



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

POTLUCK? NOT JUST YET



For the second week in a row, we're asking you to hold your horses on your potluck plans. January's always busy at St. Stephen, and our event organizers are trying not to wear you out by having you prepare food for too many Sundays. So here's the bottom line: There will NOT be a potluck this Sunday – because there WILL be a potluck Jan. 28, in connection with our Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday. For more about that event ... keep reading.

COME LISTEN TO REP. ANNA ESKAMANI

Once again, Dave Suhrweir has snagged a compelling keynote speaker for our annual Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday. State Rep. Anna Eskamani will be here Jan. 28 with a talk titled "Leading With Love: Building a Foundation for Equality in Florida."

Rep. Eskamani is a three-term legislator from the Orlando area. Before running for office, she was a senior director at her local Planned Parenthood affiliate. The daughter of working-class immigrants, the first Iranian-American elected to public office in Florida, she has been described as a bridge builder and a problem solver. And she's running for re-election. Among the bills she's sponsoring this year are measures dealing with equal rights for men and women; treatment of inmates; termination of pregnancies; and assault weapons and large-capacity magazines.



How's she doing in the Legislature? The public-interest organizations Progress Florida and Florida Watch graded each Florida lawmaker based on votes regarding health, the economy, public schools, housing affordability, clean energy and water, reproductive freedom, equality and safeguarding democracy, among other issues. Rep. Eskamani earned an A on this 2023 People First Report Card. She scored 100 percent.

So there's a 100-percent chance that she'll fit right in at St. Stephen. A few details about the event itself:

- It's a potluck, so organizers hope you can bring a dish for our members and guests to share. Yes, our keynote speaker is vegan, so we welcome vegan dishes (prominently labeled) – but we also welcome non-vegan offerings.
- Because Dave works to get the word out, we often have visitors for Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday. More visitors means more cars – and a possible shortage of parking spaces. Those who are able-bodied are encouraged to park at the office plaza uphill from St. Stephen. After you park, walk to church either along the side street or on the path that leads through the wooded area to our fellowship hall.

One way we can thank Rep. Eskamani for her visit is to make a financial offering to Zebra Youth, a cause she supports. This network of Central Florida organizations provides services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and all youth (LGBTQ+) ages 13-24. It assists young people facing homelessness, bullying, isolation from their families, and physical, sexual and drug abuse. We'll have a donation jar available Jan. 28. Or you can bring or mail a check to church, payable to St. Stephen Lutheran Church, with "Zebra Youth" in the memo line. If you're using a Venmo app, it's @stephen-saint payable to "St. Stephen Lutheran Church." Again, please designate for "Zebra Youth."

MEMBER UPDATES

By Pastor Tom

- There's good news concerning Bob Eshleman. He did very well during Monday's triple-bypass surgery, and his doctor was pleased with the strength of the new vessels. Late Tuesday he was moved to a regular room and will likely be there until tomorrow. I asked Linda how we can be of help, and she asked for a few people to be on stand-by to sit with Bob when she needs to go out for doctor's appointments or other occasional things. It only takes one person, but it would be good to have a few lined up in case there are conflicts.



- Gladys Kane is also progressing well after a recent fall that cracked a vertebra in her neck. She's doing physical therapy at Westminster Health Center with plans to discharge on Jan. 18.

PUPPETRY U.

By Sharon Simmons

High-school seniors are encouraged to apply early to the schools they want to attend. My granddaughter Blake had been researching about a year for colleges/universities that offer programs with a concentration in puppetry – and that she (or her parents) could afford. There are a lot of programs offered at schools in Europe. But in the U.S., there are only two: at the University of Connecticut and at West Virginia University in Morgantown. Blake passed on Connecticut because it was too far – and sure to get really cold. So West Virginia was her first choice. Last Saturday, she heard. She's in! She'll be entering the puppetry program in the School of Creative Arts. She'll also be taking 18 hours of college credit with her, from successfully passing Advanced Placement classes while in high school. "I'm excited," Blake said. "It's the only program for me – and the only thing I'll settle for."



REAL DANGERS: EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM'S SERMON

... Once when I was maybe 9 or 10, and out on the boat with my dad in the Atlantic around Miami, ... I was tethered to the boat in a tube-style raft. I was alone in the raft and had on a life preserver, which I was sure I didn't need. It was the kind of raft that had sides, and I floated about 50 feet out while my dad fished from the anchored boat.



The water was a deep blue, the kind that means you're pretty far from shore, and the waves were rolling. Somehow the line became disconnected from the raft. No one noticed immediately, but by the time my dad and stepmom did notice, I had floated out a good 50 yards from the boat.... My dad called to me to stay put, and then Donna (my stepmom) dove in to swim to me. She reached the raft and told me Dad would be by in the boat to pick us up in a few minutes. It all seemed quite routine to a 9-year-old.

That is, until I was a little older and my dad spoke of that day and the real dangers.... When they'd realized the raft was free-floating and moving away from the boat amidst growing waves, there was the real life/death danger of losing sight of me. Dad couldn't cut the anchor line because he didn't want to take his eyes off me and lose my position. So the first remedy was for Donna to ... swim to the raft. Dad directed her from the boat so she could swim right to me. Once she reached me, he quickly cut the rope to the anchor and spun the boat to us, now about 100 yards out....

I had that memory while meditating about this sermon. How is it that we often forget how dangerous water is? ... When we read about the baptism of Jesus, we might picture a calm and peaceful event. We may envision Jesus rising out of the water with a calm confidence, a clear purpose while striding into his ministry without a single doubt. But now, in the middle of life, I envision him breathless and expectant, aware of the danger. Was he afraid of taking his eye off the people in need? Was there a feeling of heartbreak as his own heart was torn like the heavens? What was it like to have the sudden awareness of God's favor, and delight, while still feeling the overwhelming sense of the open possibilities in front of him? These are questions we ask of the text, and answers come as we grow and mature....

COMING UP

- **Sunday, Jan. 21:** Congregational meeting. On the agenda: Vote on our 2024 proposed budget, and elect people to two open Church Council positions.
- **Tuesday, Jan. 23:** Debee Meyer service, 10 a.m. in the sanctuary.
- **Sunday, Jan. 28:** Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday, with potluck.
- **Sunday, Feb. 11:** Mardi Gras Talent Show, after the liturgy.



BEFORE YOU GO...



- How's everyone doing after Tuesday's frightful weather? Do you have any storm stories to share in next week's newsletter? Send them to rrhartung1@gmail.com.

- The end-of-year giving statements will be ready for pickup in the narthex beginning Sunday. Office Manager Lori will mail any remaining statements Jan. 29.
- 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 in the narthex. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

- Mary Andersen - 01/11
- Mason Bonfanti - 01/11
- Sharon Gordon - 01/11
- Erin Kenney - 01/11
- Mark Canning - 01/13
- Nathan Basford - 01/19
- Myrna Dowdell - 01/21
- Stephen Barton - 01/22
- Denise Bookwalter - 01/22
- Ann Hingst - 01/22
- James Gunderson - 01/24
- Sandy Ness - 01/24
- Gladys Kane - 01/28
- Jennifer Buchanan - 01/29
- Graham Hackley - 01/30
- Warren Schave - 01/31
- Jayden Schiffer - 01/31



IN THE WEEK AHEAD

Today:

Noon - Al-Anon meets in fellowship hall (FH)

5 p.m. - Villas HOA meets in FH

7 p.m. - AA meets in FH

This Friday:

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

6 p.m. - Game night group meets in FH (outside group)

This Sunday:

9:00 a.m. - Book study

9:30 a.m. - Choir practice

10 a.m. - Worship, Second Sunday after Epiphany

4 p.m. - Congolese Christian worship in FH

Tuesday, Jan. 16:

11:30 a.m. - OWLs lunch at Panda Buffet

Wednesday, Jan. 17:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH

7 p.m. - Choir practice



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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