

ST. STEPHEN'S SPIRIT

The Newsletter of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Wilkinsburg PA

March 2023

Fifteen Reasons Your Soul Needs Gathered Worship, Not Just a Livestream

Article
08.27.2021

Part of a 3-part series

The pandemic continues. Physical attendance in many churches remains sparse—or at least sparser than before. For various reasons, some may need to continue staying home. But other low-risk or fully vaccinated congregants seem to prefer the livestream far longer than we expected.

Amid these various circumstances and uncertainties, we need to lead our people well. Part of that means we need to remind our people of what we lose when we don't physically gather in worship. Below, I've written 15 reflections on all that is lost when we choose to worship from the couch instead of the pew.

1. As Bonhoeffer said in *Life Together*, "The physical presence of other believers is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer." The mere presence of other Christians has a fortifying effect on our souls, beneath what we're even able to consciously recognize. That's one reason the Bible exhorts us to meet together. We are Christ's very body, organically connected to each other, the life and strength of Christ himself flowing into us *through* one another.
2. A virtual worship gathering is one-way participation, not two-way. You're receiving, but you can't give. You are seeing those leading worship, preaching, praying—but they can't see you. They don't see your eyes, your body, your solidarity. At best you're a number, piping in on a livestream.
3. We use our screens for work and for entertainment. But corporate worship is neither. Watching worship on our screens can subtly dilute the special-ness of corporate worship, as the very medium tends to mush it into other more mundane realities of life like work and entertainment.
4. Coming in for worship takes more effort. You have to get out of your pjs and put on jeans. You have to get in the car. If you have kids, you have to go through the routine of getting them all presentable and into the minivan. Up here in the north, you have snow and ice and cold to deal with. *Good*. We're teaching our kids, and we're training our own souls, to value corporate worship. The very effort to come in trains us in a healthy direction, reinforcing the irreplaceable value of gathering with other Christians.
5. There's not only the worship service itself; there's all the hallway time, the passing conversations, the wave across the sanctuary, the smile in the parking lot, the greeting while washing your hands in the restroom. All of that is lost in virtual worship from home. Instead of getting in the car at 9:10 for the 9:30 service, arriving at 9:25, and having several minutes of passing fellowship—along with the unhurried fellowship and encouragement after the service—you open your laptop at 9:29 and close it one second after the benediction. A protracted period of virtual worship weakens our relationships.

By Dane Ortlund

[15 Reasons Your Soul Needs Gathered Worship, Not Just a Livestream : 9Marks](https://www.9marks.org/article/15-reasons-your-soul-needs-gathered-worship/)
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Prayer for March

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

-Book of Common Prayer

March is Disability Awareness Month

In our bible study we were asked to consider the appropriateness of the word "disability." Perhaps it is society that suffers when it does not make room for or cherish the gifts of those who are "disabled." How can we begin to honor the physical diversity of all God's children?

-ideas from Jamie Clark-Soles

WANT TO MAKE
PEOPLE HAPPY?
SIGN UP FOR
COFFEE HOUR!



BIRTHDAYS

March 1 - Steven Akers and Laura Block
March 12 - Malia Nelson
March 17 - Soon Choi

MORNING PRAYER WILL BE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 1 AT 10:30 AM. (The
first Wednesday of each month.)

Beloved Community News

Be the Bridge! 40 day Lenten challenge



Beloved Community Initiative

(The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh)

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

The Beloved Community Initiative (BCI) seeks to promote the liberating and reconciling love of Jesus Christ, particularly as it relates to racial justice and reconciliation. The BCI will serve specifically to develop strategies, as informed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, our Baptismal Covenant and our diocesan mission.

How do we foster Beloved Community in the church?

Baptismal Promise: Strive for justice and peace among all people & respect the dignity of every human being.

"I believe we are called to be bridge builders"

Church it is time to change! How can we expect the world around us to be transformed if we aren't? Dismantling racism and achieving reconciliation in the church begins with education and dialogue. Join us in this 40 day challenge to read "Be the Bridge" by Latasha Morrison and discover how we can begin showing the world that we are



Jesus disciples and that we are growing to love one another.

Let's become bridge builders. Let's connect the dots and show we mean what we say and our covenant is our identity and our activity. Let's begin repairing the breach, repairing the world by repairing the church. That begins with you! The Beloved Community Initiative invites you to the challenge!



Core Question: How will we grow as reconcilers, healers, and justice-bearers? What activities, practices, learning and experiences would (trans)form us? How will we share stories and grow relationship?



Core Question: What institutions and systems bear the signs of racial injustice? How will we participate in the repair, restoration and healing of people, institutions and systems?

FOOD OF THE MONTH

Soup and Crackers



Michael Hogan's 70th birthday celebration!



Mission of the Month

Doctors without Borders

This is an international organization where doctors and nurses from all over the world volunteer to “help people where the need is greatest, delivering emergency medical aid to people affected by conflict, epidemics, disasters, or exclusion from health care.” There is not a region of the world they will not go to if the people’s health is in endangered. Their services are needed especially now in places like Syria and Turkey. You can learn more about them and donate at

[MSF | Doctors Without Borders - USA](https://www.msf.org/doctors-without-borders-usa)

Or write a check and put it in the communion plate on Sunday.

SACRED GROUND is a film based dialogue about faith and race consisting of eight week sessions that meet once a week. There are sessions at Calvary and other churches that are held at different times and during different months. If you'd like to attend one, please contact the office or find it on the diocesan website. Episcopalpgh.org

WATCH FATHER CHUCK'S PAST SERMONS by accessing our website, "Ststephenswilkinsburg.org;" click "Worship," and then click on "Livestreaming our worship service." A special thanks to Pam Sovich for livestreaming the service each week and maintaining our Facebook page, and to Sig Tragard for maintaining our website!

WHAT ARE YOUR LENTEN PLANS? PLEASE JOIN US!!!

LENTEN BIBLE STUDY. (12 NOON IN LIBRARY ON THURSDAYS. LET MELANIE KNOW IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING. STSTEPHENSWILKINSBURG@GMAIL.COM)

APRIL 2 - PALM SUNDAY

APRIL 3-8 - HOLY WEEK

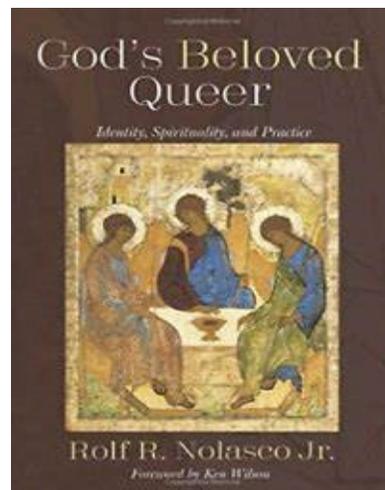
APRIL 6 - MAUNDY THURSDAY
SERVICE AT 7 PM

APRIL 7 - GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE AT NOON

APRIL 9 - EASTER SUNDAY



NATIONAL READING MONTH!



The book re-centers the conversation back to what I believe anchors our identity and inspires our ways of being, living, and loving. That is, we all are beloved children of the Triune God whose image and likeness we bear—hence, we all are God's beloved queers primed to flourish in more ways than we can ever dare to imagine for ourselves. I have drawn from a wide range of disciplines—pastoral theology, spirituality, counseling psychology, affective neuroscience, anthropology—to offer a more nuanced description of what it means, as queer folks, to be sacred icons of God like everyone else, offering multifarious windows into the spacious, gratuitous, and transforming love of God. It also explores with penetrating detail the inner psychological and spiritual terrain of our queer lives, along with spiritual practices that will help support our flourishing.

-Rolf Nolasco

Sunday Worship 8AM & 10:30AM

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