



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

9:43 a.m.
Wednesday, Jan. 24

Dear St. Stephen,

Our Sister in Christ Val Sullivan died last night at 9:27. Our hearts break at the loss of Val, and we rest in knowing the promise of God and the resurrection of Christ have embraced and received her. Please join me in praying for Val Kibler, family and friends who grieve.



Grace and Peace,
Pastor Tom

(All longtime St. Stephen members froze in their tracks when they read this email from Pastor Tom yesterday. For you newer members: That's Val Sullivan on the right. On the left is Val Kibler. Together they were The Valz, the smiling faces of St. Stephen's welcoming spirit. Yesterday evening, Pastor Tom followed up with an announcement that the Celebration of Life for Val Sullivan is scheduled for 10 a.m. this Saturday. A reception with refreshments and light hors d'oeuvres in the fellowship hall will follow the service. Please let Lawana and/or Margaret know if you're available to bring food, or to help with cleaning up.)

THIS SUNDAY: POTLUCK AND 'LEADING WITH LOVE'

For our annual Ministry of Reconciliation observance, state Rep. Anna Eskamani will be here Sunday with a talk titled "Leading With Love: Building a Foundation for Equality in Florida." (See flyer details on page 2.) It's a potluck, so organizers hope you can bring a dish for our members and guests to share. Our keynote speaker is vegan, so we welcome vegan dishes (prominently labeled) – but we also welcome non-vegan offerings.



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. Thanks in advance.

NOISY OFFERING

This Sunday is also a Noisy Offering Sunday. This time, our kids will be collecting donations for Zebra Youth, a cause that's dear to Rep. Anna Eskamani's heart. (See the flyer for details.) She's taking time out from the legislative session to come speak to us, so let's thank her in this tangible way.



St. Stephen Lutheran Church

Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday, January 28, 2024

A celebration of God's inclusive love.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. — 1 John 4: 7 - 8

Worship Service 10:00 a.m.

Guest Speaker following the service (approximately 11:15 a.m.)

Luncheon in the fellowship hall to follow (near noontime)

All are welcome. All activities are free.



Speaker: Representative Anna Eskamani,
Florida State House of Representatives
*“Leading with Love:
Building a Foundation for Equality in Florida”*



➔ To participate virtually, visit <https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee/>
Videos of the service and presentation will be available on that Facebook page for later viewing.

Representative Eskamani asks that donations be made to **Zebra Youth**, a network of organizations in Central Florida that provides services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and all youth (LGBTQ+) ages 13-24. Zebra Youth assists young people facing homelessness, bullying, isolation from their families, and physical, sexual and drug abuse with individualized programs to guide them to recovery and stability.

For more information, go to <https://zebrayouth.org/>

Zebra Youth is a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Freewill donations may be made to the Zebra Youth organization.

- Donation jar in the sanctuary and fellowship hall on January 28th
- Check delivered or mailed, payable to “St. Stephen Lutheran Church.”
Please designate for “Zebra Youth.”
- Venmo app: @stephen-saint payable to “St. Stephen Lutheran Church.”
Please designate for “Zebra Youth.”

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, 2198 N. Meridian Road,
Tallahassee, FL 32303 (one block south of John Knox Road)
850-385-2728



<http://www.ststephenlutherantally.com>

<http://www.reconcilingworks.org>

St. Stephen Lutheran Church (ELCA) is a Reconciling in Christ congregation that explicitly welcomes people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. St. Stephen is equally committed to anti-racism. We welcome people without regard to race, ethnicity, age, family status, economic status, or differing abilities.

OUR FINANCIAL PRIORITIES

By Pastor Tom

At last Sunday's congregational meeting, we discussed a lot of financial issues. I won't review all of them today, but I want you to know our priority list.

In the next two months, we'll select an independent financial consultant to complete an informal audit. That will provide reassurance and evaluate our effectiveness in following key financial/accounting controls. The ELCA provides a Congregational Audit Guide, but it doesn't supply financial consultants for us. In initial conversations, one potential local consultant said we'll need to use a software program like QuickBooks. That caused some dialogue at Sunday's meeting. We actually bought QuickBooks in the recent past, but the dedicated member who was all set to use it for us developed a long-term illness. Long story short: We never did use it, so now we need to investigate whether our purchase is still valid. If not, we'll purchase QuickBooks again.

One important difference between then and now is that Office Manager Lori Zengel is now officially part of our finance team, and she wants to be trained to use that software. Among the benefits of Lori's involvement will be a clearer carryover of financial accounts from year to year, as well as programmed spreadsheets that will minimize human error.

Most of us have heard tragic stories of church embezzlement or theft. I fully trust our hard-working counters, financial record-keeper and treasurer. We have checks and balances in place that allow Lori, Treasurer Jennifer Dritt and me to view bank statements and account balances, but not all of us can write checks or move money. Still, we know that better practices and tools are available. As we grow and as our financial gifts increase, so must our responsibility in maintaining full integrity.

The members of the Church Council, too, recognize the trust that the congregation has placed in their hands. We take that trust and the stewardship of God's resources seriously. Here in 2024, for the first time since I've been your pastor, 100 percent of Council members have pledged. We place our money in God's hands, too. I give thanks to each of you for your commitment and your first-fruits given to our mission and ministry.

NOBODY DOES IT BETTER

By Susan Warren



On many a Sunday I am so touched by our choir's anthems that while putzing around the house in the afternoon I "YOUTUBE MUSIC" the anthem of the day. I try out several versions, searching to find one as uplifting as the one our choir delivered – and the search always falls short. I know the center of what I feel has to do with the forgiveness I receive early in the service and then later receiving Christ's body and blood. But I also know deep in my heart that no one's piano playing and choir directing moves me like Katharine's. The icing on top is all of the voices coming together seamlessly to move us all.

THE UNSINKABLE GLADYS KANE

By Sharon Simmons

Have you been missing Gladys Kane's smiling face? Wait no more! As reported earlier, Gladys suffered a traumatic fall in December, necessitating a hospital and rehab stay.

She's now home, and I took flowers from church to her on Sunday. The sparkle and smile are back. While she continues to recuperate at home, she sends her thanks and love for the many prayers and cards from her St. Stephen family. With her permission, I'm sharing this photo.



ANY MORE STORIES LIKE THESE?

We all like to hear other people's stories. In fact, sometimes we need to tell other people's stories for them. Maybe those people are too self-conscious, or they're unaware that they even have a story to tell. What stories do you have to tell about St. Stephen people? How have they inspired you, with the way they've related to others either at church or in the community? Who are your St. Stephen role models, and why? The newsletter would love to tell those stories. Please send them to Lori in the church office or to rrhartung1@gmail.com.

'IT'S ALL RIGHT'

Back in 2018, one of our first glimpses of Pastor Tom was at a funeral. Our dear sister Kris Knab had just died. Listening to his sermon, we heard a pastor who was skilled at offering comfort and hope. This week, at Debee Meyer's service, Pastor Tom did it again. Here are memorable excerpts.

A couple weeks ago in the news, we were told about more problems with a particular airplane. A piece of the fuselage blew off and fell from the sky. Thankfully the accident didn't turn tragic, but it reminded me of the many kinds of fear we encounter every day. We need to worry about our plane; if on the ground, we need to worry about what might fall from a plane. There's that and the fear of losing a job or losing our health, losing a war, or a relationship breaking. There is the fear of losing material wealth, and fear of being left alone. And finally, of course, there is the fear of loss itself.

This loss that I refer to here is the kind often associated with death. The death of a parent/grandparent, friend, sibling or child. After such experiences we move into a new kind of fear. The fear of losing control. We ask ourselves questions like: "Could I have done more to save them?" "Did I say the right things or do the right stuff while my loved one was still here?"

All these run through our mind today; choke us up; and it is possible to even be angry with God. Angry like Job was against God. “If you are a truly compassionate God, how is it that death happens?” And all these kinds of fears feel like a mountain has fallen upon us. We wonder: Who can lift it off of us? Who will breathe for us when we can’t? Who will quell the fear?...

When we read today Debee’s selections of texts from the Bible, we find solace in what gave her comfort. In the very ones she picked out for this service, we find her encouragements to press on and the urgings to live by the Spirit. Whether it is a writing from Paul or the words from Jesus’ mouth, we glimpse a God who has loved us with an everlasting love and see the One who prepares a place for us. And even when we feel forgotten, or afraid, we are reminded ... of the way a mother cares for her child. Is it possible for a mother like Debee to forget her child? No way! So we, too, believe that God will not forget us....

[Debee] rejoices in victory and is healed, but we are left to grieve. So, whether one is angry, sad or in fear – we are not ashamed to cry out because the whole point of faith is the conviction that someone will answer. As the child wakes in the middle of the night crying from a nightmare, the parent comes in to soothe them. To reassure them so as to understand they’re not alone, they’re safe.... That it is all going to be OK.

So it is the same way with God. Our Lord will not let us ever lose relationship with Christ – that someone who will say, “It’s all right.” Even though it hurts now and even though you wished (we all wished) it could have turned out differently, it’s all right. Even though you have fears, doubts and anxieties ... it’s all right....

(Pray for Pastor Tom as he prepares a sermon for yet another celebration of life.)

FOR ONLY \$5

Here’s an offer you can’t refuse from embroidery wizard Margaret Bowers:



“Bring your own shirt, jacket, bag or apron and get the St. Stephen logo embroidered for only \$5. Our fabulous Council President Denise came up with the idea of rainbow colors. Bring in your item and \$5, then drop off in fellowship hall – so you can promote our wonderful church.

“Questions? Call Margaret at 407-921-8671.”

BEFORE YOU GO...

- For all of us procrastinators! Sunday (not tomorrow) is now the deadline for contributing toiletries and toilet paper as part of our ongoing, joint mission with New Mt. Zion AME Church. When you make your weekly run to the store, pick up some extra toilet paper or toiletries – such as bar soap, shampoo, body wash, deodorant, toothpaste or toothbrushes. All our donations go directly to the Kearney Center to benefit its clients. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.



- Margaret says: “Come join us on Tuesday, Feb. 13, at 11:30 for OWLS at Casa Grande Margaritas & Cocina, 1800 Thomasville Road, next to Jo-Ann fabric store. RSVP 407-921-8671.”

- All those people you see serving at St. Stephen in various roles on Sunday mornings? Sundays are not their only days. For Debee Meyer’s memorial service Tuesday, for example, Pastor Tom preached and presided; Katharine Gossman played beautifully; Beth Alexander was worship assistant; Colin Hackley greeted and ushered; Cindy Suhrweir and Caroline Collins livestreamed the service; and Margaret Bowers and Carol Santos set up the fellowship hall and cleaned up afterward. A number of other members attended or watched online. No doubt the Meyer family and friends felt welcome indeed.

- **Performers, if you haven't done so already, please let the Mardi Gras Talent Show impresario know how you plan to amaze the St. Stephen audience on Feb. 11. Write to rrhartung1@gmail.com.**



- **The end-of-year giving statements are ready for pickup in the narthex. Office Manager Lori will mail any remaining statements Monday.**



- **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!**

UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

- Gladys Kane - 01/28
- Jennifer Buchanan - 01/29
- Graham Hackley - 01/30
- Warren Schave - 01/31
- Jayden Schiffer - 01/31
- Joey Bonfanti - 02/02
- Gabbi Oates - 02/02
- Barb ODonnell - 02/05
- Chris Reece - 02/15
- Patrick Kennell - 02/18
- Tami Allen - 02/21
- Lisa Medley - 02/25
- Jackie Mustian - 02/25
- Judi Duffy - 02/27
- Rob Schiffer - 02/28



IN THE WEEK AHEAD

Today:

- Noon** - Al-Anon meets in fellowship hall (FH)
- 7 p.m.** - AA meets in FH

This Friday:

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

This Saturday:

- 10 a.m.** - Celebration of Life service for Val Sullivan

This Sunday:

- 9:00 a.m.** - Book study
- 9:30 a.m.** - Choir practice
- 10 a.m.** - Worship, Ministry of Reconciling Sunday/Noisy offering
- 11:30 a.m.** - RIC Speaker/Potluck
- 4 p.m.** - Congolese Christian worship in FH

Monday, Jan. 29:

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

Wednesday, Jan. 31:

- 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>.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, ELCA
2198 N. Meridian Road | Tallahassee, FL 32303

The Rev. Tom Holdcraft, Pastor