

March 18, 2021

**What's New? Was gibt's Neues?
For the of Week of Week of March 14th, 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,

Let me fill you in on the decision the St. Matthew's church council made during their meeting on March 14th regarding the reopening of our sanctuary for in-person worship services: we will wait just a little longer. Let me assure you that we are not the only church currently not offering any in-person worship services: almost all ELCA churches in San Francisco are still closed; so are many churches of our ecumenical partners, like the Episcopalians.

Yes, things have been looking up lately: COVID-19 cases in San Francisco and the entire Bay Area have been declining. More and more people are getting the vaccine. However, there are projections that case numbers will surge again a few weeks from now. In addition, as your pastor I would feel much more comfortable meeting in-person again once I received the vaccine as well. Clergy are currently not listed under folks eligible to receive the vaccine in San Francisco and the county where I live – however, I might be eligible under some other category (and I am currently waiting to see if Contra Costa County will accept my application to receive the vaccine). The church council will revisit the reopening issue during its next meeting on April 11th.

I know waiting is hard, especially as we approach Holy Week and Easter. But be assured that, sooner or later, we will be able to worship in person once more. God continues to be with us, even during these trying times.

Until we meet again: stay healthy and safe! Get vaccinated if you can. God's blessings,

Pr. Kerstin Weidmann



Spiritual Reflection as We Continue the Journey through Lent by *Pr. Kerstin Weidmann*

“For in Christ all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Colossians 1:16-17, NRSV

This week, St. Patrick's Day was celebrated in Ireland and many other places of this world (as far as one can celebrate during a pandemic). Now outside of Ireland, St. Patrick's Day often is a mere excuse for drinking and having rowdy celebrations of whatever is considered 'Irish' (including elements from Irish folklore). But St. Patrick's Day, like other ancient church feast days (St. Valentine's Day, for example), goes back to an actual person with an actual life lived for the glory of God and in the shadow of the cross.

St. Patrick is the most important of the patron saints of Ireland. There are many legends surrounding the life of St. Patrick (snakes and shamrocks, anyone?). The most reliable account of his life we have from a letter he wrote himself, and in which talks about his turbulent life journey, which ultimately led him to God and the service for others.

Patrick, also known as Patricius, lived in the 5th century and came from a rather privileged family Roman Britannia (modern day England or Wales). At age 16, he was kidnapped by Irish pirates and brought to the Emerald Island. Patrick worked as a slave in Ireland for six years, pining for his old life, and eventually hatching a plan for an escape. After a long and perilous journey, Patrick finally arrived back home.

In my opinion, the most remarkable thing about St. Patrick is not so much what legends tell us about this man - the most remarkable thing is that, shortly after he arrived back on the English Isle, he was called by God to return to the place of his miseries this time, as a missionary. And Patrick heeded the call. The rest is history. St. Patrick wasn't the first one to bring the gospel to Ireland, but he proved to be a very successful missionary by not just dismissing old religious traditions and symbols, but by explaining them in the context of the Christian faith. Celtic crosses, like the one you see in the picture above, are an example of how pre-Christian symbolism and patterns were incorporated into the new faith.

The circle with interwoven patterns is an ancient Celtic symbol of the universe and the interconnectedness of all things. It is said that St. Patrick was the one to combine the Christian cross with the Celtic circle and its distinctive patterns, purposely connecting the life and death of Christ with the experience of the divine in the universe. To this day Celtic Christianity embodies so much of what it means to understand, and honor, how all aspects of our life and of the bounty of creation and intertwined with each other and with the mystery of Christ.

Christ died for all of creation – and not just for a limited group of chosen human beings. The Celtic cross reminds us of this. Patrick understood that his life was mysteriously intertwined with God and the people he first so despised. He understood that his life, and the life of all of us, is part of the mystery of God which we experience in nature, in life events, and in tradition.

May our continued journey through Lent be blessed!

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

St. Matthew's church council discussed the reopening of the church for in-person worship services during its meeting on 3/14. Given the concern about another surge in COVID-19 cases in the near future and the fact that Pr. Weidmann hasn't had a chance to receive the vaccine yet, it was decided to wait a little longer. The issue will be discussed again at the next council meeting on 4/11. Please be patient!

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') for the time being.

We will also offer an online worship service for Good Friday, which will be made available on Friday, April 2nd, before 12 noon.

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.

Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly 2021 – Looking for a Female Lay Voting Member!

This year's Sierra Pacific Assembly will be held from Thursday, May 6th, through Saturday, May 8th, ONLINE via Zoom. St. Matthew's is entitled to 'send' two lay voting members to the Sierra Pacific Synod Assembly. Since we already found a lay male voting member (thank you, Steve Crabiel!), we are still looking for a female lay person who might be interested in participating. This year's assembly will be quite interesting, since we will be electing a new bishop – Mark Holmerud, who served in the capacity of bishop for the last 13 years, will be retiring.

Requirements for participating as a voting member are: the access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone, the willingness to download the video conferencing program 'Zoom' on the device, and a stable internet connection. If you are interested, please contact Pr. Kerstin: pastorweidmann@stmatthews-sf.org. Registration deadline is April 1st.

Even if you can't or don't want to be a voting member, you can still follow the synod assembly at your own leisure online. It will be live streamed via YouTube (more information to come).

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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