



# ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

## St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

### ‘PASTOR TOM’S PRESENCE WAS A GIFT’

#### Remembering Manfred ‘Fred’ Ernest Deckert

By Caroline Collins, with Margarete Deckert

With heavy hearts, my mother and I share the passing of my father, Manfred “Fred” Ernest Deckert, on Feb. 13 at age 95. He was a man who found joy in making others laugh and satisfaction in dedicating many hours of his long retirement to community service. His warmth and humor touched many lives.

During his final days and in the weeks since his death, our church family has been a source of great comfort. Pastor Tom Holdcraft walked alongside us with kindness and faith, offering support through hospice care, last rites and my father’s private green burial. Pastor Tom’s presence was a gift, especially to my mother in her grief, and we are deeply grateful.

While we miss my father dearly, we find peace knowing he is at rest. We appreciate the love, prayers and expressions of sympathy from our church community and invite you to read his full obituary at <https://www.lifesongfunerals.com/obituaries/manfred-fred-deckert/#!/Obituary> to learn more about his life and legacy.

Thank you for keeping us in your hearts.

**IN THE PHOTO BELOW:** That’s Pastor Tom, front left, lending a practical hand to the lowering process. Instead of a hired crew of six men, my husband, Keith (in green jacket), recruited family members and close friends to keep the burial process personal. My dad was a genuine do-it-yourselfer, so he would have appreciated our DIY burial efforts.





## DIANE, SIMONE AND SYLVIA

Pastor Tom happily confirms that we're scheduled to welcome Diane Hines, Simone Schuster and Sylvia Smith to membership in St. Stephen this Sunday. Afterward, in Hingst Hall, there'll be a reception welcoming our newest members.

## MINISTRY SPOTLIGHT: LENDERS' CONSORTIUM

*By Caroline Collins*

Money may not grow on trees, but for first-time homebuyers in Tallahassee, financial assistance is within reach. Through the Tallahassee Lenders' Consortium (TLC) and the city of Tallahassee, eligible buyers can receive up to 20% of their home's purchase price as a zero-interest loan — completely forgiven after 15 years of living in the home. That's free money toward homeownership.

To raise awareness of this incredible resource, TLC's chief operations officer, Pamela Greene, joined us last Sunday for our Ministry Minute. After her talk, she encountered a flurry of interest from congregation members eager to learn more. As a HUD-approved nonprofit housing counseling agency, TLC helps first-time buyers navigate the home-buying process, secure down-payment assistance and even explore aging-in-place options for long-term stability.



In a college town like ours, where affordable housing is in short supply, TLC is working hard to make homeownership more accessible. Its mission is to provide comprehensive, client-focused housing services and to support resident-driven neighborhood revitalization. One way it does that is by partnering with the Community Land Trust to create lasting affordable-housing solutions. If you or someone you know is dreaming of homeownership, TLC is ready to help. Call 850-222-6609 or visit [www.tallahasseeenders.org](http://www.tallahasseeenders.org) to learn more. (Photo by Caroline Collins)

## A NEW WRINKLE FOR THE NOISY OFFERING

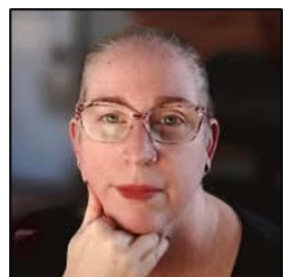
St. Stephen's monthly Noisy Offering is usually designated for the nonprofit spotlighted in the most recent Ministry Minute. But this month, since the Tallahassee Lenders' Consortium is well-funded, the Outreach Committee decided to designate the Noisy Offering for Unity in the Community. It's an annual event that supports empowering high-school seniors who need financial assistance to continue their education. The scholarship was established by St. Stephen friend Brenda Christie and her family in honor of her mom, Mercedes Hall Thomas, a longtime Leon County Schools employee. Unity in the Community will be held this year at 3 p.m. May 25 at Allen Temple on Kissimmee Street.



## ON PURPOSE WOMAN: CONNECTIONS & CONVERSATION

*By Caroline Collins*

The local chapter of On Purpose Woman will meet from 1:30 to 3:30 this Sunday in St. Stephen's Emory Hingst Fellowship Hall for Connections and Conversation. All women are invited to attend at no cost. The featured topic is "From Fractured to Connected: A Practical Guide to Compassionate and Strategic Community-Building," with KimBoo York. More details: <https://conta.cc/3R864GB>



The gathering will be facilitated by Donna M. Anderson. Come to connect, share and be inspired.



## LIGHTNING, THUNDER AND CHURCH

So far, the WCTV weather app has a friendly yellow sun posted for this Sunday. Sunshine would be a nice change from the past two Sundays and their dire batten-down-the-hatches warnings. Sad to say, last weekend's storms led to dozens of deaths west of here. And some Tallahassee churches apparently at least considered canceling services in an abundance of caution.



“When I hear about the warnings for the approaching storms on Saturday for Sunday,” Pastor Tom said Tuesday when we brought up the weather, “the thought that comes to mind is, ‘Lord, it's hard enough getting people to attend in-person worship! Please, stop the storms from coming on Sunday morning!’ After that, the thoughts move to safety. I do wonder: ‘When is the right time to cancel services?’ And I rely on Church Council to help make that decision.

“If the weather is safe enough for me to travel, then I'll be here for whoever can show up. My habit is to get to church on Sunday around 7:30 to quietly prepare for book study and worship, and that gives me a better sense of what kind of weather is occurring on-site. As with all weather warnings, I encourage people to stay home if they do not feel it is safe to drive or attend worship.”

## ‘I CANNOT DO THE JOB ALONE’: EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM’S SERMON

Sometimes, someone will ask me, “What it’s like going to the Capitol?” And my first thought is that it’s like a hen walking into the fox house. :-)

It can feel like everyone in the building is an enemy that’s ready to devour you. It’s the human condition, I suppose, to succumb to the temptation that it’s “us against them,” but we must be careful with those thoughts and suppositions....

Rev. Tony Lowden, who served as President Jimmy Carter’s personal pastor for over 30 years, ... said that from the very first time he met President Carter to the very end of his life, the president would ask him four questions:

Where have you been?

What have you done?

Who have you helped?

And the last was: How can I help you, help them?

... President Carter’s commitment to humanity was deeply intertwined with his spiritual foundation, and the church was the guiding force in that journey. It was his spiritual foundation that kept him from sending soldiers into battle during his term. It was his spiritual foundation that led him to continue his work of service to people held down by systemic poverty after he left office....

[It was] His spiritual foundation that spoke when he said the nation was in the midst of a crisis of confidence.... [H]e was addressing the people’s desire to have a strong man in office who’d do all the work for them. He said the people of the nation are what makes this nation strong, not the strong man in the Oval Office who wants to be glorified.



What made President Carter, and makes any leader that’s worth their weight, is that they can be bold enough to say, “I cannot do the job alone.” Which means we must let our voices be heard, we must be able to say something good about our country and then join hands in service of helping – committing ourselves to a rebirth and to a working together....

## YOU’VE PUT IT OFF LONG ENOUGH

Please join us at 11:15 a.m. Sunday, March 30, to hear 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.

FINANCIAL UPDATE

JANUARY	
Checking account beginning balance	\$10,029.32
Non-designated giving	\$21,639
Non-designated expenses*	\$27,600.34
Checking account balance as of 01/31/25	\$2,922.31

\*We paid out \$10,916.84 for staff benefits expenses from 2024.

FEBRUARY	
Checking account beginning balance	\$2,922.31
Non-designated giving	\$24,554.73
Non-designated expenses	\$21,284.59
Checking account balance as of	\$6,206.67

As of 02/28/25:

- We are current on all bills.
- We have \$2,866.53 in our Gap Fund with a goal to get it back to \$10,000.
- The Wonder Fund account has \$15,879.33 in it, leaving a debt of \$12,145.67 (we pay \$200 per month toward the debt)

BEFORE YOU GO...

- Greta Scavone forwarded this update on Ann Hingst, who is undergoing treatment for leukemia: “Ann is tolerating her chemotherapy as well as can be expected. After this week, she will not have another round of chemotherapy until the third week of April. That is as far as her treatment plan goes at this time, until the effectiveness of the treatment can be assessed. She thanks everyone for their most kind expressions of love and concern in their own special ways.”
- Those of us who gratefully take advantage of the Facebook worship option noticed that things got off to a shaky start Sunday – even though preparations started early. Thankfully,” said one tech volunteer, “Jonas was around to troubleshoot.” Thanks, Jonas. And thanks, tech team.
- How about that “Guide My Feet” anthem from the choir last Sunday! Outstanding. Speaking of the choir: You might have noticed that the alto section has a new voice: Lawana Lamb-Daniels! (Is there *anything* those Lamb-Daniels women don’t do?) When we spoke with Pastor Tom about the choir, he added: “Katharine is challenging us more than ever to be attentive to the text and not sing the anthem like a ‘bar song’! The change of tempo during the first verse of ‘Guide My Feet’ was her idea on Sunday morning. I’m so pleased with our choir and their unity!”



- 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.
- Don’t forget that we’re sponsoring a Diaper Drop for Refuge House. Children’s diapers, sizes 2-6, are the most requested.) We’ll collect packages of diapers in Hingst Hall through March 30.
- 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!



## COMING UP

### Today:

**Noon** - Al-Anon meets in Pastor Emory Hingst Memorial Fellowship Hall or 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

**11:15 a.m.** - New member reception in Hingst Memorial Fellowship Hall

**1:30 p.m.** - On Purpose Women meet in HH



### Monday, March 24:

**5 p.m.** - TIMA meets in HH

**7 p.m.** - TIMA meets in HH

### Tuesday, March 25:

**5 p.m.** - NA meets in HH

### Wednesday, March 26:

**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](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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