



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

***May the same God
who designed the daisy
bring peace to your
heart during these
difficult days.***



INTERFAITH CALL FOR PEACE IN UKRAINE

Feb. 24

Though we have been anxious about the recent growing tensions between Ukraine and Russia and between Russia and the NATO countries in recent weeks, we remain deeply concerned, as we have been since 2014, for the impact of this ongoing conflict on innocent civilians throughout Ukraine. All parties to the conflict must take every measure possible to protect civilians. All parties and the international community must renew efforts to de-escalate this threat to international peace and security.

All our religious traditions call us to pray and work for peace. We join our voices and hands together. We must open our eyes to those who are suffering, and we cannot remain indifferent to the injustice this conflict has brought on the people of Ukraine and may bring on people of neighboring countries.



We call on all those involved — whether governments, movements or individuals — to repent of aggression and violence, and turn instead to the way of peace through dialogue. We also call upon the faithful people of our congregations and communities to pray for wisdom, peace and justice to prevail in Ukraine. Join us as we pray:

Oh Divine, most mighty, most merciful, our sacred stories tell us that you help and save your people. You are the fortress: may there be no more war. You are the harvest: may there be no more hunger. You are the light: may no one die alone or in despair. Oh Divine, most majestic, most motherly, grant us your life. Amen.

- Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*
- Rev. Eddy Alemán, General Secretary, Reformed Church in America*
- Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church*
- Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer, General Minister and President, United Church of Christ, National Ministries*
- Bishop Sally Dyck, Ecumenical Officer, The United Methodist Church*
- Rev. Teresa Hord Owens, General Minister and Pres., Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in U.S. & Canada*
- Bishop Teresa Jefferson-Snorton, Fifth Episcopal District, The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; Chair, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA; President, Churches Uniting in Christ*
- Rev. Dr. Betsy Miller, President, Provincial Elders' Conference, Moravian Church Northern Province*
- Rev. Dr. J. Herbert Nelson II, Stated Clerk of General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA)*
- Mr. Basharat Saleem, Executive Director, Islamic Society of North America*
- Dr. Tarunjit Singh Butalia, Executive Director, Religions for Peace USA*
- Rev. Chris Thore, President, Provincial Elders' Conference, Moravian Church Southern Province*

RETURN OF THE CHOIR

After Sunday's liturgy, 13 members stuck around for the first choir practice in two years. And Wednesday evening, fully masked, the choir sang "Dust and Ashes" for the Ash Wednesday service.



"Choir, anthems and choir rehearsals are actually a thing again," Music Director Katharine Gossman wrote in an email to choir members last Thursday. "We will meet in the sanctuary each Wed. night at

7 p.m. We will be masked and distanced. We will be in community again. We will refrain from harassing or otherwise abusing our choir director. *[In case you didn't know, Katharine has a well-tuned sense of humor.]* It's gonna be great."

But lower your expectations, people. Some of us are rusty. "Please know that I am not expecting us to just pick up where we left off," Katharine said. "We probably have not been singing much, if at all. We will start slow, find our voices again, and enjoy making music together." Amen to that.

MANY THANKS TO THE CANTORS

When the pandemic scattered us in our worship and disbanded the choir, St. Stephen turned to online worship – with a cantor to lead us in song. For a year and a half, that cantor was the unparalleled Isabel Barton.

When Isabel went off to college, we discovered that we had a hardy band of cantors-in-waiting. Since then, they have served us faithfully. What a blessing! Now, the return of the choir is bringing about another change. "I am going to try eliminating cantor leadership and have the choir lead the singing from the congregation as was done previously," Katharine wrote this week to cantors and choir members. "I will still need a cantor for the psalm each Sunday, but we should be able to arrange that during choir rehearsals as we used to."



Speaking for all of us, Katharine added: "You all stepped up to lead the congregation for the last 7+ months, an invaluable service, and the congregation and I deeply appreciate you." Many thanks to you cantors: Isabel Barton, Kirsten Ebbesen, Rita Ford, Martin Guttenplan, Jake Hartung, Rudy Hehn, Susan Hehn, Sandy Larson, Chris Reece, Jen Reece and Cassandra White.

COME TO COFFEE TALK

By Pastor Tom

Do you miss St. Stephen and wonder how to make re-entry? Want to start slowly? Have a story to share? Then come to church around 9:15 a.m. for the next few Sundays and join in conversations over a cup of coffee! No agenda, no signup sheets, just free coffee (the good stuff!) and a St. Stephen family to catch up with. It's Coffee Talk, and you're invited!

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

After our January congregational meeting, the pastor and Church Council promised that we'd get monthly financial overviews. Let's look at the numbers so far this year.



- **JANUARY:** Expenses: \$19,876. Total income: \$13,734. So income was below expenses by **\$6,142.**
- **FEBRUARY:** Budgeted expenses: \$21,684. Total income: \$9,788. So income was below budgeted expenses by **\$11,896.**

Clearly our finances are off to a slow start for the year. We asked Pastor Tom to provide a bit of context:

- "I frequently hear that 'the people of St. Stephen always come through in their giving, and by the end of the year we make the budget.' Having that history is helpful. I am confident that, by communicating our financial report, our giving will 'catch up.'
- "As far as being able to pay our bills, we have a savings account of about \$10,000 that we can use as a cushion during lean times, usually in the summer. When giving picks up again, then we replenish that cushion – so it'll be available next time we need it.
- "We collected a surplus for the repair and renovation project. Although those funds are restricted to sanctuary work, they allow us some stability in cash flow.
- "Another help is that some bills (like benevolence to Synod) are paid quarterly. So we have time to divert the expense if necessary.
- "To all of our members and friends: Please check to see if you've missed an offering and can assist us in making up the shortfall. A congregation unified in her mission is strongest when everyone gives according to their ability and their blessings."

NAVAL GRADUATION, COMING UP SOON

Some of you have been keeping up with the Bagnalls on social media while SR (Seaman Recruit) Doug is away at boot camp. Here's an update for the rest of



us, which Zach (*on the right*) sent a week ago: "We are wrapping up week 6 and headed into week 7, 3 more weeks to go! I have all my travel arrangements taken care of for his PIR (graduation) on March 25. He's been doing really well and exceeding his goals so far. Please keep sending him prayers and positive thoughts. I'll be listing our house in April more than likely, so if you know anyone who's looking, let me know. I am so ready to be with my person again and excited to see what this next chapter holds for us. Hope you all are doing well and staying healthy!"

YES, YOU CAN HEAL PEOPLE: EXCERPT FROM SUNDAY'S SERMON

"... With the Lenten season around the corner, we will be committing ourselves to deep prayer. From the practice of prayer we will witness dazzling experiences. They may not be immediate, most aren't. We might even be silent for some time. But ... looking back upon the moment, we may see the dazzling answer or shining moment and reflect, 'Yes, God was there.' It is then that we venture out – come down off the mountain, you might say – and speak affirming words, bring gentle touches, and even heal people. Do you believe that to be true? That you can heal? We know we can hurt people, but often question if we can heal them. We can, through prayer."

OUR PURIFIED AIR

Some people are reluctant to return to in-person worship because they think we're recirculating potentially virus-contaminated air. Not so! Back in 2020, thanks to a generous donation, St. Stephen installed four REME air-purifying systems in the units that serve the sanctuary, fellowship hall and office lobby. Among other things:

- Dual ionizers reduce airborne particulates (dust, dander, pollen, mold spores).
- They kill up to 99% of bacteria, mold and viruses.
- They reduce "sneeze germs" by 99% in the time it takes a sneeze to reach 3 feet.
- Zinc ions kill 99% of viruses on surfaces.



Plus, for the time being, we're all wearing masks in-doors. So, next time you come to our buildings, breathe easy.

HAIKU CORNER

UKRAINE HIGHWAY

A huge tank rumbling down the road follows road signs on its way to war.



LET US PRAY

God, is it too much to ask for a miracle as Ukraine suffers?

NOT EVERY WAR IS TELEVISED

Ukraine is just one of the world's aching nations. Peace to them all, Lord.



MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES

- St. Stephen's annual camping trip is coming up fast. Watch for an update soon.
- Reminder from Marilyn Larson: "A Time for Burning" is a 1965 film about an ELCA pastor who stood up courageously to move forward on the issue of race. The film was selected for preservation in the U.S. Film Registry by the Library of Congress. Search for it on YouTube.
- Ah. Receiving communion at the altar again, surrounded by St. Stephen friends, provides such a spiritual boost.
- 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 2022 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

Jim Christianson - 03/03
Robin Oliveri - 03/05
Linda Fevrier - 03/09
Victor Muchuruza - 03/13
Chris Gossman - 03/19
Stephanie Leitch - 03/27

UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday:

10 a.m. - Worship, First Sunday in Lent

Wednesday, March 9:

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/>*

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