

**SAINT STEPHEN  
BYZANTINE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
90 BETHEL ROAD  
NORTH HUNTINGDON, PA. 15642**

Christ is Risen!

Dear Members of St Stephen Parish Family,

Greetings and blessings to all on this sixth Paschal Sunday. Even in lockdown this Paschal season seems to be slipping by so quickly. I'm not sure that everyone feels this, but without the congregation in the pews, something vital seems to be missing in this season. Although I grew up long before the means for virtual contact and communication were available, I have tried to embrace it as fully as I can (and I have even learned to preach to an empty church!). But I must admit that a virtual community is not my "natural habitat." I miss all of you!

So, here are some important announcements and updates for our parish:

**CHURCH RE-OPENING**

On Friday afternoon, we received a communication from Archbishop William announcing the gradual re-opening of our parishes. The full letter is attached at the end of this note. It gives some general guidelines for all parishes to follow and also leaves some decisions up to the local churches. Since we have parishes of vastly different sizes and circumstances, we will all need to make appropriate decisions for our parishes.

With this in mind, we at St Stephen Parish will be opening for public liturgical services on the weekend of **Pentecost, 30-31 May** at our usual times of 5:00 pm on Saturday and 10:30 am on Sunday. To follow the civil guidelines, the pews will be marked with blue painter's tape indicating where you may sit. This will allow for the proper social distancing that is required. Of course, those who live in the same household are permitted to sit together.

So folks, this may mean the end of thinking that this is "my/our" pew! You may need to make some adjustments. Fortunately we had the foundation of the church building re-pointed not too long ago, and so I don't think that it will collapse if we do change some seats!!!

It is a requirement of the Archeparchy that all participants in the liturgical services wear face masks. If you appear without one, we will provide one for you. *No exceptions!* Also, all the books, pamphlets and papers will be removed from the church pews as these are manners of transmitting this highly contagious virus. I will be wearing a mask and gloves at the time of Holy Communion. There will be more specific instructions on the reception of Communion next week.

Since the Sunday morning Divine Liturgy will continue to be live-streamed, I am asking that we fill the church beginning with the front pews (always preserving the proper social distancing). We

don't want to broadcast a Liturgy with all the people behind the camera! So I respectfully ask you to comply with the directions that will be given as you enter the church.

Speaking of the camera, since we do not have a balcony in our church from which we can broadcast the Liturgy, it is now set up in the center of the church. There will be more specific guidelines given next week on the ways in which we will deal with this.

I realize that this may be a lot to digest in a short time, but with the co-operation of all, we can make a smooth transition to accommodate the new norms and still have a prayerful and respectful celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

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*IN YOUR PRAYERS ...*

In your prayers, kindly remember Sue Sabol of our parish who is a resident at Redstone Highlands and is need of all our prayers at this time. And please remember her husband Jack. With the lockdown of medical care facilities, Jack was able to see his wife for the first time in 70 days this week. This is truly a sacrificial love.

Also remember Helen Magdic who was recently hospitalized and is now recuperating at home. Another parishioners, Ted Race, has been hospitalized for several weeks and is now undergoing rehab at Hempfield Manor. Once again please remember his wife Pat and the family who also are not able to be with him at this time. This time of separation from loved ones is indeed a painful time for so many. Thus we continue to be with them in spirit and in prayer.

Your prayerful care for all these members of our parish, along with all your family, loved ones and friends is a powerful support for them and a solidarity among our parish.

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*OUR TITHES*

\$1,715.00      Deposited on 15 May 2020

Thank you to all those who are faithfully sending in their contributions to our parish. This allows us to continue the upkeep of the church and property, pay the bills and keep up with the on-going maintenance. Thanks again to all.

With these funds continuing to come in, we were able to have all the carpeting in the church professionally cleaned and Scotch-guarded this week. Additionally, the entire church was professionally sanitized in preparation for our return for liturgical services.

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THANK YOU

A hearty thank-you to Mike Andrejcek who spent hours on his hands and knees planting flowers and vegetables this week. He did allow Fr John to plant herbs and spices and some vegetables (the easy stuff!). Even though no one is around to see this yet, hopefully by the time folks are returning, we will have some beautiful color around the property and plenty of herbs and vegetables later in the summer.

And we would be remiss if we did not offer our gratitude to Larry Sabol and Bob Lanyi who faithfully cut the grass, trim and weed-whack every week so that the property always looks in great shape. We receive many compliments from folks who come by and see the property.

I am so proud of all that the members of our parish offer, often unnoticed behind the scenes, and offered with love in the works of their hands.

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LITURGICAL SCHEDULE

**SUNDAY 17 May 10:30 am Live-streamed**  
**SUNDAY OF THE MAN BORN BLIND**  
*+Ann Bodnar & Mary Kudrick req by MM George Bodnar*

**THURSDAY 21 May 7:00 pm Live-streamed**  
**FEAST OF THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD**  
*+Ruth Seech req by Eleanor Timko*

**BECAUSE MANY PEOPLE ARE NOW BACK AT WORK,  
THIS DIVINE LITURGY IS RE-SCHEDULED TO THE  
EVENING AT 7:00 PM.**

**SUNDAY 24 May 10:30 am Live-streamed**  
**FATHERS OF THE FIRST ECUMENICAL COUNCIL**  
*+Deborah Vasko req by MM Michael Dzura*

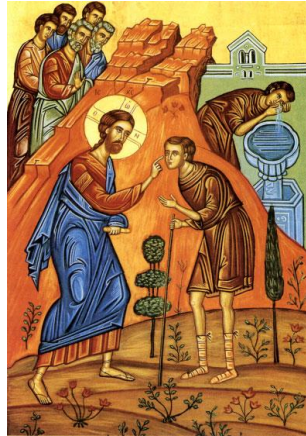
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PLEASE NOTE

There are three attachments to this parish note:

- A reflection on the Gospel of the Sunday
- A magnificent reflection on Pascha as told by Deacon Paul West
- The Archbishop’s memo on the re-opening of churches

## *THE MAN BORN BLIND*



Jesus is the *light of the world*.

He is the one who reveals God to us ... who lets us see the human face of God ... and who shows us what it means to be able to *see*.

We all *look* ... but not everyone is able to *see!* Even among those whose eyes are physically healthy ... not all are able to see.

To those who dwell in darkness ... God breaks into our world as a great light! Jesus also came into a world that sat in darkness ... and He brought light to people's lives. He let them see the world as He saw it ... as God originally intended it to be.

To be baptized into Christ is to put on Christ... to put on his eyes and heart and mind ... his way of seeing. Baptism is a rebirth in Christ. As we are washed in the waters of baptism ... we are reborn, renewed. We can then see with new eyes.

In today's Gospel, Jesus took some mud from the earth (reminiscent of the original creation when God formed the first human person also from the clay of the earth) ... He then rubbed it on the eyes of the man who was born blind and told him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam ... and the man was able to see. The Church sees in this event an image of baptism ... washing and then being able to see. It is really an image of re-creation.

We have been baptized into Christ ... we have been washed in the saving waters of baptism. We have been given the ability to *see* in a new way.

To live out our baptismal vocation ... means to live in such a way that we can see the goodness of God's creation ... the beauty in ourselves, each other and the world ... and to lead others to this same vision.

*The Joy of the Resurrection*  
Dn. Paul Varchola West

It goes without saying that we all miss going to church right now and I am sure we are all praying for the day that we can once again congregate and worship together as a full community once again. With all that has been happening in the world, many of us have had to “re-define,” so to speak, what “going to church” means. Perhaps we question if church will ever “go back to the way it was” or will things ever be “normal” again? Fortunately, after four years of seminary formation and running in and out of my family’s life as a ship passing in the night, I have had the experience of spending the past month in isolation with my wife and children in a house nearly a century and a half old, nestled on the side of a cliff in a neighborhood called Observatory Hill. While much of this time has been spent filled with anxiety and worry; thoughts of missed visits with family; fear for the safety of all those back home; there have also been many uplifting moments that have helped me gain valuable insight into the questions mentioned above. Fittingly enough, the most precious and insightful of these moments occurred the morning of Pascha!

Early on in the morning of Pascha, our family rose to pray Resurrection Matins. We all went downstairs and went outside to begin the service and sing *Christos Voskrese*, very eager to break our fast and usher in the Resurrection of Christ. After the ending of the prayers, we entered the house to venture up to the make-shift chapel I had devised up in the third floor attic space. It was there, at the empty tomb of Christ, that my eyes were opened to what constitutes “church.”

On the previous evening at around midnight, I tiptoed my way up the squeaky stairs to have much needed quiet time with Christ in the tomb prior to praying the *Midnight Office of Pascha*. At the conclusion of the prayers, I moved (what can be considered) our *Plaschanitsa* from the tomb and placed it on our icon stand. I then strategically moved the few potted plants we have to make it clear that the tomb was empty and Christ was no longer there. Our children were unaware that I did this. The next morning, as we briskly entered the house, our daughter bolted up the stairs with sheer jubilation yelling “Christ is Risen” all the way up the stairs to the third floor. She made it up first by a long shot. She then ran back down and met us, yelling with all the joy in her heart, “Daddy, Daddy; I went to go say hi to Jesus in the tomb and he wasn’t there... He’s gone... He’s Risen!” My breath escaped me as I watched her, the moment felt like it lasted an hour. As this little Myrrh-Bearing woman exclaimed the joy of the Resurrection to me, it all became clear.

Having spent so much time with the kids lately has helped me to remember to think like a child, which is a good thing. In that moment of joy, I could not help but think of Dr. Seuss’ *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. This old, green codger, living all alone on a mountaintop has the arrogance to think he could stop Christmas from coming. Of course, we all know that he couldn’t. It is the same with COVID-19. A microscopic virus might have altered our lives for the foreseeable future, but it has not altered Christ in the least. Pascha came and Christ is Risen! It came without incense. It came without bells. It came without flowers, or willows or ham! Christ is Risen! Pascha came; it came just the same. Just as the Grinch realized that fateful Christmas morning, standing with his feet ice-cold in the snow, that the trimmings and trappings are just

that, I too realized this Easter Sunday that Pascha, and even church, perhaps, mean something a little bit more.

If we think of the disciples, the Myrrh-Bearing Women, the Mother of God; we need to realize that they too, after the Crucifixion, were terrified, quarantining themselves in their homes and fearing the unknown; however, on that fateful Sunday morning it was made clear to all of creation that no matter what we fear in life, we need to understand that nothing, absolutely nothing, can contain, inhibit, impede or change Jesus Christ and the unbounded grace of God. The strongest army in the world, the best trained guards, all the “hush money,” and an immovable stone could not stop the Resurrection. The same applies today. Just because we were not physically in a church building, that does not stop the Resurrection. Just because we were unable to worship this year as we always have, that does not mean the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ simply did not happen this year.

Missing the various sensory aspects of church is a normal thing. Having a yearning to receive the Eucharist is certainly painful; however, this will not be forever. We need to realize that, by praying in our homes, we are not missing out on God in any way, shape or form. If anything, we are inviting a guest into our home that is not bound by social distancing restrictions. We can miss family, friends and physically being in church, but we must never miss God as he is never absent. Church is not all about the external, it is about the internal realization that, no matter what, God is with us. I urge each and every one of us, over the coming weeks, to pray like we have never prayed before. We must invite God into our homes, have Him over for dinner by praying before every meal. Have Him attend all our *Zoom* meetings by praying before work. Have Him spend the night by praying *Compline* before bed. This is the time we need God more than ever, and he is certainly with us. Just as the woman discovered at the empty tomb, the tomb is empty because life has been fulfilled. While we all may feel isolated right now, and even lonely, we must remember in our fear and sadness that we are never alone. For Christ is Risen!