



# ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

## St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



*The lowly cabbage is one thing; this proud cabbage palm is quite another. It kept silent watch last weekend as kayakers and other creatures of God traveled the St. Marks River under a brilliant blue sky. Ah, what the people in the shivering North wouldn't give for a winter's day like this. (Photo by Jake Hartung)*

## 'WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REACH OUT TO PEOPLE?'

*As usual, Reconciling in Christ Sunday was a worship highlight – but in a different way, in this different year. COVID wouldn't let us have a festive banquet built around a keynote speaker in our raucous fellowship hall. Instead, we celebrated our tradition of openness toward the LGBTQ community with a quiet, inspiring video message from two familiar faces. As anyone who knows Jim and Matt Sampson would expect, they were thoughtful and challenging ... a vivid advertisement for father-son communication ... and a bittersweet reminder of the exceptional Sampson women who are no longer with us. Here are excerpts from Jim's statement.*



**"... When Matt was 20, in the summer after his sophomore year in college, he asked me one evening if we could talk on the screened porch. I said, 'Yes, of course.' He closed the door, sat down and said, 'I want you to know that I'm in love.' I said, 'Great!' Then he said, 'I'm in love with a guy.'**

**"I quickly realized that this was a big moment for the two of us. His implicit question was, 'Will you accept me fully as I am, now that you fully know who I am?' He deserved another honest answer. As many thoughts rushed through my mind, the need to be protective dominated – as the world in 1996 was not very welcoming for gay men, and I was anxious about his future.**

**"I don't remember my exact words, but the message was that while his being gay was fine for me as his dad, I had concerns about how others might mistreat him and how this might impact his life. He acknowledged my worries and said, 'Ask me any questions you want, Dad, and I'll answer them.'**

**“We talked for hours about AIDS, prejudice and discrimination faced by gay men, as well as how gay men coped with these challenges. He stressed that keeping safe was a high priority for him and that living in New York City provided him with a community where he could be safe and find acceptance. He also talked about how difficult it had been over the years, having the growing realization that he didn’t fit in with the interests of many of his friends and classmates....”**

**“At the end of our talk, he said, ‘Please don’t tell Mom, because I want to tell her myself, and I don’t think I can do this twice in one night.’ I agreed, Matt and I hugged, and then I tried to quietly slip into bed – only to have Sandy sleepily say, ‘Did you have a nice talk with Matt?’ I said ‘Yes’ and lay awake for hours....”**

**“The next night, Matt and Sandy had their time on the screened porch. Sandy’s talk with Matt was a blend of her concerns for him in an often gay-unfriendly world and her joy that Matt now felt free at home to be his fully authentic self. Matt’s sister, Lauren, was similarly understanding of his journey and pleased that the family was united in supporting him. The perspective that Sandy, Lauren and I gained from Matt’s journey as a gay man led Sandy to serve for many years as faculty sponsor of the gay pride student group at Tallahassee Community College and to be an active participant in Tallahassee PFLAG. It led Lauren to be a leader in the Gay-Straight Alliance at the University of Richmond and led me to be an advocate for the Safe Zone program at Florida State University. It also led Sandy and me to join with other Lutherans to promote the Reconciling in Christ program to empower congregations to be more welcoming to LGBTQ persons and to have them serve as pastors in Lutheran congregations....”**

***When Jim finished reading in Sunday’s video, Matt, seated beside him, replied to his dad and to us.***



**“... The impact that [front-porch conversation] had on me was immeasurable. That I could be myself with you and Mom and Lauren really helped me grow**

**as a human. That reaction was very important.... I knew you wouldn’t throw me out. I knew you wouldn’t reject me in that way. But ... you never know EXACTLY how it’s going to go. You never know if it’s going to be OK for any gay person coming out. So the fact that I got that reaction from you was excellent.**

**“And then for you to go on in life and become a real ally and welcome gay people into the house and advocate for them at work meant a great deal. That kind of modeling really showed me how I can make my way through this world....”**

**“To those who are listening: How can *you* be a better ally in your life? What can you do to reach out to people and accept them and let them know that everything is OK with you and with them? Having allies, especially straight allies, who are so open and loving – it can take someone who’s on the verge of suicide and turn that around.... I’m certainly grateful for my ally right here!” (He turned and patted his dad on the shoulder. Thank you, Sampsons.)**

**To see the Sampsons for yourself, go to the 50-minute RIC Sunday video at [https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee/videos/?ref=page internal&path=%2Fststephentallahassee%2Fvideos%2F](https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee/videos/?ref=page_internal&path=%2Fststephentallahassee%2Fvideos%2F). Jim begins about 9½ minutes in.**

## THE LATEST ON TIM & SANDY



*This week, we asked Sandy Larson to let us know how life has been going during this time when we're mostly absent from each other. You'll enjoy her report.*

Greetings from the Larsons. We're both doing fine but with changes in our lives, just like a lot of other folks.

Tim retired from FSU in November, and my dental lab business of 28 years closed last March. It has been a no-fanfare, quiet retirement thus far. We miss our family and friends. Hope by summer we can get together more. We go fishing during the week when the weather is good, and I ride my horse and Tim enjoys golfing.

Looking forward to getting this virus behind us and better days to come. Wishing you all vaccines and good health.

## 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/gJ-9esqog64hODmEPD\\_0kXGWgpjd-i6cAHastiDw3T6IQSrCuXf-oE4h4CkX8RMn.3FjJeNvrQb0xdexw](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/gJ-9esqog64hODmEPD_0kXGWgpjd-i6cAHastiDw3T6IQSrCuXf-oE4h4CkX8RMn.3FjJeNvrQb0xdexw)

The access code is **!Rudr5dK**

## MISC.

- Last Sunday reminded us that capturing a live liturgy and transmitting it into people's homes is no piece of cake, especially when you're inserting video content and when some experienced people have the day off. The worship team has already met to discuss what lessons it can learn. Of course, even with live worship in the old days, you never knew when something might go wrong. We're human! As always, a thousand thanks to the people on camera and behind the camera who produce our weekly liturgy so faithfully. Without you, what would we do?
- Thanks to Office Manager Lori Zengel for the new congregational directory! Print yours out. Quiz each other. ["Who lives on Shar Mel Re Lane?" "Which three households live on a street that contains someone's first AND last names?" "Is it truly a long, long way to Tipperary (Drive)?"] Questions about the directory? Contact Lori.
- We received this thank-you note related to the Giving Tree, which Andrea Notley coordinates so well: "Dear Friends, I want to thank you for once again supporting the needy Leon County Schools families during the Holiday season. It's been a tough year for all of us in one way or another and your unwavering support is much appreciated. Sincerely, Jeanne Thorbjornsen, Leon County Schools Social Worker."
- Want to provide altar flowers? For a donation of \$35, you'll also get an invitation to be among the handful of people who worship in person with Pastor Tom in the sanctuary. Afterward, the flowers are yours to keep. See Lori's contact information below.
- Have anything to add to a future newsletter? Email Lori at [sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com](mailto:sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com) or call 850-385-2728.





## UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

Gabbi Oates - 02/02  
Barb O'Donnell - 02/05  
Michele Hartson - 02/11  
Chris Reece - 02/15  
Patrick Kennell - 02/18

## UPCOMING DATES

**This Sunday:**

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

**Wednesday, Feb. 10:**

**Noon** - Bible study



If you have news or photos to share,  
please send them to Lori at  
[ststephentallahassee@embarqmail.com](mailto:ststephentallahassee@embarqmail.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](mailto:sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com).  
Website: <http://www.ststephenlutherantally.com/>*

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