

April 24, 2020

From the Rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Beaumont, Texas:



Grace and peace to you in the name of our savior Jesus Christ.

It has been a busy few weeks since I have sent a letter out to y'all and I thought it was high time I did so. As many of you know, right at Holy Week my wife, Katie, was in quarantine for two weeks after possible exposure to coronavirus. The first bit of news I am happy to report is that Katie has come out of quarantine COVID-19-free. The boys and I are happy to have her back with us and I am truly thankful to everyone who helped out and kept us in your prayers during this time. Y'all are great!

I have a few other important updates to share with everyone. We have had contractors at the St. Stephen's campus for several weeks now doing repairs from Harvey and Imelda storm damage. They have been making great progress, re-roofing the entire worship building and parish hall and restoring our choir room and Guild Room. We will have a freshly restored and water-tight campus to return to! Hooray! We should all give a great thanksgiving to the hard workers at River Oaks Roofing, Church Insurance Corporation, and The Episcopal Diocese of Texas for generously covering the costs of these repairs.

We also have been working very hard to continue to care for the needs of our parishioners, neighbors, and staff. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you know someone who is in need of help right now, whether they are members of the parish or not. The parable of the Good Samaritan still applies as much now as ever! As many of you also know, we have over two dozen employees at St. Stephen's, many of whom are caring for their families at home even while working hard during these uncertain times. I thank you for your continued giving to the church to support them and am happy to share that, again, the diocese has provided funds to continue to paying our staff so that no one will have to worry about food, housing, or medical care for their families. Thank you all so much.

Next week, on April 30th, I will be gathering with our bishops and all the clergy of the diocese (via Zoom, of course), to begin the serious and prayerful conversations about how we as a church will be moving forward. We know we will be gathering together in-person again someday soon, doing worship, formation, and fellowship. We need to consider how we will do so in a safe manner, what precautions we will take, how we will communicate to our parish, and what contingency plans we will set in case of further virus spread. As soon as I have had these conversations with the diocesan clergy, I will be in conversation with our vestry and staff so that we can start making a plan for St. Stephen's moving forward. Someday all this quarantine, social distancing, and virus battling will be a distant memory, but until that time I want you to know that we are taking the health and safety of our community very seriously even in the midst of eagerly awaiting our gathering in-person once again. Please stay tuned for important news on this matter coming in the upcoming weeks.

Finally, I have a favor to ask of you all. I am planning to continue to offer some of the creative ways that we engage in relationship with one another from a distance. I am grateful for the many of you who have provided useful feedback about our online worship, fellowship, and formation opportunities. I am seeking additional feedback about how St. Stephen's and I can be of even better service to you during this time. Please be on the lookout for a survey being emailed to every member of the church. This survey will help me see what we are doing well and where we can improve meeting our people's needs in the weeks to come. The more of you who fill out the survey, the better we'll know how to meet those needs. Thank you in advance!

Until I am in touch with you again, don't forget to keep visiting the St. Stephen's Website, www.ststephensbmt.org, to find all the ways we can keep on being that loving, welcoming, hospitable community of faith that we are. I remain ever thankful to be a part of a parish that cares so deeply about loving God, sharing Jesus, and rejoicing in the Spirit together!

God bless you all, in Christ's name,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'S'.

The Rev. Steven M. Balke, Jr.