



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



Here's Pastor Tom, all smiles at the beginning of Sunday's liturgy. Moments later, he was wearing a different stole. Keep reading to find out why. (Photos by Colin Hackley)

WELCOME BACK

As coordinator of worship and music, Beth Alexander wanted to do something special for Pastor Tom on the day he welcomed worshippers back into our renewed sanctuary – the day he also returned from his bout with COVID. How about ... a new stole?



Sharon Simmons had found one online created by someone with rock-solid St. Stephen credentials: Constance Berg, who worshipped with us in person as the wife of Vicar David Berg (1991-92) – and who, even though she and the Vic live in California, still worships with us frequently online. Beth bought that rainbow-colored stole and presented it to a surprised Pastor Tom at the start of our

Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday liturgy.

As an additional gift, Beth asked a few St. Stephen people to send her a quick, one-word description of Pastor Tom. Here are their replies:

- Steadfast
- Compassionate
- Accepting
- Creative
- Patient (*twice*)
- Caring
- Thoughtful
- Available
- Unprecedented
- Dedicated
- Understanding
- Tender-hearted
- Spirit-filled
- Gentle
- Real



We thank God for you, Pastor Steadfast.

FROM ZACH TO ZOE: 'IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN'

Over the years, Dave Suhrweir has brought us a variety of speakers for Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday – our annual Celebration of God's Inclusive Love. Politicians, pastors, family members and other advocates have spoken about obstacles to LGBTQIA+ equity but also about the importance of never losing hope. Each year we leave inspired.

This year was no exception. Zoe Williams, a software developer at Florida State, described her transgender journey from Zach to Zoe in a compelling talk to St. Stephen people in our sanctuary – and nearly 60 people tuning in online.

As a young man growing up in rural Central Florida, Zach tried his best to do what was expected of him. He hunted, rode motorcycles, flew planes, went into law enforcement, got married, had a child. As far as everyone else knew, things were just fine. But inside, even at an early age, there was a disconnect.



"I had one doll," Zoe said during her talk. "Lots of other toys, but one doll. I still have it. It reminds me of who I was – and that I'm the same person I've always been." (These photos show young Zach and present-day Zoe with the doll.)

For those of us who struggle to understand transgender turmoil, Zoe provided vivid illustrations. "If you're a right-handed person, let's say someone tells you that you have to write with your left hand the rest of your life," she said. "[You might think] 'it's super uncomfortable, and I really wish you'd let me write with my right hand but, yeah, I can figure that out.' If you're cisgender [*that is, not transgender*], imagine them telling you that you had to wear the clothes of the opposite gender no matter what you were doing.... Guys, you gotta wear a dress." You could do it, she said, but you'd be thinking, "I'd rather put on my pants again."

That's as close as she could get, she said, to describing the disconnect between what everyone else saw on the outside and what she felt on the inside. Here's what they didn't know: "That you don't want to be playing with the boys. That you don't want your face slammed in the mud. That you don't want to be pushed down on the concrete and be all skinned up and expected to throw a football and get hit in the face with it.... All these things that you don't really want to do but you try to do because you want to live up to expectations and you don't want to disappoint your family. It's hard to explain how that feels."

At age 15, Zach told his mom about the disconnect. Mom's first response: "What



did I do wrong?" (She did nothing wrong, Zoe said.) Mom's second response: "Don't tell your father."

"My problem was that I didn't feel safe telling them," said Zoe, who much later did have that conversation with Dad. "That is a very hard place for a person to be. The statistics for transgender suicide are through the roof, and a lot of it is because they

don't feel safe admitting who they are. They don't feel safe confessing to 'Look, I don't feel comfortable in my own body. Can I please get some help [so that] what I feel on the inside matches what's actually on the outside?'"

It's been seven years now since Zoe legally changed her name. She and her ex are sharing parental responsibilities for their daughter. Zoe has a "wonderful" boyfriend. She's also a facilitator in a group called Gender Chat. Life, she says, is better than she ever could have imagined. "Thank you so much for having me," Zoe wrote to Dave after her talk. "I really do hope that some in the congregation will get something meaningful out of it."

In connection with Zoe's talk, we took up a collection for the LGBTQ Victory Institute, which provides comprehensive, nonpartisan training to present and future LGBTQ candidates, campaign staff and community leaders. We're accepting donations for another week. You may give through the Venmo app @stephen-saint or by check payable to St. Stephen Lutheran Church. Please note "For Victory Institute" on either method.

Gender Chat is a group for the LGBTQIA+ community and allies. It meets monthly to discuss gender, life and the human condition. For more information, contact Zoe at zoe.williams@genderchat.org.

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/_DzwEBJQAObumajoxT94VaGtyqCqyN5sHa96hxY1mmN8reT2USLWNycay-wkjSZw.O17sEEjr29SJqRud

HAIKU CORNER

By Lex Lutheran

IN OUR NEW-LOOK SANCTUARY

We worship with joy
as the sun lights up each inch,
even the narthex.



EMPTY AGAIN

Our fellowship hall
must feel neglected now ... or
maybe just relieved.

LOTS MORE REHEARSAL TIME FOR THE NEXT ONE

Once again this year,
with the endless pandemic,
no (sniff) talent show.



Behavioral Sciences and Social Medicine COMMUNITY ROUNDS

Mental Health in Our Community: Access, Quality and Resources across the Lifespan

February 16, 2022 | 12-1 p.m.

Register at
bit.ly/CommunityRounds_02_16_22

Open to anyone!

Join Us
VIRTUALLY!



Courtney Atkins, M.A.
Executive Director
Whole Child Leon



Fran T. Close, Ph.D.
College of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences
Institute of Public Health
Florida A&M University



Nicole Everett, B.S.
Behavioral Health Community Navigator
Community Health & Planning
Florida Department of Health- Leon County



Heather Flynn, Ph.D.
Behavioral Sciences & Social Medicine
Florida State University College of Medicine



MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES

- If you're worshipping in person, please "test-sit" the sample chair in the back of the sanctuary and let Pastor Tom know what you think. The swatch next to the chair shows you the colors recommended by Ann Hingst, David Butler, Jim Sampson and Pastor.
- For the Syrian family who recently moved here (and has been befriended by Rita Ford's family), we're still collecting gently used books (picture, primary, board and early readers, graphic novels); new or gently used workbooks or activity books for children; size 4 diapers; a computer for the kids' online schooling (send a donation to church earmarked "Computer for Syrian family"); gently used games or toys; and cleaning supplies and toiletries. Drop them off in the kitchen, in a bag with Rita's name on it.
- Wait – there's more! We continue to collect items for the Going Places Street Outreach Center. Toiletries, snacks, warm shirts, pants and socks are needed – along with detergent. Drop them off in the lobby.
- Here's a note from Brenda Christie at New Bethel AME Church [see photo], thanking us for collecting items for the homeless residents at the Kearney Center: "Many thanks to you for your loving heart. I greatly appreciate your... collection of toiletries and toilet paper for individuals who are desperately in need. God loves a cheerful giver."
- The end of the year statements were sent this week. If you see any errors, please contact Lori as soon as possible.



- 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 2021 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

Barb ODonnell - 02/05
Chris Reece - 02/15
Patrick Kennell - 02/18
Lisa Medley - 02/25
Jackie Mustian - 02/25
Judi Duffy - 02/27
Jerry Rumph - 02/28
Rob Schiffer - 02/28

UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday:

10 a.m. - Worship, Fifth Sunday after Epiphany, Order of Healing

Wednesday, February 9:

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>.

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/>*

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