



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



WELCOME, NEW MEMBERS!

Each member adds something priceless to St. Stephen. What can be more affirming than welcoming *new* members? Last Sunday, the three remarkable women pictured above took the big step of joining the St. Stephen family. We thank God for them.

Sylvia Smith is on the left in the photo. She describes herself as an attorney, advocate and nonprofit human-services manager, working as chief operating officer at Big Bend Cares, our area's HIV and AIDS services organization. Sylvia writes: "Current hobbies are writing and learning creative nonfiction, yoga, vegetable gardening and taking singing lessons. I am also continuing to learn about grief and grief support. My wife died somewhat suddenly at age 66 after we were together 31 years. I am currently caretaker to our sweet old man Yorkshire terrier named Lefty and a sweet old lady short-haired tabby cat named Xena. I'm close with my two older sisters, many cousins, nieces and nephews, my brother-in-law and many local friends, and I'm active in my neighborhood, where mutual aid and community-building events are a regular practice. I was grateful to have the chance to share about my journey last fall in the newsletter, and I continue to be very thankful to have found St. Stephen, Pastor Tom and this congregation. I have joined because St. Stephen is a community where I can belong, continue to learn and grow, and openly celebrate the love of God."

We have Audrey Post to thank for new member Diane Hines – in the center of the photo. Diane is Audrey's neighbor. She's a retiree who spent 26 years as vice president of administration for the Florida Wildlife Federation and five years as deputy director for Apalachicola Riverkeeper. These days she enjoys quilting, walking, Tai Chi, spending time with friends and spending time with her daughter and family, including granddaughter Quinn. Like many of us, Diane did not grow up Lutheran. She was raised in the Presbyterian Church and later joined Tallahassee's Good Samaritan United Methodist – where she helped out with greeting, ushering and choir. "I am pleased to be part of such a welcoming church," Diane said, "and hope to contribute where I'm needed."

Simone Schuster, whom you've read about previously in the newsletter regarding choir and the talent show, is a graduate student in biogeochemistry (seven syllables!) at FSU. Her hobbies and interests include rock climbing, hiking, going to the beach and (when she has time) reading. She was born and raised a Lutheran, with past membership in Immanuel Lutheran (Pensacola) and St. Timothy Lutheran (Tarpon Springs). Last year she moved to Tallahassee for school and quickly discovered this congregation. "I really like the values of St. Stephen," she had said earlier, "and would be proud to be a member of this amazing community." And now she is. *(Photo by Colin Hackley)*



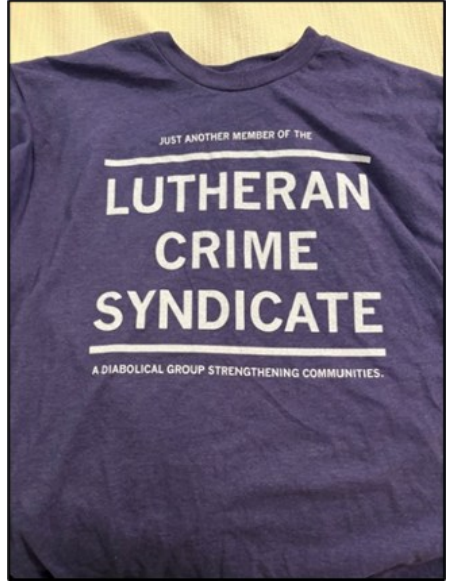
SPEAKING OF SIMONE...

Here's an invitation she has extended: "My department has started doing park cleanups, and all are welcome to join! Pastor Tom and Colleen joined us this past weekend to clean up Mission San Luis Park. Our next cleanup is April 12, if anyone wants to join. No park planned yet, still figuring that one out. But show up around 9:50 to start at 10 and supplies are provided!" *(The newsletter will send further details as they become available.)*

THE 'LUTHERAN CRIME SYNDICATE'?

By Cheryl Stuart

This past Sunday I wore a purple T-shirt to church, proudly declaring that I am "Just Another Member of the Lutheran Crime Syndicate: A Diabolical Group Strengthening Communities." It's a T-shirt that has been worn recently by many ELCA Lutherans, including the presiding bishop and the ELCA secretary. In the frenzy to destroy government institutions, the current administration and its "allies" declared, among other things, that Lutheran Social Services and Global Refuge (formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services) were illegally laundering money and froze their funding. This ridiculous assertion has no basis in fact – not even remotely. Presiding Bishop Eaton recorded and distributed a video message, "clapping back" at the statements. A link to an article by Religion News Service, setting out the absurd statements and the church's response, follows. Google will yield even more articles.



To be clear, Global Refuge has been helping refugee families settle in this country for decades. Lutheran Social Services provides a wide array of services, especially to children, throughout the country, including Florida. Our family has contributed to both over the years, as have thousands of individuals, congregations, synods and even the churchwide expression. Both groups have received funds from the federal government under contracts meant to help these vulnerable populations. They are doing God's work, on behalf of all of us.

A company based in Iowa, Raygun, produced the Lutheran Crime Syndicate T-shirt. A portion of the proceeds goes to help Lutheran Social Services in Iowa. I ordered mine from Raygun online. I chose purple in honor of Lent.

Sometimes the actions in Washington can feel removed from our daily lives. No longer. Our denomination, like several others, is under direct assault. As an ELCA Lutheran, I am proud to be part of this "crime syndicate." I hope you are as well.

<https://religionnews.com/2025/02/03/musk-spotlights-federal-funds-for-lutheran-social-services-calls-them-illegal-payments/>

<https://www.raygunsite.com/pages/search-results-page?q=lutheran%20crime>

'WITH JESUS': EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM'S SERMON

"... I hope you all see, that not only is it important to belong [to our congregation], but it is important to participate. Be a witness and know you are planted for a purpose. We are planted for a purpose, and the gardener is at work in us. And with Jesus, with Jesus, think of what we are capable of doing."

IN PRAISE OF 'DEI'

Karen Olson recently saw an attention-getting sign displayed at First Presbyterian Church. Talk about proclaiming the Gospel! So we checked out the First Pres newsletter (<https://www.olfirstchurch.org>), where we saw this photo and



explanatory text: "One of the most offensive policies [of the Trump administration] is the current scrubbing from public records of any information relating to 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' (DEI), which has already resulted in, among other things, the removal of the names of our family members and neighbors who are people of color from government

websites.... We displayed a banner affirming our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion during the 2024 Legislature's Session and have done so again for the duration of the 2025 Session." Well said, friends. *(Photo by Claire Hodges, First Presbyterian's church secretary)*

MARK MUSTIAN'S NEWEST BOOK

By Tom Flanigan, a friend of St. Stephen

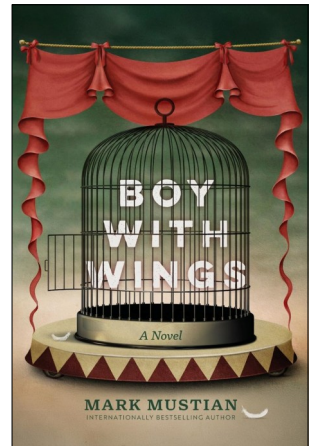
(We borrowed this story from the WFSU-FM website and updated the verb tenses, since the book has now been released. Mark is a St. Stephen member.)

Tallahassee's Mark Mustian has released a new novel. And for the first time, he'll be among the many writers and musicians set to appear at next month's Word of South Festival, an event he founded a decade ago.

You could say Mark Mustian is sort of a Renaissance guy. He's practiced law in Tallahassee since 1983. He served as a city commissioner between 2003 and 2012. And, as if he needed something else to keep him busy, he began writing novels a few years back. His first effort was titled "The Return." "I was fortunate to get that book published," Mustian said, "and I discovered I liked doing it and thought I had a little bit of talent, so I kept at it."

His second work, "The Gendarme," was a finalist for the coveted Saroyan International Writing Award, and brought home Florida Gold Book honors. And now Mustian's third book has dropped. "This book is historical fiction, which I like. The last book, 'The Gendarme,' was that way also. And this has sort of a Southern Gothic feel, which I really haven't done before. So it has a mix of different things, which I like from my end."

The title of Mustian's latest book? "Boy With Wings." "The book is the story of a boy who has these strange things on his back that are like wings, and he ends up in a freak show in the 1930s traveling the South. And so the book touches on a lot of things: race, religion, but more than anything else, what it means to be different."



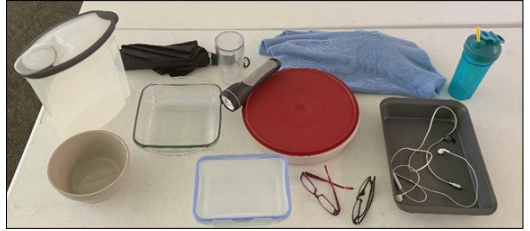
Also, how is the boy treated by those he encounters? And how does that connect to all of us? "How do we react to things we just don't understand? That's part of it, and just the human level. What is it like for these people? And are they better off doing this instead of trying to work at a store or something with an obviously visible oddity? So it's all, I think, a very interesting topic in general.

"I will be at the Word of South Festival for the first time, and I'll appear with a local keyboard player, Danny Bedrosian, who's also the keyboard player for George Clinton." The Word of South Festival ... comes to Tallahassee's Cascades Park the weekend of April 4.

Editor's note: "Boy With Wings" is available on Amazon, of course, and probably many other places. I just ordered it through Midtown Reader.

BEFORE YOU GO...

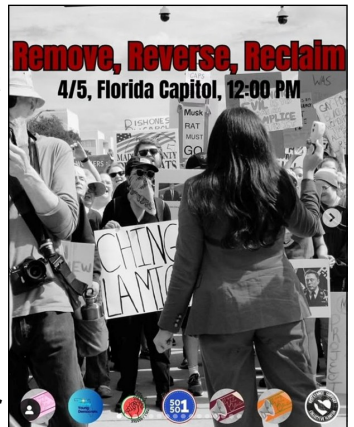
- Did you lose something at church? We might have it in the St. Stephen lost-and-found. Inspect this photo—and if something looks familiar, check with Pastor Tom.



- The proceeds from this month's Noisy Offering are going toward Unity in the Community, an annual event that supports empowering high-school seniors who need financial assistance to continue their education. It will be held this year at 3 p.m. May 25 at Allen Temple on Kissimmee Street.
- Please join us at 11:15 a.m. Sunday when an expert from a local funeral home will explain the many advantages of prearranging your funeral. This simple two-step process saves families time and money and, most important, ensures that your loved one's final wishes are achieved. Light breakfast food and drinks will be served.
- Sunday is the last day for sponsoring the Diaper Drop for Refuge House. (Children's diapers, sizes 2-6, are the most requested.) Drop off your diaper packages in Hingst Hall, please.



- We'll be using Easter lilies to adorn the chancel area for Easter Sunday. If you would like to dedicate one or more, complete the form in the narthex and drop in the offering plate. You can also email Lori the dedication. The cost is \$10 each and the deadline is April 13.
- APRIL 5: Day of Action by numerous groups, in D.C. and all around the country. In Tallahassee, it will be at the State Capitol starting at noon. Get the word out. Show everyone how concerned we are.
- 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!
- Speaking of "planted for a purpose": Our azaleas along Meridian Road are brighter than ever. Photographer Colin Hackley captured them last Sunday.



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 Sunday:

9 a.m. - Book study

9:30 a.m. - Choir practice

10 a.m. - Worship, Third Sunday in Lent

11:30 a.m. - Advance Planning meeting HH



Monday, March 31:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

7 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

Tuesday, April 01:

5 p.m. - NA meets in HH

Wednesday, April 02:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

7 p.m. - Choir practice

HOLY WEEK WORSHIP

Sunday, April 13

10 a.m. - Worship: Palm Sunday

Thursday, April 17:

7 p.m. - Worship: Maundy Thursday with Healing Service

Friday, April 18:

7 p.m. - Worship: Good Friday

Easter Sunday, April 20:

9 a.m. - Easter Breakfast

10 a.m. - Worship: Easter Sunday



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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