



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

A PLACE IS PREPARED FOR US

Excerpt from Pastor Tom's homily for Ann Hingst's celebration of life

I recently listened to an experienced hospice nurse teach. She said that there's really nothing extraordinary about dying and death: "It's one of the most natural things our bodies do, and our bodies know how to do it on their own."

If there's a terminal diagnosis, or if the person simply reaches the end of their days due to age, the process is always the same. There's the loss of appetite. There's the extension of sleep patterns, and when a person is very close to death the breathing changes. The eyes become glazed and opaque, as the body goes into something like a cocoon state. It's no wonder the butterfly is nature's proof of resurrection....

Before that, however, there's a turning inward and introspection that happens. The person reflects on life. I picture that, during this time, relationships might be considered, and/or past actions and regrets get pondered; joys are reviewed. Sometimes we get the chance to tell people "I'm sorry," or "I love you."

My point is that dying is one of the most natural things in the world. And so once we accept that life will end, we are able to accept life in all forms....



Do not let your hearts be troubled...

John 14:1-11

[After someone close to us dies] Our hearts are troubled in the fear, the loss and the confusion. In these moments, with remarkable tenderness and power, Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled." To me, that command sounds

impossible to follow. Of course our hearts are troubled.... Jesus knows. So, his command must mean something else. It does. I believe it means that we do not need to be troubled about what happens to us after we die. Just like we don't have to worry about how we'll die. The body knows what to do. After we die, God knows what to do, how to lead us, carry us and protect us....

You might notice that Ann's selections of hymns today carry the recurring theme of shepherd. The shepherd will guide and protect. Jesus' words remind us that death does not have the final word. A place was prepared for Ann, and Jesus took her there.

A place is prepared for you and me, too. The details are mysterious, but the heart of it is clear. In God's house, there is room for everyone.... We'll miss our dear friend, mother, grandmother. Our hearts are broken, and it will take time to walk the path of sadness. During this time, and all time really, have solace knowing that the shepherd, the king of love, will not fail humanity. Though we each stray, God's love seeks us out, scoops us up and rejoices to find us – then clothes us in love and binds us together in perfect harmony. This goodness never fails.

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS

Here are the names of the people who are scheduled to become new St. Stephen members this Sunday:

Andrea Albertin
Margarete Deckert
Mia Fuller
Cam Metcalfe
Monty Mortensen
Jacob Nallapu
Donna Schiffer
Jennifer Slusarz



We hope to provide bio and information and photos in next week's newsletter. Some are familiar faces; others are not. Welcome to you all, new members!

A reception for New Members will be celebrated in February.

THE MAN BEHIND OUR FLUTE MUSIC

For the holidays, we St. Stephen members contributed cash gifts for our pastor and other staff members. Listed below are the thank-you notes they sent us. Karl Barton actually wrote a bit more than just a note. Take a look.



Many people don't realize that I'm not really a staff member at St. Stephen. I just happen to be a congregation member who serves through his flute playing. I know that it enhances the service for others, and I do it with joy in my heart and revel in the opportunity for wild musical chances that I may take on the spur of the moment as the spirit guides me.

Those who have been around for a while will remember my son, Stephen, playing with me during the service. The recent addition of another flutist, Jordi Banitt, who has joined me during the service on a few occasions, has brought back memories of that time, and also

highlighted some of the personal cost that serving in this capacity can bring. When I invited Jordi to join me anytime, I cautioned her that it can also add more chaos and distraction to the worship experience. After some reflection, she stated that she has enough of that at this stage in her life as a graduate flute major, which is completely understandable. For me, I have found that what I might lose during the worship service shuffling pages, I can gain in a few quiet moments of prayer during the service and intense contemplation during communion.

Many years ago, when I stated aloud that "I wish I could play the flute more in my life," Ron Hartung encouraged me to play at church, and I said something along the lines of "that's not what I meant." Now, I can state unequivocally that playing my flute at church and for the community more broadly brings meaning and purpose to my life in ways that I never could have imagined. Having a musical partner like Katharine certainly makes the whole process much easier and is a great pleasure.

All of this is a long way around saying thank you for your gifts! For those who don't know, I set this money and other occasional monetary gifts aside for musical items that I might otherwise not get for myself, like the professional alto recorder and whistle I have purchased over the past number of years. May the blessings of Christmas last in our hearts throughout the year!

MORE THANK-YOU NOTES

Thank you for the generous Christmas gift. I am humbled to receive your cards and gifts for the celebration of Jesus' birth. Each one is a meaningful reminder to the staff and me of your care and delight, and I want you to know that it will be put to good use. I am grateful. Let God continually bless us in the new year!

Pastor Tom

Thank you so much for your most generous Christmas gift. I am very grateful for your continued support, appreciation, encouragement and gifts. My best wishes to each of you for a wonderful new year.

Thanks and peace,
Katharine



Thank you for the incredibly generous Christmas gift. I feel blessed and grateful to be working with our wonderful church, and I give thanks to God for directing me here to serve. May God continue to guide us all in this new year. Peace and blessings always,

Rita

IF YOU CAN...

By Pastor Tom

Thanks to a few generous donors, we've raised \$3,000 to assist a member of our worship community who needs significant auto repairs. We're about \$1,000 short of what's needed. If you're able, please consider giving to the Pastor's Justice and Mercy Discretionary Account so we can close that gap even more. Thank you for considering it. God is at work among us, and angels are present!

HOLIDAY BAKING WILL SAVE OUR TRADITIONS (AND POSSIBLY OUR WAISTLINES)

By Stephanie Leitch, reprinted from the Dec. 23 Tallahassee Democrat

Since about half of the average American's daily calories come from ultra-processed foods, it is fair to ask why I want to sing the praises of holiday baking. Baking gets a bad rap these days. But baked goods made during the holidays were not historically fat-laden or carb-heavy, and their ingredients were not ultra-processed. We bake during the holidays to honor our recipes, the chefs in our families and, as I realized during a recent ad hoc master class with a Swiss friend, to preserve the knowledge that most people once had at their fingertips.

I regularly suffer the indignity of walking through an aisle at a grocery store in search of flour, sugar and spices only to be assaulted by commercial cake mixes. The wayfinding banners above the supplies in the baking aisle announce a grocery list that only the Cookie Monster could have dreamt up (Candy! Condiments! Cookies! Cake Mixes!). If you want to whip up something yourself, you must enter the aisles of processed foods. For as much as we love the idea of homemade, do we really valorize home baking here in the States? Americans' favorite term for homemade, producing something "from scratch," hardly seems appetizing. And our grocers don't incentivize DIY baking either, with 80% of their shelf space given over to pudding, Jell-O and brownie mixes.

At the start of each November, I mix together honey, nut meal and spices so they can sit on a shelf and steep for a month before the holidays when I will bake them. European Christmas confections have natural preservatives like honey that allow these doughs to rest and ripen before baking and also permit the storage of those goods in tins for months afterward. These cookies are small jewels of dried fruit, citrus peel, nuts, cardamom, cloves and star anise. They have natural sweeteners, not an excess of sugars or fats. They require some attention, of course, but that is a labor that I gladly pay forward so my daughter can memorize the confections of my childhood: stars made of hazelnuts and cinnamon; almond crescents; lemon hearts; and the Linzer cookie, a double-stacked shortbread separated by a splash of raspberry jam that peers out of round portholes. These were the treats that my German grandmother baked and shipped in brown paper packages (tied up with string) so that they would arrive in time for Christmas. The elusive *Schockistängel*, a rectangular chocolate hazelnut bar with a meringue top, is a cookie recipe I spent a decade rummaging through notes and tattered cookbooks to locate. I finally found it in a commercial brochure that the baking manufacturer Dr. Oetker released in the winter of 1973.

The time I spent searching for that recipe reaped rewards, connecting me with my grandmother's old friends, reminiscences of bygone holidays, and with older, more sustainable foodways. Last Saturday my Swiss friend, a confectioner who never forgot a thing she learned in home economics, patiently schooled a friend and me in the mysteries of the *Springerle*: a pale anise-scented biscuit generated from a mold that leaves an embossed design on the surface that, when baked, rises or "jumps" to give the cookie a platform to stand on, turning them into tiny works of art. It is a printing technology not unlike the one that printed every illustration in early modern books: The *Springerle* mold is a woodblock in reverse.

Next to an image documenting our labor as we rolled out the dough to the strict height dictated by wooden rails set



on the sides of the rolling pin, my friend wrote these words: "We do this so we don't lose the knowledge of how to make these." She hit the nail on the head. Yes, we can buy something resembling German Christmas confections at the World Market or at Aldi, but what we do when we bake ourselves is conjure the chefs who watch over us from beyond, test our logic, and exercise the manual skills that remind us of our humanity. In doing so, we can also rescue our traditions, and possibly our waistlines from the short-lived perks of ultra-processed treats.

CALLING ALL CHILI FANS



Grace Lutheran invites members of St. Stephen to participate in its Chili Cook-Off at noon Sunday, Jan. 25, after its second service. The invitation states: "We welcome those who would like to make their chili to participate in the cook-off challenge and those who would just like to taste each chili."





EMERGENCY PROTEST AND VIGIL

JUSTICE FOR RENEE NICOLE GOOD!



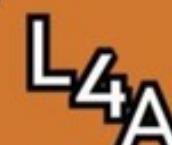
Stand in solidarity with Minneapolis as they grapple with the brutal murder of a legal observer and community member at the hands of ICE!



7PM, Thursday, January 8th



Florida Historic Capitol



BEFORE YOU GO...

- The OWLS are meeting for lunch at 11 a.m. Tuesday at Olive Garden.
- Our next congregational meeting is set for Jan. 18, right after the liturgy. The Church Council will unveil the proposed spending plan for 2026. Hope to see you there.
- Interested in attending a weekly Bible study? A new one began at 10 a.m. today, in the lobby conference room (aka the old nursery). If you didn't make it, you're welcome to attend *next* Thursday at 10.
- The Arise service, composed about 40 years ago right here at St. Stephen, begins this Sunday and will be our liturgy through Epiphany.
- Writes Andrea Notley, coordinator of yet another successful Giving Tree project: "I'm very thankful for this wonderful church! We did a little less this year, although still very impressive. St. Stephen adopted six families, which was a total of 20 people. I feel so blessed to be part of this generous church family." Thanks for your hard work, Andrea.
- Need the contact information for a St. Stephen member? Use your digital directory. Don't have it on your phone? Office Manager Rita can fix you up.
- Please remember that you can look up past sermons or newsletters that you missed. Visit our website: <https://ststephenlutherantly.com/>.
- 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 Rita to sign you up. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!



SERVING THIS WEEK

Pastor Tom Holdcraft, Preaching and Presiding; **Kirsten Ebbesen**, Assisting Minister; **Beth Alexander**, Cup Minister; **Celia Greeley**, Lector; **Ben Bush and Caroline Collins**, Tech Team; **Linda Eshleman and Barbara Sullivan**, Altar Guild; **Patricia Handschy and Margaret Bowers**, Counters; **Simone Schuster**, Cantor; **Denise Bookwalter**, Announcements

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:

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

This Saturday:

9:30 a.m. - Christmas clean up in Sanctuary

This Sunday:

9 a.m. - Bible study

9:30 a.m. - Choir

10 a.m. - Worship: Baptism of our Lord

Monday, January 12:

5:00 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

Tuesday, January 13:

5:00 p.m. - NA meets in HH

Wednesday, January 14:

5:00 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

7:00 p.m. - Choir

Thursday, January 15:

10:00 a.m. - Bible study

UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS



Marsy Miller—1/10
Erin Kenney - 1/11
Mary Andersen - 1/11
Mason Bonfanti - 1/11
Sharon Gordon-Girvin - 1/11
Mark Canning - 1/13
Nathan Basford - 1/19
Denise Bookwalter - 1/22
Stephen Barton - 1/22
James Gunderson - 1/24
Sandy Ness - 1/24
Gladys Kane - 1/28
Jennifer Buchanan - 1/29
Graham Hackley - 1/30
Jayden Schiffer - 1/31



If you have news or photos to share,
please send them to Rita at
sslc@ststephenlutherantly.com.

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

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, ELCA