

LETTER FROM THE RECTOR:

Be Here Now

[Fr. Phil Mason](#)

Dear Friends,

I remember so well riding in the back seat of the car with my brother on the way to Sweetwater, Texas where my father's army buddy Claude had a small ranch on Lake Sweetwater. Mom and Dad would take us there each summer for a few weeks so we could ride horses, shoot at rabbits, and practice being kids. (Very few rabbits were injured.) It was great fun, and we looked forward to it all the school year long with great anticipation. It was a long ride from Austin to Sweetwater, and it wasn't very long before one of us would be asking that question that I am sure all kids will ask in such a situation, "Are we there yet?!" No telling how many times we cried out for the answer.

So, there we were, stuck in the back of the car with little on our minds but what joys the next two months would bring. The only other thing on my mind might have been the fond memories of the last summer spent on the ranch. It was many years later when I realized what a beautiful drive the road to Sweetwater, Texas could be.

It is our nature--whether child or adult--to be living a great portion of our lives waiting on "the next" thing. Maybe we will be craving the next thing or fearing the next thing or maybe just numbly waiting to see what's next. The corollary is to spend precious time and energy reliving the past over and over grieving over again what has happened or basking in the glow of some wonderful experience or great success. Before I go any further, let me digress a little to say that to look ahead to what the future might be and plan for it, is most often useful and wise. Likewise, for one to look back at history--recent or ancient--and learn from whatever the past events might have been--pleasant or painful--is also proven to be a wise endeavor.

The one piece that is often quickly overlooked is a good look at the present condition of things, a good close and objective understanding of what is happening right now; a clear view of the present moment of our life and accepting the truth of what is happening. This practice could be helpful in all kinds of ways. However, I am thinking of our lives lived in the time of COVID-19 disaster. The present moment in this time is filled

with fear, anger, anxiety, grief, stress, and who knows what else--none of it particularly good. I suspect that, for most of us to find peace in these most unusual circumstances is a real challenge as we try to peacefully live our lives in this challenging present moment.

When I think of our life together as St. Stephen's Church, I feel a sense of loss. I look back fondly at the time we have spent in worship and fellowship before "the virus" interrupted it all. Looking ahead I long for the days when "the peace of the Lord" will break out in hugs and kisses and joy, and we can share the Eucharist with one another once again. In an effort to take my own advice, I turn my thoughts to what's happening now, and I see the virus still running rampant and unchecked among us. Since I am in a position of considerable responsibility--responsibility to you and for our time together--I am especially concerned about what I see in this present moment. Nothing has changed with the virus, and we are being invited to take more risks with our lives and begin to gather together again; in the secular world as well as in the religious community. I ask all of us to be patient and mindful as we consider the next phase of our life together in the body of Christ. Be safe and be well. I think when it's all over I am going to Sweetwater!

*Peace and love to all,
Phil+*



SENIOR WARDEN NEWS

[Nancy Cooke-Jenkins](#)

I have given considerable thought about what to write to you this week. I have been wondering how other parishes are coping and what methods they may be using to keep in touch.

Arch Deacon Mike Besson reports, "an incredible outpouring of appreciation for what our congregations are doing to provide worship, inspiration, and connection" and that "folks don't seem real worried, mainly concerned like everyone else." It is a comfort to know that parish-wide, we have circled the wagons.

Your Vestry and ministry leaders are working behind the scenes to continue constructing and improving ways to stay in touch with each of you. Community of Hope members have been reaching out in telephone calls to offer the church's support to each of its parishioners. Also, please remember: The Community of Hope was established to be a listening ear to those needing to express their feelings or concerns, always in confidence and always with compassion.

***"The Community of Hope
was established to be a listening ear,
always in confidence and always with compassion."
- Nancy Cooke-Jenkins***

The semi-monthly newsletter, *eNEWS*, and the newly created, *HUDDLE*, bring you up to date on the happenings within our church family. A text message tree is in the works to leave important messages on your mobile phones. (*See separate article in this issue for details.*) For those without texting capabilities, volunteers will continue to call on our established phone tree network.

Other forms of communication include the "Ask & Answer" [online form](#) found on the church website. This form, available 24/7, works well for those questions that you have and don't know quite whom to ask.

Fr. Phil is available to you in a variety of ways. You can call the office, 512-847-9956, and set up a one-on-one teleconference appointment with him, or you may Zoom into his weekly *Zoom Time with Fr. Phil* each Wednesday, starting at 10:00 a.m. CDT. Zoom Time with Fr. Phil is open to all and you can Zoom in at any time during the 90 minutes- no agenda, just visit.

Please remember, we much prefer to have you say, "stop bothering me," rather than, "I feel forgotten." Remember that while the choice for quarantine and physical isolation is not in our hands, what we CAN do and CAN choose is emotional connectedness. We are social people. If you are feeling the need of another human voice, reach for that phone. Give your Vestry members, ministry leaders, office staff, or Fr. Phil a call.

*Blessings,
Nancy*

*"God speaks to us in a thousand voices,
each with the same clear message;
'I love you.'
Please trust me on this one'."*

- Hugh Prather

FROM YOUR TREASURER

Roy Buckley

The month of April 2020 found St. Stephen's Episcopal doubly blessed through the magnanimity of its caring and gracious Members via a robust gifting of Easter Offerings that arrived during and after Holy Week; and through the efforts of a watchful and caring Diocese who cancelled the Apportionment obligations of all Diocesan churches and missions across West Texas.



The unexpected boon of Easter Offerings improved our total receipts to \$43,689, an improvement of \$3,737 over budgeted revenue expectations. Combining revenue with a markedly reduced expense side of our ledger, St. Stephen's moved out of April with a positive net income of \$13,958.

The reductions we experienced through lower than anticipated costs (across all expense categories) was a significant and substantial contribution to a positive financial picture at April's conclusion. Each major Expense category fell under budgeted expectations. Particularly helpful was the decision by the Diocese to waive Apportionment obligations during the month of April. Below is a summary synopsis of our expenses for April in comparison to the budgeted expectations:

	April 2020 Actual	April 2020 Budget	Over/<Under> Budget
Apportionment	\$-0-	\$8,340	\$<8,340>
Evangelism	\$73	\$405	\$<332>
Ministry	\$132	\$1,323	\$<1,191>
Operating	\$6,468	\$9,712	\$<3,244>
Staff	\$23,061	\$24,337	\$<1,277>
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$29,734	\$44,118	\$<14,384>

The financial health of St. Stephen's Episcopal remains sound due to the unexpected reduction in expenses and the very robust revenues provided by our Members in the Easter Offerings program. Moving into May 2020, however, we need to be mindful that Diocese Apportionment obligations will recommence, as may our Rector Search Committee efforts. We will be wise to monitor the expense side of our finances carefully and seek to enhance our revenue opportunities. Our Parish Administrator (Team Jeannetta) is ever vigilant in its efforts to defray costs by utilizing its improved administrative staff to take on efforts that were previously assigned to outside contractors.

Let us conclude this newsletter edition with a special thanks to Jeannetta and Lydia in the office, and, of course, to Fr. Phil who has gone above and beyond the duty of an Interim Rector during a time of extraordinary challenges. They shall remain focused and resolute as we move through the 2nd Quarter and the start of Summer.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, do not hesitate to email me, roy.r.buckley@rice.edu.



***BRAND NEW!* TEXT MESSAGE TREE ON ITS WAY**

You have heard of phone trees, in which staff and volunteers split up a list of names to contact members to relay important, timely messages. Well, now St. Stephen's will soon be adding a text message tree, which will deliver a text message to your smart phone. If your smart phone's cell number is on file with the church office, you will automatically be included in the text message tree. You will also soon have the option of receiving these messages by text, phone call, email, or "all options." Additionally, there will always be the option of unsubscribing all together or opting out of a previously chosen option.

The type of text messages that you can soon expect to receive include: service reminders and other church alerts. Watch your *eNEWS* for more details.



THE SACREDNESS FOUND IN SERVING: LEMS/LAY READERS/LECTORS

For *all* in-person weekday *and* Sunday worship services at St. Stephen's, there is a network of volunteers that are front and center. These are our Lay Eucharistic Ministers, Lay Readers, and Lectors. Although each of these 27 individuals have had their distinct paths leading them to join the ministry, they share one thing in common-they found the sacredness in serving.

The Lay Eucharistic Ministers/Lay Readers/Lectors is arguably the most layered ministry, meaning that choices abound. One can choose to be a Lay Eucharistic Minister (LEM), which means one would be licensed by the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas (DWTX) to serve the chalice of wine at Holy Eucharist. One could choose to be a Lay Reader, also referred to as a Worship Leader, which means one would be licensed by DWTX to lead a weekday or weeknight public worship. And, if one prefers to read only, not serving the chalice of wine, one would choose to be a Lector, who is licensed by the rector at St. Stephen's to read the *Lessons and Prayers of the People*. And, of course, there are combination choices-like going through the training and licensing to become both a Lector and a Lay Reader. If you have already served as a LEM/Lay Reader/Lector at another church, one would only need a refresher training.

Overseeing this ministry and who has accrued many hours wearing her vestments, is Charlotte Carter, Dean of Lay Ministers. After serving at St. Stephen's for 17 years and counting, she is as awed as ever, "I am eternally grateful that I have had the opportunity to serve in this Ministry. It has been a joy and a blessing to look on the faces of my brothers and sisters in Christ as they receive Eucharist."

To someone first considering joining this ministry with its front and center responsibilities, it might at first produce some hesitancy. Charlotte and the three teams of LEMs/Lay Readers/Lectors assure us that despite the initial hesitations that they may

have had when they first pondered the next step of serving, they all wholeheartedly agree that the support, mentorship, training, and personal rewards of growth are there.

"Although I still was hesitant serving Chalice, I quickly gained the confidence because I was assigned a Mentor that worked beside me as I started serving Chalice on Sundays and leading weekday services with and without Eucharist" fondly recalls Charlotte of her beginning experiences.

For former trial lawyer Frank Walker, although he readily admits that his hesitations have never really been completely allayed, he also finds through his ministry experience that "there is always more to learn. I led Morning Prayer for many years and tried to be perfect, with no mistakes. I never succeeded, which helped keep it fresh."

"The only hesitation I had when considering this ministry was that I would make a mistake or mispronounce a word or do the wrong reading!" Veronica Erwin admits. "As soon as I start reading, though, I find that my fears are alleviated. It feels very natural." She offers this advice for those that might have the same hesitancy. "We are all human, and it is OK to make mistakes."

Carla Daws who serves as LEM/Lay Reader/Lector offers some practical advice, "I thought it might be difficult to remember all the movements. Then I realized whatever you do, do it with authority! Oh, and watch out for those big sleeves. If they catch on the altar, you can spill the wine (which I almost did once)."

For those also concerned about mishaps, consider the humor within the experience. Even having been a cradle Episcopalian and well versed in scripture and ritual, Carroll Dolezal, who is a LEM, Lay Reader, Lector, and a LEV, which is someone authorized to take communion to nursing home residents and people confined at home, has had her share of qualms too. "What if I spilled the wine, or broke a vessel, or read the wrong scripture??? Well, I have done ALL of that over these many years; but God is forgiving of those trivial mistakes."

Even for those that had no hesitations, they are quick to declare, "I have no regrets," Phil Muth. "Come join us! You will never know what you are missing until you do!"

Serving in this ministry has provided each member many times with unexpected surprises and/or spiritual growth.

"Leading the Healing Service, increased my compassion, and my ability to connect with others, especially in difficult times," shares the Ministry Division Leader, Frank Walker.

Connie Maverick has been serving as a LEM and Lector for as long as she has lived in Wimberley, more than 20 years, and has gained insight through her experience. "Serving as a LEM has been truly meaningful. As I serve the wine to people, I have had an awareness of each person and that we are all equal in God's sight."

Although she was initially responding to the immediate need of the congregation for volunteers at the time, Judy Holmes, has found her 20+ years of participation continues to deepen her worship. "The ministry always gave me much more than I gave of myself."

For Peggy Schiflett, she has been attached all her life to the symbolism and personal spiritual enrichment of the Eucharist, "and these ministries seemed perfect for my participation...I love reading scripture aloud to help other folks and myself to understand

and be inspired by its messages."

For couple Bob and Linda Reed, they discover the gift found within and feel "humbled by the great privilege of serving the Eucharist to people at one of their most private and special moments of worship."

Being in this type of ministry started when Lexi Jones was a young teenager in Brownsville, Texas. "My dad has been a Lay Reader for as long as I can remember. When I was a young teenager, he enlisted me to be his reading partner in a bilingual Mass. He read in English so you can guess what that meant for MY job-yep, you guessed it, to read in Spanish." It was this early experience in a church with 100s of attendees that Lexi credits for her ease of public speaking. In turn, she has had the pleasure of watching and hearing her own son read the *Prayers of the People* at St. Stephen's during a Family Celebration Sunday Service. "He did great!"

Our senior warden, Nancy Cooke-Jenkins, offers this parting thought, "In reading and serving, you go from observation to participation."

The next training for LEMs/Lay Readers/Lectors will be held soon after we have our new rector. In the meantime, if you would like to serve as a guest Lector for the Holy Eucharist Sunday services which are currently being streamed through YouTube and Facebook, make that leap and contact Charlotte Carter, charlotteanncarter@gmail.com, who can answer many of your immediate questions and allay any concerns.



DWTX NEWS

EXTENSION OF SUSPENSION OF IN-PERSON GATHERINGS CONTINUES

The Rt. Rev. David Reed announced in a May 8, 2020 letter that the suspension of in-person worship and other gatherings will continue. All churches, including St. Stephen's, remain in Phase 1. To read guidelines for Phased Reopening, [click here](#).

CHANGES TO DWTX SUMMER CAMPS 2020

CAMP CAPERS	Postponed until July 5
DUNCAN PARK	Youth programs canceled
DUNCAN PARK	June retreats canceled
MUSTANG ISLAND	Sessions start with session 3, June 11

For up-to-date information on all DWTX Summer Camps 2020 including registration, please visit: <https://www.dwtx.org/departments/camps/>.

PICK UP YOUR DAY BY DAY DEVOTIONALS (May-July)

Copies of *Day by Day* daily devotionals for May, June, and July 2020 are available for pickup in a plastic container by the side of the Chapel. Next time you find yourself traveling down FM 3237 toward St. Stephen's, swing on in to get your copy of summer spiritual meditations.



IDEAS FOR PARTICIPATING IN GLOBAL PRAYER

Due to COVID-19, Thy Kingdom Come participation will look different this year. Check out this year's five ideas on how your family can choose to participate.

[*Ideas for Thy Kingdom Come 2020*](#)

CCP MEETS THROUGH ZOOM ON WEDNESDAYS

Christ Centered Prayer (CCP) has been a ministry at St. Stephens Church for several years. Ordinarily this group meets weekly in the Rector's Office. Due to COVID-19, the group now meets through Zoom on Wednesdays at 5:00 p.m. CDT for about an hour with Fr. Phil as the coordinator.

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." - Matthew 18:20 KJV

Although CCP is an individual contemplative prayer practice, the CCP ministry members have experienced a strengthening of their practice when together, whether in-person or now via Zoom.

If you are new to CCP and are considering joining this ministry, please contact Fr. Phil Mason, pmason@ststeve.org for more information.

JORDAN MEMORIAL DAY BBQ

POSTPONED

This year due to COVID-19 we will need to wait a little longer to enjoy that mouth watering, lip smackin' BBQ courtesy each year from the Richard & Darelle Jordan family. Our tradition of stampeding over to McArthur Hall after the Memorial Day Sunday Service will shift a few more months down the calendar.



Richard Jordan assures us that, "It will happen! And when it does, it will be a big, ole celebration." If absence makes the heart grow fonder, we are all about to discover what it does for our BBQ appetites.

Thank you, Jordan Family, and we look forward to sitting at the shared table.



YOUTH MINISTRY NEWS

ONLY A FEW MORE WEEKS UNTIL HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR SUNDAY

**ATTN: Parents, grandparents, and guardians
of graduating high school seniors**

At the end of the school year, St. Stephen's Church honors our high school seniors in a special tribute and presentation of the senior blankets. We want to be sure to include your high school senior. Please email Elisa, elisawebster9@gmail.com, a digital headshot photo of your 2020 high school graduate.

SUMMER MISSION TRIP RESCHEDULED FOR 2021



With the need to continue social distancing due to COVID-19 and with safety of our children of the utmost concern, the Youth Summer Mission Trip has been canceled and rescheduled for summer 2021. Those that paid a deposit for the 2020 summer mission trip will be refunded. Contact Elisa if you have questions.

YOUTH ZOOM MEETINGS SUNDAYS 5 PM CDT

JH/HS Youth are invited to join Elisa this summer on Sundays at 5 p.m. CDT through Zoom. If you have not received your invite with the meeting information, contact her today. This month we're wrapping up our discussion on different types of prayer and growing our list of every day gratitude.

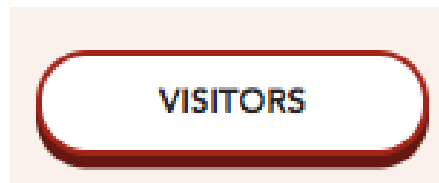
For more information, contact: Elisa Webster, elisawebster9@gmail.com.



GODLY PLAY SUMMER SERIES STARTS JUNE RECORDED & ONLINE

All ages are in for a treat this summer as Darelle Jordan shares "Godly Play" with us through a series running June, July, and August on St. Stephen's YouTube. Watch your next eNEWS for details.

In the meantime, to tide us over, we can sit back and enjoy a Pentecost Godly Play lesson with Darelle airing on YouTube and Facebook during the streamed Sunday, May 31 Holy Eucharist service. Make sure your email address is up to date and on file with the church office, office@ststeve.org. This is one you won't want to miss.



VISITOR WELCOME CARD ONLINE

If you know someone: a friend, neighbor, or family member, that has recently been visiting St. Stephen's Church virtually, please let them know about the [new visitor's card](#) on the church website. Even though we are worshipping virtually at the moment, we would love to begin getting to know your friend, neighbor, or extended family. On the [online form](#), they can indicate what kind of information that they would like sent to them and by whom they would like to be contacted. With your help, we can continue to help our newcomers.

If you have ideas on helping newcomers to the church, please share your suggestions by emailing, Newcomer Coordinator, [Lydia Baese](#), or Newcomer Team Leads, [Veronica Erwin](#) and [Carla Daws](#).



ANNOUNCE YOUR BIRTHDAY OR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

If you would like us to announce your birthday or wedding anniversary in the virtual order of worship, [click here](#) to complete the online form. Birthdays are grouped by month, rather than specific days.



ASK & ANSWER AVAILABLE 24/7

You can now find a form on the church website called "[Ask & Answer.](#)" It is available to you 24/7 for all those questions that you don't know quite who to ask. [Fill out the simple form online](#), and we'll get started on your answer.

ZOOM TIME GETS THEME SONG

Each Wednesday between 10:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Fr. Phil Mason waits, coffee cup in hand, to talk about whatever is on your mind. No appointment is needed, and you can use the same meeting ID and password to Zoom in.



[ZOOM TIME LINK](#)

Meeting ID: 824 792 5886

Password: 2468

Thank you to Carroll Wilson and Tom Dawson for creating the entertaining theme song. To listen, [click here](#), and in no time at all don't be surprised if you find yourself singing along to the catchy ditty.



WIMBERLEY GARDENERS ON THE GO

Fellow parishioner Greg Webb, Susan Webb's husband, has organized a signup for people to share their extra produce being grown now in their home vegetable gardens. The extra donated produce will be collected and taken to the Wimberley Crisis Bread Basket. You may not know this, but the number one request from people at the Crisis Bread Basket is for more produce. It's a great way to share your spring and summer bounty. "It doesn't have to be a lot," Greg says, "Just a few fresh summer tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, peppers--whatever you have."

To sign up as a gardener or a driver, [click here](#).

Community of Hope Ministry



Do you need someone...

*To listen, without judgment, to what is weighing on your heart?
To recognize your needs and respect your rights to your feelings?
To honor any conversation with complete confidentiality?
To support you as you take steps of change on your journey?
To just walk with you and let you be you?*

Each one of us, at some point in our lives, could use a "companion" to walk with us during the challenges of our journeys. A Community of Hope Lay Chaplain is someone

who cares about you, will not promise miracles, will not decide for you what you should do, will not take steps for you, and will not rescue you. He or she will be available to you, support you, pray for you, and assure you that you are God's beloved. Please, if you are walking alone, invite one to join you on your path.

For more information during MAY contact:

Nancy Cooke-Jenkins, nmjenkins@austin.rr.com or Kristen Schmidt, tkschmidt@anvil.com.



UPCOMING SUBMISSION DEADLINES

The eNEWS is published on Fridays generally every two weeks and delivered straight to your e-mail's in-box. If you have an e-mail address update, please make sure to send these to the church office, office@ststeve.org.

With more than 25 ministries and groups here at St. Stephen's Church, we've got a lot happening! Help us cover your event by submitting articles, photos, and artwork to: Communications Manager, Jackie McFadden, eeant@mac.com.

UPCOMING DEADLINES:
12 noon Wednesday or earlier

May 27
June 10

IN THE LIFE OF SSEC



Life at St. Stephen's is certainly out of the ordinary right now during COVID-19. Although church worship services continue to be 100% virtual for the time being, it's nice to know that parishioners are finding their own unique ways to customize their St. Stephen's worship experience. Some invite their pets to sit alongside them and some, like Albert Sander, find company with their farm animals.

Thank you for keeping us up to date on what is going on at St. Stephen's. Appreciate all

you do. I listened to Sunday's service while touching up exterior paint. This probably sounds strange but it was a very different experience. For some reason, the service took on a different meaning for me and seemed more personal. Maybe it was hearing the birds and having the cows and calves come up for water but it was different. I have always felt that the continuity of the service has been special. It doesn't matter if I am in Europe, New Zealand, Turkey, Africa, Thailand, South America, or Russia, it is a constant in my life. Have a good day and stay safe. - Al (Albert Sander)



SUN, MAY 17

Holy Eucharist Sunday Service (online), 10:30 a.m. (YouTube, Facebook)

SUN, MAY 24

Holy Eucharist Sunday Service (online), 10:30 a.m. (YouTube, Facebook)

SUN, MAY 31

Holy Eucharist Sunday Service (online), 10:30 a.m. (YouTube, Facebook)

**Are you on Facebook? YouTube? Instagram?
St. Stephen's is!**

**Click here to visit our Facebook page
and don't forget to LIKE and SHARE us!**

Please contact the church office at 512.847.9956, Monday through Thursday,
8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. and 8:30 a.m. - 12 noon Fridays if you have any questions.

Join Our Mailing List!

Stay Connected

