



# ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

## St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

### UPDATE ON THE GIVING TREE

By Andrea Notley, coordinator

It's not too late! If you'd like to participate in the Giving Tree, please let me know if you want to adopt and shop for a child or donate money. There is more if you want to get in the Christmas spirit, but if those options don't work for you, you can **come to the church and help wrap gifts on Saturday, Dec. 14**, from 10 a.m. till noon. We'll listen to Christmas music and drink hot chocolate (or coffee) and eat doughnuts. Please let me know if you'd like to join us.



### RITA'S GRAND THANKSGIVING

As advertised, Rita Ford prepared a Thanksgiving feast in the fellowship hall and invited everyone to show up. About 35 people did, and from all accounts it was quite a success. "We were blessed to have people from five different countries for dinner – Syria, Guatemala, Mexico, Pakistan and, of course, the USA," Rita said when we asked her for details.

"Three of the invitees are employed at the place where I work, and they brought their families. We made food to feed about 50. My son and sister helped with the cooking. I did the majority of the cooking in the fellowship hall. We had turkey, beef, buttered poached fish, chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, dressing, sweet potatoes, zucchini casserole, vegetable rice, mac and cheese, green beans, roasted veggies and a garden salad. Plus homemade cookies, chocolate cookies and pumpkin cheesecake. I think that's it!" Any music? Any dancing? Rita, our dance enthusiast, replied: "We had some music. I wish there were dancing. Maybe next time!"



### REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS IN A TIME OF DISTRESS

Excerpt from the E-Spirit Synod newsletter

As we journey through this Advent season, the Just Love team of the Florida-Bahamas Synod is pleased to offer ["The Advent of Peace: Reflections and Prayers in a Time of Distress."](#) We hope this devotional will bring unity, hope and healing during these challenging times.



This year, marked by a devastating hurricane season, a divisive national election and ongoing conflicts, calls us to work for peace and justice for all of God's children and healing for God's creation. The devotions draw inspiration from the Gospel of Luke, especially Zechariah's Benedictus, and the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a pastor who resisted the Nazi regime.

We thank the Revs. Paul Gibson, Gabriel Morgan, Derek Hoven and Chuck Miller for their reflections. Each devotion includes hymn suggestions and a YouTube link for an additional song. [Download the devotional](#) and join us in this season of reflection and prayer.

*Cheryl Stuart urges us all to sign up for E-Spirit to get a glimpse of what's happening around our synod and state. Visit [https://visitor.constantcontact.com/manage/optin?v=001axme-E2H6q\\_znOPpFUjl-vncrakbzGPKZkGvC5sh\\_RwR6llQtVuvXvxB0cexp\\_fAqD9M1tLTfOm4ieOhSlqDQ\\_vYXj\\_MJc-9V](https://visitor.constantcontact.com/manage/optin?v=001axme-E2H6q_znOPpFUjl-vncrakbzGPKZkGvC5sh_RwR6llQtVuvXvxB0cexp_fAqD9M1tLTfOm4ieOhSlqDQ_vYXj_MJc-9V).*

# SUAKOKO SERAPHIM’S GIFT-WRAPPED JOY

*By Karen E. Olson (An excerpt from the Dec. 21, 1992, Tallahassee Democrat)*  
*Suakoko Villa used to be one of Tallahassee’s worst drug havens, but this story shows how the children turned things around one holiday season.*

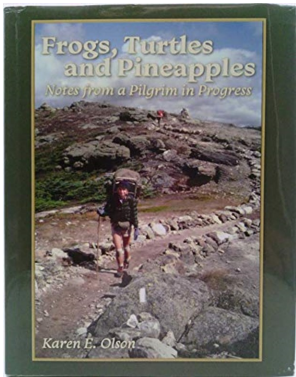
At first blush, the setting looks bleak. The tile floors are crumbling, the windows masked by security grates. But at Saturday’s dress rehearsal, the actors were entranced by their costume jewelry and pseudo-Palestinian headgear. “I have yet to have one of these kids confront me about scenery,” said director Cassie Hammock, 47, a grandmother of four. “This is Broadway for these kids.”...

Ten-year old Chris Mon had to confront the angelic host all alone, and he wasn’t entirely faking it as he quaked with apprehension. “Looks like you’re going to have to be all the shepherds,” Hammock told him. “You’re going to have to be a quick study.” If any more cast members drop out, she joked, “The narrator will be saying a whole lot more than I had planned.”

After a month of rehearsals, she was still exploring ways to dispose of the stuffing in Mary’s belly at the proper moment. And she was still dispensing basic etiquette tips – like, you don’t escort a pregnant woman by grabbing her arm.

But by the end of Saturday’s final run-through, the angels were dancing and the cast was blowing spontaneous kisses. The only outcast was 12-year-old Michael Kemp, portraying evil King Herod. He had to be repeatedly shooed away from the joyful crowd in the stable....

And while she’s still hoping for a last-minute donation of toys, Hammock will manage just fine if they don’t materialize. After all, she proposed the pageant as an antidote to commercial frenzy. The message of Christmas, she emphasized, is that hope and redemption occur in the midst of poverty: “Jesus – God – was born poor, but He continued to do good. And we still celebrate His life.”



*This is our final installment of Karen’s stories about her faith journey and her experience of St. Stephen. You can find them all in her book, “Frogs, Turtles and Pineapples: Notes From a Pilgrim in Progress,” in the church library. Thank you, Karen!*



## SMILE FOR THE CAMERA


Every year or so, we like to get a fresh congregational photo. We’ve been looking for a time when a goodly number of us will be around anyway – and the date we’ve chosen is Sunday, Dec. 15, immediately after the liturgy. That’s also the day of the children’s Christmas program, which is woven into the liturgy.

So please scribble “Cong. photo after church” on your calendar for Dec. 15. And practice smiling. *(The cropped picture above is from 2012. Zoom in. See any familiar faces?)*

BEFORE YOU GO...

- Looking for creative holiday gifts that you can't find in department stores? Check out the annual Alternative Christmas Market, which will be celebrating its 37th year from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday at John Wesley United Methodist Church, 1689 Old St. Augustine Road (at Blair Stone Road, behind the Florida Commerce Credit Union). Among many other nonprofits, KidSafe will be there with gift ideas for you.
- Once again, we'll be decorating the chancel area with poinsettias for Christmas. Want to dedicate one (or more)? The cost is \$10 apiece, and the dedication list will be in the Dec. 15 and 22 bulletins. Just fill out the form in the narthex and place it with your payment in the offering plate, or email Lori with the information. The deadline is **this Sunday**.
- We're collecting pledge cards for 2025. Please prayerfully consider your planned contributions for the ministry of St. Stephen. The estimate of giving





**2025 Estimate of Giving**  
In support of God's mission for St. Stephen Lutheran Church:  
To be an active community that welcomes all people to nurture and share their faith and gifts with everyone, according to God's call.

NAME(S): \_\_\_\_\_

I/we pledge to intentionally give financially to the ministry of St. Stephen Lutheran Church:

(Please select one option)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ per week  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ per month  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ per year

*I/we understand that this plan can be changed by notifying the financial secretary.*

is vital information for our Church Council to begin preparing our budget. Our planned gifts are also vital to our own spiritual development and maturity. Thank you in advance for your generous stewardship and trust in God's mercy. (Cards are in the narthex

and can be dropped in the collection plate. You also have the option of pledging directly to Lori via email or phone.)

- If you have an anniversary, birthday, special memory or special St. Stephen person or program you'd like to honor, celebrate by sponsoring the altar flowers for our service. Sign up on the flower chart, out by the nametags, or ask Lori to sign you up. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

- Annette Claussen - 12/08
- Janet Barber - 12/09
- Ridy Hofer - 12/11
- Laura Sullivan - 12/14
- Rita Ford - 12/18
- Wesley Holdcraft - 12/18
- Carol Santos - 12/26
- Pr. Tom - 12/29
- Kate Stuart - 12/29
- Mike Martinez - 12/30



COMING UP

Today:

- Noon - Al-Anon meets in fellowship hall (FH)
- 7 p.m. - AA meets in FH

This Friday:

- 9:30 a.m. - TOPS meets in FH

This Saturday:

- 10 a.m. - Sew for Hope meets in FH

This Sunday:

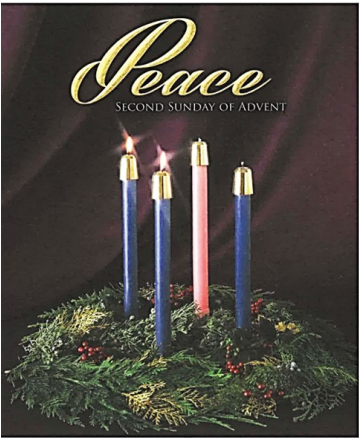
- 9 a.m. - Book study
- 9:30 a.m. - Choir practice
- 10 a.m. - Worship, Second Sunday of Advent
- 5 p.m. - Compassionate Friends Candlelight service in FH

Monday, December 9:

- 5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH
- 7 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH

Wednesday, December 11:

- 5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH
- 7 p.m. - Choir practice





If you have news or photos to share,  
please send them to Lori at  
[sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com](mailto:sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com).

Don't forget our Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee>.

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The Rev. Tom Holdcraft, Pastor

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