



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



Are the azaleas in our front yard white or pink? Depends on where you're standing. We have some of each, and ace photographer Colin Hackley captured some of each. Notice the cross against the blue sky. He always makes St. Stephen look so good.



PRESERVING OUR MINISTRIES: AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM COUNCIL

We know firsthand the damage that the current coronavirus pandemic has done to our community's social fabric and its economy. Right now, the Church Council is focused on preserving the valuable ministries of St. Stephen, which have been continued so effectively by Pastor Tom, members of the Worship Committee and other members. We have cut all but the essential expenditures, which include salaries, benefits and utilities. And we need all members and friends to be mindful that the church still needs resources to operate and to exist well into what we hope is a brighter future. Whether you have suffered personal losses that make it impossible for you to continue at your current level of giving, or you have the financial means to give more in order to offset the reductions others must make, we urge you to give consistently during this time.

Here are some ways, including some that have just been created, to do that:

1. You can now use Venmo to directly deposit your offering into St. Stephen's operating account. Unlike PayPal, there are no charges for using Venmo, which means that St. Stephen receives the entire amount of your offering. Venmo is easy to set up and even easier to use. You can download the Venmo app to your phone, and then set up your account from there. Setting up an account requires:
 - choosing a username;
 - entering your bank routing number and account number;
 - waiting less than 48 hours for Venmo to deposit two very small amounts into your account; and
 - verifying the amounts Venmo has deposited into your account.



You can choose to link your Venmo account to your bank account, which allows Venmo to verify your bank balance, but that's not necessary. We recommend you choose the verification method that requires you to wait for, view and then report the amounts Venmo deposited into your bank account. Finally, once your account has been verified, you'll be able to send money directly to St. Stephen, using our username, which is **Stephen-Saint**.

If you decide to use Venmo to send your weekly or monthly offering to St. Stephen, please, in the "what it's for" section, include your envelope number, and how the offering is to be recorded: Regular, Manna, Initial, Justice & Mercy, and the like. Finally, Venmo requires that you have a cellphone number, and the "web-based platform no longer allows you to pay vendors from the web. Venmo is exclusively a phone app."

2. You can sign up for the Simply Giving program to have your offering debited from your account by filling out the attached form and mailing it to Lori at the church office (2198 N. Meridian Rd., Tallahassee, 32303) with a canceled check.
3. You can simply mail your offering to the church (2198 N. Meridian Rd., Tallahassee, 32303).

May God bless each of you as you cope with these extraordinary circumstances. As Pastor Tom is fond of saying, "God is here too."

Need help figuring out how to have your contribution taken directly from your bank? Get in touch with Lori, our mighty office manager: 850-385-2728, between 8 a.m. and 1 p.m.

'WE REMAIN A COMMUNITY UNITED'

In times such as these we are reminded of God's promise to us: "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you."

There are teams of people calling to check in with those in our worship community who may encounter loneliness. We are adjusting to stay connected with little or no physical contact in order for our community to move past this time of COVID-19.

Lori and I still hold office hours at church, and I can always be reached on my personal cellphone.

Worship this Sunday will be celebrated again by streaming the service on Zoom and Facebook. Below you will find the link for Zoom (you can link directly using the link at the top of this email). To watch through Facebook, simply go to the St. Stephen Facebook page at 10 a.m. Sunday. The service will be saved there if you happen to miss the 10 a.m. "live" version.

Meeting ID: 717-611-628; Pass: 091942

<https://zoom.us/j/717611628?pwd=NHBBVnNTSi9XWDFMdxkxN3dSb2NTQT09>

Again, may we be strengthened to know that we remain a community united. Recalling who God is and what God has done, even when we experience times of not knowing what to do. In this time of distance, we are not alone and we have our eyes on Christ.

God bless you and keep you,

Pastor Tom

FINDING GOD ONLINE

Dozens of households “went to church” Sunday morning by going to their favorite digital device and logging on to St. Stephen’s liturgy. There on the screen was our unflappable Pastor Tom, seated before a banner in the lounge, leading the service of readings, prayers, sermon and song.

A handful of worshipers joined him in the room: Colleen, Judi, Jonas, Sue W., Karl, Isabel, Paul and Karen. Katharine provided piano accompaniment from her adjoining office. Karl’s flute was there, as always. Isabel was the designated singer, providing a strong foundation for those of us warbling along from our living rooms. Some participants were in other states: Anna Amundson wrote on the Facebook page, “So good to ‘see’ everyone. Hi from South Dakota.” Melody Duke tuned in from Washington, and Dale Henning from Michigan. At least a few worshipers were from Grace Lutheran across town.

“So inspiring!” Jan wrote afterward.

“Beautiful service. Thanks, everyone!” wrote Beth.

“Thank you, Pastor Tom, and all who made this happen!” wrote Kirsten Matthis-Bonfanti. (Sue and Paul were among those who figured out the technical aspects of bringing a live liturgy into our homes. Bless them.)

“Thank you Isabel, Karl and Katharine for the music,” Cheryl wrote. “Isabel, you have the voice of an angel!”

“We thought of all you church friends, saw your little hearts floating on the screen. Felt your love!!” Ruth wrote.

Those little Facebook “likes” and “loves” were part of what made the service interactive. Some people also wrote “Amen” at appropriate times in the service. Barb wrapped up the liturgy by writing our traditional “Thanks be to God, we will!”

Linda spoke for everyone, no doubt, when she wrote: “Outstanding service today via Facebook but missed seeing everyone’s face.” Husband Bob took it one step further: “I do miss the ‘sit down and be quiet’ gong.”

The gong and the faces will be back before long. But in the meantime, Facebook is our friend. Thanks be to God.

MEANWHILE, BETWEEN SUNDAYS ...

Pastor Tom also is finding online ways to reach out to us during the week. Here’s a new link to Facebook (you can link directly using the link at the top of this email):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dF6vOy-5IU>. It takes you to a brief introduction to contemplative prayer, direct from Pastor Tom’s office. It’s the first in a series, another way for our community of faith to stay connected to each other, and to God, while we are physically apart. You’ll feel your blood pressure lower and your connection with the Holy Spirit strengthen. “May you be blessed today,” Pastor says in closing, “and be a blessing to others in your path.” Amen.



WANT TO WATCH A CHILDREN’S SERMON?

Yep, our pastor has created one of those, too. You’ll love it. Here’s the link (you can link directly using the link at the top of this email):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Xz0eEFVxlw&feature=youtu.be>

TAKE HEART

By Marda Messick



After my husband Woods died in June, I began walking in Cascades Park and discovered the Korean War Memorial. In the center of the memorial space is an upright circle of polished stone, but the circle is broken at the top. The missing arc is on the ground, as if violently blasted away. The broken circle is inscribed with three words: *Duty, Country, Honor*. A fourth word is inscribed on the side of the fallen piece: *Life*. On its top are etched the names of the dead.

I thought about what core values might be written on the broken circle of my husband's life.

Perhaps ... *Family, Nature, Home*. And on the circle of my as-yet intact life ... *Beauty, Spirit, Friendship*. And you? What is most sacred to you? What are the deepest values your life declares? What endures, even though the names of the dead are etched on our own hearts?

In the pandemic that now afflicts the world, our circles of connection are ruptured. We are not allowed at the bedsides of the sick. We cannot kiss the faces of dear ones in nursing facilities. Our children are separated from friends and teachers. The familiar daily interchange of work and social relationship has gone – or, at least, gone virtual. We've become like the lepers of Scripture crying "Unclean!" to warn others to keep a safe distance from us. We can't encircle the altar to share the means of grace and hear the promise of "for you." We can't touch one another. We know that life itself is and will be ripped away from multitudes.

But now, right now, we are *alive*, and we have a way of life that is sacred to us. You know the words that guide our way, and by which we help one another. *Lovingkindness. Trust. Hope. Justice. Peace. Steadfastness.*

The old song asks, "Will the circle be unbroken?" No, of course not. As Jesus said, "Open your eyes and look around." But also, yes. Yes, because we are encircled by the love of the One, the Three, who promises, "I will not leave you desolate. I am coming to you." Nothing can separate us from that love. Take heart, dear ones, take heart.

A FAMILIAR FACE AT ESPOSITO'S

By Audrey Post

Our prayers have been answered: I have a job! I'm working at Esposito Garden Center, in the bedding plants area, helping people with plant selection and garden design. Once the coronavirus crisis is over, I'll be leading garden tours on Esposito's 34-passenger bus and coordinating garden workshops and seminars, as well as helping customers with design consultation.

Until then, I continue to work with a great team of people, including our own Mark Warren, at the garden center. Plus, it's like getting a free gym membership with my job. I'm tired at the end of each day, that satisfying kind of tired, and feeling stronger with all the walking, climbing and lifting. And I love what I'm doing.

I thank each of you for your prayers and support — taking me out to lunch or dinner on occasion, a gift card that arrived in the mail when I really needed it, adjunct teaching gigs, and yardwork opportunities that provided additional income. I'm still working on a few yards and will get them completed soon.

Getting breast cancer in 2017 while self-employed was a bad combination. Once I recovered from successful cancer treatments, I discovered that job-hunting over age 60, even with an impressive resume and references, is humbling and humiliating. But your prayers and support reinforced what I know, that we walk by faith and not by sight. God didn't bring me this far to bring me only this far. It has been a long journey but I know He is with me, and I am making it back into the light.

FYI, Esposito's is doing a brisk business with curbside pickup or home delivery of call-in orders for people who'd prefer not to visit the Garden Center right now. So stay isolated, keep gardening, worship virtually, and thank God for His many and continuing blessings. We will get through this together.

(Here's a link to a video where Ralph Esposito describes Audrey's new role:

<https://www.facebook.com/espositogardencenter/videos/141704557162146/>)

TWINS!

While we were working on the newsletter this morning, guess what? Erin and Eric McClanahan's twins were born! Baby girl Avery Grace and baby boy Brennan Kyle. Erin told Colleen that everyone is doing great. (Sorry – no other details just yet.)

Colleen, meanwhile, had been writing up a plea for gifts for these little ones. After all, due to Erin's hospitalization since early February, there's been no time for shopping or showers for babies.



It sounds as if gift cards might be the best thing for the family. Their top priorities are big-ticket items such as high chairs and car seats – so if we shower them with gift cards, they can use them for what they need.

Erin and Eric are registered at Target, Amazon and Pottery Barn. For your convenience, the links are posted below, and a direct link is at the top of this email. (Colleen checked the Target site this morning – and right after all the specific gifts are listed, there's an option for ... a gift card!) Here's

the address for sending gifts: Eric McClanahan, Danimer Scientific, 1301 Colquitt Highway, Bainbridge GA 39817.

Colleen says: "Babies are blessings: Go and be a blessing to others. (WE WILL!) Please call/text me (850-303-4557) or Margaret Bowers (407-921-8671) for more details."

[Amazon Registry Link](#)

[Pottery Barn Registry](#)

[Target Registry](#)

GOD'S GORGEOUS BACKYARD



This is some of what Jake saw Saturday afternoon while paddling around Lower Lake Lafayette. How about you? What have you been up to? Taken any photos you'd like to share with the newsletter? Maybe some that we non-Facebookers haven't seen? Love to see 'em.

A SLICE OF LAST SUNDAY'S SERMON

"...Did anyone expect self-quarantines and business closures? Did we ever think we'd come to the day of a closed-door sanctuary? I never thought a Sunday like this would come. I was blind and unprepared. We look forward to the day when we are together again and life goes back to the usual, but we are reminded today that if we get too forward-thinking we just might miss seeing God right next to us today. Maybe it is better to understand what is happening right now as a sign to open our eyes and see ... to no longer be blind, to no longer let business be usual. To see the family member under our own roof, whom we haven't sat down with in a while. A time to pick up the phone and call someone for a genuine heart-to-heart talk. Perhaps this is the time to start that meditative prayer practice you've always wanted to do but have been too busy to pick up. It is not against the law to take a lawn chair and sit on your driveway or by the front door outside. Think of how your eyes might be opened to seeing your neighbors. You just may see Jesus...."

HOW'S THIS FOR ADAPTABILITY?

Mike Martinez reports that, last month, the Manna on Meridian food pantry that we share with other congregations served 135 bags of groceries in a drive-through fashion. "The process has changed to avoid group interactions," Mike says, "but the mission is still vibrant!"



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS:

Stephanie Leitch - 03/27

Davis Holdcraft - 04/01

Gordon Fleischer - 04/06

Colin Hackley - 04/06

Vicki Guttenplan - 04/07

UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday:

10 a.m. - Worship (online), Fifth Sunday in Lent



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>.

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, ststephentallahassee@embarqmail.com.

Website: <http://www.ststephenlutheranally.com/>

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