

February 18, 2021

**What's New? Was gibt's Neues?
For the week of Week of February 14, 2021**

A Bi-Weekly Update about What's Going on at and around
St. Matthew's during the Pandemic

Dear Members and Friends of St. Matthew's,

You probably have heard that the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the ban on indoor worship services in California. Indoor services are permitted to resume at a capacity of 25% max – however, singing and chanting indoors are still not allowed, and of course all worshipers have to follow rules about masking and social distancing.

After that ruling, the San Francisco Department of Public Health published new (and very strict) guidelines about indoor worship services, prefacing them with: you can, but you shouldn't. COVID-19 cases are still at an alarming level. New (and more contagious) mutants of the Corona Virus have reached the Bay Area. The County of San Francisco (like almost all the counties in California) are still in the 'Purple Tier' (which is the second most restrictive tier after the stay-at-home 'Blue Tier').

The leadership of the Sierra Pacific Synod of the ELCA also published a statement regarding indoor worship services. It reads in part: 'As stated before, we continue to believe it is not yet time for a return to indoor worship. Just because we can do something doesn't mean we should. There are far too few vaccinations which have been given at this time to believe we have arrived at a place of broad immunity which would make a return to indoor, in-person worship safe for the most vulnerable among us. Included in this group of vulnerable persons -- persons who are over 65 years of age and/or have secondary ailments/health concerns which make them more susceptible to infection -- are many of our clergy, music leaders, and technicians.'

In line with the recommendations of the SF Department of Public Health and the Sierra Pacific Synod Leadership, the St. Matthew's church council has decided to NOT offer any in-person worship services at this point. The council will reassess the situation on a regular basis. We will let you know well in advance as to when we think it might be safe to reopen our sanctuary for worship services once more. Please continue to be patient! May God continue to bless us all during these trying times.

Pr. Kerstin Weidmann



Spiritual Reflection as We Begin the Season of Lent *by Pr. Kerstin Weidmann*

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:35, NRSV

The cross you see in the picture above is one of the crosses in the sanctuary of the community of Taizé in France. Taizé has become well known in the worldwide Christian community for its particular meditative worship service, and for the beautiful chants and songs that come out of this community.

The ‘Cross of Hearts’ symbolizes God’s love for humanity, which culminates in Jesus’ death on the cross. However, this cross also says a lot about the community of Taizé itself – and about its founder, Brother Roger Schütz.

Schütz was a native of Switzerland. He attended a Reformed seminary in order to prepare for ordained ministry. The atrocities of Nazi Germany changed the course of his life. During World War II, Schütz was hiding people of Jewish faith in the French village of Taizé, in order to save them from persecution. However, in 1942 Taizé was occupied by the Germans, and Schütz had to abandon the hideout.

After the war, Europe was in shambles. There was a deep and bitter enmity between its peoples. Schütz was pained by the rift he saw between people – especially in light of the fact that most Europeans at that time were Christians, worshiping the same God. Schütz returned to Taizé and founded an ecumenical fraternal community with the goal of reconciliation. He realized that only Christian love, a love that transcends denominational and national boundaries, would be able to heal the wounds of war. As the leader of the Taizé community, Schütz would become known as ‘Frère Roger’, or ‘Brother Roger’.

Brother Roger especially targeted the youth of Europe. He invited young people to come to Taizé, to live and worship there for a while, and to meet their siblings in Christ from beyond former enemy lines.

Brother Roger and his brethren tried to focus on the common ground of all those gathering at Taizé: Jesus Christ, the cross, and the call to Christian love and reconciliation.

Brother Roger succeeded. The community of Taizé grew by leaps and bounds over the decades. In the times before the pandemic, tens of thousands of mainly young people would come to Taizé every year, living and working alongside other young Christians, and worshiping together. The ‘Cross of Hearts’ and the boundless and passionate love of God it symbolizes is one of their focal points as they worship.

Ironically and tragically, Brother Roger, a beacon of love and peace, died a violent death; he was stabbed by a mentally ill woman during worship in August of 2005. But his legacy endures.

Reconciliation is badly needed in many places. We all need to be reconciled to God, as Paul says in 2nd Corinthians 5:20. We are invited to go on this journey – which isn’t an easy one. For reconciliation starts with confession of guilt, and the asking for forgiveness. And that’s tough.

May God give us courage to love and be reconciled to God and one another and may the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be in our hearts and mind as we begin our journey in the shadow of the cross.

News from Our Former German Intern, Susanna Hassel



I hope you remember Susanna Hassel, who served St. Matthew's as an intern exactly a year ago (the picture shows her at our joint Ash Wednesday service with the people of St. Mary and St. Martha). Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Susanna had to return to Germany earlier than planned.

If you met Susanna, you know that she has a caring and compassionate nature. She continues to think of and pray for the people of St. Matthew's, and through our newsletters follows what is going on in and

around our congregation. Susanna sends warm greetings to

all of you – and would like to announce that she and her husband Felix had a son, Nathanael, in January (see the picture). We congratulate Susanna and Felix on the birth of their child and wish them all the best and God's blessings!



Update: In-Person Worship Services and Events at St. Matthew's

Due to the still alarming number of COVID-19 cases in the San Francisco Bay Area, there will be no in-person worship services until further notice.

Sunday Online Worship Services

St. Matthew's will continue to make recorded worship services available every Sunday by 10 a.m. on our website (www.stmatthews-sf.org) and our Facebook page ('Matthew Lutheran') until further notice.

If you'd like to receive a link to St. Matthew's worship services in your email inbox every Sunday, please let us know by sending a request to office@stmatthews-sf.org.

Congregational Meeting via Phone on Sunday, February 21st at 11 a.m.

Mark your calendars: on Sunday, February 21st at 11 a.m., St. Matthew's will conduct its annual meeting **as a phone meeting**. All voting members should have received the annual report and the information what number to call in order to participate in this meeting.

We will keep the meeting brief. The main order of business will be to approve a budget for the year 2021.

Continuation of Phone Services on Thursdays

Since we will not be able to worship in our sanctuary in the foreseeable future, Pr. Weidmann will continue to offer brief worship services with communion over the phone on Thursdays at 10 a.m. Please contact her if you would like to participate. 925-330-2289 or pastorweidmann@stmatthews-sf.org.

Irregular Office Hours

We continue to offer irregular office hours during the ongoing pandemic. Our office administrator, Angie Holt, usually is in the office on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. You can reach Pr. Weidmann at any time: 925-330-2289 or pastorweidmann@stmatthews-sf.org.

Continued Financial Support of St. Matthew's Ministries

We want to thank everyone who has supported St. Matthew's financially during the past months. Please continue to send in your contributions!

Pr. Kerstin Weidmann's Contact Information

You can reach Pr. Weidmann via her cell phone (925-330-2289) or via email (pastorweidmann@stmatthews-sf.org).

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