

The First Order

St. Stephen's Parish

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SEPTEMBER 2021

Beloved Community of St. Stephen's,

As I write we are in the midst of another spike in the pandemic, which is causing a lot of frustration and anxiety. And yet, we still plan and look to the future, knowing that the landscape continues to shift and changes may have to be made.

There's so much happening these days that it's difficult to know where to start. Please watch the weekly news bulletins for the latest information, and news of changes.



Most immediately, **Streaming:**

We are hard at work to improve the worship experience of those who rely upon our streaming the in-person service. We truly appreciate everyone's patience as we've had to patch things together these past several weeks. Please, don't give up on us! New equipment purchased to assist with streaming was purchased this week (8/17), and it's our hope that you'll notice an improvement on Sundays.

Worship:

We will begin worshipping at 10am on Sunday, September 12th. Unfortunately, given the increased safety concerns currently, we will not be offering additional in-person worship services.

Creation Season:

September marks the beginning of the Episcopal Church's season of Creation. From September 5 through October 3 we will be celebrating Creation Season at St. Stephen's - both on Sundays and in a new, seasonal online worship offering. The Sunday liturgy is crafted specifically to celebrate and honor Creation, with prayers highlighting Climate justice, and readings from Genesis 1, and extra-Biblical sources. We will be adding our prayers to those of thousands and thousands of others across the Church.

Here's the schedule:

- Sept 5: Creation One - Creation and Bringing Order from Chaos
- Sept 12: Creation Two - Earth and Sky
- Sept 19: Creation Three - Water (and Baptisms!)

Sept 26: Creation Four - Tilling the soil

Oct 3: Creation Five - People and Animals in relationship

St. Francis Day - we will celebrate on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 3rd, at St. Helena's.

Compline for the Climate:

A newly crafted worship service that will be offered online (by zoom), the Wednesdays during Creation Season. It's my hope that we will be joined by speakers who would share a 5-minute reflection during the service, and be available after the service for informal conversation with those interested.

Dates and Themes:

- Sept 8: Pray
- Sept 15: Learn
- Sept 22: Act
- Sept 29: Advocate

Adult Formation:

If you have been moved to awareness by events in our collective experience over the past two years and are ready to dig into your own relationship with race and how you may continue toward racial reconciliation personally, and as part of Beloved Community and our society as a whole, **Sacred Ground** is for YOU.

Tell Me MORE!!

Sacred Ground is a film- and readings-based dialogue series on race, grounded in faith. Small groups are invited to walk through chapters of America's history of race and racism, while weaving in threads of family story, economic class, and political and regional identity. The 10-part series is built around a powerful online curriculum of documentary films and readings that focus on Indigenous, Black, Latino, and Asian/Pacific American histories as they intersect with European American histories.

Sacred Ground is part of *Becoming Beloved Community*, The Episcopal Church's long-term commitment to racial healing, reconciliation, and justice in our personal lives, our ministries, and our society. Participants are invited to peel away the layers that have contributed to the challenges and

from the Rector

divides of the present day – all while grounded in our call to faith, hope and love.

This is a film and reading based series which requires commitment on the part of the participants – while structured and carefully curated, it will still require your attention and preparation. “Making a commitment to the full 10 sessions is a powerful sign that we are engaging in what is actually a lifelong journey. It took centuries, and one’s own entire lifetime, for harmful racial patterns to be put in place; it takes an investment of time and attention to undo the internal and external harms.”

Sacred Ground at St. Stephen's:

Because the program involves watching portions of films and reading articles and portions of books, the group doesn't meet weekly, but on a schedule that allows time between meetings to read, watch, mark and inwardly digest our response to the material.

It's my hope that we will be joined by members of Zion Lutheran, Second Congregational, Cathedral of the Beloved, and others for this 10-part series. It's also my hope that there will be more than one Sacred Ground Circle offered – and that I'll have more information to share. But at this moment we are definitely planning on offering a Sacred Ground Circle on Thursday evenings, 6-7:30pm (keep in mind that the 10 sessions are spread across several months; we don't meet weekly).

We're only able to take up to 14 people for each circle, so please be sure to sign up if you are interested in participating. (Sign up by emailing Sarah in the office.) Our first session will be on Sept. 16, 6-7:30pm. (In-person or zoom – TBD).

Post Card Project:

Hopefully, you've received a post card by a member of our Post Card Project team. We hope it made you smile. Why don't you pass it on? Send a quick note/text/email, or make a quick “just to say Hi” call to someone you miss seeing at St. Stephen's.

Looking forward to seeing you soon,
God bless and keep you,
Nina+



Flower images from Debbie and Roy Stillman's garden, flowers grown from the Easter wildflower seed packet given out at our Easter Parking lot service.

Greetings St. Stephen's teens!

The Young People's Fellowship will be resuming activities this fall and we want you to be there! The YPF is open to all youth in middle and high school, whether church-going or not, so invite your friends to join the fun. This base schedule for the fall alternates service opportunities with fellowship. If participants and families want to add to this base with other fun ideas, chime in!

Looking forward to seeing you!

Matt Behnke
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mbehnke@pittsfield.net

Young People's Fellowship fall 2021 schedule

September

9/11- Saturday Habitat for Humanity workday
TBD (possible rescheduled fishing day?)

October

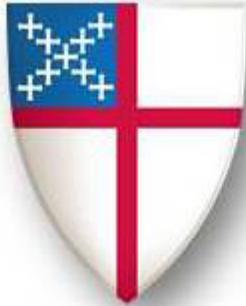
10/24 Sunday- Jiminy Mountain Coaster/ziplines (haunted mountain?) (leave from church after service)

November

11/20-23 Thanksgiving Angels Food distribution volunteering

December

To Be Determined....



During a time of discord and rebellion in the ancient Holy Land, the biblical prophet Jeremiah recorded the grief of a bereaved mother. “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Too often today, we find ourselves weeping as Rachel did because God’s children are being taken from us by a rising tide of gun violence. As the Episcopal bishops in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, we lament this senseless carnage and the inaction of too many of our elected officials who allow it to go unchecked.

Recently, however, we have found hope in the Biden Administration’s strategy to reduce gun violence and crime. We commend President Biden’s executive order to reduce the sale of privately made ghost guns, encourage red flag laws that keep guns out of the hands of people who present a danger to themselves or others, regulate equipment that turns pistols into more deadly rifles, and require federal research on the scourge of illegal gun trafficking. We join him in urging Congress to pass, at long last, expansion of background checks for firearm purchases and a federal ban on assault weapons. And we welcome his administration’s commitment to invest in evidence-based community violence interventions, including programs and employment opportunities for teenagers and young adults and help for formerly incarcerated people reentering their communities. We applaud this wise allocation of public resources for the common good.

The Episcopal Church has long advocated with local, state and federal leaders for sensible laws that would help end the public health epidemic of gun violence. As faith leaders, we have also invited gun manufacturers to work with us in addressing this issue together for the well-being of our communities. Yet shootings in Massachusetts and across the United States continue to surge: 2021 is on track to be this country’s deadliest year of gun violence in two decades. Without these new initiatives to address both the guns that flood our streets and the root causes of poverty, racism, and hopelessness, we fear that the epidemic of violence will only worsen.

Another ancient prophet, Isaiah, showed us a better path when he wrote, “You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” With the support of elected leaders and the courage of faithful advocates, we pray that we can bring about an end to weeping and repair the breach caused by gun violence here in Massachusetts and across the United States.

The Rt. Rev. Douglas J. Fisher, Diocese of Western Massachusetts
 The Rt. Rev. Alan M. Gates, Diocese of Massachusetts
 The Rt. Rev. Gayle E. Harris, Diocese of Massachusetts

September

Happy Birthday:

- 2 Anne Jones, Nicholas Trapani,
Maria Zuckerman
- 3 Susan Cahill
- 4 Melissa Morin
- 5 Robert Langsdale
- 6 Alex Demary, Jean Gray
- 7 Janice Furcinite
- 8 Beth-Anne Hamling
- 9 Everett Heiss
- 10 Virginia Donovan
- 11 Matthew Fenton, Louis Senecal
- 13 Donna Chandler, Audrey Harrington,
Mary Wheelock
- 14 Daniel Doyle
- 18 Steven Wheelock
- 19 Jezzmyne Dowling-Black
- 22 James Behnke
- 24 Aloha Winchester
- 25 George Church III
- 26 Christopher Fenton
- 29 Susan Smith, David Adams,
Helene Robillard
- 30 Katie Haviland

Happy Anniversary:

- 1 Sarah Novak & Glenn Novak
- 3 Leila Drury & Tom Drury
- 12 Jayne Church & George Church III
- 15 Suzanne White & Joe White
- 23 Lois Symonds & Alfred Symonds
- 25 Diana MacFarlane & Bill MacFarlane

Financial Update

submitted by Leah Luczynski, Treasurer

As of the end of July, we are net positive \$7,512. We received our 2nd quarter general investment income totaling \$17,106. Year to date, we are underbudget in pledging; \$2,000 for loose plate offerings, about \$1,800 in regular pledge money, and about \$1,800 in non-pledge receipts (money received from Givers of Record/non-pledger).

As you can see from the bar graphs below outlining the average income and expenses for July 2018 – 2020 (BLUE) as compared to July 2021 (ORANGE), income is up this July than the average of the previous 3 years. Expenses are also up but as mentioned before, that’s mostly due to salaries and benefits. To date, we have not taken any money from the endowment to offset expenses.

