

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church



1001 OLSON LANE
EL DORADO HILLS, CA 95762
Telephone: (916) 933-1441

Greetings, Friends and Members of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church!

June 23, 2020

This past March, we began a time away from public worship in the Sanctuary at 1001 Olson Lane. We didn't have any idea how long it would last. We still do not know how long it will be before we can gather safely in large groups, sing out together in praise, greet one another with hugs and handshakes, and share home cooked food together with love and care. We are all grieving the loss of these important, life-giving things. Many of us do not see our own relatives, except with masks and six feet apart. It is a challenging time. But like all times, this is God's time and we are in God's care.

A great many scholars, bishops and Lutheran pastors have argued well over whether we may celebrate the Lord's Supper, connected by the electricity of Zoom or Facebook live instead of physical proximity. The answers are not definitive or conclusive, because matters of faith are rarely so. The questions are, "Can we gather together electronically to celebrate the Meal?" And, "How is the Sacrament made *real*?"

Martin Luther, who was only one great Christian leader of many, wrote, "The body cannot grasp and appropriate what is given in and with the sacrament. This is done by the faith of the heart that discerns and desires such treasure," and "It is appropriately called food for the soul, for it nourishes and strengthens the new creature. ...(it) is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may be refreshed and strengthened and that it may not succumb in the struggle but become stronger and stronger. (Large Catechism)

Luther taught that bread and wine all by itself is not the Sacrament. What makes it so is the Word of God. Again, he wrote "Even though a scoundrel receives or administers the sacrament, is it the true sacrament (that is Christ's body and blood), just as truly as when one uses it most worthily. For it is not founded on human holiness but on the Word of God. As no saint on earth, yes, no angel in heaven can make bread and wine into Christ's body and blood, so likewise can no one change or alter the sacrament, even through misuse." Even if we were to make some gross error, the Word of God makes the Sacrament real.

The pastor or leader does not "make Communion real." Physical proximity does not "make Communion real." The Word of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit make it real. When we ask the Holy Spirit to come, the Spirit always comes. This is our true faith.

Your leaders have thought long and hard these months without the Lord's Supper. We undertake to move forward celebrating the Lord's Supper together each Sunday online, beginning this coming Sunday, June 28th, 2020. We do not do this impulsively or lightly, but with reverence, prayer, and due

diligence. Our Bishop, Mark Holmerud, has publicly said that he neither endorses nor condemns the decision of each congregation. No one is compelled to receive the Sacrament, but all are welcome. We fully respect those who wish to wait until we can be together physically.

Here are some guidelines for when we gather for the Lord's Supper electronically:

- Set aside a small plate with a piece of bread and a cup of wine or juice. Designate and set aside these dishes for Communion until we gather again in person. Perhaps choose a special plate and cup that are particularly meaningful to you. Spend some time centering on the fact that this is no ordinary meal as you prepare.
- If you are able, light a candle as we begin worship and intentionally invite God's presence with you.
- Pray together the Eucharistic Prayer with the minister and follow the instructions.
- Be assured of God's saving love and presence with you now and in every circumstance.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Trudy Franzen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Pastor Trudy Franzen