



THE VOICE

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

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

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DATES TO REMEMBER:

- January 5, 12, 19, & 26:** Tuesdays Together in January: Virtual Prayer: 10:00 a.m.
- Centering Prayer via Zoom: 6:00 p.m.
- January 7, 14, 21, & 28:** Centering Prayer via Zoom: 2:00 p.m.
- Unbinding the Gospel: 6:00 p.m.
- January 7 & 21:** Bible Study via Zoom: 10:00 a.m.
- January 9:** Confirmation Class ice skating event (tentative)
- January 10 & 31:** Sunday School via Zoom: 10:00 a.m.
- January 11:** Nominations Due for Congregation Council
- January 15:** February VOICE submissions deadline.
- January 17:** Virtual Worship led by Sunday School Children: 9:00 a.m.
- January 23:** Men's Breakfast via Zoom: 8:30 a.m.
- January 24:** Annual Congregation Meeting via Zoom: 10:00 a.m.



A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR

I begin this new year with a strong sense of hope. Hope that this year we will see the end of COVID-19. Hope that we will be able to worship together in-person soon. Hope that we will be able to "get back to normal" again. Hope that what we've been through as a society will make us more concerned about those most vulnerable and that we'll look out for each other more. But 2021 begins much the same way 2020 ended, with the need for patience. Patience while we wait for everyone to receive the vaccine. Patience while we prepare safety protocols to ensure gatherings are as safe as possible. Hope and patience are what are required of us.

Hope and patience are not just themes relating to the coronavirus. Hope and patience are fundamental attitudes for the Christian faith. Hope is what motivates us to keep moving forward, to work for justice and righteousness in all the world, trusting that God will bring about a better future. And patience is what keeps us in a state of constant hope, even amidst frustration and apparent delay of this hopeful vision. Paul's words to the church in Rome 2000 years ago are just as relevant for us today:

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

While we hope for the promise of the Kingdom to be born in this world, we also wait for it with patience, knowing that it may not be in our lifetime. The transformation of the world may still be a long way away. Nevertheless, as Christians we are Kingdom People. We are a people who live our lives as if it is already fully present, full of hope and patience, longing for the world God has promised, yet patiently waiting as we participate in the ministry of reconciliation. (continued...)

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.*

(...continued) And so this year, I invite you to the spiritual practice of hope and patience. Never lose sight of where the world is headed. Hope not only for an end to coronavirus, but also hope for an end to poverty, war, and injustice. Hope for peace on earth and goodwill toward all. Hope for God's vision of shalom to be actualized. Hope for the birth of this transformed world Paul writes about. Hope for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. We wait with eager expectation for this promise, and we wait for it with patience.

May your new year be filled with hope, patience, and all good things.

Pastor Brian



SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School will continue to meet twice per month on Zoom. This month we will meet January 10th and January 31st. Both lessons will be on Zoom at 10:00 a.m. Sunday School will also lead worship January 17th which will be at 9:00 a.m. on Zoom. In the following months we will meet the 2nd and 4th Sundays for our lessons.



YOUTH GROUP! Youth group is planning a mission trip the first week of August! We are hoping everything will be relatively back to normal by then and have booked the same mission trip to North Carolina that we were planning on doing this past summer. Mark your calendars and check your email for updates!



CENTERING PRAYER

Centering Prayer group will be trying something new this year: we'll be meeting every week! We'll meet every Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. and every Thursday at 2:00 p.m. We are also picking up again with reading Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart* and will cover Chapter 8 the first week of the month. Our meetings will continue to be on Zoom. Newcomers are always welcome—this is a great time to join if you've been thinking about it!



MEN'S GROUP

Men's group will meet on Zoom Saturday, January 23rd at 8:30 a.m. During the year 2021 we will also be reading Richard Rohr's *On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditations for Men*. This daily meditation book will be given to every man of St. Matthew who wants a copy, and it will be the basis of our discussions this year. We look forward to journeying through Rohr's work together.

TUESDAYS TOGETHER

Every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. a group of St. Matthew members meets on Zoom for our *Tuesdays Together* session. It is a period of devotions, prayer, and fellowship. Newcomers are always welcome and there's absolutely no commitment to come every week. Just come once and check it out. Hope you'll join us!

BIBLE STUDY

Bible Study meets every first and third Thursday at 10:00 a.m. on Zoom. This month we will meet January 5th and 19th. Newcomers always welcome!

SMALL GROUP STUDY OPPORTUNITY IN JANUARY & FEBRUARY

The Evangelism Committee invites you to help set the course for St Matthew's ministry after the pandemic by participating in a small group study using a resource and prayer journal entitled, [Unbinding the Gospel](#). Through this study we will uncover our personal convictions and explore what it means to share our faith more deeply with those in our congregation as well as those outside St Matthew. We will meet Thursday evenings from 6:00 p.m.-7:00 p.m. on Zoom, January 7-February 18. Please contact the office to be connected to Council Liaison for evangelism, Lanelle Gallo, or reach out to one of the pastors for more information or to be registered for the study.

Our weekly Constant Contact communications include links to access our current online opportunities. If you would like to be added to our contact list to receive the weekly communications, please email office@stmatthewavon.org or call (860) 673-3301.

NEW YEAR, NEW COMMITTEE being formed at St. Matthew Lutheran Church. If you are interested we invite you to join us!

It's the Marketing and Communication Committee! The goal of this committee is to create a strategic marketing and communications plan, with an overall strategy to share our congregation's story with our audiences. The committee will identify SMLC target audiences, the messages to communicate to those audiences as well as which media vehicles to use for the most impact. SMLC mission, vision, branding, messaging, communication processes (internally and externally) will be discussed as a first step in the process! Contact Diane in the church office at office@stmatthewavon.org to be connected with Missy Lindquist.

SAVE THE DATE:

VIRTUAL ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING, JANUARY 24, 2020 at 10:00 a.m. Your attendance is much appreciated and encouraged as we review 2020 and look forward to a new year!

GOOD THINGS: So many good things happened at St. Matthew this past month!

- ✦ Several community members donated 30 handmade hats and 11 baby blanket and hat sets to the St. Matthew Mitten Tree! St. Matthew members provided 94 hats, gloves, and scarves. Thank you to all who donated, and also to Doreen and Dave who delivered these gifts to Grace Lutheran and Gifts of Love. You are helping keep others warm this season in Hartford and the Farmington Valley!
- ✦ Rick Hanson put together an exceptionally beautiful Advent blue slide deck for our Zoom worship this month. The Sunday School students led worship on Advent 4 with a record number of 11 participants!
- ✦ The Confirmation Class hosted a Virtual Fun Night for 40 Mosaic group home residents from around Connecticut. Mosaic is a ministry with Lutheran roots that advocates for and supports people living with intellectual disabilities (mosaicinfo.org). The Confirmation Class and the residents shared favorite ornaments via Zoom, played a Christmas trivia game and freeze dance, and led a virtual Christmas pageant, ending with candlelight and Silent Night. The Mosaic residents loved it!
- ✦ The Men's Breakfast and Women's Fellowship each held holiday themed gatherings this month. Folks continued to gather for Centering Prayer and Bible Study and of course for worship. In the midst of the pandemic, we are grateful for the ways we can meet virtually. It really helps us stay connected in these crazy times!
- ✦ The Council began working on some post-pandemic planning focusing on the ways to tell our story of faith personally as well as through marketing and technology. Thanks to Missy Lindquist for helping launch a new committee focusing on Communications and Marketing!
- ✦ The Reopening Task Force continues to monitor the risk in our communities and recommend steps for safely conducting ministry. Currently the office and staff are available by appointment, or simply by calling first before stopping by. Thank you to the Task Force for their hard work, and to everyone for working so hard to keep yourself and others safe—it is a concrete way for us to love our neighbors.
- ✦ Council President Jack Pietrick and Council Secretary Ann Eberhard finish up their terms this month. Ann completes her term on council after six years of dedicated service and two years of excellent minute taking. Thank you, Ann! Jack led our congregation as we met three major challenges: Close the Gap, where we raised over \$55,000 for our operation budget; a congregation wide visioning process, which created our mission statement, tag line, values, and goals, as well as over 200 ministry ideas and 9 new ministries; and re-framing ministry for the pandemic era. In each case, Jack's ability to lead while listening and his blend of organization and caring helped us as a congregation to meet these challenges and to thrive. Thank you, Jack!

Thank you for your support over the last year – your prayers, your calls to fellow members, your in-kind donations to help our ministry partners, your leadership and practical service, and your faithfulness in giving! We are on track to be in the black for 2020, and we are deeply grateful. 2020 has been quite a year. And we can still say:

God is good, all the time!

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
January 2021					1 OFFICE CLOSED	2 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
3 9:00 Virtual Worship live via Zoom	4 1:00 Staff Meeting	5 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 6:00 Centering Prayer	6	7 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer 6:00 Unbinding the Gospel	8	9 Confirmation Event—Ice Skating (tentative) 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
10 9:00 Virtual Worship live on Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom	11 Council Nominations Due 1:00 Staff Meeting 6:00 Altar Guild 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Joshua 7:00 Finance Committee	12 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 6:00 Centering Prayer 7:00 Church Council	13	14 2:00 Centering Prayer 6:00 Unbinding the Gospel	15 VOICE Deadline	16 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
17 9:00 Virtual Worship led by Sunday School live via Zoom	18 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 1:00 Staff Meeting 7:00 Confirmation Work on Your Own: Judges	19 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 6:00 Centering Prayer	20	21 10:00 Bible Study 2:00 Centering Prayer. 6:00 Unbinding the Gospel	22	23 8:30 Men's Breakfast via Zoom 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
24 9:00 Virtual Worship live on Zoom 10:00 Annual Congregation Meeting via Zoom	25 1:00 Staff Meeting 6:00 Worship and Music 7:00 Confirmation-Zoom Check-in	26 10:00 Tuesdays at 10: Virtual Prayer via Zoom. 6:00 Centering Prayer	27	28 2:00 Centering Prayer 6:00 Unbinding the Gospel	29	30 4:00 Zoom Worship Rehearsal
31 9:00 Virtual Worship live on Zoom 10:00 Sunday School via Zoom	<i>If you need to stop by the office for any reason, 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!</i>					

January 2021

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

Non-Profit Organization



ADULT EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY: INTRODUCTION TO ISLAM

You are invited to learn about our neighbor's faith in this course sponsored by the Avon Public Library and taught by Imam Safwan Shaikh of the Farmington Valley American Muslim Center. Classes meet virtually January 6 through January 20, from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Register at <https://www.avonctlibrary.info/event/introduction-to-islam/2021-01-06/> or contact Pastor Julie for more information.

WHAT'S GOING ON AT GRACE LUTHERAN? An Update from Pastor Rick

Our deeply committed volunteers continue feeding the community with a home-cooked meal and other much needed items every Friday. A small group of the hundred or so who come are welcomed in the building for prayer before we begin sharing food with those who have lined up outside. Limited to ten people, separated by at least six feet, with masks and having washed their hands with sanitizer, we gather. On Tuesdays and Thursdays we have AA meetings that are also held in the Community Room inside the church with similar requirements and precautions. There are few AA meetings that involve an actual in-person meeting. There are fewer and fewer sources of a home-cooked meals available for the people we serve.

And, on Saturdays at noon, with stringent precautions, we invite people in to draw clothing from Janet's Closet, a ministry that continues to be lovingly offered by several very serious volunteers. Fresh Start Pallet Products, Inc., no longer structurally a part of Grace, is now a standalone non-profit. It has been operating almost all year with only one break in action as we were not viewed as "essential." However, now we are!

Besides record-breaking sales, we now have more employees than we have ever had and have recently been featured on Fox 61 interviewing our volunteers and employees.

Thank you, St. Matthew, for your generous support of these ministries!

A team of 3 St. Matthew members continues to volunteer on Friday nights. Pastor Brian and Pastor Julie attend once a month to lead a prayer circle. If you would like to join in this ministry, please reach out to one of the pastors.

NOMINATIONS FOR CONGREGATION COUNCIL - DUE JANUARY 11

The Congregation Council is accepting nominations for 2021! Council members are elected spiritual leaders of the congregation, who promote the mission of the congregation and provide financial and organizational oversight. We have one open seat for the coming year.

Please give prayerful consideration as to who you think would make a good Congregation Council member and submit their names for consideration. Our Nominating Committee will follow up with all nominees in January to ascertain who is willing to serve. The official vote will occur at our Annual Meeting which is scheduled for Sunday, January 24th.

Nominations can be submitted by emailing the church office at office@stmatthewavon.org or calling (860) 673-3301. Due to the pandemic, we will not be collecting hard copies of nominations. A special thank you goes to Ann Eberhard as she completes her term for her years of participation on the Council and for her excellent service as our Council Secretary!

WONDERFUL NEWS!

The remarkable generosity of the congregation has provided St. Matthew the dollars and pledges required to pay our \$300 thousand mortgage in full. The Capital Campaign to match the Steinberg and Jensen family gift of \$150,000 occurred during the pandemic but succeeded in spite of this challenge with your support! Any additional dollars received will be used for future capital improvements. A dinner celebrating this blessing will be held when we can safely come together again, hopefully in the fall. Again, thanks to each of you. God has indeed blessed us!

George Reider and Missy Lindquist, Co-Chairs

COUNCIL HIGHLIGHTS

- Pastor Julie presented an overview of proposed Post Pandemic Planning. She said that we all know that lives have been changed by the pandemic and we must find ways to incorporate the new into the old as we prepare for the time when we return to in-house services on a more regular basis.
- The Council passed a motion to move forward on developing a plan to address post pandemic needs for St. Matthew Lutheran Church.
- Ben Wright advised the Council of the Property Committee work that will allow us to safely return to in person worship and provide a variety of services to the congregation until that time arrives. Updates have been made to our Wi-Fi system among other things.
- The Stewardship Campaign has progressed well so far and is slightly ahead of last year at this time.
- Plans for Christmas Eve services were reviewed.

REOPENING TASK FORCE UPDATE

The Reopening Task Force continues to monitor, on a weekly basis, the COVID-19 epidemiologic data in Connecticut, with focus on the Farmington Valley (Avon, Canton, Farmington, and Simsbury). This review revealed that the number of COVID-19 cases and rates of COVID-19 infection had significantly increased in November and December in Hartford County, including the Farmington Valley.

The principal criteria that the Task Force is using to suspend in person services in the Sanctuary are:

- When any of the four towns in the Farmington Valley are in the **red zone** (15 or greater positive cases/100,000 people/day)
- Trend of changes in positivity rates from week to week.

Using these criteria and in consideration of the safety of our congregation and staff, the Task Force recommended to Pastor Julie that we temporarily suspend in-person services in the Sanctuary for Sunday worship beginning on November 29, 2020.

The Reopening Task Force continues to meet biweekly via Zoom, with ongoing communication throughout each week via e-mail and cell phone. This approach permits ongoing monitoring of the COVID-19 trajectory, in order to recommend either to remain closed or reopen the Sanctuary for in-person Sunday services.

We offer the reminder that the church office is closed to the public at this time, but parishioners are more than welcome to call the office and make an appointment to stop by.

The Task Force continues to enthusiastically support offering weekly Zoom worship as a continuing option throughout the pandemic. We are hopeful that we can return to in-person Sanctuary services very soon, as soon as the COVID-19 risk becomes less.

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

Kathy Alsgaard, Ellen Ericson, Tom Leonard, John Pearson, Doug Peterson, Jack Pietrick, and Pastor Julie

