

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

109 South Barry St. PO Box 446
Olean, NY 14760

August 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

These past six months have presented all of us with challenges we never could have imagined. They have caused us to rethink what it means to be Church and how we live together as communities of faith in the midst of a pandemic. We were forced to shelter in our homes for the safety of our communities and out of love and respect for each other. While all of this was happening, we were asked to wrestle with the entrenched systems of racism and discrimination. Every day seems to bring new situations and updated information, which requires us to continually adapt and change how we live.

I know that this has been hard on each and every one of us. I know that there have been times of great sadness and struggle. I also know that we are a strong community that has been and will always be there for each other. I am writing again to update you to more changes in our ongoing situation and options regarding Church Worship.

Since May, we have been providing Sunday Worship Services by Zoom and as of the first Sunday of July, we have been providing Sunday Worship Services in the Parking Lot of Bethany Lutheran Church via radio transmission. The first Sunday of August we began the option of some fellowship time on the Church side lawn with face masks and social distancing. We will be continuing with these options through August and the first week of September. With the approval of our ongoing plans by the Diocese, starting the week of September 13th, we will be holding Church Worship Services in the Church facilities utilizing all possible options to keep these worship services as safe as possible. First Sunday Service will be September 13th, first Wednesday Service will be September 16th. Church buildings, which have no ventilation systems have been and continue to be sites of "super-spreader" events in the pandemic. Returning to inside worship means using all possible options to prevent the spread of the virus. Even with our best efforts, we cannot make church proper completely safe at this point in time. As such, we will be holding worship services in the Ashton Parish Hall, where we can open windows and provide air flow. Persons wishing to attend services will be required to register for which service they wish to attend ahead of time as we will have to limit the number of persons in the room. Anyone with underlying health conditions and/or over the age of 65, who are concerned about their safety, are encouraged to remain at home. We will still continue the option of Zoom worship for St. Stephens people from the Parish Hall Services. Everyone attending worship services will be required to sign an attendance book for tracing purposes and is required to wear a mask throughout their time in worship, If anyone is not willing to do such, they should remain at home and can use the option of the Zoom worship. Anyone who has had a known exposure to COVID or is awaiting a COVID test result, or anyone who does not feel well or suspects that they might have symptoms of COVID should not come to any worship service. If we become aware that anyone who attended an in-facility worship at St. Stephens Church has tested positive for COVID, we will take the

necessary actions required by the Health Department and if necessary, shut down the Church Facilities for a minimum of 14 days.

For those who decide to come back to in-facility worship, our services will be necessarily different than what we have been used to in the past. I want to prepare you for these changes. First, there will not be worship services in the Church proper until such time as we know there is no chance of a virus spread in such a closed in facility. We will be holding the worship services in the Ashton Parish Hall, where we can open up windows and allow for air flow that lessens the possibility of transmission of the virus. Everyone in attendance must wear face masks during the whole time we are together and practice social distancing. There will be no singing, only instrumental music. We will open the doors for worship services 15 minutes prior to the service. If you arrive ahead of that time, please remain in your cars until the doors are open. You may enter the Parish Hall in either the North (handicap) or South entrances into the hall area. You will be greeted by ushers with hand sanitizer, who will seat you. Everyone waiting to be seated, must remain at least six feet apart. We will be using a modified, shorter, version of our worship service. There will be no passing of the peace and no passing of the offering plates. Your offering may be placed in a stationary offering plate as you enter into the hall. Communion, will be offered at each service in a different manner than you are accustomed to. Packaged communion wafers and wine in single serving cups will be handed out as you come into the worship space and consecrated from the altar as you hold them in your hands. This is similar to the process we have used for the Parking Lot services. Following the dismissal, ushers will dismiss everyone according to their seating area. We ask that people not congregate in the parking lot areas. We will be offering two worship services during every week, one on Wednesdays at 1:00pm and another on Sunday Morning at 9:30 am. Since we only have seating capacity for 30 persons in the Parish Hall, we ask that you register for the service you wish to attend by e-mailing the Church at:

ststephensolean@gmail.com.

If at any time, the situation regarding the virus worsens and we feel it necessary for the health and safety of our members, we will discontinue these in-facility worship options and continue with Zoom worship.

For a more detailed guide regarding St. Stephens Church COVID-19 protocols and the beginning of worship services in the building, please visit the Church web-site, ststephensolean.net.

Please know that, as is necessary, we will continue to adapt all that we do, according to the most updated information available from the CDC, the NY State Health Department and the guidance and direction of the Diocese and the Bishop.

I continue to keep you all in my prayers.

Faithfully, In Christ

Pastor Kim

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