

ST. STEPHEN'S WORSHIP SERVICE

Ready for your participation each Sunday morning.
"Together in Spirit"

Worship in the comfort of your own home.

Go to the recording at www.stephenslutheran.org

*(Print the bulletin and Celebrate so you can read, sing
and pray with Pastor Jim. Have some bread and
wine/grape juice ready for Holy Communion)*

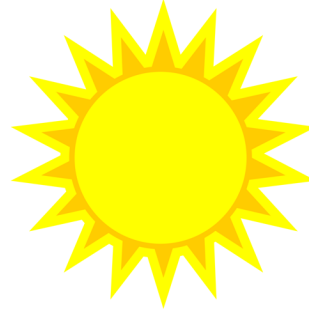
NEWSLETTER WAS SENT ON
January 28, 2020

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St Stephen's Lutheran Church
2500 Soquel Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

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St. Stephen's Lutheran Church



Sun

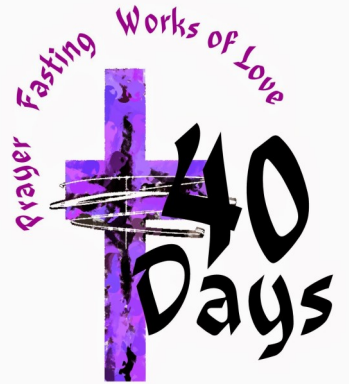
February 2021

Ash Wednesday – February 17th

A recorded service will be offered on our website.
The ashes will be mailed to you in a Lenten packet
so you can observe this solemn and
reflective beginning to the 40 days of
preparation for the Joy of Easter.

Wednesdays in Lent Feb. 24, March 3,10,17,24

A recorded Holden Evening Prayer Service
will be available on our website. A copy of the service and
readings will be mailed to you.



St. Stephen's Lutheran Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America
2500 Soquel Avenue, Santa Cruz, California 95062
Phone—831-476-4700 — Fax—831-476-3918
www..ststephenslutheran.org
email—office@ststephenslutheran.org
Rev. James P. Lapp, Pastor

Ministers: The Entire Congregation

Church Council: Pres. — Renee Rice V.P.— Robert Bartee
 Secretary - Jay Johnston Treasurer— Kent Madsen
 David Balogh, Bill Schraft, Alyssa Burkhardt,
 Paul Cunningham, and Steven Hendrickson

Director of Music: Gary Roberts

Sunday School: Leslie Lapp

Pre-School Director: Kathy Berens

Custodian: John Hopping

Church Administrator: Leslie Lapp

Office Open: Mon.—Thurs. 8:30am—2:30pm

Pastor Jim's Office Hours — Weds. & Thurs. 10 am to 1 pm

MISSION STATEMENT

St. Stephen's is a welcoming, healing community who worship God in Christ, nurture people growing in faith, serve others with acceptance and love, and invite people to share the joy of the Spirit.

VISION STATEMENT

To become an energetic, inclusive, multigenerational, multicultural, missional community that offers, hope, joy, worship, service, play, and life as disciples of Jesus Christ

Birthdays & Anniversaries

2-1 Lu Sluiter	2-18 Jay Johnston	
2-2 Jean Petersen	2-19 Connie Creel	2—6 Pastor Jim & Leslie
2-4 Kyle Travers	2-19 Charles Eldridge	
2-7 Marla Meek	2-21 Caitlin Hopping	2—24 Richard & Susan Oldfield
2-8 James Russell	2-24 Miller Mouw	
2- 10 Paul Powers	2-29 Beth Stiles	
2-12 Beverly Giladett		
2-18 Kathy Hopping		



Short Term: Healthcare workers, teachers, Marla Meek and family, Kathy Allen and Family, Beth Stiles, Nancy, Marisa, Margot Wilson, Corinne, The Wickham Family, Kent, Donna, Betsy, Tom, Anna, Krispa, Patsy, Zachary, Family of Al Mitchell, Jean Patterson, Frank Giammona, Heather, Kevin, Vanessa, Rose, Shelly Barker & family, Sam, George Webber & Family, Cox Family, Becky & Aaron Johnson, Lorraine Chavez, Lora Schraft Poulson, Nelleke, Hendrick, Kayla, Don, Lina, Sal, Katarina, Taiyo, Mateo, Stephanie Jager, Cabel, Miller, Kyle, Noah, Esdras, Jackson, Immigrant families, The Homeless, Our Nation's leaders, Mt. Cross, St. Stephen's Child Development Ctr, Pastor Jim and Our Church Family.

Long Term: The Sanders Family, Linda Johnson, Bailey Ingalls, Jan Shadle, Vi Olly, John B., Michelle, Josh, CJ, Jeff Tarantino, Susan Anderson, Rick, Bobbie Erickson, Edna Lindquist, Richard C., Eric VonSchell, Lauri Hollist, Ken Pahel, Pat M., Gary, Brouse Family, Janet Baker, Sandy Godvine, Janelle Yung, Barry & Barbara, Chris & Lorie Juhl, Karin, Will, Chris, Pat Hubbard, Cathy, Pearl Runquist, Volpi & Robe Family, men and women of Armed Forces, and the Youth of today.

Zoom with Pastor Jim
check email on Weds. for link



THURSDAYS 11am -12noon & 7:30 pm—8:30 pm

We will be looking at the upcoming scripture readings for Sunday, to enrich our worship experience and uncover some of the deeper truths of our faith. As we grow in our faith, we grow in community.



Celebrate Music

We all miss in-person worship gatherings, being part of many voices and singing together.

We have a suggestion. Form a VIRTUAL CHOIR. We have all the ingredients: talent, voices, and software. From home or church you can be part of a choir. No weekly meetings. Thanks to Shay Barsabe who has the software program.

Ideas for 2021:

- *Forming our music team.*
- *Building a brass choir*
- *Inviting in-house musicians to sing & play instruments.*
- *Rent or use our space for rehearsals in the future.*
- *Looking for woodwinds (flutes, clarinet and oboe) to join our music program.*
- *Strings are always welcome.*
- *Do you play the piano?*
- *Family singers, and instruments.*

Consider joining the Music Ministry. All ideas and members are welcome!

Contact beachhillgary@comcast.net or church office.

Yours in Christ, Gary Roberts

One of the silver linings of our ministry during the pandemic has been our Zoom Bible Study. As a result of a discussion there, I asked one of our scientists to share her thoughts on a very important topic. It is a beautiful statement of faith.—Pastor Jim

"It isn't uncommon in popular culture to see science and religion juxtaposed against each other. I like to see the science and religion topic as an "and" and not as a "vs". To me the two are compatible if not complementary, and both suffer when they are framed in a combative relationship. As a scientist, I've had many conversations about my faith, the most memorable of which was with an agnostic in a graduate school. He had assumed that all Christians rejected evolution, believed in a literal 6-day creation, and fit the negative stereotypes of the political group now called "Evangelicals". If this were my view of Christianity, I would be an agnostic too. We had an honest conversation in which I admitted that the Bible didn't have all the answers and after several hours, I was considered "the most rational Christian" he'd ever met.

I feel like science and faith work together, and a partial understanding of either are harmful. People of faith that tell science-minded people to check their curiosity and reason at the door are at best making someone hide part of themselves and at worst are turning people away from God. I have always been a curious person but thought science (especially evolution) was vaguely "bad" until my high school biology teacher (who happened to be Christian) gave me an encouraging article about Christians in science. Today, I don't see science as a threat to Christianity, and don't read the entire Bible literally. For me, God is so much more than the ancient account in the first few chapters of Genesis and the main focus of God in the Bible is one that spans from creation to redemption and focuses on forgiveness and love.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, I feel like some people believe that science "has all of the answers". The first thing that I learned about the scientific process is that it doesn't *prove* anything. You can only support or refute a hypothesis, AND you can only test your hypothesis using what you can observe with your own human senses (even if these senses are enhanced with advanced instrumentation). The existence of God, miracles, etc. are outside of measurable, objective human observation and thus not testable with science. We can learn a lot through science, researchers know that many hypotheses are wrong and most experiments fail. However, this doesn't mean that the process of science is wrong because it is THROUGH science that the original hypotheses were tested and results were gathered that supported other explanations. Science is a systematic process of answering questions and is not an absolute truth. The best science always leads to more research; however, just because science is "in process" doesn't mean that it should not be trusted. Often, it provides the best human explanation and shouldn't be countered with baseless opinions.

I approach science and religion in the same way - in both cases I believe in things that have substantial supporting evidence. In neither case can I "prove" beyond a doubt that something is true, but in both cases some level of faith must exist. I focus on getting the "big idea" right and assume some of the lesser details are wrong conclusions made by imperfect humans. Due to our limitations as humans, we cannot design a scientific experiment to examine God but I collect my "evidence" from history, the Bible, and my own life experiences that point toward God, and particularly to the God that we worship. I personally found spiritual support in the book "A Reason for God" by Tim Keller. Many of the things that point to God in my life are the same things that science can't explain – like my life's purpose and the ideas of love, forgiveness, and justice rather than pure survival of the fittest. For these things which science can't explain, I rely on my faith and daily seek my supporting "evidence" for God."

Alyssa Burkhardt, Ph.D. Cell and Molecular Biology

Council Highlights

1. Devotions centered on Psalm 139—"You have searched me out and known me..." as a reminder that God is always with us, carrying us, leading us, and hoping for our well-being. Our relationship with God is worth always seeking after because of the great love God has for us.
2. Pastor Jim reported that Kathy Allen lost her mother to Covid-19 recently. She lived in Massachusetts and had suffered from dementia for several years. Marla Meek lost her mother too, and Pastor Jim will lead her funeral service at Holy Cross Cemetery outdoors.
3. Kent Madsen, Treasurer, gave his year-end report and highlighted the faithful giving of our members. Despite the challenges of the pandemic restrictions, our envelope giving stayed very close to what we had planned and hoped for. The total income was lower due to reductions in loose plate offering and facility use. The preschool had to suspend its contributions to the church due to its closures and resulting financial hardship that saw its reserve significantly reduced. Beginning in March, the preschool will be able to begin building back its reserve fund. Council consensus was that the priority was rebuilding the reserve fund, and then resuming contributions to the church budget after. Our bottom line looks much worse than it actually is because it does not yet show our federal PPP loan as income because our bank, Comerica, has not begun the process of filing evidence that funds were used for payroll—which will result in not having to pay back the loan.
4. The 2021 budget was approved to be sent to all congregation members 2 weeks in advance of our Annual Meeting. It includes a deficit of around \$27,000. If needed, the congregation had authorized the spending of up to \$25,000 from our \$1.5 million in reserves for the coming year and for 3 more years after 2021.
5. The Annual Meeting will be held via Zoom. People without computers can call in by regular phone. If we fail to achieve a quorum of 32 present, then all voting will be advisory and will be brought to the next Council meeting for official approval. Voting will take place by private chat to the President during the meeting. The Annual Report will be sent out to all members.
6. Kent Madsen and Jay Johnston will be nominated for a 2nd 3yr Council term. Shelly Barker will be nominated for her 1st 3 yr term. David Balogh completed his two 3yr terms and the Council's deep gratitude was expressed to him.

Reconciled In Christ Welcome Statement

(Approved at January 2020 Congregational Meeting)

"We welcome all who are seeking God's love and grace.

We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status.

We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, imprisonment, socio-economic circumstances, or anything that too often divides us.

Our unity is in Christ."

"I'm happy to hear that the six-month time frame resonates with all of you," Manzo said. "It has been clear that there is inequitable access to these resources by those disparately affected by COVID."

"I think we have to make our mark," she said. "We'll probably be known as the first county to ever fully jump in and invest our dollars at the core. It will be lasting."

The monies will be distributed through the Community Foundation for Monterey County to seven nonprofit groups and the city of Gonzales, to hire and train the workers who will engage with community members at testing sites and elsewhere. The goal will be to educate and connect people to services should they test positive for Covid. Part of the money will go toward stipends to pay for quarantine needs, including food, medical care and housing.

In addition to targeting the census tracts within the county with the highest rates of the virus to get people to testing and services, the supervisors see the pilot as an important way to educate and encourage people to get vaccinated as the Covid-19 vaccines become available to essential workers in the months ahead.

A staff recommendation for a three-month program went up on the county's website. Over the weekend community organizers and various nonprofits, **including COPA**, worked to gain support for the secondary proposal for the six-month alternative approved today.

Representatives from the Monterey County Farm Bureau and the Monterey County Hospitality Association said they fully support a six-month program. Also in support is the collaborative group convened by the foundation, CFMC President and CEO Dan Baldwin told the supervisors.

The only change in the program's budget came after Supervisor Chris Lopez questioned why 15 percent of the program's budget—roughly \$643,000—would cover the indirect administrative costs of the nonprofits and city involved. He wanted some of the money to go toward quarantine stipend costs that go directly to residents. He wanted groups to receive 10 percent for administrative costs.

A representative from one of the nonprofits, Andrea Manzo of Building Health Communities, said lowering what the nonprofits receive would negatively impact their ability to administer the program.

The board agreed to a compromise of 12 percent of the total budget going to cover those costs, with 2 percent going toward increasing the quarantine stipend.

The supervisors asked for monthly progress reports beginning in February so they can monitor the program's effectiveness and make changes to the budget as needed.

Update -COPA (Communities Organized for relational Power in Action) ***"Bringing Biblical Justice to People in Need"***

We are delighted to share with you the outcome of Monterey County Board of Supervisors meeting! The Board voted unanimously, 5 to 0, to support COPA's proposal. In response to the Covid-19 crisis, they allocated \$4.9 million to hire 100 community health workers for 6 months. These workers will reach out to families in high risk census tracts, providing information, guidance to testing, and supported isolation.

Monterey County Board of Supervisors approves nearly \$5 million for COVID-19 program to begin in January 2021.

Angelica Cabral, "The Californian", Salinas Dec. 21, 2020

Monterey County Board of Supervisors unanimously voted to continue a program aimed at educating residents who are most at risk of contracting COVID-19.

After hearing several presentations, Supervisor Mary Adams made a motion to expand the COVID-19 Community Outreach and Education Pilot Program for 6 months.

"This is more than really important stuff... this is the biggest thing that we have ever been charged with doing," Adams said. "If we don't step forth in a strong, resolute way, I don't think that we're going to succeed."

The county intends on funding the program with \$1 million coming from contingency funds, \$1 million coming from the strategic reserve, and \$2.9 million coming from the Cannabis Tax Assignment.

Supervisor Jane Parker did request county staff to come back with more details regarding how funds will be spent. There will be a monthly presentation for reviewing the project, including looking at the metrics, such as how the project is going.

Earlier this year, Monterey County, along with several partners including the **Communities Organized for relational Power in Action—COPA**, and Building Healthy Communities (BHC) launched the COVID-19 pilot program.

So far, the county has trained 45 community health workers. The project is dedicated to providing community outreach and educating the public, specifically those residents in the lowest quartile of the Healthy Places Index, HPI Census Tracts.

The public comments were overwhelmingly in favor of a six-month rollout. Andrea Manzo, of BHC, spoke in support of the \$4.9 million, six-month proposal.



Child Development Center

Over the last year it has been hard to know even what time of year it is! We have opened and closed a few times during important holidays. Usually, the holiday events at school make it truly clear. Even the weather is not consistent with this time. Is it really winter? Time to make Valentines!

We returned, again, on January 11th! On the first day the children could not separate from their parents fast enough to run to the door where they anticipated playing with their friends again. Parents left with smile and a sigh. How wonderful that we can provide this service to families again. Our children entered Chapel with the same enthusiasm, a favorite of theirs with "Chapel" Jim! With hopes of the vaccine coming possibly this month for childcare workers and teachers maybe we can avoid any further closures.

Today was especially fun. One of our students donated oranges from her tree. Each child got to manually juice the oranges, using their fine motor muscles while enjoying a sense of wonder taking in the orange scent. We put it into small pourers so they could each pour their own cup. We enjoyed it with heated croissants, Miss Caryn's favorite!

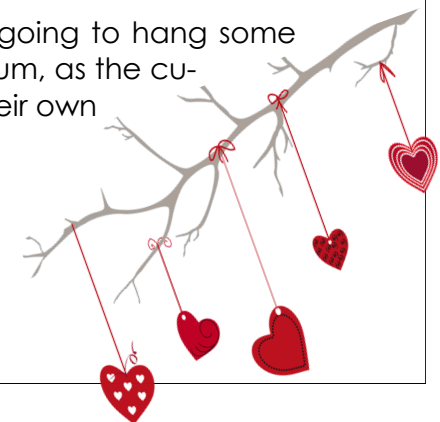
During Circle time we are reviewing the alphabet, starting at the beginning again so we can provide consistency. They love to come up with words that start with the topic letter. Today Caryn sang the "Two Little Blackbirds" song. They fly away behind her then back out using each child's name in the song. It also includes concepts like, near and far, quiet and loud, etc. This group loves listening to stories. In today's story the mouse sneezed in the bear's ear and woke him up from hibernation! We learned about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and striving for kindness to others.

Miss Brenda has two toddlers, two days a week. By March 1st, we will add three more. She is looking forward to reviving her program with more children who all know each other as they have/had older siblings here.

We miss sharing our displays with you. Caryn is going to hang some paintings she made mats for in the hallway for a museum, as the curator. Since they cannot go visit one, they will create their own to visit together.

In March we plan to serve 17 students from 14 homes. Consistency will be the answer to our financial recovery and the future is looking brighter!

Warmly, Kathy Berens





Association of Faith Communities—
Advocacy and programs for homelessness in SC

We wanted to let you know how the AFC has been doing, it's been a while. It's been an unbelievable year in many, many respects and we are most thankful for having gone through it without a single case of COVID in any of our programs.

This is largely due to the County and City quickly funding staffing and meals allowing us to consolidate the Faith Community Shelter to two sites open 24/7 and, therefore, dramatically reducing the number of vectors to which our members, as well as volunteers would be exposed.

At the same time, our congregations stepped up with Resurrection and UMC Santa Cruz opening their facilities 24/7 for FCS with others willing to take over should either not be able to continue. Also, many SafeSpaces spots moved to 24/7, again cutting down on the vectors our folks are exposed to. Lastly, our staff and members have been extremely disciplined in observing protocols.

Notably, all this has had a very positive effect on the number of members moving on to jobs, and better housing; a 50% increase. In the midst of all the disruption and death, COVID has provoked a real response to homelessness with a doubling of shelter beds, greater coordination of programs and a proposed three-year plan to consolidate these gains, add 160 more shelter beds or supportive housing units. It is hard to know where God's blessings will land, but we can see in the above.

We all miss the fellowship of volunteers preparing and sharing evening meals. It was a grounding and spiritual event that was God's people doing just what they are supposed to do to the benefit of themselves and those they serve, and the glue that bound the AFC to its member congregations. With the speedy rollout of vaccines, we hope a return to "normal" by early summer for which we all pray.

We hope you and yours are well and greatly look forward to renewing the close relationship between the AFC Board members and staff, yourself and your congregations.

With many thanks,

AFC Board, Staff and members. (Rev. Herb Schmidt—retired, serves as the St. Stephen's rep.)

Provide Lunches for Volunteers
Tuesday, February 23
(4th Tuesday of each month)

Contact church office if you can provide
Sandwiches, Fruit, Chips or Cookies



Benevolence Donations (Individual and Church)

2020 through December	
Am. Fdn. Suicide Prevention	\$305
SS Scholarships	\$380
Live Oak Resource Center	\$245
Habitat for Humanity	\$470
Mt. Cross	\$410
World Hunger	\$295
Housing Matters	\$315
CLU/PLTS	\$335
Lutheran Campus Ministry	\$485
SS CDC	\$1,170
El Salvador Sister Parish	\$585
Lutheran World Relief	\$155
ELCA Synod	\$1,000
COPA	\$2,900
Lutheran Immigration	\$0
Total	\$8,150
2020 Benevolence Target (10%)	\$14,658
% of Target	56%



Treasurer Notes ...
 Budget Information · December 2020

	December	December	YTD	YTD	Net
	Actual	Budget	Actual	Budget	
Contribution Income	\$13,960	\$13,333	\$145,032	\$146,585	\$-1,553
Facility Use Income *	\$620	\$1,535	\$11,807	\$18,415	\$-6,608
Investment Income	\$4,007	\$3,750	\$44,889	\$45,000	\$-111
Total Income	\$18,587	\$18,618	\$201,728	\$210,000	\$-8,272
Expenses	\$22,091	\$21,459	\$228,608	\$234,871	\$-6263
Net	\$-3,504	\$-2,841	\$-26,880	\$-24,871	\$-2,009

* Includes Child Development Center facility use @ \$300/month + Miscellaneous Income.
 Contribution income for December was above budget (thank you!), but we continue to fall behind with Facility Use Income; we’re helped by somewhat lower expenses, but still running with a deficit larger than expected. A Paycheck Protection Program loan in the amount of \$59,300 was granted to St. Stephen’s and the Child Development Center.

While the church is closed to fight the coronavirus pandemic, our expenses continue. *Thank you to those who have mailed contributions or made them online on our website.*

Special funds for the Organ, Piano,
 Hearing Impaired and Solar Electricity

	December	Reserve	Needed to Payoff
Organ	\$0	\$260	
Piano	Tuning \$-190 Donation 50	\$-45	
Hearing Impaired Equip	\$0	\$395	
Solar Electric Payback	\$124		\$15,232

El Salvador Sister Parish News

Guillermo Ungo Update As like many other nonprofit organizations in 2020, Santa Cruz al Salvador had to become creative. Our “normal” ways of operating weren’t available during the pandemic shelter-in-place.
 We solicited our sponsorship donations online and by telephone, rather than in person during social time after worship services. Along with that, we were faced with a challenge: without traveling to El Salvador in January 2021, how could we provide our traditional gifts to the students we sponsor? Working with our in-country partner, Robert Broz, we came up with a plan. Rather than each sponsor filling a gift bag for their student and the delegation delivering the bags, we could ask for an equivalent amount of money and buy “gift baskets” for the students and their families. Voila! That amounted to a win-win as we had a gift solution and helped the Salvadoran economy at the same time! The response by our sponsors was amazing. As I write, the Scholarship Committee in Ungo, along with the University students, are assembling the gift baskets for delivery to the students along with their shoes, uniforms, and supplies. They will be distributed in February during several smaller meetings with students rather than one large ceremony that we traditionally do when we go.

El Pilar Update To date, we have funded 61 of the originally requested 83 latrines. We have the funds for another group of 10, and are waiting for the next proposal from the community team in El Salvador.

As always, thanks for the generous support St. Stephen’s gives for our projects and Salvadoran communities. For Santa Cruz al Salvador, Kent Madsen

Monthly Special Benevolence Offering

February - St. Stephen’s Scholarship Fund

Over the years we have been blessed to receive several bequests from former members that make up our present scholarship fund. Many of St. Stephen’s youth have benefited from this fund as they further their education in college while costs continue to rise. We attempt to use the interest only from this fund, but sometimes we need to dip into the principal in order to fulfill the requests. This month you can give a special offering in addition to your regular offering in order to keep this fund healthy well into the future. Maybe you, too, could think about including the St. Stephen’s Scholarship Fund in your will or estate plans as others before us have. This is a multiplying gift as it enables someone else to develop their God-given gifts in service to others.

January—Society for the Prevention of Suicide = \$15 (as of Jan. 11)

Book Review by Kim Frey

Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer

First of all, I truly hope that you can get a hold of the audio book as this author's voice is so wonderful to listen to!! The timber of her voice can immediately put you into relaxation mode! It's warm, measured and lyrical. I rented it from "Libby", a cell phone app that allows me to borrow audio books from libraries for free. (I did have to put it on hold and wait till it was available though, as it's popular) Dr. Kimmerer is a mother, botanist, plant ecologist, writer and Professor at the College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse New York. She is also a First Nation person and her tribe is Potawatomi. In her book she gracefully mixes wisdom of the plant world including indigenous knowledge, with current ecological issues of soil and plant management which desperately needs addressing in our modern world.

She includes in her book, descriptions of her life as a single mother: warm-hearted descriptions of her loving the raising of her two daughters to honor and respect the natural world around them. Bringing them out in nature in the country, where they live, as much as possible. She worked to return a polluted long forgotten pond on their property to health, bringing her daughters into the journey. She taught her daughters how to tap maple trees for maple syrup and much more.

Her interwoven descriptions about the environmental field trips she created in order to impart knowledge and wisdom to her college students about ecological soil/plant management is also very inspiring! It's so easy to understand why she became many of her student's favorite teacher during their college years. She artfully describes her own college experiences and how she became a strong advocate, in her professional life, for returning to many of the wise ways of Native Americans in regards to soil and plant management.

This book and her Potawatomi ancestral beginnings were especially interesting to me as many of my Great(s) grandparents on my mother's maternal side are Cherokee First Nation people. And the fact that I love working in the garden and nurturing plants, trees and flowers just to see them flourish, lends to my interest. I am known to silently pray for the health and well-being of the trees, as I sit waiting at a red light in my car, glancing at the trees around me. The trees always draw my attention, and how I love the beautiful, large healthy old trees of all different types!!

Robin Kimmerer's book Braiding Sweetgrass became a best seller in North America as 400,000 copies were sold with very little marketing. Mostly people became aware and interested in her book just by word of mouth alone. Her book was on the New York Times best-seller list seven years after it was published by independent press Milkweed Editions. This is truly remarkable! I hope that you have the opportunity to read or listen to this wonderful book!!

Thoughts about my time during COVID by Jeanette Dawson

My life during COVID has been filled with blessings. Like everyone, we've missed planned travels, special life events, and gatherings. But that is minor, my family and I have remained COVID-free.

As with so many times during my life, I feel like God was guiding my path and taking care of me when I could not imagine what the future might bring. Last January, upon my return from El Salvador, I finally "chose" a retirement date of May 1st. My daughter, Stephanie, had been pressing me for a date since the fall when she found out she was pregnant with her second child. (Would I be available to babysit, or did she have to save a childcare spot?) After working full time as a registered nurse for 42 years, and commuting "The Hill" for 36 years, I was ready; but still considering all the factors of completing projects at work, health care coverage, retirement benefit options; and we were still helping our son Cabel who had returned to academia to get his Special Education credential.

Little did we know our country, and the world, would experience the worst health care crisis in over 100 years. My younger self would have volunteered to go to the frontlines to help in a time of need, but now I feel blessed I was spared having to deal with COVID at work. Dealing with the new policies and unknowns during my last month at work, I realized, I'm just tired.

I feel like God knew I needed to have time to prioritize my time with family: Time at home with Tom (isolating at home suits him just fine); being able to babysit at a moments notice so Steph and Jared could go grocery shopping or on a bike ride; and overnight visits to my parents home 1-2 times/month to help out during these restrictive times. I have been able to complete a few sewing projects, gardening and house projects, without the constraints of squeezing them into the weekend. But daily life is so full, I haven't had time to consider new hobbies, baking sourdough bread or doing jigsaw puzzles.

Now that Stephanie and Jared are back to work, I am babysitting Conrad (3 years), and Savannah (9 months), 4-5 days/ week. I don't relish starting my day at 5 AM, but the seeing Savannah break into a big smile and kick her feet with joy upon seeing me and getting a sleepy hug from Conrad makes it worth it!



We miss you all!
Let us know what's been happening
in your life. Your notes help keep us
hopeful and joyful.