

Beth Soslow, Council President

I have been part of the council for the past 3 years. I continue to be amazed at the generosity, devotion and involvement from our congregation. Through this year, we have experienced a new way to communicate fellowship and continue to grow in God's grace. Council met in December of 2019 with a task to look at what the next 5-year goals could be. The group reviewed our Mission Statement and future, and came up with five things to focus on as a Council:

- 1) The structure of the Council and committees with liaisons and members
 - a) Open communication, growth, and support for continued awareness and involvement
- 2) Review the continuation of the Internship Program
 - a) Structured committee to review recommendations and present to Council and congregation
- 3) Setting the expectations of Council for the support to the Mission Campaign
 - a) Assist Mission Campaign Committee
 - b) Monthly updates and reports during the process for review
 - c) Special congregational meetings as needed
- 4) Continue to review and monitor Volunteer Steward position
 - a) The program will be reviewed for continuation and integration into the congregation
- 5) Increase community involvement
 - a) Utilize more tools with events, services, and organizations
 - b) Utilize the Volunteer Steward for support, committees, and leadership direction

As with most committees and the congregation, this year brought significant changes to how we interact, support, and grow. Looking through our goals however, we are still able to do these things, just differently.

I feel privileged to represent a congregation that has embraced each other through the change. We miss seeing smiles on everyone but know we will continue to do God's works, differently.

Romans 12:6-8

In his grace, God has given us *different* gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.

Peace

Beth Soslow, Council President

Dr. Adam Lefever Hughes, Director of Music

Wow, what a difference a year makes. Last year at this time, I'm sure not one of us expected for the world to be thrown into grappling with responding to a worldwide viral pandemic. Yet, here we are, still ministering to the people of Neffsville and proclaiming the goodness of God's grace and mercy to all.

As the landscape of online and in-person worship continues to evolve, the staff of St. Peter's and the Worship Committee have worked tirelessly to keep our people safe, share the Gospel as widely as possible, and keep envisioning what relevant worship looks like for our community. Countless thanks are owed to those who are involved in the day-to-day activities which keep music and worship alive for us. From ushers to virtual choirs, in-person socially distanced bell ringers to video-recorded lectors, to children's sermon-givers, it takes a whole host of people to get worship off the ground on a weekly basis. Thanks to all of these folks, and more, who give freely of their time and talents.

Looking forward, I personally long for the time when we will be able to gather together and sing in person. Unfortunately, the research and anecdotal evidence point to singing together as one of the riskiest things we can do for public health these days. Thus, in an effort to keep our community safe, we will not engage in group song until we have a reliable treatment for and protection against spreading COVID-19.

Although this reality makes me sad, I look to the future with hope. I am hopeful that this experience will end up drawing us together as a people of God who can support one another in dark times. I am hopeful that our song, when it returns, will be deepened by our collective suffering. I am hopeful that as we await the dawning light of our regathering, that we will continue to find ways to be a Christ-centered community which draws on song as a primary expression of our faith.

As always, I feel grateful to be your Director of Music. Even in times when our ability to make music together is limited, it is an honor to serve among you. Peace to you and your families in these times.

In Christ,

Adam Lefever Hughes

Sister Dottie Almoney, Director of Education and Outreach

At the time of this writing, I have begun my final year working towards my Doctor of Ministry degree. My focus is the role of the diaconate in the ELCA. I am working on my thesis entitled, "Reclaiming the D Word; the role of Diakonia in the ELCA." I have been spending many hours each week researching and writing. I will defend my thesis in April of 2021 with a projected graduation day of May 8, 2021.

This has been a crazy year. This virus has caused us as a staff to recalibrate how we do ministry and I am grateful for the collegiality of our whole staff and how we have been working together to come up with creative ideas for ministry. New ministries and small groups have formed such as our Moral Monday book Study and a Moms' Bible Study. The Hosler family is hosting a small learning pod for grades 5-8, their siblings and parents.

We created a safe church task force that at first focused on the safety of the church from the standpoints of an intruder, fire and weather emergencies. We did a quick readjustment on focusing on the effects of the virus in our church community. We collected PPE equipment, created protocol, and continue to assess the situation as it pertains to outbreaks and state mandates.

Lutheran Pastor and Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God." This virus was certainly an interruption! But when I talked to our youth, most said they had more time with their families, spent more meal time together, played games, and were able to slow down. What can we learn about our church community? God has interrupted our status quo, how we worship and how we learn together. While many of us get "Zoom fatigue", it has also given us a chance to stay connected to each other. I see Zoom being used even when this virus is gone. We may be able to include more people in our ministries that may not want to drive at night. We can still meet when the weather is bad. We are learning that we have more options for participation.

There is no doubt that I miss being in person with our community. I long for the day when we can hug each other and talk without a mask on our faces. But we can still be in community together right now.

What can we continue? Small learning pods may be a new way in which to do educational ministries. Home based groups and small interest groups can continue and evolve. Maybe God has pushed our reset button which allows us to move forward more creatively, to find others who want to pursue certain ministries with us. We read in Revelation 21:5, "And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new'." I do believe that God is making all things new at this point and we have the chance to be part of God's kingdom-building here on earth!

Pastor Sarah Teichmann, Pastor of Christian Formation

Dear friends in Christ,

I write to you at the end of an unprecedented year. I realize that the term "unprecedented times" may seem a bit overused in these past months. Sometimes, we as a culture use words and terms over and over again because words may fail to describe our experience. This fall I celebrated my 6th year serving as a pastor at St. Peter's and this summer I remembered my 10th year as an ordained servant

of the church. Though I have been a pastor for 10 years, I lived ministry as a pastor's child for 20-plus years. And in these 30 years of ministry experiences, I can tell you that this pandemic is an unprecedented experience. You certainly can speak to its unprecedented nature as we have shared phone calls, emails, and masked conversations together of how our lives have been changed.

And yet, in these ever-changing times that can cause whiplash to the heart, mind, and body, we cling to the truth "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) This is why we cling to Christ Jesus. As the African American Spiritual proclaims, "*Jesus is a rock in a weary land, my Jesus is a rock in a weary land, a shelter in the time of storm.*" (ELW #333)

So, let me provide this annual pastor's report in that light—Jesus as our rock in the midst of changing times.

Our Worship Life

We have experienced a dramatic change in worship due to the pandemic. On March 12 the St. Peter's staff gathered and made the decision to cease in-person gatherings—including worship. At the time, we thought it would be for a few weeks, but I write this report with the reality of the pandemic still in our midst.

And yet worship continued! Being church together doesn't stop.

We were able to livestream worship so quickly because the New Day leadership and the Communications Committee had seen to the creation of a livestream option 18 months prior to the pandemic, so when we could not physically be in the building, we immediately had a way to worship as a community. During those early days in March through June, worship would be livestreamed using a small computer webcam in the Teichmann home running on my husband's computer using software that we routinely used for the New Day service. Since those early days, the Council approved the expenditure of PTZ cameras and a church worship computer that can handle the demands of livestreaming. We also had our technology company come in and provide a network cable in the sanctuary space so that we could reliably stream worship from the sanctuary. These steps have allowed for worship leaders to provide worship from the sacred spaces you know and love.

On August 30, we gathered together for our first **Drive-In worship service**. It was the first time that we were able to celebrate Communion together since mid-March. I had the privilege of being celebrant that day, and I was truly emotional when I was able to say, "the body of Christ, the blood of Christ given for you." I give thanks that we may experience the presence of Christ—even when that presence may come in surprising forms like pre-packaged wafer and juice-filled Fellowship Cups.

In terms of worship, I commend the priesthood of all believers, and the ways that you have been part of worship. From the skilled craftsmen who built the stage used during the Drive-In worship to skilled videographers who faithfully record scripture readings, children's sermons, and sung offerings, Thank you for being part of this body of Christ that gives meaning in the midst of a weary land.

The presence of the steady nature of Christ has been in and among our staff—especially in the ways that they help to craft various worship services. When I have felt like I was in the midst of the 'weary

land,' I experienced the rock of Christ in my colleagues. I give thanks every day for the health of our staff and the care that we provide for each other and the congregation as a whole.

Learning Continues

Ask any educator and they will say that this year is unprecedented. Do me a favor and keep our educators in your prayers. They have been working so very hard. I watch this with members of my family who are teachers, I've seen the creative ways our preschool teachers are bringing virtual lessons to preschoolers for free, and I've witnessed the many ways our Christian education leaders are dedicated to the promise that as church we teach the gospel. These gospel teachings have occurred over Zoom, through YouTube videos, and even safely-distanced in-person small group gatherings. A pandemic is not going to keep us away from growing deeper in our faith! So maybe see this as a nudge to you to get involved in a learning opportunity. You can find out more at <https://www.stpeterslutheran.org/learn/>

Feasibility Studies, Strategic Planning, and Capital/Mission Campaigns: In the beginning of the year we engaged in a feasibility study that helped leadership see an overall picture of places of need and how we may respond in raising funds and directing resources. During the summer, we began a strategic planning process that helps us detail some of the places where we as a church are called to improve (capital and ministry both!) as well as grow. This is still a work in progress as I write this report. We hope to raise funds to actualize proposed strategic plans.

Gathering in Various Ways

I know that these months of pandemic, my learning curve has been through the roof—especially learning how to manage some of our website, video, and digital platforms. I am grateful to digital educational partners like Erik Teichmann, Adam Lefever Hughes, and members of our Communication Committee who help us to gather in virtual ways.

We are incarnational people who long to be together in person, but for many months we've not been able to do so. I give thanks that in the storm of uncertainty and ever-changing landscapes and news that can frighten, this church has been dedicated to being a shelter to be able to gather (virtually or in person) and be Christ to each other. You don't have to be alone, we are church together. **Do you know that we have several small groups and gathering opportunities?** Find out more at <https://www.stpeterslutheran.org/gather/>

I've noticed that several of you have asked to start small groups. And it's our pleasure as rostered leaders and staff to aid in these gatherings. Don't hesitate to reach out about how we can create more. Perhaps all that's needed is someone like you, who has an idea for a small group and needs some help getting it off the ground.

Service to God and Neighbor

I give thanks for so many of you who are serving during these unprecedented times. You are serving Christ by offering care to one another. The care ministries offered through cards and phone calls is a balm to our embittered lives. Seeing the ways that you are serving the community at large (either

through a St. Peter's ministry or on your own) has also been heartening. At a time where it can be so tempting to be only self-serving, witnessing your service to your neighbor has been a true privilege to see, my friends.

I continue to serve as an executive board member for the Samaritan Counseling Center in Lancaster. We recently experienced a transition in executive director leadership, and I give thanks for leadership past and present during these times. Counseling is so important, and during these very stressful, anxiety-inducing times, I pray that you know that there is support and care available. You do not have to feel alone, because you are not. Whether seeking a counseling relationship with Samaritan Center or another resource, I hope that you might consider the benefits of counseling.

This year I also took on a new role as serving on our Lower Susquehanna Synod's Candidacy Committee. I will aid in guiding candidates for rostered church leadership as they ready to enter seminary and respond to God's call in their lives.

Giving Thanks

I recently came across the passage St. Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. He writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:4-7)

Yes, this year has been unprecedented and we can feel tossed in storms and thrown into weary lands. BUT the presence of Christ is unchanging, and God is with you. I pray that you may feel and experience the Lord through this community of faith and through one another.

In Christ's Peace,

Pastor Sarah

This year's Annual Report booklet (either in your hands, or on your digital device) gives you a wealth of information about life at St. Peter's as we enter the eleventh month of the year 2020. Committees have shared descriptions of how their ministries evolved this year, sometimes in ways they could not have envisioned in February ... staff members have shared the projects that have been front and center for them, especially since March ... you will see lots of statistics whose purpose is to give you a picture of life in the congregation through the lenses of worship, education, visitation, social ministry, fellowship, and community building. A variety of financial metrics is included, also, with the hope of helping you see how the sacrificial offering of your treasures to God is helping to support ministry in this community and beyond. Yes, as usual, there is a lot of data in our Annual Meeting summary of reports, even though some of it is data that measures things that you never thought you would need to know. I'm not going to add any more data to your already overflowing plate. I'm going to make a few observations about some of the significant realities that have shaped life as we know it at St. Peter's this past year.

Speaking first to the elephant in the room, the COVID-19 pandemic, I will not flood you with any more numbers, projections, or plans that have been shaped by the decisions and the wisdom of global, national, state and local leaders. I will simply say that we have been threatened with a medical crisis that seeks to undermine everything we love about being a community. In the face of that threat of isolation, you have stepped up to embrace new opportunities for ministry, new ways of staying connected, new ways of worshiping, learning and serving, along with consistent support for the ministries that we embrace, where that was possible. I could not be prouder of the way this congregation has balanced safety and good health practice with creative ways of building community these past seven months.

On the topic of worship, it has become clear that in a congregation of 600-700 households, we have 800 different perspectives on what worship should be like in the pandemic. Okay, I exaggerate a bit here to make you smile. But in truth, we have had lots of conversations (with each other on staff, with church leaders, and with many of you in person, via letter, email, phone, or Zoom) about any number of things that we should or should not be doing. We have striven to honor your comments, examine them in light of what we know about safe practices in worship, and discussed what was achievable given our resources and the large number of people affected by those choices. Thus, you have seen the evolution of our worship life, which began as a live stream from the Teichmann's home led by just a couple of people ... to live stream led in the sanctuary, led by our worship team, and supported by musicians and parishioners who send in music and liturgy videos for inclusion in the stream ... to the addition of parking lot worship with Communion and hymn singing on our property ... to the preparation for a modest, in-person liturgical worship service in our sanctuary at the time of our normal "early service." Everything we have done worship-wise has been a hybrid-model that has sought to have components from each of our regularly worshiping communities. We have not done this perfectly, we know ... but it is not for lack of trying, coupled with significant hours given to planning, experimenting, and striving for balance. You have blessed us with your consistency in connecting to our worship life, either live on Sunday mornings, or later in the day or week through our YouTube channel videos of that worship. Thank you for that, and for all of your input and advice.

On the topic of stewardship, I found it incredible that as of the end of August (our most recent summary as of the writing of this report), our yearly giving (which includes general fund, debt reduction, loose plate offerings and Easter offerings) was up by a total of 2%. Friends, give yourselves a pat on the back, and keep up the good work. Admittedly, we are behind in the loose plate and Easter offerings, which are driven by “in person” passing of the plate. But the General Fund (up a little over 4% of budget) has more than made up for that deficit and then some. Please continue your faithful giving. We are also so very grateful for the more than 60 of you who have signed up to use our Tithely online giving tool. Your consistent giving through that giving tool helps create a weekly stability of income that has been especially helpful during this time in the church’s life.

On the topic of pastoral care, I suggest to you that you are pastors to each other The members of our Pastoral Care teams (Home Communion, Nightingales, Visitation team), in the absence of being able to visit in person, have been faithfully calling members under all kinds of circumstances. Thanks to our In Touch card and phone ministry for doing what they do every week of the year in reaching out by phone and greeting cards to our members, especially when sickness, death, or isolation touch their lives. Thanks to dozens of church members who, on their own, reach out week in and week out through phone or cards (and sometimes Zoom) to check in on people who may be isolated from others or at risk. Thanks to our office staff who have also been calling church members, and updating emails, phones and addresses, and sharing a little TLC at the same time.

On the topic of our Mission Appeal, I invite your participation. I am grateful that at our congregational meeting two week ago, you endorsed our intentional plan to look at our current capital and ministry needs, and support them in the ways that allow this congregation and these ministries to thrive. We continue to be grateful to the Mussers and their experienced guidance of our process. And we invite you to keep a watchful eye on our concurrent Strategic Planning process, which should be ready for unveiling to the congregation early in the New Year.

On the topic of staffing, I offer my thanks to each of our staff members ...

To Erik & Pastor Sarah ... for being the backbone, primary creators, and managers of our live stream worship. Their investment of time, knowledge, and problem solving is an immeasurable gift to our community and has given us the ability to worship in the best venue we have had available to us for most of the pandemic thus far.

To Adam Lefever Hughes ... who has been a strong participant with the Teichmanns in our new worship venues, and has found ways to take the very unsafe practice of singing together in choirs, and cast it into the digital realm, thus allowing us to enjoy all kinds of taped and live music in safe and secure ways.

To Sister Dottie ... for the creative ways she has kept a number of our social ministry programs functional and productive, all while helping us create safe and healthy places for conversation about our current culture, whether through sermons, book studies, education classes, or simple conversations in informal settings. She has helped us model how to be Christians who remain connected as a family of faith, even when our political or social passions land us on opposite sides “of the aisle.”

To Cindy Geesey ... for accepting the challenge of trying to teach the faith to children who learn best with hands on, active, and in person gatherings. The time constraints on the lives of our typical young families do not allow a whole lot of room for things like Christian Education. But Cindy has found ways to make our Children's Ministry offerings flexible enough to be used in a number of ways by our families.

To Betsy Linn ... for the countless ways she has connected our members to ministries, and her continuing work on the organization and involvement of our members in the ministries of the parish.

To Lorraine DiBernardo and her preschool staff ... who, being unable to provide preschool ministry in the manner we have always offered it, have created online lessons for our preschool members and others who may find them helpful, that are used and enjoyed by our youngest learners twice a week.

To Gary Williams ... for the ways he has tried to keep all the moving parts of our church building and grounds in working order. For his dedicated time given to our HVAC contractors, to help create a system that gives us the kind of fresh air exchange needed, which allows us to gather safely in the 2005 addition without significant risk of catching any airborne virus particles. And for handling the application for and approval of the PPP loan we were blessed to receive.

Personally, and on behalf of our staff, I thank the church for keeping us employed for our full hourly expectations, even though those hours look a little different in this unusual time. We and our families are grateful for your support and affirmation in many ways.

Pastor Craig Ross, Senior Pastor