

A Letter from the clergy and wardens of St. Stephen's Church

September 2, 2017

Dear St. Stephen's family,

First of all, from the bottoms of our hearts we are grateful for each and every one of you. We know this experience has been hard on all of us—on each of us in our own way. We know, however, that there could not be a finer group of people with whom to literally weather this storm and we could not be prouder than we are now of our St. Stephen's family.

We want to take a moment to inform you of the work we have been doing at the church and our plan for the community moving forward. This will be addressed in three areas: our church building, members of our church, and the wider community.

The church buildings

All of our buildings at St. Stephen's are safe. The church got very wet inside and volunteers have been helping remove the carpet to prevent mold damage. Long-term, the buildings will be secure and we will have to address new flooring after the needs of others in our community have been met. In the meantime, we will be holding communion at our regular 8:00 am and 10:00 am times this Sunday, September 3rd. They will be simple, casual services, but we will be together as we praise God and hold each other in prayer. We will continue to have our regular Wednesday 5:30 pm communion services and Sunday morning services without interruption.

Broce Hall will be used as a supply distribution center during the week for people in need of water, cleaning supplies, paper goods, baby products, and more as long as we can help people recovering from this crisis. More on this below.

Members of our church

Many people's homes have been flooded, including some of our own members at St. Stephen's. We have been doing our best to make sure everyone has a place to stay and have been overwhelmed by everyone who has volunteered to take people into their homes. Right now we have more volunteers to take people in than we have need, thanks be to God.

In the days, weeks, and months to come we will need to help members of our family in recovery and rebuilding. We do not know the extent of the damage yet, but we do know that people's homes will need to be stripped of drywall, flooring, and furniture to prevent mold from setting in. We will need to come together as a community to help them, so please consider how you can help. If you have experience as a contractor, builder, electrician, etc. we will need your expertise. If you have a pick-up truck, we can use your help. If you are a licensed therapist or counselor, we

can absolutely use your help too. We all have varied skills and we will find good uses for them all. More on this below.

The wider community

As the number of people who have lost power, water, and been completely displaced from their homes mounts, we have gone to work. In the past few days, St. Stephen's has been set up as a dispatch center for emergency rescue crews and we have been feeding and caring for the rescue crews as well as some of the people they bring in. We have now also been accepting donations of goods to Broce Hall to distribute to those in need—primarily in the form of drinkable water, cleaning products, paper goods, and baby supplies. We have been overjoyed at the number of volunteers who have brought donations to the church and we have been able to help many people in need during this crisis.

In the days, weeks, and months to come, the immediate crisis will abate but needs will persist. Once drinkable water is restored there will still be many people in our city who have lost everything. St. Stephen's will continue to distribute goods from Broce Hall for as long as it is necessary. We will need your help to accept, sort, and distribute donated supplies to those in need. We will help rebuild our beloved city of Beaumont together.

Many people have asked how else they can help the wider community of Texas, Louisiana, and beyond. In emergencies such as these, two most helpful things to do are to, first, pray together, and second, please consider making monetary donations to Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD). There are mechanisms in place so that everyone can receive the best kind of help that they need the most through ERD. We also want to give a special thanksgiving to all of the churches across the country that have donated to ERD and directly to St. Stephen's on our behalf. People from as far away as Maryland, New York, Washington DC, Indiana, Kentucky, and California have been incredibly generous in donating money to us for our immediate and future needs.

Conclusion

Thank you to everyone who has played a part in our community's response to Harvey—from helping clean up the church to cooking hot meals in Broce Hall, helping entertain our children while we volunteer to coordinating rescue teams in the field, from handing out much needed water to keeping us all in your prayers from wherever you are.

We know that this tragedy has struck all of us in different ways and we will all be processing many mixed emotions and thoughts for a long time to come. We give thanks to God that—in the midst of all this hardship—we get to process this together as a family. This Sunday, September 3rd, after both the 8:00 am and 10:00 am services, we will have people on hand to talk with children, youth, and adults about what they are feeling and to give them a chance to share their

stories. We will have pastoral care providers on hand to talk to privately as well as groups to share a hug and a prayer. Now more than ever we are the Body of Christ together.

In addition, this Sunday we will also have a table where you can sign up for what your needs are—whether it is a place to spend the night, dry clothes, food for your pets, etc.—and a table where you can sign up for how you can help—whether it is a pick-up truck, home repair knowledge, counseling experience, etc. This Sunday we will continue to do the work of being the people God has made us to be, *for* and *with* each other. We will work to pair up those in need of help with those who are able to help.

We look forward to seeing you all again soon and giving you a hearty St. Stephen's embrace. You are all a great blessing to us and we are honored to serve for you and beside you as your clergy and wardens.

God bless each and every one of you on this day and forever.

Yours In Christ,

The Rev. Steven M. Balke, Jr., Rector

John McElroy, Senior Warden

Doug Fair, Junior Warden

The Rev. Pat Ritchie, Deacon