



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

NEW LOOK FOR OUR SANCTUARY

By Pastor Tom

The flooring work is progressing quickly, as you can see! They pulled the old carpet and cement-skimmed the whole sanctuary floor to make it smooth for the new carpet squares. They're really "rectangles," but they look wonderful. What an amazing color.

The chancel and communion-rail kneelers will have the same carpet on top but a wood-stain finish around the kick plate to give the chancel a floating effect. The choir risers will also get new carpet – for when it's safe for our singers to inspire us again.



Check out the new look in the sacristy! The vinyl laminate tiles open the room nicely and look great. We expect that the flooring work will finish today, and then all subcontractors will be moving through their punch lists to wrap up loose ends.

Next we'll be setting up the sound system and moving the chairs and pews back in place. We believe that worship will begin in the sanctuary on **Jan. 23!** Stay tuned to the newsletter for the day when all hands will be needed to move furniture back to the worship space.



God is doing good things here at St. Stephen! (Photos by Pastor Tom)

MANY THANKS

- "Thank you, St. Stephen! In the season of giving and celebration, let me say how thankful I am for your Christmas gifts to the staff, musicians and technical support people who do so much to inspire and share the gospel message. This Christmas season was especially meaningful having been the most 'in person' since 2019! We continue to be safe and prove that we can outsmart this virus by getting vaccinated and wearing masks. Keep up the good work, and we look forward to a brighter 2022, with God's help and presence." (Pastor Tom Holdcraft)
- "Dear members and friends at St. Stephen: Thank you so very much for your generous Christmas gift. I deeply appreciate your kindness and wish everyone a happy new year!" (Katharine Gossman, music director)
- "I was delighted to receive the generous Christmas gift. I feel very lucky and privileged to be a part of this family. Happy 2022!" (Lori Zengel, office manager)



Two of St. Stephen's favorite traditions: the candlelight Christmas Eve service and then, soon after, photographer Colin Hackley's incomparable capturing of that service. Even in this lowly fellowship hall, and even at 4 p.m. rather than late at night, Colin captures the glow.

'PLEASE CONTINUE TO HELP US'

By Sharon Simmons, outreach coordinator

The Outreach Committee is SO grateful to the members of St. Stephen for their faithful and generous outpouring last year to support our initiatives to Manna on Meridian, the Giving Tree, the Going Places Outreach Program, the Haitian Church of Tallahassee's initiative to aid victims of the earthquake, the New Bethel AME Church water-bottle and sock collection for the Kearney Center, and the International Rescue Committee's work to provide support for new Tallahassee residents from Afghanistan. Now with the new year, the committee is asking you to continue supporting the Kearney Center by joining us in partnering with New Bethel's TNT drive to collect toiletries and toilet paper. Bring your items to the collection place outside the nursery by Thursday, Jan. 27.



God's work, our hands. Happy and healthy new year to all.

POINSETTIA POWER



Most of us love poinsettias until the day after Christmas ... when we toss them out and let their bold red leaves shrivel. A few hardy gardeners, however, nurture them along. In this photo, Anita Sawh – Rita Ford's sister, who sometimes worships with us – stands beside the colossal poinsettia in her yard. Last year at this time, it was decorating our sanctuary. Pretty impressive. Rita takes no credit for its performance. "If I had touched that plant," she says, "it would have refused to grow." (Lori urges us to pick up the poinsettias we paid for by tomorrow. "If you want yours but can't make it by Friday, let me know and I'll put it aside for you," she says.) *(Photo by Rita Ford)*

'ISOLATION HOTEL'

Dave Suhrweir teaches English to Chinese students virtually, and three of his students live in Xi'an, where a COVID surge broke out Dec. 14. Here's an email excerpt from an engineering professor there whose sons are among Dave's students:

Because three teachers and four students in my laboratory were diagnosed positive, I became a key monitoring officer. At present, I live in a special isolation hotel, and some people deliver meals every day and do regular nucleic acid and body temperature testing and disinfection work.... All those who were diagnosed were sent to the hospital for further examination and treatment. I have been in the hotel alone for almost ten days. There are many people in Xi'an who are isolated like me, and most hotels in the city are full of people who are isolated....



Fortunately, there are dedicated staff and volunteers who provide services for delivering daily necessities and regular testing. I still have to deal with students and work in the hotel. I am the head teacher of an undergraduate class with 40 students, and I have 9 graduate students. Because a small number of students have been diagnosed with the virus, a small number of other students are isolated in hotels, and most students are isolated in university dormitories. Every day I use the Internet to communicate the situation of all the students and give some comfort to their emotions. Therefore, every day is very busy....



INSTANT TENT

Sunday's theme was "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." During his children's message, Pastor Tom explained that the Greek word for "lived" could mean not only "dwelt" but also "tented." With the aid of a big blue blanket, he created a low-rise tent in the fellowship hall and crawled inside, saying: "[This tent] is a really good representation of what John the gospel writer is telling his audience – that the Word was made flesh and God 'tented' with us.... If you remember being a kid, and all you kids watching, you crawled into a fort or a tent that you made in your living room and you felt safe in there, right?... Wherever we are, even in a tent that can be picked up and moved somewhere else, God is always with us...." (Photo by Colin Hackley)

'THROUGH THE CHRIST LIGHT': EXCERPT FROM SUNDAY'S SERMON

"... When it comes to preaching, I often think of it like plunging my hands into a stream. No matter how much I try to make my hands water-tight, water slips out – so by the time I try to offer it, there is not really any water in my hand anymore. So, too, with sharing the spoken word.... Unless there's flesh on it, then spoken words are quickly lost.

"John's gospel does well in reminding us that God's Word was made flesh.... I used to replace all of the 'he's' in John 1 with the name of Jesus or John the Baptist, according to which was appropriate. And that is correct for John the baptizer. But it is harder, for me at least these days, to do the same thing with the name of Jesus.... Where we read 'the world came into being through [Jesus]' means we picture Jesus [in earthly form] at the beginning of creation. And while that's not exactly false ... for me, it is like pretending a Photoshopped picture is realistic. It is not realistic. It looks awkward, or out of place.

"But [if you picture] Christ as Light, then that is read as 'the world came into being through the Christ Light....' Picturing it this way helps me lose that awkwardness, and it answers another problem that comes up for me in John's gospel. You see, in John there is not any context of historical names to connect Jesus to. Nor are there any names that embed historical context into the birth story. In John, there is no Jesus birth story. The Christ Light, noted as Word, has simply always been. So John is clear in communicating to his audience, and to us, that Jesus (the Word made flesh) is the birth story....

"By [God] coming to us and becoming one of us, we are shown firsthand just how deep God's love is. The baby in the manger is only the beginning of God's message, but it is in the infant that we come closer to the heart of God. The baby invites you in, around the baby we gather, for we are not afraid around babies. Today, we remember how we can come close to the Child in ways that we cannot come close to God...."

Want to read Pastor Tom's sermons? Go to <https://ststephenlutherantally.com/>, look for the dropdown menu called "More," and click on "Sermons."

BIBLE STUDY DOESN'T FIT YOUR SCHEDULE?

For those who'd like to take part in the weekly Bible study but have a schedule conflict, here's a link to the recorded meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/ltE5aX4VqW5Ou28zvix9hmwaudw-UrkdAdBaL3LwE6uaQ7Mt62QFbkqIH5zEf0Im.qOHLbr1JrdLOybWl>

HAIKU CORNER

By Lex Lutheran

ROLL UP YOUR SLEEVES

All that stuff we hauled
out of the church – guess what?
It's gotta go back.



PULL IT UP, PLEASE

Mask around his chin
protects us from his whiskers,
not from his COVID.

AT MY MERRY IN-LAWS' HOUSE

The 4-year-old boy
at our Christmas feast erased
our '21 blues.



MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES

- There'll be a congregational meeting Jan. 23 after the liturgy. The main business of that meeting will be to vote on next year's budget and elect new Council members. Everyone is welcome to attend, but only members of St. Stephen are eligible to vote. If you wish to become a member, please contact Pastor Tom.
- Do you have an anniversary, birthday or special memory you'd like to honor? Celebrate the occasion by sponsoring the flowers for our service. Sign up on the 2022 Flower Chart in the narthex. The cost is \$35, which you can place in the offering plate.
- Have anything to add to a future newsletter? Email Lori at sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com or call 850-385-2728.



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

Vince Muchuruza - 01/07
Marsy Miller - 01/10
Mary Anderson - 01/11
Mason Bonfanti - 01/11
Sharon Gordon-Girvin - 01/11
Erin Kenney - 01/11
Mark Canning - 01/13
Natalie Schiffer - 01/15
Nathan Basford - 01/19
Myrna Dowdell - 01/21
Stephen Barton - 01/22
Denise Bookwalter - 01/22
Ann Hingst - 01/22
Sandy Ness - 01/24
Gladys Kane - 01/28
Jennifer Buchanan - 01/29
Warren Schave - 01/31
Jayden Schiffer - 01/31



UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday:

10 a.m. - Worship, Baptism of Our Lord Sunday

12:15 p.m. - Council meeting

Wednesday, January 12:

Noon - Bible study



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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