our spiritual lives it is what can help us find deeper connection with the divine and to grow spiritually. Of course, it is also crucial to be gentle with yourself so that your practice does not become legalistic, and to understand such practices are not done to earn favor with God but rather to deepen your own awareness of God's already present love for you.

As we enter into these forty days, I pray that you may have the inspiration to challenge yourself with (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) something new. Invite the Spirit to enter in and help you grow in whatever way God is calling you.

Blessings on your Lenten journey.

- Pastor Brian



SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School will meet the second and fourth Sundays of the month at 10:00 a.m. That is, March 14th and 28th. We will continue to cover themes in the Apostle's Creed and sing songs led by Dick. Newcomers are always welcome!

Sunday School will not be leading worship in March. This is because Confirmation is leading worship every Sunday during Lent. But Sunday School will be back on for leading on the third Sunday of April and May.



YOUTH GROUP! Mark your calendars for the North Carolina mission trip the week of July 31—August 7. We are still planning on it, praying and hoping the pandemic will be behind us at that point! Also, we are looking for youth Zoom Masters, Web Masters and Videographers. Contact the pastors for more information.



CENTERING PRAYER

Centering Prayer group will meet every Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. and every Thursday at 2:00 p.m. this month. We are reading Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart* and will cover Chapters 12 & the appendices this month. Our meetings will continue to be on Zoom. Newcomers are always welcome! Contact Pastor Brian if you'd like to join.

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, March 27th at 8:30 a.m. During the year 2021 we will be 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 that will be March 4th and 18th. A link will appear in St. Matthew's weekly Constant Contact for all who wish to attend. Newcomers always welcome!

REOPENING TASK FORCE UPDATE

On February 7th, the Reopening Task Force held a "Community Conversation" via Zoom with the members of St. Matthew. Parishioners were free to ask questions about Covid-19 and the reopening plan. Approximately 34 members were present, and questions included:

- * What to expect when we reopen (i.e., at least 9 feet apart, masks, no singing, etc.)
- * What is the red zone?
- * Would it help to know who is vaccinated?

Although there continues to be definite interest in returning to the sanctuary, it was understood that the safety of the congregation needs to come first. A summary of these issues was also discussed with Church Council on February 9th.

The Reopening Task Force continues to monitor, on a weekly basis, COVID-19 epidemiologic data in Connecticut, with focus on the Farmington Valley (Avon, Canton, Farmington, and Simsbury). (continued...)

REOPENING TASK FORCE UPDATE (...continued)

The primary criterion to remain closed is when any of our four towns are in the “red zone”, along with changes in the positivity rates in the state from week to week.

However, the Covid-19 vaccine is becoming more readily available and more people in the state are being vaccinated. Because of this very encouraging news, coupled with warmer weather around the corner, the Task Force is hopeful that the sanctuary could be open for worship in the not-too-distant future.

In the meantime, although the church office is closed to the public at this time, parishioners are more than welcome to call the office and make an appointment to visit. Additionally, individual appointments can be made to reserve a place for personal prayer in the sanctuary on Holy Saturday, or on a different day if this date doesn't work for you. Please contact the office for further information on how to reserve seating.

As always, feel free to contact the Pastors or members of the Task Force with any questions or concerns.

LENTEN OPPORTUNITIES:

Join others for daily prayer by picking up a copy of *Christ In Our Home* outside the church office, or subscribing to Pastor Brian's and Pastor Julie's devotional picks:

- [Pray As You Go](#)
- [Father Richard Rohr's Center for](#)
- [Luther Seminary's God Pause](#)

GOOD THINGS: The month of February saw many good things happening at St. Matthew!

- † The Confirmation Class hosted worship in Bushnell Park at Church By the Pond, a ministry of Christ Cathedral. The class made lunches and personal care kits to hand out.
- † The Reopening Task Force hosted a Community Conversation with 34 people in attendance. People asked questions about what worship would be like when we worship again in person and what the metrics are for reopening in-person indoor worship, and shared both the wish to be back together, and their gratitude for the work of the Task Force.
- † The new Communications and Marketing Committee is working on a new logo for St Matthew, as a first step in re-branding. This work will focus us on our mission tag line: In Christ, we are Digging Deep, Reaching Out, and Changing Lives.
- † Pastor Julie and Confirmation students Zoe and Reese were featured on Camp Calumet's Wednesday night evening prayer service. Check out this iconic New England Lutheran ministry on Facebook Live at 7:30 on Wednesday evenings, or afterward at your leisure.
- † The Sunday School studied the betrayal and death of Jesus as stated in the Apostle's Creed via Zoom. Dick Silbereis led the class through a consideration of Jesus' final night with his disciples, using a model of the Upper Room where Jesus shared the Last Supper.
- † The Ash Wednesday imposition of ashes in the parking lot welcomed 44 people, 13 of whom were visitors to St Matthew. We also shared worship on Zoom to begin the holy season of Lent. Thank you to our Confirmation class, who were our Confirmation parking lot attendants, and who serve as assisting ministers and lectors during the Lenten season!
- † Eight participants finished a small group study on faith sharing and prayer entitled, “Unbinding the Gospel.” It was so good, we might do it again! If you are interested in learning more about this small group ministry, let one of the pastors know.
- † Pastor Brian kicked off the Lenten study, *Discipleship in a Democracy*, on Thursday evenings at 7, February 25-March 25.
- † The Property Committee continued to upgrade the lighting in our sanctuary to be more energy efficient. Thank you, Ben and the Committee!
- † Thanks to Doreen and Margaret who volunteer each Friday at Grace Lutheran's grab and go meal, and to all who have donated to Gifts of Love's food drive, and to Dave E. for delivering. Your generosity makes a difference!
- † St. Matthew's budget is in the black this month, thanks to some pre-paid pledges, and expenses that are slightly under budget. Thank you for your faithful giving!

God is good, all the time!

FEBRUARY 2021 CHURCH COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

- ◆ The Council elected new officers for 2021: Jason Lindquist, president; Fred Fenn, vice president; Lanelle Gallo, secretary; Dawne Ware, treasurer; and Debbie Steinberg, assistant treasurer. We are grateful for their leadership.
- ◆ The council has a vacant seat, as Clint Harriman has resigned from the council. The council will appoint a new council member at its next meeting per the St Matthew Constitution. Thank you, Clint, for your faithful service to St Matthew.
- ◆ The Reopening Task Force gave an update, noting the current positivity rate is too high for in-person indoor worship, but feeling cautiously optimistic about the future with immunizations and warmer weather on the way. Pastor Julie shared a strategic plan to focus the work of the council in 2021, entitled, "Telling the Story."
- ◆ The council voted to authorize the treasurer to apply to People's United Bank for a second wave Payroll Protection Program loan.



REMINDER: THRIVENT FINANCIAL MEMBERS

Thrivent Financial members can direct 2020 *Choice Dollars* through **March 31, 2021**. *Choice Dollars* can be directed to St. Matthew.

Visit www.Thrivent.com/thriventchoice or call 1-800-847-4836 and when prompted, say "Thrivent Choice". At the second prompt, say "Choice Dollars". A representative will then work with you to direct your *Choice Dollars*.

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS January 2021

Operating Income:

- ⇒ Offering income was \$43K higher than budget due primarily to prepayments of pledges.
- ⇒ Facility use was slightly higher than the straightlined budget due to timing.
- ⇒ Total Operating Income was \$43K higher than budget due to the items noted above.

Operating Expenses:

- ⇒ Total Operating Expenses were \$3.9K lower than budget, with most categories being below budget. - Property was \$1K lower than budget due primarily to snow plowing being lower than budgeted due to timing. We paid for the HVAC project in January - it was budgeted in Capital projects, but came in on budget.

Net Operating Fund Activity:

- ⇒ Net Operating Activity was positive \$40.8K for the month vs. the budget of negative \$6K due to higher income and lower expenses than budget as noted above.

Cash and Restricted Cash:

- ⇒ We made a principal payment of \$2,700 for the Endowment Loan from capital campaign donations received in December.
- ⇒ We received \$1,495 in Hunger donations that were passed on to the NE Synod.

Loans:

- ⇒ The balance of the loan from Endowment is \$13,954.60 at January 31st.
- ⇒ We are working with People's to submit our application for PPP loan forgiveness and expect the full amount of the loan to be forgiven.

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.*

LENTEN STUDY OPPORTUNITY: DISCIPLESHIP IN A DEMOCRACY

Pastor Brian and Pastor Julie invite you to a study on the ELCA's social message entitled "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy," Thursday evenings in Lent, starting February 25 at 7 p.m. Zoom login information will be shared in weekly Constant Contact emails.

"Pastor, I was really upset by Sunday's sermon. You're meddling in politics, which you have no business doing. I also hear that you participated in those recent protests. Don't you understand the separation of church and state?"

"Some of us are frustrated that our church won't take a stand. Aren't we named for a protester, Martin Luther? Don't we point with reverence to martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who took a very political stance?"

"As a young person, I am deeply concerned about social justice, and I find little to no support for my convictions in my church."

"I don't want my church to tell me how to vote, but I would welcome some guidance on how to prayerfully cast my ballot."

Each of these wide-ranging views represents the stance of some members in a typical ELCA congregation. It's little wonder, then, that much of the conflict we experience in the church today is generated by differing views about the proper relationship between church and state, faith and politics.

Prompted by increasing polarization over the appropriate role of government and by the conflict such divisions are causing in congregations, the ELCA has developed a social message on the role of government, the nature of civic engagement, and the relationship of church and state.'

The social message offers guidance on considering scripture, Lutheran theology and tradition, in connection with public life, and an opportunity to hear from one another in a spirit of dialogue.

Session topics include:

- ◇ SESSION 1: HOW SHOULD LUTHERANS BE INVOLVED IN POLITICS? AN OVERVIEW
- ◇ SESSION 2: WHAT IS THE PROBLEM TODAY AND WHAT HAVE LUTHERANS TAUGHT ABOUT GOVERNMENT?
- ◇ SESSION 3: GOD'S TWO WAYS OF GOVERNING
- ◇ SESSION 4: GOVERNMENT ROLES AND FUNCTIONS: IS THE NEIGHBOR BEING SERVED?
- ◇ SESSION 5: CALLED TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

You can find the Living Lutheran article for session one here <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2020/10/discipleship-in-a-democracy/> and the social statement here [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Government and Civic Engagement Social Message.pdf?ga=2.170302822.795868743.1611086926-56195097.1597846357](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Government%20and%20Civic%20Engagement%20Social%20Message.pdf?ga=2.170302822.795868743.1611086926-56195097.1597846357) .

We hope to see you there!

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LENTEN OPPORTUNITIES:

This year **midweek Lenten worship will be a series of short video devotions** created by Pastors Brian and Julie based on the Philippians Christ hymn. We will share the following themes:

- ✠ Week 1, February 24 - Christ emptied and humbled himself - Pastor Julie
- ✠ Week 2, March 3 - Christ became obedient - Pastor Brian
- ✠ Week 3, March 10 - At the name of Jesus all knees shall bow - Pastor Julie
- ✠ Week 4, March 17 - Every tongue confesses Jesus - Pastor Brian
- ✠ Week 5, March 24 - Let the same mind be in you - Seminarian Kurt

The devotions will be posted on the church's Facebook page and homepage of the website, as well as sent in a midweek Constant Contact email. Our worship on Sunday mornings will focus on our new life in Christ in baptism and feature the leadership of our confirmation students

GIFTS OF LOVE COLLECTION

So that we may remain mindful of other people's needs during this Lenten season, we will be collecting items for Gifts of Love. Below is a list of the items needed most urgently. Please place your donations in the gray containers behind the white bench in front of the church. Thank you!

- Peanut butter
- Jelly (plastic containers)
- Boxed cereals
- Rice
- Tuna fish
- Juice boxes
- Individually wrapped snacks
- Chicken noodle soup
- Toiletries (i.e. toothpaste, toothbrushes, laundry detergent, shampoo)

Gifts of Love primarily serves individuals and families facing a financial crisis due to reduced work hours, illness, divorce, death of a spouse/mate, exiting an abusive relationship, or a significant unexpected increase in expenses. By helping clients meet their most basic needs through food – including fresh produce from their Farm in Simsbury, clothing, housewares, linens, furniture, and financial planning and self-sufficiency consultation, Gifts of Love and the Farm enable them to divert their income to necessities such as rent/mortgage, heat, debt reduction, medications/medical bills, and the like and regain their financial independence. Learn more [here](#).

WANTED: VOTING MEMBERS FOR SYNOD ASSEMBLY

St. Matthew can send a male voting member, a female voting member, and a person under 30, along with the pastors, to the New England Synod Assembly, Saturday, June 12. The featured speaker is the Rev. Dr. R. Guy Erwin, president of the United Lutheran Seminary and Ministerium of Pennsylvania Chair and Professor of Reformation Studies. Prior to this appointment, he was fourth bishop of the Southwest California Synod, and many years before that, he was Pastor Julie's seminary professor teaching Luther! Some at St. Matthew will remember his online presentation on Reformation theology and the sacraments which we studied this past summer.

Synod Assembly is virtual this year, so voting members will need access to a smart device to attend. The Council will appoint our voting members in April, so please let one of the pastors know if you are interested in attending. St. Matthew picks up the registration fee, and visitors this year are free. It's a great way to learn more about the ministry of Lutherans around New England! We hope you consider attending as a voting member or a visitor. See <https://www.nelutherans.org/assembly> for more information.



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 drive-in worship in the parking lot. If health conditions permit, we will add in-person worship in the sanctuary.

March 28 PALM SUNDAY

9:00 a.m. via Zoom

A Commemoration of Christ's Entry into Jerusalem

10:30 a.m. In-Person

Palm Sunday Processional

Worshippers park their cars and gather in front of the church. A short liturgy in the parking lot, followed by a procession on foot with palms and singing. Those who wish may participate from their cars.

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.

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.

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

Private Prayer in the Sanctuary

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

A Drive-In Worship Service with Holy Communion

Worshippers park facing the church and stay in their cars for a short service. Worship outside from lawn chairs placed by bumper. Worship will move to the backyard of the church if weather conditions permit.

On Demand

Children's Sermon

Pre-recorded and available at our website Easter morning.

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

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Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
March 2021						
	<p>1 1:00 Staff Meeting</p> <p>7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Amos</p>	<p>2 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.</p> <p>6:00 Centering Prayer</p>	<p>3 7:00 Choir Zoom Fest</p> <p>7:00 Online Devotions</p>	<p>4 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Discipleship in a Democracy Study</p>	5	6 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
<p>7 9:00 Confirmation leads Worship with Holy Communion live on Zoom</p>	<p>8 1:00 Staff Meeting 6:00 Altar Guild Meeting 7:00 Finance Committee Mtg 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Isaiah Part 1</p>	<p>9 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.</p> <p>6:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Church Council</p>	<p>10 7:00 Online Devotions</p>	<p>11 2:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Discipleship in a Democracy Study</p>	12	13 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
<p>14 9:00 Confirmation leads Worship live on Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom</p>	<p>15 VOICE Deadline</p> <p>1:00 Staff Meeting</p> <p>Confirmation: In-Person Event at church</p>	<p>16 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.</p> <p>6:00 Centering Prayer</p>	<p>17 7:00 Online Devotions</p>	<p>18 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Discipleship in a Democracy Study</p>	19	20 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
<p>21 9:00 Confirmation leads Worship with Holy Communion live on Zoom</p>	<p>22 1:00 Staff Meeting</p> <p>6:00 Worship and Music 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Exile and Isaiah, Part 2</p>	<p>23 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.</p> <p>6:00 Centering Prayer</p>	<p>24 7:00 Online Devotions</p>	<p>25 2:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Discipleship in a Democracy Study</p>	26	27 8:30 Men's Breakfast via Zoom 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
<p>28 9:00 Confirmation leads Worship live on Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom 11:00 Drive-In Palm Sunday Processional</p>	<p>29 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation: Zoom Check-In</p>	<p>30 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom.</p> <p>6:00 Centering Prayer</p>	31	Notes: Weekly online devotions will be available on our website and Facebook page, and will also be included with the weekly Constant Contact emails.		

March 2021



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