

SPRING 2022 ..... Issue No. 18  
*Stories of God at work in our lives*

ANASTASIS | ἀνάστασις

[Greek for 'Resurrection' or 'Rising Up']





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**ST. STEPHEN**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church

..... *Anastasis is a quarterly publication of* .....

**ST STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH**

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Our congregation responds to Christ's love by feeding those who hunger in body, mind, and spirit. The stories in this issue are examples of times we have experienced God in our lives. We invite you to encounter Jesus each Sunday morning in worship (both online and onsite following social distancing protocols) or through any other of the programs and events listed throughout this publication.

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God works through each of us and uses us to help each other.

PHOTO CREDIT: Dave Ruck for UNSPLASH.

## THIS ISSUE'S SCRIPTURE FOCUS: 2 Corinthians 5:17 NRSV

So if anyone is  
in Christ,  
there is a  
new creation:  
everything old has  
passed away;  
see,  
everything has  
become new!

*a time to ...*  
**ADAPT**

Our Church Council is engaging in a book discussion at the start of each meeting. The book we are currently reading is *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Unchartered Territory* by Tod Bolsinger.

This book tells the story of Lewis and Clark and their expedition across the North American continent to find a navigable route to the Pacific Ocean. The belief at the time was that they could just canoe down the Missouri River right to the Pacific. And as they went, they came across something that caused them to re-think everything—the Rocky Mountains. Not only are canoes not useful in mountains, they are actually a hindrance. New thinking and creativity are necessary.

Bolsinger makes the following statement in his book: “Churches need to keep adventuring or they will die.” (pg. 38)

This is a time and a season of adaptation. We’ve been adapting since the beginning of the pandemic. Living things do that in

order to survive and thrive. And the church is the living body of Christ.

And so, as we navigate our way through this time, we will come upon our own version of the Rocky Mountains.

We’ll need to ask ourselves some important questions. Questions like:

What do we need to take with us? And what do we need to discard because it is no longer helpful?

What are we yearning for? What are the challenges we face?

How do we respond faithfully to the road ahead with grace and mercy, adventure and creativity?

It is my hope that this issue will assist you in your reflection and your journey.



Pastor Matthew Best



# WHAT'S OUR VISION?

by Rev. Matthew Best



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*“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”*

– 2 Corinthians 5:17

Paul wrote this to the church in Corinth. This church, of all the churches that Paul was associated with, had some serious challenges. As I’ve often said, the church in Corinth is a prime example of how *not* to be church. Yet Paul stuck with them, writing to them multiple times (most likely beyond the two letters we have in our New Testaments).

Such a passage as 2 Corinthians 5:17 makes me think that Paul was looking at the church, at what was going on in the world around him, and at how God was always up to something. His message is really something that the church has been proclaiming for a very long time – life, death, and resurrection. The old passes away and everything becomes new! If that’s not a message of resurrection, I don’t know what is.

As much as we want to hold onto the past and the way things used to be—when the pews were full and more—we can’t. Living things change and adapt. They go through the cycle of life, death, and resurrection.

And that is true for the church as well – whether it’s a dysfunctional church like the one in Corinth or a much healthier church focused on mission, discipleship, and service.

It’s with all that in mind that I wrote the following blog post last month about a vision for the future of the church.

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The current model of the church is no longer sustainable. Some may think such a statement controversial but evidence shows that how the church is structured, functions, and operates hasn’t been sustainable for a while now. How many articles have you read about the decline of the Western church? By some measurements, the decline started in the early 1950s after it crested following the chaos caused by World War II. It makes sense there would be huge growth in the church then, as people were searching for meaning, belonging, and safety when the world offered war and financial chaos. But when the war ended and people started to get on with life, there was less of a need for the church. However, the culture still catered to the church and so many people remained a part of it because it was an expectation, a social outlet, a good place to make contacts for business, etc. (many reasons not associated with the church’s main tenets). That’s

not to say that there weren't those interested in faith and discipleship—there certainly were. But it would be hard to argue that everyone was interested in that.

We are still using the model of the post-world war church, though we are several generations removed from the circumstances that created that model. And guess what? It no longer works. And it is no longer sustainable. I'd like to propose a new model for the church in the West, a model that might work given our current circumstances. A model that I also know will need to change again within a generation because circumstances will have changed by that time if not sooner.

Models are not meant to be set in stone. They are something that you use for a while then retire when they are no longer valid or useful. Changing a model isn't about success or failure of the model. It's an acknowledgement that what once worked no longer does because things have changed. The assumptions that we had are no longer valid. The communal agreements no longer hold.

Companies do this all the time. So do nations. Militaries, universities, and even families make necessary changes based on changing circumstances. Take my own family for example. My wife and I have four children. When they were young, how we interacted with them was different than how we interact with them as teenagers who are in high school and college. The model for interaction changed because circumstances changed. It's not that the earlier model was bad. It's just no longer valid or useful. A new model was needed and we adapted and changed to meet the needs.

For too long, the church seems to have refused to go through this necessary examination and adjustment, preferring to do the impossible—keeping things the way they are, even though the world around the church, the people in the church, and everything else changed.

That's not healthy or natural. It's a recipe for death. In nature, creatures that refuse to adapt go extinct.

## OUR CURRENT MODEL

Let's take a look at the current model of the church in America, which typically looks like this (there are variations, of course):

- ✦ One pastor per congregation (or several smaller parishes) who does the majority of the ministry on behalf of the congregation.
- ✦ Each congregation has their own supplies, building, staff, resources, money, and land.
- ✦ Each congregation tries to do as many things as they can

on their own, often replicating services and ministries of other nearby congregations.

- ✦ The vast majority of church funding is collected during Sunday morning worship.
- ✦ Most congregations operate via a committee structure of regular monthly meetings with an agenda. Decisions may be made but often need to be signed off on by some other group within the church.
- ✦ Most church activities are done onsite with members and visitors expected to come there as the base of activity.
- ✦ Church membership is considered important and offers a form of identity, belonging and community.
- ✦ Attendance at worship is the key way for people to be a part of the church and is the first way to get people engaged. Worship will lead to service, growth, etc.



This model is neither good nor bad. For many congregations for many years, that model worked great. That's the model many people in the church believe in because it is familiar and worked well in the past. This is why so many want to go back to certain things ... as if going back will somehow bring back greater attendance for early morning Sunday worship or higher Sunday worship giving or more participation in church committees.

None of those assumptions are correct though. If they were, the church would be in a different place than it is currently. I'm Gen X. And while I can't speak for everyone of my generation, I feel pretty confident that many Gen Xer's feel the same. The younger generations do too.

Here's what I know: I've never been in a full congregation in my entire life (except maybe Easter or Christmas). It's not the norm by which I measure church. It's an oddity. Attendance does not equal belief. Membership does not equal discipleship. People who work throughout the week, especially



those with kids, are exhausted and the last thing they want to do is wake up early, get dressed up, and go to church on a Sunday morning, if at all. My generation and younger don't use checkbooks; many don't even have a checking account and wouldn't know how to write out a check if they had one. We don't fear technology. We find it helpful and use it throughout the day every day. In fact, we use apps to help our spiritual lives grow and don't find this odd at all. We find it weird that the church doesn't use technology as much as it could. We hate committees because they are like eternal commitments that seem like the most important thing they do is meet for the sake of meeting. We have been screwed over by institutions and don't trust them. Why would we want to identify with them?



## A NEW CHURCH MODEL

Here's the model I propose for the church in America:

✦ **There is no one-size-fits-all solution.** We aren't interested in the fights over who is right and who is wrong. We're interested in seeing what works in a given context. People

need to be empowered, rather than told what to do. When people have ownership, amazing things happen. Plus—or maybe even primarily—this empowering opens the door for the Spirit to do what the Spirit wants to do.

✦ **The role of the pastor needs to change.** Over the last two years, things that pastors were never trained to do became essential parts of our jobs, on top of what we were already doing. No wonder pastors are leaving at alarming rates. We need to rethink the role of the pastor from the person with all the knowledge, information, and answers to one who walks with people, empowering them to do ministry. A person who knows where the resources are and can shift those resources to match up with what the Spirit is actively doing. A person who facilitates faith growth and discipleship rather than tells people what they have to believe. A person who encourages critical thinking and the asking of questions and who offers a courageous space for doubt to exist without shame or judgement. A person who equips people to do ministry instead of doing it on behalf of everyone.

✦ **Team ministry is the way to go.** Solo ministry leads to burn out. I envision a group of congregations (however you want to define that) getting together and discerning several things. They would need to discern what the congregation is called to—what is the ministry focus? Not everyone should do all ministries. But if congregations are in partnership, then they can identify who does what well and connects those people with ministries they are called to, regardless of where it is being done. On the same token, a team approach to pastoral ministry would look similar. It would take the gifts and talents of pastors for a group of congregations and discern what roles they would have. Not all pastors are visionary. Not all are good at pastoral care. Not all are detail people. But in a team, you are more likely to have people who cover all the bases for multiple congregations and you have ministers doing more of what they are good at, working together to help the congregations move forward in ministry. It's a real partnership. (Include deacons and other professional religious folks in this same approach as well.)

✦ **Funding for ministry has to go beyond the offering plate on a Sunday morning.** Given the advances in technology and how churches are starting to tap into it, there are many opportunities for new funding models for ministry. Congregations who are blessed with land have options and opportunities for how they use those resources and can receive funding for their use.

✦ **We haven't even begun to tap into what Christian formation looks like in a hybrid age.** When automobiles





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first came out, they were referred to as horseless carriages, and driven that way, because people fell back on what they knew. It took an attitudinal shift to leave the carriage behind and recognize what a car was and what it could do. Our faith formation is driving a horseless carriage right now. I look forward to seeing the attitudinal shift of what faith formation becomes as it utilizes all the technology we now have. It requires holy imagination and experimentation.

✦ **New ministry and mission needs to be the focus.**

Trying to save all the existing institutions and models and congregations is a losing battle. That doesn't mean write everyone and everything off. Far from it. It means that we should be looking at our communities and seeing where God is already active and becoming a part of that. This approach is what it means to be a community hub. Not everyone wants to be in a sanctuary on a Sunday morning. That's fine. But doing a ministry on your own is difficult and often ends in failure. What if instead of fail or succeed, we approached this as a community hub. Think of a wheel with spokes coming out from it. All of its ministries are connected. They don't all work the same or look the same or happen at the same place, though they all have value and support one another.

✦ **Digital isn't an add on but a core part of ministry.**

We have to shift our thinking from being an in-person church with an online option to an online church with an in-person option. I heard this not long ago at a conference I attended and it is true. This means a reexamination of the church. It means looking at the budget, our staff, our properties, tech needs, how we operate and function, how ministry happens, etc.

✦ **Form teams instead of committees.** This not a rhetorical difference but rather a cultural shift. Committees gather for meetings. Teams get to work. People aren't interested in meeting to talk about things. They are interested in getting to work to solve problems and, when they are done, disbanding until something else needs to be addressed. Having said all of that, strategy is needed, along with coordination. But, again, this is looking for people who have those skillsets and empowering them to do what they are called to do, so that they can in turn empower others to do the detail and hands-on work that follows.

✦ **Advocacy is an essential part of discipleship.** It's not an add-on or something to be feared. Advocacy goes beyond charity. Charity deals with the wound that exists, offering





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comfort and healing. Advocacy tries to prevent the hurt in the first place or to end the hurting that is going on so that we can start to help others. Both charity and advocacy are needed. But the church of the past has focused on charity and been silent on advocacy, at least in terms of the average church member.

✦ **We are called to make disciples, not members.**

All it takes for someone to be a member is to show up, to commune once, and to give a penny in the offering. That's it. Of course, there are many dedicated members in churches across this country who go far beyond this minimum requirements. These folks are a blessing and make ministry a joy. But the concept of membership in church needs to be examined. This relates to how decisions are made and who makes them. This requires a better understanding of context in which ministry is happening. It includes engaging with and empowering those who are on the receiving end of ministry as well as those who are offering the ministry. That's true accompaniment.

✦ **Stewardship is discipleship.** Stewardship is more than fundraising. (Also, we have to get past the fear of talking about money.) There are great resources that offer

wonderful models for equipping a stewardship environment and culture.

✦ **Youth aren't just the future, they are now.** Far too many churches are noticing that they have few or even no youth in their midst. Why is that? There are no nice easy answers. Want more youth, then spend resources on them. Spend time with them. A congregation that makes youth a priority—not just in terms of words but in putting time and money where their mouth is, alongside their investment in adults—will see results. This will benefit the youth for sure but, even more than that, it will benefit the entire congregation. It will make our thinking younger, more creative, more willing to explore and imagine. It will force us to examine our faith and to share it in ways that are realistic and practical.

✦ **Talking about difficult topics and issues.** If we can't talk about racism, sexism, nationalism, poverty, drugs, sex, money, work, violence, homelessness, crime (and more!) in church, then where in the world can we? And by talking about these things, I don't mean parroting lines we've heard on cable news shows or from politicians. I mean really *talk* about issues and how they impact



communities. How they impact real people. How they impact *us*. Part of this is listening to those who have been impacted – people who may have different experiences than us. When that happens, we learn. We gain new perspectives. We move from the right or wrong duality narrative to seeing complexity and perplexity and the mess and the complications of life. We can then look at these situations through the lens of faith and how our faith calls us to respond or be active.

✦ **Stop using attendance and offering as the sole measuring sticks.** These measurements are fine but they don't tell the full picture. We should decide what we else need to track as a church. Bigger isn't always better. More isn't always what we want. We need to be intentional in what we measure and have reasons for why we are measuring things. And this relates to the first point ... context matters. The larger church can do a better job in helping congregations determine what they can measure within their context to help them know if they are on the right track. There isn't a universal measurement that works for everyone. But there are things that churches should measure.

✦ **Holy imagination is essential, including in worship.** The pandemic has been terrible in so many respects. It has been a blessing as well. Because of the pandemic, many churches made decisions and changes that they could have otherwise put off for another decade. They experimented and tried things. They adjusted. And

that's a beautiful thing that should continue to happen. Maybe Sunday morning isn't the best time to worship for a given community; then worship on another day or time. Maybe in-person worship isn't what is needed any more; then go hybrid or online. Maybe the building in which you worship needs to be changed in order to accommodate hybrid worship. Maybe the pews need to be removed in order to move the altar to the center of the sanctuary. Maybe worship happens in various locations beyond the building. Maybe worship looks different or takes a new twist each week. Maybe worship looks different with different groups of people gathered. We are in a new era in which imagination and creativity are the keys. It's what will allow us to recognize that God is encountering us in our worship and in our daily lives.

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I'm sure I could have added more to this. But here's the thing: this is a model. Is it perfect? No, not for everyone. And if you ask what model will work five years from now, I'm willing to bet my answers will be different. That's the beauty of this.

It's time for a new model. Let's get to work. †



*Rejoice! It's the return of ...*

## **Dinner with Friends**

*... Third Saturday of each month at 5:30pm ...*

**ST STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH**

**30 WEST MAIN ST., NEW KINGSTOWN, PA 17072**

Upcoming dates: 5/21, 6/18, 7/16, 8/20, 9/17

Enjoy a delicious home-cooked meal followed by some kind of relaxed activity or entertainment. No RSVP necessary. Contact the church office to volunteer.

At this point, these meals are scheduled through September, pending any pandemic restrictions that may arise. Check in closer to the date of each gathering to confirm that they are cleared to proceed.

**(717) 766-2168 .... [www.StStephenLC.org](http://www.StStephenLC.org)**





# EVERYTHING HAS BECOME NEW!

by Tom Burson

This issue's theme is "A Time to Adapt" referencing 2 Corinthians 5:17: "*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*"

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It seems like we have been in our current situation for a while ... maybe for the last two years or so ... constantly needing to adapt to those things happening around us that affect our lives. But now, as spring arrives, it does seem like more is changing than just the new season. We are coming out of the socialization restrictions that affected so many of us in undesirable ways. So, when we read the scripture passage assigned to this issue of *Anastasis*, it seems particularly relevant ... "everything has become new!"

Of course, Paul was not writing about our situation when he wrote those words to the church in Corinth. But, as we study the Bible texts, we look not only to perceive what they meant at the time but to understand what they might teach us today. Paul seems to be trying to make the point that he (and everyone who believes in Christ) has become a new person in that he has a different point of view about his life and relationships with others. He shares that, before he encountered Christ, he viewed many of the claims and teachings of Jesus to be blasphemous and thought dying on the cross to be God's curse. But, since becoming a believer in Christ, he has been convinced that God's new creation has begun. "God has reconciled us to himself through Christ" (5:18).

Paul's explanation of his becoming a new person in Christ are just as relevant to us today. We go through a transformation that may be dramatic or subtle. Paul was a very passionate person and he seemed to never do anything half-way. When he persecuted the followers of Christ, he did it with great enthusiasm and zeal. And when he found Christ in his

life, he was no less enthusiastic. We probably cannot and should not expect to have Paul's zeal. However, we should find that different point of view in ourself as Paul discusses in how we look at ourself and those around us.

One of the things we do in Lent is to meditate on forgiveness and repentance. We remember our sins, both known and unknown, and ask God to forgive us. We repent. This can bring about reconciliation but God has already reconciled with us. We just have to recognize and accept it. We especially struggle with the forgiveness of ourselves, being our own worse critics. When we truly repent, we are "turning around" and becoming new. We are facing a new direction and have dropped the baggage of guilt.

Learning how to become fully new can be a challenge. You may spend time meditating and reading and planning how to be the new person in Christ that you wish to be. A lot can and should be done by yourself but it is important to work on your faith with others who support you and are trying to go in the same direction. One of the easiest ways to do that is through the ministries at places like St. Stephen, especially Sunday Church School. That is where, in small groups, we get to actively challenge our understanding of the Bible and what it says to us today. We learn about the struggles of people and groups as well as how well they listened to God and learned or did not learn how to live fruitful lives. Likewise, we hear about each other's struggles and successes and support each other as we each journey through our life.

We are constantly looking for something new in order to improve our life, those we love, and even our enemies. We ask that you pray for our educational ministries and its teams as we try to provide service to all whom we encounter. †



# BROKEN BRANCHES

*by Julie Grove*

PHOTO CREDIT: This page—Mila Tovar, Next page—Demian Tejeda, both for UNSPLASH

It's that time of year again ... time for the annual picking up of the broken branches. As I stand in my front yard looking around, I see a hard morning's work ahead of me. Sometimes, I think all the trees come together and have a great big sneeze so all their branches and sticks come down at once. What a mess! As I think to myself "Well they aren't going to gather themselves up," I start putting branches into piles. I hear my husband Art start the backhoe up to bring it out to me. We use the bucket to haul them all away.

I start to gather some in my arms then notice Art climbing out of the cab. He begins gathering up branches to put in the bucket as well. While I know he has work to be doing himself, without my asking, he just starts helping. As I look at him, I think to myself, "Where did I see God today?" I definitely see him in my husband as he joins me on this project.

Then my mind starts to wander, as it always does when I work outside. These are some thoughts that I had: Why did God send his son to us as a baby, like a new spring tree of life? He let us see his early days of nurturing, his love and compassion, from the very beginning, like a farmer tends to his new trees as the leaves open in a warm spring breeze.

He lets us see Jesus as he grows into manhood, as his "leaves" come out in all their glory. Jesus teaches us all about God's love and mercy. He helps to shield us from a life of trials and pain. He teaches us how to live and saves us from the burning hot rays of misery and suffering just as the trees shade keep us from a late summer sun. But even then, some come out from the shade of the tree of life to get burned in the afternoon sun.

Before we know it, autumn arrives and the leaves are changing their colors. All the beauty of red, oranges, and yellows surround us, just as some of us are beginning to show our colors of gray and white. We think we are done for this season in life; however, the Lord has much more for us to do. So we come together to gather up God's people, to help the lost ones and feed them in mercy and love, passing on God's welcome to those who may think they are too broken to be of use. Like a farmer gathers up leaves to protect the young plants that come in the spring, so we gently rake together those in need of God's everlasting love and a place to rest their weary heads.

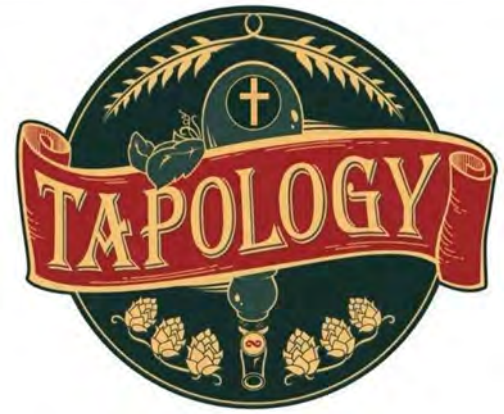


We all know there will be cold and snowy days ahead. But we also know that our Lord will open the door for us when that days come. He will let us in with all his love and forgiveness. He will keep us warm in his everlasting house of love and beauty. He will be there in our darkest and loneliest times, when our branches fall for the last time. Oh, how his light will show the way to eternal glory in the house of God!

As I continue to pick up the branches and sticks in the yard, I wonder "Is this how Jesus does it? Does he bring us in one by one?" Yes, God walks around gathering all the fallen branches of our lives. Next year, he will start all over again with the new trees that sprout from the earth and the new branches that have fallen to the ground.

Oh, I love to work outside! I see God in my husband, I see God in broken branches. Yes, even broken branches can tell a story if you are willing to stop and quietly listen and open your heart to what they are saying.

Thank you, God, for all the seasons and parts of our lives ... yes, even the broken branches! †



Come to **TAPOLGY**, where we talk about theology and issues that matter over some cold drinks. All are welcome.

**FIRST SUNDAYS 5:00-7:00pm**



Hosted at:

**DESPERATE TIMES BREWERY  
1201 CARLISLE SPRINGS RD  
CARLISLE, PA 17013**

*Tapology was founded in 2017 by two local churches: St. Paul Lutheran Church in Carlisle and St. Stephen Lutheran Church in New Kingstown. Since then, more and more people have joined to enjoy food, alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages, friendship, and fellowship. Each month, we discuss a different topic related to faith. We invite the questioners, the doubters, the believers, and all people from all walks of life, denominations, and faith traditions to join for this monthly event. Find details about upcoming events and more at:*

**[Facebook.com/TapologyCarlisle](https://www.facebook.com/TapologyCarlisle)**



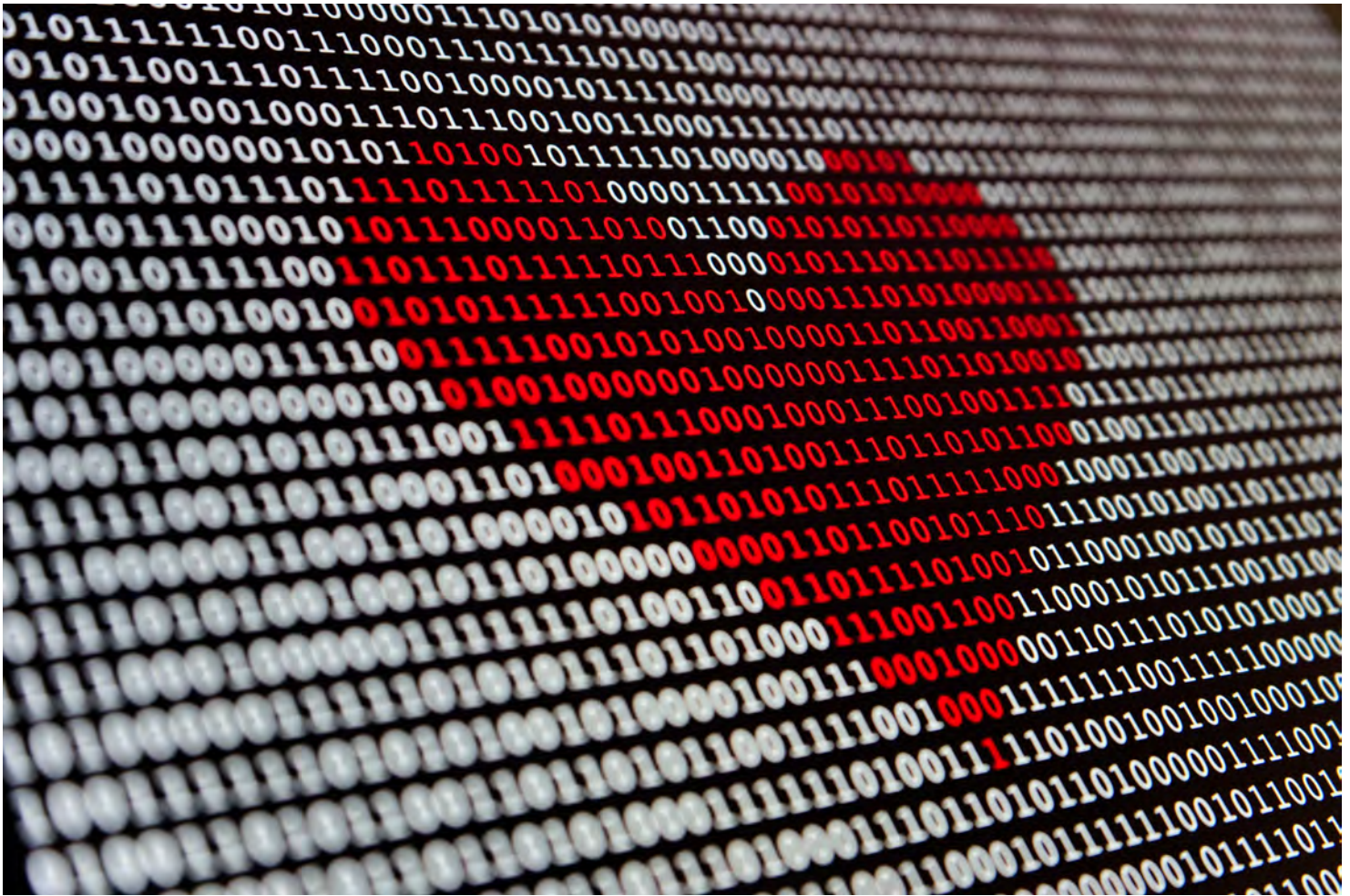


PHOTO CREDIT: Alexander Sinn for UNSPLASH

# SALVADORAN MINISTRIES BECOME CREATIVE

*by Caroline Sheaffer*

Annual trips to El Salvador allowed for planned opportunities to meet with our pastors, congregations, and friends in order to strengthen our long-term relationships. We also could visit our scholarship students personally to form new relationships. I called it “eyeball-to-eyeball” ministry. We would cram as many interviews as possible into our concentrated amount of time. We taped and I took notes over most meals, between sessions at a church conference, in the backseat of a truck driving into rural campesino areas, between election monitoring duties, all to use for our embracingelsalvador.org website. All the while Don was snapping photos galore.

Often our friends would suggest and arrange an interview of a specific person they felt would be a worthy candidate for

our historical memory (story) project. We interviewed folks from all walks of life: four former gang members in hiding, a prisoner convicted of patricide (and her lawyer), world-known artists and musicians, the most prestigious pediatric oncologist in Central America, clergy, sugar cane workers, and expats giving up lucrative careers to live lives of humility. Every person indulged our requests for interviews. We encountered some interesting folks to interview at guesthouses, at the airport, wherever we were. These stories were all threads woven together to form a tapestry of viewpoints and a peek into the Salvadoran reality. Sharing them has been our privilege. A few storytellers have died validating our project to share their stories.



The unforeseen, serendipitous moments are generally my favorites on any trip – those fluky encounters that just happen – our car breaking down on a volcano, celebrating U.S. presidential elections with a group of American Peace Corps workers, inviting two scholarship students to lunch and 22 family members showing up, being invited to sit in on a local negotiation of coffee finca owners, spending the Day of the Dead at a cemetery, joining friends on turtle releases, helping a volunteer group cook meals and then serving people who are homeless under bridges in the dead of night in places churches refuse to go, and a tedious drive over a narrow, eroded mountain road in the dark without guardrails, lighting, or road markings of any kind. One somber, shocking note was visiting someone we had helped years ago only to discover he and two of his sons had been kidnapped; his sons were murdered by a gang. Every experience is also part of our work.

At one time, Don would personally select scholarship recipients based on recommendations from pastors within communities all around El Salvador. He had a knack for choosing responsible and capable young people who have made a difference in their country. Our goal has always been for these youth to have educational opportunities that expand the options in their lives beyond crossing the border to the U.S., joining a gang, or living dismal lives cutting sugar cane.

Now health-related issues related to age in our local leadership are taking a toll and annual trips are no longer an option for us. How can we continue to do Salvadoran ministries without personally being there? How can we adapt? We have spent much time pondering and “chewing on” this.

The first conscious adaptation we made several years ago was to consider choosing an in-country coordinator for our scholarship program rather than continuing to travel across the country choosing students ourselves. Pastor Cristian Chavarria has graciously accepted this new role. He has also agreed to include the two remaining students we have been supporting who are finishing their studies but who live outside his area. This has been a godsend to us. We work closely with Cristian knowing he has many other demands on his time and responsibilities within his synod.

At the same time, we decided to limit our new scholarship students to one community rather than throughout the entire country. (While El Salvador appears to be a small country if you only look at a map, it is largely rural with roads zigzagging around and up and down its twenty volcanoes, making travel slow and tedious.)

We are exploring ways (without actually being there in person) to be supportive of our scholarship students with Cris-

tian. His sending us videos of the students in action as well as sharing their thoughts helps give us insight into their world. We are also included in group chats on WhatsApp with them.

When you let people know your situation, they are willing to help. One night, I was responding to a newly-retired pastor friend, an expat from Canada living in El Salvador, about a number of things. He said he hoped to see us soon. I explained this may not happen and how this impacted a number of our ministries, including our story project. I asked if he knew of one or two persons we could interview via WhatsApp, Skype, or Zoom. Within two minutes, he not only had a willing candidate but also was ready to immediately set up the interview with his friend, now living in Northern Ireland; however, he explained that, since it's 3:30AM there, could we wait until tomorrow? Now *that* is a friend who is helping us adapt!

One of our university scholarship students began telling us via WhatsApp about her extensive 300-hour social service project in a Salvadoran men's prison – *her* choice. It was so intriguing and she was so appreciative of the opportunity she has to study, thanking us for the support from our scholarship program. Through this contact, we are able to continue to emotionally support her as well and will write up her experience for a story.

Another friend in San Salvador sent us three videos of a new – first in the world! – project for handicapped individuals she is spearheading in her country. We plan to follow-up with an interview soon.

Certainly, ministries cannot occur in the same comprehensive and efficient way as they did in person when we try a less personal approach via social media 3,200 miles away. We miss all those chance encounters to meet people and have serendipitous moments. We miss the subtleties in facial expressions, the group dynamics, the interactions among the scholarship kids, and a chance to bond from our eyeball-to-eyeball ministries. It is hard to create new friendships and relationships.

However, we can hope to sustain the ones we have. We simply have to find creative ways to adapt. The key seems to be making each other aware of our needs and working together to strategize and constantly re-evaluate what is most effective.

It is a learning and growing process as we all adapt.

One thing that remains consistent in our ministries is financial support to carry them out and, for your help in that, we give thanks. †

# Longsdorf Cemetery

201 N. Locust Point Rd, Mechanicsburg, PA 17050



PHOTO CREDITS: Tom Burson

## LOTS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE

Contact custodian Guy Eckert at 717-795-9107

Interested in serving on the cemetery board? Contact St. Stephen Lutheran Church at 717-766-2168.

*St Stephen is affiliated with this historical local cemetery, est. in 1771.*

*(Longsdorf was the original name of our church prior to 1844.)*

MONDAYS @ 10:00AM

## Stroll Through Scripture

Preview next Sunday's  
scripture readings with  
Pastor Matthew Best

Follow us on Facebook

@

[Facebook.com/StStephenLC.org](https://www.facebook.com/StStephenLC.org)





**ST. STEPHEN**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church

*Holy Week Worship*

**April 14 Maundy Thursday 6 p.m.**

**April 15 Good Friday 12 noon (in-person)**

**April 16 Easter Vigil 7 p.m.**



**ST. STEPHEN**  
Evangelical Lutheran Church



**APRIL 17**  
**EASTER WORSHIP**

## **Holy Week Service Notes**

**ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH, 30 W. MAIN ST, NEW KINGSTOWN, PA**

- Maundy Thursday and Easter Vigil worship are hybrid services (offered both in-person and online); visit [StStephenLC.org](http://StStephenLC.org) for the Zoom link for online participation.
- The midday Good Friday service is in-person only.
- In addition, there is an in-person 7:00PM Community Good Friday service at Young's United Methodist Church, 7075 Wertzville Road, Mechanicsburg, PA 17050.
- You are invited to celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord on Sunday, April 17 at 9:00AM via our regular hybrid worship; visit [StStephenLC.org](http://StStephenLC.org) for the Zoom link for online participation.

# FILLING THE CHURCH

*by Sally John*



PHOTO CREDITS: Above—Zoltan Tasi for UNSPLASH, Graphic next page created by Sally John

When one thinks of a full church, it brings a number of images to mind. An overflowing choir loft and parishioners joyfully joining in to sing their favorite anthems on a candlelit Christmas Eve. Dozens of energetic children skipping up the aisle to hear the children’s sermon or to receive new Bibles. Newborn babies dressed in lacy finery accompanied by family members uplifting them in baptism. A triumphant Easter processional accompanied by an invigorating trumpet voluntary. A wedding ceremony with friends and family witnessing the formation of a new union. A standing-room-only memorial service for a beloved life lost.

But churches are not full any more. According to a March 2021 Gallup poll, “U.S. church membership was 73% when Gallup first measured it in 1937 and remained near 70% for the next six decades, before beginning a steady decline around the turn of the 21st century. Currently only 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue, or

mosque.” To exacerbate those statistics, pandemic restrictions set in, and it has been heartbreaking to see forlorn churches yearning to be filled again.

Despite the downturn, I see the life and mission of our church continuing even when the pews are not always warm and at top capacity. It has caused me to think of a full church in a different way. It has reminded me that a church is much more than just the building itself.

This February, it was once again time to write the ELCA’s required end-of-year grant report. This year, though, because we were at the end of the three-year grant, they asked for data for the entire three years. As I compiled the requested information, I found it to be quite impactful indeed. Our church has been filled to the brim with care and assistance in so very many ways.

Following is a snapshot of just some of the things that have been going on. We provided 330 showers and loads of laun-



dry, served and delivered almost 2,200 meals, offered 55 opportunities for communion (outside of worship services) and fellowship, gave \$8,610 in grocery gift cards, paid for \$1,283 in house repairs, distributed 120 personal care kits, mailed 30 college care packages, gave \$12,881 in housing assistance, distributed 140 goodie boxes during Chocolate Fests, paid \$9,142 for car repairs and \$5,483 in heating costs, donated \$3,832 for Global Outreach, and helped 305 people obtain greater food security. In all, this assistance totaled almost \$69,000! Beyond that measurable data came the sense of trust and community built with our participants and the valuable connections made with the expanding list of partners who contribute to our ministry.

In May of 2021, we submitted an application for another three-year grant. Two representatives from the ELCA wanted to talk with us further about our ministry so we had a Zoom session in June. They were enthused about the ministry but we found out in November that our application was turned down. It was a disappointment but they always receive many more applications than they can fund and we had had a turn so it was understandable. Then out of the blue in

February, we received a surprising email saying they had “found” some more money and were awarding us another \$20,000 in “recognition of the vital work of (y)our creative and courageous ministry.”

We learned a great deal in those first three years – some of the lessons were tough to chew and swallow. Being able to adapt is essential in order to not only endure but to grow. Growing pains are inevitable and a great deal of discernment is required but God encourages that process. In Luke 5, Jesus challenges Simon to alter his focus from filling his boat with fish to serving people. He reassures him not to be fearful of moving in a different direction. “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.”

It is encouraging to witness God’s work continuing even during downturns in membership and through the hurdles of a pandemic. It will be exciting to see how we fill St. Stephen during the next three years as we adapt and formulate a new path moving forward. †



# GOD IS WITH US IN CHANGING TIMES

*by Mike Kulikauskas*



*Changing time.* These two words, said together, have many shades of meaning depending on where we are on life's journey.

For a newborn, it may mean a fresh diaper, for a toddler a bath, PJs, a story, and bedtime. For an elementary student, a shift from total dependence to more self-reliance and responsibility. For a teen, the challenging changes of puberty, finding one's way in relationships, and looking to a future filled with possibilities. The young adult considers careers, life partners, mastering finances, and possibly offspring. The established middle agers, switching caregiver roles with aging parents while launching their kids into the world. Those heading into the last quarter of the game feel the relentless passage of time and catalog the new aches and pains each morning uses to remind us we are truly alive. Those who have journeyed far are blessed with the memories created along the way. Overlay all of this with the daily upheavals—from both natural disasters and the broken sinfulness of human's fighting for power, wealth, and control—and this thing we humans call *living* becomes messy, confusing, and stress-filled.



Popular culture inundates us with messages telling us what we need to do to find happiness. Many rush headlong into the “next new thing.” Working harder, sleeping less, doing whatever it takes to get ahead of the next guy and winning it all, only to find that popular culture keeps moving the goal.

That seeking heart, that desire for fulfillment, that restless, unsatisfied soul cannot be quenched by things of creation. Only from God comes that which truly satisfies.

God gifts us with faith and chooses us to be his children. Baptized into Jesus's death and resurrection, we are placed into community with God and God's spirit resides within our hearts. When we keep God in the center of life, when we come to understand that literally everything—including us—belongs to God and we realize that we are but stewards of all these freely-given gifts, then we undergo life-changing, focus-







changing shifts in understanding that lead us into true discipleship.

As disciples of Christ, we are called to actively follow the lessons Jesus taught. We are to live lives of humble gratitude, freely sharing the unearned love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace that God has first given us. We are to love God with our whole being and truly love our neighbor as ourselves.

This issue's theme scripture illustrates this life-changing shift in how we should live in and interact with the world. *"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" – 2 Corinthians 5:17*

Over the last two years, the COVID pandemic has wrought much change in our lives. Old practices had to be changed or discarded, new ways and procedures had to be implemented, all of society shifted and, just as water flows constantly downhill and time passes in measured seconds, there is no going back to that which was because the situation and circumstances that created it no longer exists.

Jesus brought a huge change to the status quo of the world. Praying was a central aspect of that change. In the record we have of Jesus public ministry, he paused, separated himself from others, and prayed at least thirty times.

Prayer—connecting to and communicating with God and listening for God's direction was an important part of Jesus's life. Jesus' disciples recognized that truth and asked him to teach them to pray. We too, as stewards of all we are given by God, need to deliberately set aside time for prayer and discernment.

Personally, I have found that starting each day with devotions, study, and prayer keeps me focused and makes the day run more smoothly.

I have experienced the work of the Spirit through groups of faithful people praying for guidance and, though physically separated, all reaching the same understanding. They experienced the same call for action, the same answer, when the group shared how the Spirit had spoken to them in their listening time.

The outcomes of our congregation's renewal (R3) process and its associated Council retreats resulted in Spirit-led change. These are changing times, being led by God's Spirit.

What will our future hold as we "respond to Christ's love by feeding those who hunger in body, mind, and spirit?" †



ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH, 30 W. MAIN ST, NEW KINGSTOWN, PA

# Senior High Summer Camp

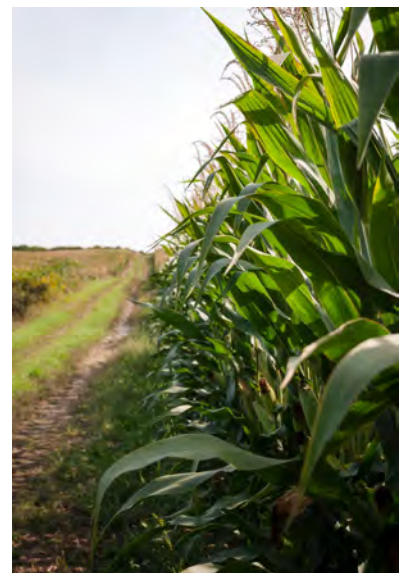
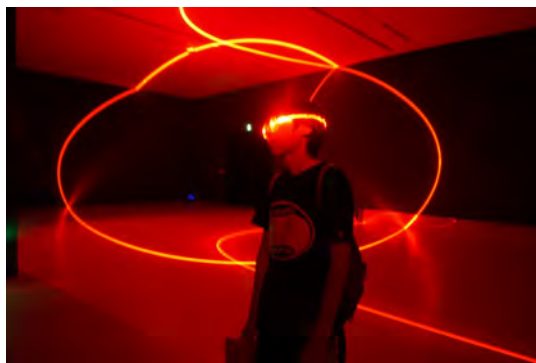
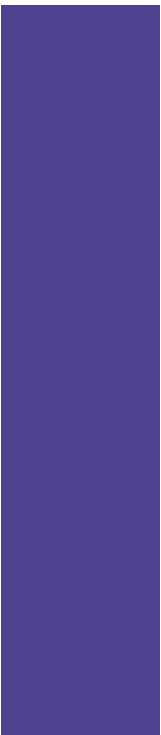
**AUGUST 7-12, 2022**

Cost: \$50 for the entire week (partial/full scholarships available)  
*For teens entering grades 9-12 this fall*

This week-long overnight camp will be based at St. Stephen. Throughout the week, we will focus on the theme *Mystery Around God*. Camp will kick off Sunday evening at 5:00PM with a picnic for registered youth and their families before the youth embark on their own journey of excitement and perplexities. Throughout the week, we will travel to various locations to explore, solve, and complete activities full of puzzles, intrigue, and mystery. Camp ends at 5:00PM on Friday. Youth will look forward to exploring new daily swimming locations as well as a corn maze, escape room, laser maze with tag, dinner murder mystery theater, and even a trip into God’s natural wonder-filled creation. In addition, we’ll be camping in tents for the week and having themed studies, games, campfires, and onsite activities.

Register by July 8 at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PZKLSDT>  
 Questions? Contact Jenny Batcheler at [YFMD@ststephenlc.org](mailto:YFMD@ststephenlc.org)

PHOTO CREDITS: Top, left to right: Simon Maage, Gavin Van Wagoner; Bottom, clockwise from top left—Jessica Delp, Laura Pluth, Zachary Keimig, Banna Morrissy, Hsinshu Lee, and Erik Dungan, all for UNSPLASH.





# EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

**Saturday, April 23 from 6:30-10:30PM**  
**St. Stephen Church Pavilion**  
**30 West Main St, New Kingstown, PA 17072**



What better time to get outside and celebrate God's creation than at Earth Day? You are invited to St. Stephen's church pavilion for hot dogs and lawn games at 6:30PM followed by an outdoor screening of the movie "The Lorax" at 8:00PM (drinks and popcorn provided). While seating is available, you may also bring your own chairs. We are also organizing a small plant sharing opportunity. Anyone interested in bringing your extra plants (indoor, outdoor, or vegetable) to give away to a new home can bring them to this event. They will be distributed on starting at 7:00PM.

# TRINITY FARMER'S MARKET

**Thursdays 3:00-7:00PM during July and August 2022**  
**Parking lot of Trinity United Methodist Church**  
**4 West Main St, New Kingstown, PA 17072**

A fun new local farmer's market is being organized by our neighbor, Trinity UMC, and St. Stephen and other community groups are taking part.

If you want to get involved, contact:

- Vendor information: (717) 579-8822
- St. Stephen volunteers: Nicole at [cn5groves@yahoo.com](mailto:cn5groves@yahoo.com)

Follow Trinity's Market on Facebook:  
[Facebook.com/Trinity-Farmers-Market-105304992133299](https://www.facebook.com/Trinity-Farmers-Market-105304992133299)







# CLOSING PRAYER

*Please pray with me.*

God of Life, you come to us in the midst of change, adaption, and transformation. Your Good News is a transforming news. This can be scary for many because, when change happens, we feel like we are out of control and don't know what will happen next. But you don't call on us to know or to be in control. You call on us to follow your way and example. You walk with us in as we venture in uncertainty. You accompany us in our journey of life as we canoe the mountains of life ... as we let go of things familiar to us, as we take up new things, as we continue in the path of discipleship.

AMEN.

PHOTO CREDIT: Sally John







## A FEW WAYS TO RECEIVE & RESPOND

1

You can hold our ministries and those who work in these ministries in prayer. In need of prayer yourself? We pray at every gathering and also have an electronic prayer list that goes out regularly with specific requests. If you would like people to pray for you, please call 717-766-2168 or send a message to [prayer@StStephenLC.org](mailto:prayer@StStephenLC.org).

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2

You are invited to worship and engage in the life of ministry. Our worship services and other gatherings are listed throughout this magazine and our website. There are many opportunities to learn and participate as well as to volunteer your time and skills. For more info, contact Pastor Matthew at 717-766-2168 or [pastor@StStephenLC.org](mailto:pastor@StStephenLC.org).

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3

You may also contribute financially in any of the following ways (all are tax-deductible). Thank you for your generosity!

- Cash or check
- Go to [StStephenLC.org](https://StStephenLC.org) and use the Donate button at the bottom of the page
- Text the dollar amount to 717-685-6947
- Via Engage: Go to the <https://engage.suran.com/sslc/>. Select giving fund(s) and enter amount(s). Furnish any additional information in "Gift Memo" box on the Submit screen. Undesignated gifts will go to our General Fund.
- Via PayPal: Enter [PayPal@StStephenLC.org](mailto:PayPal@StStephenLC.org) as the destination, choose your amount, and use "Add a note" to provide designation. Undesignated gifts will go to our General Fund.



Engage QR code



PayPal QR code



## ST. STEPHEN

Evangelical Lutheran Church

30 W. MAIN ST,  
NEW KINGSTOWN, PA 17072

.... We respond to **Christ's love** by feeding those who hunger in body, mind, and spirit ....



PHOTO CREDIT: Sally John

### YOU ARE INVITED TO WORSHIP

We now offer hybrid worship (both in-person and online) on Sundays at 9:00AM. Call 717-766-2168 or visit [StStephenLC.org](http://StStephenLC.org) for the latest gathering options for worship and summer Sunday School in terms of pandemic restrictions.

### WE ARE HERE TO HELP

If you are hungry or in need, please contact our church office at 717-766-2168. We have meals, gift cards, personal hygiene kits, and more to share.

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*For more information, contact:*

## ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH

30 West Main St, New Kingstown, PA 17072

717-766-2168

[office@StStephenLC.org](mailto:office@StStephenLC.org); [StStephenLC.org](http://StStephenLC.org)