



“NEWS FROM THE PEWS” FOR FEBRUARY 2021
ST. STEPHEN’S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
BILLINGS, MONTANA

Greetings Brothers and Sisters!

First, allow me to begin with the prayer appointed for Ash Wednesday, which is around the time you will hopefully receive this letter.

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lent is a season of penitence and fasting, a time of preparation for Easter. It is a time when we are invited to reflect on our behavior and how we live out our lives as disciples. The Ash Wednesday liturgy invites us “to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God’s holy Word.”

This year’s Ash Wednesday is unlike any other. We will not be able to come together and worship as one body. Nor will we be able to receive the visual reminder of our mortality with the imposition of ashes. Over the past year we have had to forgo many traditions. However, we have continued to worship and share God’s Word.

But there is hope on the horizon! Vaccines are getting administered and that is a vital first step to beginning to resume so much. I was able to sign up for a vaccine through Billings Clinic as a member of group 1B and will receive my second dose of the Pfizer vaccine on Ash Wednesday. I know of many other members of the congregation who have also gotten at least their first dose. This is quite exciting!

At the same time, it will take some time to resume many of our traditional behaviors and activities. First, we will still require everyone who enters the church to wear a mask for some time. This is necessary to protect those who aren’t vaccinated, because we still don’t know if someone who is vaccinated can spread COVID. Other activities, like coffee hour, singing, and the use of the common cup will take time. Our bishop should be providing details for that process in coming weeks.

My hope is that we can slowly begin to resume in-person worship in March so that we can be ready for Easter Sunday, which is early this year (April 4). We will still need to wear masks and space out, but it will be wonderful to back together again in our wonderful worship space. I know that we all long to be back together. Even once we resume in-person worship we will continue to offer online streaming of

our liturgies. This will allow those who aren't yet comfortable with in-person worship or who are unable to attend for other reasons to still participate.

I know that when we began to worship online last March none of us could have ever imagined that we would still be doing it nearly a year later. This has been an unbelievable time, but we have continued to worship in new ways. Our online weekly lectionary Bible study has been a great success and a wonderful opportunity to have fellowship.

One thing to look forward to in the near future is our first visitation by Bishop Marty Stebbins, which will take place on April 11, 2021. This will be the Second Sunday of Easter and more details will follow as we get closer.

In unrelated news, our new Senior Warden, Shelly Nauman, wanted me to remind members to please return any outstanding pledge cards for 2021 by February 26. If you misplaced your card, please contact our wonderful treasurer, Doris Gerstner, for a new one.

Also, the 2021 Diocesan Convention will be held in Billings this year from October 8 to 10. At our annual meeting we elected Elizabeth Grandahl and Shelly Nauman as our delegates and Carol Moore as our alternate. After the meeting we found out that St. Stephen's will actually have three delegates, not two. So, we need a new alternate! If you are interested, please contact Shelly or me.

Finally, I just want to again thank everyone for their patience and understanding over the last year. As I usually say at the end of every liturgy, keep the faith, we can make it! Stay safe and stay warm!

Yours in Christ,
Father Stephen

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