



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

TIME TO FILL UP THAT TRUCK AGAIN

By Sharon Simmons, outreach coordinator

Wonderful Lenten liturgies and our joyful Easter music and service have moved us to the edge of summer. As in years past, Pastor Tom and a delegation from St. Stephen will be traveling to Orlando to attend the Florida-Bahamas Synod Assembly. Voting delegates from St. Stephen will include Colleen Holdcraft and Rita Ford. Jonas Holdcraft will be attending as our youth representative for the last time. (No, he's not too old, but he'll graduate from Lincoln this year and then will be off to college in the fall.)

Each congregation is asked to bring donations, which are then given to a local nonprofit. This year the donations will be going to the Hope Partnership in Orlando. According to its website, Hope Partnership "aims to provide a holistic continuum of care in order to end homelessness and poverty in Central Florida." It works to accomplish those goals by connecting service providers, businesses and investors with evidence-based solutions and trauma-informed care practices. With that in mind, each congregation is asked to collect and bring the following to the Synod Assembly:



- Body wipes
- Travel-size lotions
- Deodorant (men's & women's)
- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- Razors (men's & women's)
- Men's boxer briefs (M/LG/XL)
- Women's underwear (L/XL, 2X)
- Unisex T-shirts (L/XL)



From May 4 through June 8, a tub will be available in the Hingst Fellowship Hall where you can place donations. Most of the items can be purchased at a reasonable price at Dollar Tree. (Travel-size lotions are available at Target or Five Below, in case you don't find them at Dollar Tree.)

Let's fill the bed of Pastor's truck!

YOU'RE INVITED

By Sharon Simmons

Sunday, May 25, at 3 p.m. is the annual Unity in the Community program at Allen Temple CME Church on Kissimmee Street. This event raises money to support scholarships for graduating high-school students who need financial assistance to attend FAMU, FSU or TSC. A Noisy Offering last month was collected to support this program. After the service will be a sit-down dinner. Please RSVP to Brenda Christie at 850-599-1948 or email at bchristie15@gmail.com. Talk to Judi Duffy about how wonderful the program is.



BELIEVING

By Lauren Jackson. We think you'll find this article heartening. It was published Easter Sunday in The New York Times, one slice of a much larger project.

Americans believe.

Most people are wary of the government, the future and even each other, but they still believe in astonishing possibilities. Almost all Americans — 92 percent of adults — say they have a spiritual belief, in a god, human souls or spirits, an afterlife or something “beyond the natural world,” as we reported earlier this year.

The country seems to be acknowledging this widespread spiritual hunger. America’s secularization is on pause, people have stopped leaving churches, and religion is taking a more prominent role in public life — in the White House, Silicon Valley, Hollywood and even at Harvard. It’s a major, generational shift. But what does this actually look like in people’s lives?

I have spent the past year reporting “Believing,” a new project for *The Times*. This project is personal to me. I was raised a devout Mormon in Arkansas. I’ve left the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and I understand how wrestling with belief can define a life. I hoped to capture what that journey looked like for others, too — both inside and outside of religion. I interviewed hundreds of people, visited dozens of houses of worship and asked *Times* readers for their stories. More than 4,000 responded.



In my reporting, I found that there are many reasons for this shift in American life. Researchers say the pandemic and the country’s limited social safety nets have inclined people to stick with (or even turn to) religion for support. But there is another reason, too: Many Americans are dissatisfied with the alternatives to religion. They feel an existential malaise, and they’re looking for help. People want stronger communities, more meaningful rituals and spaces to express their spirituality. They’re also longing to have richer, more nuanced conversations about belief.

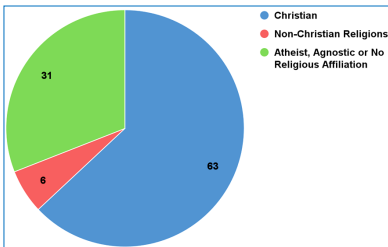
Over the past few decades, around 40 million Americans left churches, and the number of people who say they have no religion grew to about 30 percent of the country. Many people turned to their jobs, gym classes (yoga, CrossFit, SoulCycle) and mysticism (astrology apps and meditation) for answers on how to live well. Some stopped speaking about their past faith — it was unfashionable, in big cities and on college campuses, to do so.

Studies provide a sense of how that’s going: “There is overwhelming empirical support for the value of being at a house of worship on a regular basis on all kinds of metrics — mental health, physical health, having more friends, being less lonely,” said Ryan Burge, a former pastor and a leading researcher on religious trends.

People who practice a religion tend to be happier than those who don’t, a study by the Pew Research Center found. They are also healthier: They are significantly less likely to be depressed or to die prematurely from suicide, alcoholism, cancer, cardiovascular illness or other causes, multiple studies from Harvard found.

This isn’t true for everyone, of course. Many people have built happy, healthy lives outside of faith, and about a third of Americans who have left religion appear to be doing just fine, according to a new study from Burge. But in aggregate, religion seems to help people by giving them what sociologists call the “three B’s” — belief in something, belonging in a community and behaviors to guide their lives.

Religion fills a psychological need, Michele Margolis, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, told me. “We want to feel connection,” she said. “We want to feel like life makes sense.” Finding these things alone or creating them from scratch is “really hard,” she added.



Now, something is shifting. Most Americans identify as religious (around 70 percent of adults), and many are very committed to their faith (44 percent of Americans say they pray at least once a day). For the first time in decades, America’s religiosity is remaining stable. This may change, of course, in the coming years, especially as young people age.

But for now, many “nones” — people who have no religious affiliation — that I spoke to seem to have a dawning recognition that, in leaving faith, they threw “the baby out with the baptismal water,” as my Opinion colleague Michelle Cottle said. Some are even converting to a religion. Depressed and doomscrolling during the pandemic, Matt McDonough, a 39-year-old in Minnesota, said he found a “profound” community in a men’s Bible study. “I got baptized as an adult. My mental and physical health improved dramatically.”

Most say they aren’t going back to religion. But many people told me they want new spaces to discuss and explore their spirituality. “My inner life is rich with spiritual reflection, and I sometimes yearn for a more open dialogue about it,” said Doris Andújar, 42, from Ponce, P.R.

Conservatives seem to be better at naming this longing. They speak to “civilizational” renewal and a restoration of moral values. They promise deliverance through politics. They use the infrastructure of evangelical Christianity to communicate their vision. It’s working for them.

But is this the only way? Successful alternatives haven’t emerged at scale, and many liberals have ignored American spirituality — this longing — at their party’s peril. This data reveals that finding a way forward may require acknowledging that Americans want to wrestle with hard questions about how to live. They’re looking to heady concepts — confession, atonement, forgiveness and sacrifice — for answers. In short, they’re looking to believe in something.

WHAT JUDI STANDS FOR

By Judi Duffy

Sometimes during the liturgy, dear Judi Duffy stands when the rest of us don’t. In recent days, several worshippers have asked her why. So now she thinks that maybe all of us are wondering why – or that some of us might even think she’s too big for her britches because she’s the pastor’s mom! We assured her that wasn’t the case but invited her to tell her interesting story.



For clarification, I want to share with all of St. Stephen’s faithful about my early Episcopalian upbringing. High Episcopal education was very much like the Roman Catholics’ education. That’s why I always stand when we sing “Lamb of God,” right before Holy Communion, as a sign of respect for the priest/pastor and his/her assistants as they receive the bread and wine.

Also, I always stand to sing hymns. During Holy Week, Good Friday was unique. The choir sang the first four stanzas of “Ah, Holy Jesus” and “Were You There,” as the rest of us remained seated. But the bulletin invited the congregation to join in for the last verse of each hymn – so, for those verses, I stood. Apparently some of you did, too – which I think is what gave rise to the recent batch of questions about why I stand. Fact is, because I sit in the second row and don’t turn around much during the service, I don’t know who’s doing what behind me! To be honest, it’s easier for me to sing when I’m standing.

The wonderful diversity of St. Stephen means that we can dress as we like, be who we are, and stand or sit however we choose. So please feel comfortable sitting or standing as the Spirit moves you – as I will always do.

'I FEEL FOR THE POOR AND UNLUCKY'

As a longtime member of St. Stephen, Mark Mustian knows his way around a prayer. He lets us eavesdrop on the prayer life of one particularly vile character in his new book, "Boy With Wings."



“When [my son] asks me to accompany him to church, I go praying for mercy, for God to see the good I’ve done and the great freedoms kept, to hear my promises that if saved I won’t fail Him. I smile at [my wife] and the kids after my petition, reminding the Lord that there’s a noble side to me too. I renewed the contract with the Division of the Blind at the capitol, for example – something I could have revoked, but I feel for the poor and unlucky; I won’t be outflanked by my noble and selfless son.

“I saw a hunchbacked girl mopping last week, ugly as sin and purblind as a newborn, and thought the angels in heaven should be dancing and pleased. No one can say that Governor Doyle lacks compassion or kindness, or feels no mercy or pity. I’ve never intentionally been mean. The Lord’s light can certainly shine straight through me.”

ON MERCY: EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM’S SERMON

... Mercy is defined as compassion for another who is in distress and wanting to do something about it. Mercy is a movement inside of us to become the doers that bring about the help someone needs....

Many faithful Christians are being tricked into believing that Jesus’ ways of caring and compassion are forms of weakness and no longer are effective. There is not a stitch of gospel news when there is no mercy in word or action....

So what do we do when we are forced to live under laws that are unjust? Do we grit our teeth and obey what some call “the law of the land”? Or should we take what can be called life-threatening (or freedom-threatening) risks and break the law that is unjust?

Civil disobedience is the nonviolent refusal to obey laws the protester believes to be unjust. Rosa Parks did it when she refused to give up her seat to a white man when the bus filled up with passengers. Pacifist David Miller did it when he burned his draft card publicly in opposition to the Vietnam War. He spent two years in prison for that.



Students have engaged in civil disobedience when they walked out of classrooms to demand action on climate change or pitched tents on university campuses to point out military atrocities forced upon citizens. Parents of transgender children are doing it when they continue gender-affirming care for their child.

These nonviolent actions can get one handcuffed, spat upon (or worse) and/or incarcerated.

These days if you’re in the U.S. on a visa for work or school, standing up for justice can get you deported to a jail in another country. Even when our administration admits the error, it does nothing to bring Kilmer Abrego Garcia back from El Salvador.

BEFORE YOU GO...



- Reminder: There’s still time to make your Noisy Offering in support of the Peace and Justice Endowment Fund that Ann and Emory Hingst established.

- 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 name tags, or ask Lori to sign you up. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS



Julia Bonfanti - 05/03
Emily Jennings - 05/07
Eva Mustian - 05/09
Claire Claussen - 05/09
Jennifer Dritt - 05/21
Paxton Oates - 05/23
Sandy Larson - 05/24
Jake Hartung - 05/25
Blake Simmons - 05/25
Lawana Lamb-Daniels - 05/30

**If you have an upcoming birthday not listed above, let the church office know.*

COMING UP

Today:

Noon - Al-Anon meets in Pastor Emory Hingst Memorial Fellowship Hall, aka Hingst Hall (HH)

7 p.m. - AA meets in HH

This Friday:

10 a.m. - TOPS meets in HH

This Saturday:

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

3:30 p.m. - HH Carpet Cleaning

This Sunday:

9:00 a.m. - Book study

9:30 a.m. - Choir practice

10 a.m. - Worship: Third Sunday of Easter



Monday, May 5:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

7 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

Tuesday, May 6:

5 p.m. - NA meets in HH

Wednesday, May 7:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

5:30 p.m. - Mutual Ministry meets in Matthew room

7 p.m. - Choir practice



If you have news or photos to share,
please send them to Lori at
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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