October 29, 2026

ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

CHANGE YOUR CLOCKS ON SATURDAY NIGHT



Yes, it's that time again -- the goofy, twice-yearly ritual to reset our clocks. Here in autumn, we fall back … and get to sleep an hour longer Sunday morning. If you don't set your clocks back Saturday night, though, you might show up at church an hour before everyone else. Good luck.

THE SOUNDS OF MUSIC

Music has long been one of the strengths of the St. Stephen worship experience, but last Sunday was a real corker. First came the breathtaking arrangement of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," a prelude with Katharine Gossman on piano and Karl Barton on flute.



Then, since it was Reformation Sunday, Katharine dusted off our organ, recently cured of its electronic hiccups. So we had a thundering organ, Karl's fierce flute and even Tom Buchanan's mighty horn.

That's not all. On this particular Sunday, Tom also was leading the choir through music that he composed, "Grace Upon Grace." As Pastor Tom said in his opening announcements, "It ain't easy!" It is indeed a challenging piece, and the choir had limited rehearsal time. But, oh my gosh, what a glorious sound.

In short, it was a worship service combined with a music festival. God bless our marvelous musicians. (Photo by Jennifer Buchanan)

WANT A FAMILY PHOTO FOR CHRISTMAS?



New member Bennett Zerbe (pictured here with his family) has a proposal for you to consider. He's offering family Christmas portraits to the congregation – not to make money for himself, but to raise money for the church. "I was formerly a professional photographer, so I have lighting and cameras for a studio-style setup, or we can photograph outdoors," he says. "My thought was to make this a fundraising opportunity, so we can offer everything for free to the church members." Pastor Tom is on board with this idea. He's suggesting a $50 donation for pictures, "or another amount as you are able." Bennett points out that $50 per group "is a very modest fee for something like this."

Tentatively, he's looking at offering the sittings (15 or 20 minutes each) on Sunday, Nov. 15, starting immediately after the service and going until midafternoon. "If there is a lot of interest," he says, "we can open up some slots on Saturday of the same weekend as well."

Interested? Text Bennett at 303-883-7447. "We'll take down their email addresses and send full-size digital images within a week or so of the sitting. Families, couples or individuals all welcome. Happy to do professional headshots as well."

CATCHING UP WITH THE OUTREACH GROUP

By Sharon Simmons, outreach coordinator



THANK YOU, THANK YOU!

82 and 56 = 138. What does it mean? Well, 82 is the number of men's socks that were collected in our annual drive, and 56 is the number of women's socks – for a total of 138 socks. The donated socks will be collected by our outreach partner from New Mt. Zion AME Church and transported to the Kearney Center. Many thanks to all who brought socks and prayed for the success of this outreach ministry.



SPICE IT UP SUNDAY

The second Sunday of November (Nov. 8) is Spice It Up Sunday to benefit the Seminole Manor Neighborhood Food Pantry. These are spices that can be used to add flavor to the dinner of pantry patrons. Salt and pepper, of course, are needed, but try to include other spices: Garlic powder, onion powder, allspice and Italian seasoning are all appreciated. Look through your spice cabinet. If you like it or use it, then a pantry patron will also. Dollar Tree has a good selection of spices ($1.25 to $1.50 each), and Outreach Committee member Monty Mortensen, who works for Publix, will let us know of any spice BOGO's leading up to the 8th. Keep in mind that we will collect spices on one day only (Nov. 8) but you can start buying spices now. Let's really spice it up.



THE GIVING TREE

Outreach Committee member Andrea Notley and the Giving Tree will be revving up in the middle of November through the first part of December. Talk with Andrea about an opportunity to support a local family and purchase Christmas gifts for the family's children.

Are you new to St. Stephen and want to know the scope of the work of the Outreach Committee? Check the bulletin board in Hingst Hall for a list of year-round initiatives. The committee meets four times a year. If you'd like to join, the next meeting will be in January.

'POETRY IS WAITING FOR YOU'

We were riding in the car the other day when a familiar voice came over the radio. It was the latest installment of WFSU-FM's "Voices That Inspire." And it featured one of St. Stephen's beloved former pastors. Here's the text.



I'm Marda Messick. I'm a poet and a priest. It was around 1994 that I knew I wanted to be a priest, and I was very surprised by that. It came out of the blue. My faith and sense of belonging to a beloved community is really the center of my life and keeps me centered. I always knew that I was a poet. In fact, I think I always knew that I was a priest, which to me are deeply related, because as a poet, I have a sacramental view of the world and of life.

But I started writing poetry at the beginning of COVID. My husband had died of ALS a few months prior to that, and I was in a place where I was ready to begin moving on from five years of caregiving. And then, bam, everything shut down. That isolation and solitude were a crucible for me to reflect on the meaning of what I had been through with his illness. That was the theme that led me into writing. And then it just kept coming and kept coming. It's very mysterious. I just put myself in a place of receptivity and willingness, and words always show up.

I think my capacity for compassion probably was modeled by my mother, because there's an unconditional love that's needed in this world.

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I'm Marda Messick. I'm a priest and a poet. To those of you who think you don't like poetry and you can't understand it, that's not true. Poetry is waiting for you.

Marda's remarkable book of poetry, "Feral Princess," published by Apalachee Press, is available in bookstores around town.

A PLACE TO SAY THEIR NAMES

The ministry known as The Compassionate Friends of Tallahassee has used St. Stephen office space for years – yet few of us know its story. Here's a glimpse, and an opportunity to help, courtesy of Chapter Leader Becky Barch.

Some people come carrying a photograph. Others arrive with a story they have told a hundred times — or one they have never found the right moment to share. Some say very little at first. All have something in common: A child has died, and they are looking for people who truly understand what that means.

For 47 years, The Compassionate Friends of Tallahassee has offered that kind of understanding to parents, grandparents and siblings who are grieving the death of a child. Our chapter was chartered in 1979, and its work continues today through monthly support meetings, remembrance gatherings and the simple act of making room for another family's story.

St. Stephen has been an important part of that work by providing a welcoming place for our chapter to gather. We are grateful for the hospitality — and for the understanding that grief belongs to no single tradition or belief system. The Compassionate Friends is a nonreligious, nondenominational organization. We welcome families of every faith and those who have no religious affiliation….

The death of a child changes every aspect of a family's life … in ways that are difficult to describe. Even loving friends and relatives may not know what to say, especially as months and years pass. In a room with others who have experienced a similar loss, there is less need to explain why a birthday still hurts, why an ordinary song can bring tears or why someone wants to tell a story about their son or daughter who died many years ago.

Recently, the TCF Tallahassee Chapter became one of six nominees in the 2026 GiveTLH community awards program, an initiative of Rick Kearney and the Beatitude Foundation, in partnership with WCTV. Each nominee receives $1,000, and public voting Nov. 17-27 will determine additional awards of $10,000, $5,000 and $2,500. The possibility of a grant matters to a volunteer-driven organization like TCF-Tallahassee. It could help sustain our meetings, remembrance events and outreach. But there is another reason this recognition matters: Someone who has never heard of The Compassionate Friends may see a story about GiveTLH and discover there is a place for their family.

We are thankful to St. Stephen for being part of the quiet, steady work of making that welcome possible. We hope members of the congregation will share our news with anyone who might need to know about our chapter — whether or not they choose to take part in GiveTLH voting.

To learn more, visit www.tcftally.org/givetlh. Voting runs Nov. 17-27, and you can cast one vote each day at givetlh.com/. For info about The Compassionate Friends, contact Becky Barch at 850-296-8413 or tcfot@yahoo.com.

GREETINGS, BILLIE!



Look which St. Stephen member got a recent visit from our traveling goodwill ambassadors, Rita Ford and Margaret Bowers. It's Billie Reardon, who hasn't been able to worship with us in person for quite a while. Looking good, isn't she? "I am home," Billie says, "after having been hospitalized seven weeks surgery to remove blood clots from both Still requiring constant oxygen inhibits my mobility." We look forward to the upcoming day when Billie's mobility brings her back to our sanctuary.

IF YOU HAVEN'T VOTED YET…

By Dave Suhrweir

As befitting our Reconciling in Christ statement, I believe it's appropriate that our church newsletter provide information and guidance regarding the current general election. Here are some resources.

- **Leon County Supervisor of Elections Office, https://www.leonvotes.gov/ (Those who reside outside of Leon County may need to research their own local resource.)**
- **Equality Florida PAC, https://eqflpac.org/endorsed-candidates/**
- **Florida Rising, https://floridarising.org/endorsements/**
- **League of Women Voters Florida, https://www.lwvfl.org/voter-guide-2026/**

'STAND IN PROTEST': EXCERPT FROM PASTOR'S SERMON

Today, as we engage with Paul's letter to the believers is Rome, we can highlight Luther's idea of justification through faith in Christ alone and expand the highlight to understand that believers also participate in Jesus' faith. It's what we mean when we say "participatory faith." Out of what God has done for us, we do for others….

Can we, like Paul and the early Christians, participate with Jesus by welcoming those who are oppressed in our midst? Our participatory faith is to publicly display the justice of God to rulers in our nation who favor an imperial system. In the American imperial system, we witness ICE agents disappearing people off the streets and shuffling them secretly off to remote detention centers.

In the context of the American imperial system, we witness masked men breaking down doors of family homes where parents work and children go to school. In the context of the American imperial system, we witness mass incarcerations of the Black and Brown in order to supply the economy with slave labor. In the context of the American imperial system, we witness political powers turning a blind eye to human trafficking in order to satisfy disgusting desires of the extremely wealthy.

What does it mean to gather, read Scripture and preach the gospel within a system like this, but with an attempt to liberate people from the depths, the fears, and the anxieties of a system that doesn't care whether the oppressed live or die? It means we, like Luther, must stand in protest. We stand knowing we have been healed, in order to heal.

BEFORE YOU GO…

- **Let us pray for the election workers as next Tuesday's appointment with destiny approaches. Let us pray as well for the candidates and the voters.**
- **Watch for Monty Mortensen's prize-winning chili recipe in the next newsletter!**
- **The OWLs will gather for lunch at the Lively Café, 211 N. Monroe St., at 11 a.m. Tuesday, Nov. 10. Let Barbara Sullivan know if you plan to take part.**
- **Pray for our office manager, please. Poor Rita. She always used Publisher for our newsletters and bulletins. But recently Publisher vanished, just like that. So with the help of Ben Bush, she's adjusting. Hang in there, Rita.**
- **If you need any offering envelopes, please let Rita know. You may notice that the printed dates on them have been blocked out. We're doing that intentionally so we can make full use of our current supply and avoid wasting them.**
- **And pictured here is the newsletter editor's latest suggestion, in case the Church Council votes to provide him with a company car. It's a 1947 Studebaker. Or, as the ad stated, "a low, long, luxurious motor car that's a melody in metal." A melody in metal. Poetry! For the second time in today's newsletter! God, watch over us as we drive through life.**



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 Sunday:

9:00 a.m. - Bible study

9:30 a.m. - Choir rehearsal

10 a.m. - Worship, All Saints Sunday

Monday, November 02:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

Tuesday, November 03:

6 p.m. - NA meets in HH

Wednesday, November 04:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

6 p.m. - Confirmation for adults

7 p.m. - Choir rehearsal

Thursday, November 05:

10 a.m. - Bible study

SERVING THIS SUNDAY

Pastor Tom Holdcraft, Preaching and Presiding; **Kirsten Ebbesen,** Assisting Minister; **Rob Schiffer,** Cup Minister; **Emery Oates,** Lector; **Simone Schuster,** Cantor; **Ben Bush and Colin Hackley,** Tech Team; **Linda Eshleman and Barbara Sullivan,** Altar Guild;**Rob Schiffer and Patricia Handschy**, Counters; **Colin Hackley and Patrick Kennell,** Ushers; **Denise Bookwalter,** Announcements.

UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

Bern Mustian - 10/30

Emily Stover - 11/02

Jen Reece - 11/02

Paul van der Mark - 11/06

Barbara Sullivan - 11/07

Hector Quinones - 11/07

Daniel Martinez – 11/10

Mark Warren – 11/13

Cheryl Stuart – 11/14

Elliot Reece - 11/14



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

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

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, ELCA

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