



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



*This month, while our friends up in Pennsylvania observe the groundhog and hunker down for more winter, we behold the camellia – such as this one at FSU – and prepare to embrace spring. Ahhhhh.
(Photo by Jake Hartung)*

UPDATES ON OUR BUILDING PLANS AND OUR (SORTA) FILM DEBUT

By Pastor Tom

- In our Capital Campaign for the Sanctuary Project, we've received \$119,618, and we have \$23,000 in pledges. Add them up, and you'll see we're more than \$142,000 toward our goal of \$175,000. Thank you for your continued financial support. If you can make a gift of any amount, please be sure to designate it to the Capital Campaign for the Sanctuary Project.



- The Church Council and the Building Design Team have decided to have two sections of the carpet in the sanctuary removed so that the engineer and architect can assess the concrete's integrity and help us determine next steps in flooring options.
- Remember when St. Stephen opened our sanctuary doors for a group of students from the FSU College of Motion Picture Arts? Well, we have the link to share with you to enjoy their finished work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mie9rB2Vo-U&feature=youtu.be>. That link takes you to a collection of short films. The film shot in our sanctuary begins at the 1-hour-35-minute mark. You'll appreciate its message.





STEPHEN, THE SERVANT

By Robin Whitley

Recently we told you that Robin, our gifted vicar back in 1992-93, had created a painting of our favorite saint as a gift to us. She's been working on another painting, and now that one has arrived as well. Both of them relate to our congregation, and every detail was chosen with care – sometimes even on the back of the painting. Below, Robin explains.

As I was painting, memory after memory of the love and kindness you gave to me as a vicar flowed through my being like its own unsung hymn.

In painting Stephen, my original thought was to paint a traditional icon. But as I researched the period and the person, I realized the importance of leaving out the nimbus (halo), the sign of sainthood. Also, originally I wanted to paint Stephen as the people were stoning him – because it seemed pertinent to our own political climate. But when it came to actually painting people of faith lifting their hands to murder another, I couldn't. So I showed him by the gate, just before the stoning.

As I continued to research and pray about how to proceed, it became clear that what lifted Stephen into sainthood was not that he was the first martyr but that he was willing to serve. Remember, Stephen was one of the seven leaders chosen by the disciples to help feed and care for widows and orphans. This is service. In Chapter 7 of Acts, before we read of the stoning, Stephen gives a speech in which he stands up for immigrants and reminds the council how the “patriarchs” themselves were immigrants. Sounding like a prophet, he concludes, “You stiff-necked people...You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.”

His message is full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit, yet the religious leaders don't like it. They “instigate” men to spread lies about him. Yet Stephen continues to serve the poor, the immigrant, the hungry. He has surrendered to serve G-d.

After the angry mob takes Stephen, instead of fighting back or saying harmful things, he goes to his end much as Jesus did: “While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit.’ Then he knelt and cried out in a loud voice, ‘Lord do not hold this sin against them.’”

So as I began to try to paint a person who might look like a young first-century Hellenistic Jew, my mind began to sing “The Servant Song” as prayer.

***Will you let me be your servant/ Let me be as Christ to you/
Pray that I might have the grace/ To let you be my servant too***

***We are pilgrims on the journey/ We are travelers on the road/
We are here to help each other/ Walk the mile and bear the load***

***I will hold the Christ light for you/ In the night time of your fear/
I will hold my hand out to you/ Speak the peace you long to hear.***

***I will weep when you are weeping/ When you laugh, I'll laugh with you/
I will share your joy and sorrow/ Till we've seen this journey through***

***Will you let me be your servant/ Let me be as Christ to you/
Pray that I might have the grace/ To let you be my servant too***

From that time on, whenever I painted a layer on the Stephen panel, I sang “The Servant Song” as prayer: singing while I painted and to the painting itself. This is what moved me to put the words of the hymn on the back.

The second painting is more of a map of Jerusalem facing north. Various sources say Stephen was from Syria. When he was led out to be stoned, it was out the Damascus Gate. In essence, he was thrown out of Jerusalem the way he came in.

Throughout this process, I thought of all the wonderful saints at St. Stephen Lutheran Church. Though I haven't been your vicar since 1993, my heart remains with you. As I wrote those words, I saw Pastor Hingst presiding at Eucharist. I saw Anna Bartels' smile as she silently said “I love you” to me every time I had the blessing of chanting Evening Prayer. One memory led to another. There was Rainbow Rehab and Caring Connection and Habitat for Humanity. From feeding the homeless to ministering to the poor, St. Stephen Lutheran IS a church of service. It has been a mentor, leader, teacher of what it means to live a faith-filled life while also practicing social justice.

My paintings are love letters to you all. Everyone associated with this beautiful congregation has continually shown themselves to be following Jesus Christ just as Stephen did. Stephen was a regular person like you and me who chose to serve until his very last breath, and in that breath offered forgiveness. May we continue in the path of Stephen.

[When we asked Robin whether she had a place in mind for displaying her work, she said Office Manager Lori had shown her an available space in the sacristy. “As I painted, I thought about the space and what might minister to those preparing to lead worship,” Robin said. She pictures her creations as a diptych, where two panels are displayed next to or even attached to each other. She wonders whether some handy person might be able to put a hinge on them – though she concedes they might be too thin. Volunteers?

[Like most creative people, Robin ruefully acknowledges that her projects are never perfect. But “one day as I was fretting and painting, I was also listening to some sermon or chant/hymnody and I realized how important the symbolism in imperfections was.” Thank you, Robin, for this perfect gift.]



Thanks to Ursula Morgan for forwarding these Bernie moments.

AN AWARD-WINNING MODEL A

By Phil Williams

Phil's not one to brag, you know. But when we got wind of this award, we asked him to write it up.



As you may recall, our car Fern is a 1931 Ford Model A that an uncle gave to me when I was about 6. A complete restoration of Fern was completed in January 2019. Now that I'm retired, Sue and I are finally finding time to get out some with Fern. Thanks to COVID, most of those outings are solo ventures – because car club activities, like most others, have been greatly curtailed. That's beginning to change a bit.

This past Saturday, we entered Fern in her first judged car show. It was a benefit for the Leon High Dance Marathon, which raises money for the Children's Miracle Network at Shands Hospital in Gainesville. Thirty-eight cars were registered participants, and Fern drove away with the second-place trophy in the car category. Not bad for an initial foray into the competitive show world.

Fern has had other interesting outings as well. One day in December, we drove by a friend's house for a quick driveway visit because she'd recently had knee surgery. Her brother, who had cancer, was staying with her, and he came out in his wheelchair to check out the Model A. He'd done restoration work on one just like it years ago, and he really liked it. Recently, the brother died. Last Friday morning, he was buried at the Tallahassee National Cemetery. And who got to carry his ashes from our friend's house to the memorial service? Fern did.

HOW IS MARK CANNING DOING?

Here's an update from Sue: "Mark had quadruple bypass surgery on Wednesday, Feb. 17. The surgery took five hours. He was discharged from the hospital Monday. He tires easily but his spirits are good. He is not allowed to lift anything 'heavier than one gallon of milk,' twist or turn or stretch in any direction. His orders are to walk around the house several times a day. Walking to and from the stop sign at the end of the street is a major goal. OLLI classes via Zoom provide some variety. No driving or much else for six weeks." We all wish you the best, Mark and Sue, and look forward to seeing you before too long.

'GOD CAME BACK': EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM'S SERMON

"...Dear church, even seminary students, pastors and professors need to be reminded that baptism really works. The gospel message of God's love and mercy found in Christ Jesus, God's forgiveness of sinners, God's resurrection power that defeats the forces of sin, death and the devil – really happens. God's children being claimed in the waters of baptism – really works!

"At Jesus' baptism, something entirely unexpected occurred. God came back. The Jewish people had believed that prophecy had ceased with the last prophets and would be restored only at the end times. The Holy Spirit, sent into Jesus, opened up the heavens and a revolutionary concept that Israel's God was speaking again, at work again, and God chose to do this through a peasant man from Galilee.

"During these forty days of Lent, we begin today with the focus of baptism – its invisible brand on us and the joyful understanding that God's Spirit is still let loose in the world."

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/o13z2H7gDwPAR60REA1o5o7fnGXnq0xEot6ghe1HHTxxnhhZiAINzFia58y-LOMD2.VGX6F2OtPwFzUtHe>

The access code is **Eu?6n*F6**

MISC.

- 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 or call 850-385-2728.



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

Jackie Mustian - 02/25
Lisa Medley - 02/25
Judi Duffy - 02/27
Rob Schiffer - 02/28
Jerry Rumph - 02/28
Jan Harrison - 03/02
Jennifer LaVia - 03/02
Jim Christianson - 03/03
Robin Oliveri - 03/05
Linda Fevrier - 03/09
Victor Muchuruza - 03/13
T'moi DeWindt - 03/16
Tenan DeWindt - 03/19
Nicholas Franklin - 03/19
Stephanie Leitch - 03/27



UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday:

10 a.m. - Worship with communion, Second Sunday in Lent

Wednesday, March 3:

Noon - Bible study



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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