



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



What a relief to see water in our local ponds again. As Pastor Tom prayed Sunday: "We praise you for the waters of life."

'I STAND WITH LUTHER, AND WITH YOU'

As always, our annual Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday provided a keynote speaker with a thought-provoking message. Our speaker last Sunday was Rob Atkinson Jr., a member of the FSU Law School faculty since 1987. You'll find a video of his engaging talk on St. Stephen's Facebook page. Below is a super-condensed print version. The topic was "The Legality and Justice of Same-Sex Marriage: Listening to Dr. Martin Luther and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."

To understand Martin Luther's position on same-sex marriage, we have to go back to that most basic of Lutheran teachings, *Sola Scriptura*: "Only the Scriptures." Luther believed that the Christian Scriptures are the ultimate source of all matters of the Christian faith. Famously, as a doctor of theology, he was willing to stand alone on the Scriptures against the whole world, Church and Empire, in the face of death itself. Less famously, as a subject of Frederick the Wise of Saxony and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles, Luther insisted that legal questions should be left to lawyers and philosophers, even non-Christian lawyers and philosophers, and he explicitly recommended Aristotle: "... *Whoever wants to learn and become wise in secular government, let him read the heathen books and writings.*"

What's more, Luther saw marriage as just such a legal question. On the basis of *Sola Scriptura*, he believed that the Scriptures themselves declare that the legal status of marriage is not given in the Scriptures; it is given in the law, based on universal rational principles of human justice. Look, he said, not to the Scriptures, but to philosophy and jurisprudence – especially non-Christian philosophy.

What, then, do philosophy and jurisprudence have to say about legality and justice, particularly on the subject of marriage, and same-sex marriage? Here it's helpful to look beyond Dr. Martin Luther to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King, of course, spent the bulk of his career trying to bring United States law into accord with universal justice. For our purposes, it's enough to focus on two passages, one each from two of his most famous works.



The first is from his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech. It reflects his most basic understanding of justice: "*I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.*" The second quotation is from his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." It reflects his view on the proper relationship of justice and law: "...*I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all.'* ... *Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.*"

What would Dr. King say today about same-sex marriage? Even from our two brief quotes, we can extrapolate his position. The answer is astonishingly simple: Most of us, to fully flourish, need a mate, a soul-mate. Therefore, to encourage our flourishing, to uplift our personality, to be just, the law must recognize marriage. For some of us, our soul-mate has to be a member of our own sex. Therefore, to encourage our flourishing, to uplift our personality, to be just, the law must recognize same-sex marriage. That's all there is to it: Human flourishing requires it. The law must provide it. That is why Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Dr. Martin Luther himself would, were they with us today, embrace same-sex marriage.

But the very simplicity of that answer raises a nagging question: Why has it taken us so long? Why is today a service of reconciliation? What [brought about the] current [negative] reaction to same-sex marriage is a most unholy alliance between those who have taken two wrong turns: those who say they have privileged access to the will of God in all matters, and those who say that justice is no more than the will of the majority. That is not what Luther said. I stand with Luther, and with you.

If you want to read Professor Atkinson's complete text, ask Dave to send you a copy. And if you have questions? The professor generously offered to continue the conversation. Dave has his contact information.

MEMBERSHIP, ANYONE?

By Pastor Tom



On Feb. 19, we'll welcome several new members to St. Stephen. If you're interested in joining St. Stephen, please see me.

SINGING WHILE SMILING

By Caroline Collins

During the choir's singing of Sunday's anthem, "A Place at the Table," I noticed members seemed to be smiling more than usual. It inspired me to get up and sneak a photo. I didn't manage to catch one of the most smiley moments, but I wanted to share anyway. After the service, I asked Pastor about it. He said Katharine had coached the choir to smile when they sang the word "justice." At home, I watched the video replay and captured a screen shot that shows several singers smiling simultaneously. Seeing the choir express their joy made me appreciate the anthem that much more. May justice be as contagious.



ALTAR GUILD 101

Last week, we told you St. Stephen can always use additional Altar Guild members. This week, we asked 50-year veteran Billie Reardon for a closer look at what the Guilders do – in case you're thinking about becoming one of them.

Time commitment: Maybe once a month or every other month (depending on our numbers) for Sundays – plus special needs and services for Advent, Lent, etc.



Saturday duties: Each week we need to polish the brass and check for dust at the communion rails and lectern – roughly 20 minutes. We pour water into the baptismal font. If there's communion, it takes 10-15 minutes to set out the communion ware. (With two people and experience, it moves faster.) You could do those things Friday, but you have to swing by church anyway on Saturday. That's bread-pickup day, which requires getting the Publix card from the sacristy to pay and then making "the run."

Sunday before the liturgy: On a non-communion Sunday, we place a partially filled glass of water on the table beside the pastor's chair. Also, if the ushers haven't done so, we remove the baptismal-font lid. On communion Sundays, we also pour the grape juice (if previously refrigerated) and place it with the other communion ware behind the altar. We pour the wine (if previously refrigerated) in the flagon/decanter and set it on the credence table.

Cleanup: When there's no communion, it takes less than 10 minutes to empty and dry the baptismal font plus wash and put away Pastor's water glass. When there's communion, it takes a bit longer to wash and put away the ware but less than 30 minutes. Other Guild members pitch in. Many hands make light work.

Other duties: We help with Christmas and Easter decorating and assist if called to help. While traditionally the Guild is responsible for ordering supplies, upkeep of linens, albs, banners, etc., we have such wonderful help from Pastor Tom, Office Manager Lori, Martha Marky and Beth that, at this time, we don't perform any tasks other than setup and cleanup.

Rewards: "It's a way for me to serve or 'give back,'" Billie said. "It also fills a desire or need for me. My mother, my sister and my mother-in-law were all very active Guild members, and I love continuing their tradition. My daughter Bevin also served at the Lutheran Center on campus while at FSU."



At the moment, in addition to Billie, the St. Stephen Altar Guild consists of Beth Alexander, director; Caroline Collins (pictured above, checking the duty roster with Andrea after church Sunday); Judi Duffy; Linda Eshleman; Rita Ford; Erin Kenney; Andrea Notley; Audrey Post; and Susan Warren. That's quite a powerhouse group. Want to join them? Talk to Beth.

COMING UP



- Feb. 19: Mardi Gras Talent Show, after the liturgy. See Pastor Tom, Karl Barton, Kirsten Ebbesen, Rita Ford, Jake Hartung, Susan and Rudy Hehn, Colleen Holdcraft, Jonas Holdcraft, Patrick Kennell, Chris Reece, Dave Suhrweir – some of them as you've never seen them before! Please be there to cheer them on!
- Feb. 22: Ash Wednesday.
- March 12: Spring forward. (Daylight time begins.)
- April 9: Easter!

MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES

- Many thanks to Dave Suhrweir for organizing Sunday's Ministry of Reconciliation Day, and to Margaret Bowers and her team for organizing the potluck lunch.
- Professor Atkinson is the faculty sponsor of the student group called OUTLaw, which "seeks to provide a platform for all students to learn about the legal issues facing gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and other queer people." In connection with Sunday's celebration (including the Noisy Offering from the preceding Sunday), St. Stephen donated \$575 to OUTLaw. Said Pastor Tom: "What a generous love offering!"
- This wasn't Professor Atkinson's first visit to St. Stephen. Thirty years ago, when his family worshipped at Faith Presbyterian across the street, his then-8-year-old son asked one Sunday whether they could worship here instead. When asked why, the son reminded his dad how they both admired "old Martin Luther." The real reason was that he thought a particularly cute girl he knew was a member here. Turned out she actually worshipped at St. Stephen Catholic Church. "Looking back on that first visit here," the professor said, "I like to think, in our case today and as in [his son's] back then, the whole truth is this: You can go looking for love and you can go looking for Luther at the same time, in the same place."



- St. Stephen, you're pretty good at this TNT stuff. Outreach Coordinator Sharon Simmons took this picture of the toilet paper and toiletries you donated last month. "Thank you for the generous contributions," Sharon says. "They were picked up on Monday and have been delivered to the Kearney Center."
- Here's a sincere note from Sue Canning: "Thank you for your cards, notes and kind words on the sudden death of my brother-in-law. They were all of great comfort. We are deeply grateful."
- St. Stephen's end-of-year statements on members' financial offerings have been mailed out. Contact Office Manager Lori if you have any questions.
- 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 flower chart in the narthex. The cost is \$35, which you can place in the offering plate.
- Have any questions for our Church Council members? They're listed on our website, <https://ststephenlutherantally.com/about-us>.
- Have anything to add to a future newsletter? Email Lori at sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com or call 850-385-2728.



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

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
Jerry Rumph - 02/28
Rob Schiffer - 02/28



UPCOMING DATES

Sunday, Feb. 05:

9 a.m. - Book study

9:30 a.m. - Choir practice

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

Wednesday, Feb. 08:

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

*Edited by Lex Lutheran. Designed by Lori Zengel, office manager, sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com.
Website: <http://www.ststephenlutherantally.com/>*

If you no longer want to receive this newsletter, please [unsubscribe](#). To unsubscribe please reply with "UNSUBSCRIBE" as the subject line.