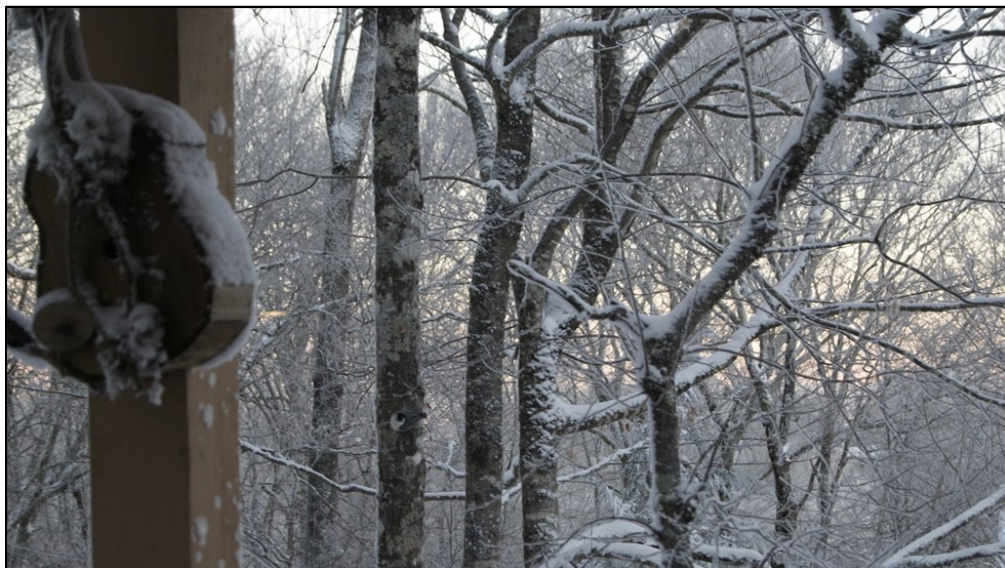




ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



WINTER WHITE

Think it's been wintry around here lately? Here's a glimpse of REAL winter, courtesy of Robin Whitley up in the hills of North Carolina. "I am tickled that a sparrow has finally decided to nest in my guitar-shaped birdhouse," she says. "Oh, and we still have lots of snow."

GET READY FOR A BIG MEETING JAN. 24



By Pastor Tom

Mark those calendars for Jan. 24 at 11:30 a.m., when we'll gather in person and on Zoom for our January congregational meeting. During the meeting we'll vote on the 2021 financial budget presented by the Church Council; elect officials to Council; and vote on moving forward with the construction and renovation project in the sanctuary. *(See more about that project below.)*

All people from the worship community are welcome to attend, but only members are permitted to vote. If you'd like to be in church in person, please let Office Manager Lori Zengel or me know.

NOW, ABOUT THAT BIG PROJECT...

We caught a glimpse of the Building Design Team in action Sunday, during the latest Zoom update on our sanctuary repair and renovation project. *(In case you missed Sunday's meeting and want to catch up on it, here's a link:*

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84461212693>

Providing an overview, committee leader Denise Bookwalter said the main focus is fixing the sanctuary structure – you know, the “roof thrusting” we’ve heard so much about. At the same time, the committee is exploring options for improving the interior view of our stained glass, making our building “greener” and possibly taking steps to bring it up to code, where feasible.

Lots of fact-gathering has been going on. There've been discussions with the architect. Huddles with the Church Council. Conversations about everything from flooring to “hurricane straps.” Talks with the worship team about acoustics and more. As Denise said, the goal is to be transparent and open.

At the Jan. 24 meeting, we'll get an estimate on how much this project is likely to cost. Pastor Tom repeated that, so far, we have more than \$120,000 in gifts and pledges for the upcoming work. Treasurer Jennifer Dritt gave an overview of congregational finances – which seem healthy, especially considering we're in the middle of a global pandemic.

Congregation President Val Sullivan said a capital campaign will be launched Jan. 24 but assured us that "we will only do what we can afford." Later in the meeting, St. Stephen member Karen Olson urged congregational leaders not to be shy about asking for what we need to do a thorough job. Some potential donors might be inspired to give if they know more about the various options under consideration, she said.

It was an inspiring meeting – and it's important that all of us show up for the next step on Jan. 24. If you have more questions before the upcoming congregational meeting, ask Denise or Pastor Tom. (You'll find their contact information in your church directory. If you've lost yours, check with Lori.)

Many thanks to our congregational leaders. May God continue to bless your work in our behalf.

RECONCILING IN CHRIST SUNDAY

On Jan. 31 we'll celebrate Reconciling In Christ Sunday, but not as thoroughly as usual. Because of COVID safety concerns, we won't gather around a special keynote speaker or have lunch together. But, on a brighter note, worship will still be centered on the inclusivity of the LGBTQ+ community. Please join us for live-stream worship and invite friends and family in support of God's reconciling love in Christ's Church. The link to the service is <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ststephentallahassee/live/>.



A MOMENT WITH RITA FORD

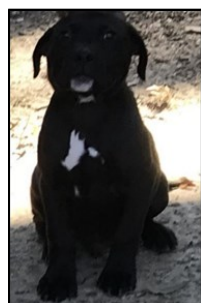
So how is effervescent Rita doing in these days of social distancing? We asked her for an update.

2020 was an interesting year for us. While our lives slowed down quite a bit, we still managed to make it work. Fortunately, we are still working in our household. I'm the administrative assistant at Capital City Collision paint and body shop. At the start of COVID we thought we'd have to go on leave. After a couple of months, though, we started to get work that continues to come in slowly but constantly. In addition, my son Ajay got an IT job in the middle of the pandemic. My son Amrit will start a new job in a few weeks, too.

While we leave the house only for groceries and work (with masks and social distancing, of course), we still manage to enjoy ourselves. Whether it be experimenting with new recipes or singing and dancing in the middle of the living room, it's not difficult for us to find something to do. Movie nights have become very common in our household. Plus with everyone staying indoors, our family dog is enjoying all the extra attention and walks.



Speaking of our family dog, these past few months we've had a guest staying with us, with his very own puppy. Our dog Lady (*left*) was not a big fan of sharing the attention with the puppy Dingo, so she would do everything to get all the attention back to her. But with time, they're starting to get along, and they've been playing with each other. Of course, Lady would step in if she thought Dingo was getting too needy.



Praying that you have a truly remarkable and blissful year ahead! Happy new year to all!

TOILETRIES, PLEASE?

By Cheryl Stuart



It's a new year, and we have new opportunities to help those struggling with homelessness and poverty. As you responded last year with donations of socks, we again have been approached to partner with New Mt. Zion AME Church (on Old Bainbridge) in their "TNT" drive in January.



This time, they're looking for lotion, toothpaste, toothbrushes, mouthwash, soap, shampoo, shaving cream and razors. Regular size, please. Well, maybe hotel size, but not jumbo.



Please bring your donations to St. Stephen's office or fellowship hall if after office hours by noon next Thursday, Jan. 21. Steve and I will transport them. Thank you in advance for your generosity and help.

AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO DONATE

By Dave Suhrweir

In this age of technology and the internet, a weekly envelope in the offering plate is no longer the only way to donate to the church. Many members of the congregation are now making their offerings using a Venmo app. Here's another way.



In general, for those who are retired and have an Individual Retirement Account (IRA), funds may be withdrawn without penalty. Any distribution to the account owner is taxable income. Funds that are directly distributed to a "qualified charitable organization," however, are not considered taxable income.

This becomes particularly relevant when the Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) takes effect.

This occurs when the owner of the IRA reaches age 70½. (A law signed in 2019 says that if your 70th birthday is July 1, 2019, or later, you don't have to take withdrawals until you reach age 72.)

The RMD for any given year is based upon the balance of the account at the end of the prior calendar year and a factor on a life expectancy table. At least that amount must be distributed from the account by the end of the year to avoid paying a penalty. The account owner may direct the brokerage firm to send designated amounts to a church, such as St. Stephen, or other qualified charities, thus fulfilling some portion of the RMD tax-free.

(I'm not a tax expert. You're advised to do your own research and seek advice from those knowledgeable about retirement plans and tax laws.)

Resources:

- [What if I withdraw money from my IRA? | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](#)
- [Retirement Topics - Hardship Distributions | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](#)
- [Retirement Topics — Required Minimum Distributions \(RMDs\) | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](#)
- [Retirement Plans FAQs regarding IRAs Distributions Withdrawals | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](#)
- [Churches & Religious Organizations | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](#)
- [Tax Exempt Organization Search | Internal Revenue Service \(irs.gov\)](#)

'GOD LET LOOSE IN THE WORLD': EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM'S SERMON

"... This past week we encountered a shaking in the foundation of our own government and society. Zealots, insurrectionists and thugs stormed into the sacred spaces of our democracy and stained our history of over 200 years of peaceful transfer of power. We watched from the safety of our homes but felt the panic as the people in the Capitol were under attack – driven by conspiracy theories, lies and a man who cannot accept defeat even when it means people's lives are threatened.

"What are we to do with this as people of faith? It is tempting to load our own weapons and fight for the good that we know exists in the world, yet this violence would only beget more violence. As people of faith, we looked for God in the crisis and we saw the Holy Spirit in those charged with the solemn duty to protect the innocent. I saw the work of God in the determination of senators and representatives to reconvene in order to complete their task of certifying a fair election. In one moment, it looked like everything had fallen apart and turned to dust by these hundreds of rioters and terrorists attempting a coup, but then beauty came out of the ruins.

"Evil flexed its very real muscle and for a brief moment assumed its victory, but not for long. For we saw God let loose in the world. The movement of the Spirit in our midst...."

MISC.

- Some poinsettias didn't get picked up. If you can give one or more of them a home, look for them on the sidewalk near the Luke Room (the side facing the next-door apartments).
- Alas, there'll be no Mardi Gras Talent Show this year. Keep practicing your song and dance, so we can enjoy it next year.
- Alas, there'll be no Arise liturgy during Epiphany this year. But if you call up composer Tom Buchanan and ask nicely, he might hum a verse of "Kneel Me Down."
- Many thanks, as always, to the people who faithfully bring the Sunday liturgy into our homes: Pastor Tom, Katharine Gossman, Isabel Barton, Karl Barton, Paul van der Mark/Jonas Holdcraft and the Altar Guild.
- Lori reminds us that, even though we're worshipping virtually, we're still using altar flowers – which we can see on our computer screens. And now, Lori says, the flower chart for 2021 is ready for you to pick a special day and honor a special person. For a donation of \$35, you'll get an invitation to be among the 15 or fewer people who worship in person with Pastor Tom and Co. in the sanctuary. If you attend, you can take the flowers home with you. If not, you can pick up the flowers from the fellowship hall – or make other arrangements with Lori.
- Have anything to add to a future newsletter? Email Lori at sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com or call 850-385-2728.



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

- 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
- Graham Hackley - 01/30
- Colin Schiffer - 01/30
- Warren Schave - 01/31
- Jayden Schiffer - 01/31



UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday:

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

Monday, Jan. 18:

The office will be closed in observance of MLK Day

Wednesday, Jan. 20:

Noon - Bible study

Sunday, Jan. 24

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

11:30 a.m. - Congregational meeting via Zoom



If you have news or photos to share,
please send them to Lori at
ststephentallahassee@embarqmail.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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