



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



*From left: Will Allen, confirmation teacher Dave Suhrweir, Graham Reece, Pastor Tom and Colton Allen. Not pictured is confirmand Astrid van der Mark.
(Photo by Colin Hackley)*

CONGRATULATIONS, CONFIRMANDS

By Sharon Simmons, chief newsletter correspondent

Last Sunday was important in the lives of some of our newest members. The Confirmation Class of 2024 comprised Colton Allen, Will Allen, Graham Reece and Astrid van der Mark.

- Colton Allen will graduate from Sail High School today (May 23). He and his family will be moving to Florence, South Carolina, in June. Colton plans to spend the summer helping his family get settled in their new home, but in the fall he's planning to join the U.S. Navy and is interested in being an engineer or involved in food service. Thank you for your service, Colton. In his spare time, Colton plays his guitar and writes fantasy and comedy books. He hopes to have them published one day. Congratulations, Colton. Remember the light will always shine for you at St. Stephen.
- Will Allen is completing seventh grade at Raa Middle School. Like Colton, Will is moving to South Carolina and is very excited to attend the Academy for the Performing Arts in the fall. Will's passions are drawing, singing, acting and participating in Young Actors Theatre. When high school is complete, Will plans to go to Broadway – and wants the St. Stephen family to “Never forget my name or forget how I acted.” Congratulations, Will. Remember the light will always shine for you at St. Stephen.
- Graham Reece is completing seventh grade at the Fairview Middle School Pre-IB Program. In addition to his rigorous academic work, Graham plays the trumpet and is very active in Young Actors Theatre. Last night he also received the cross-country teammate award from Fairview. His long-term goal is to study archaeology, perhaps at a university in Iowa. He's looking forward to adult book study. Congratulations, Graham. Remember the light will always shine for you at St. Stephen.

Astrid van der Mark will be profiled when she returns from her trip.

OUTREACH UPDATES

By Sharon Simmons, outreach coordinator

- This Sunday is the last day to bring toiletries for the Florida-Bahamas Synod Assembly collection. The tub sits in the fellowship hall. Let's fill Pastor's truck as he and our delegates go to the assembly at the end of the week.
- When you drop off your toiletry donations, be sure to place your order for Lucky Goat coffee for the KidSafe fundraiser. Even though you'll place your order Sunday, you won't pay for your coffee until it's delivered. The order form is on the Outreach Ministry bulletin board in the fellowship hall. Let's help to make the kids in our community SAFE.



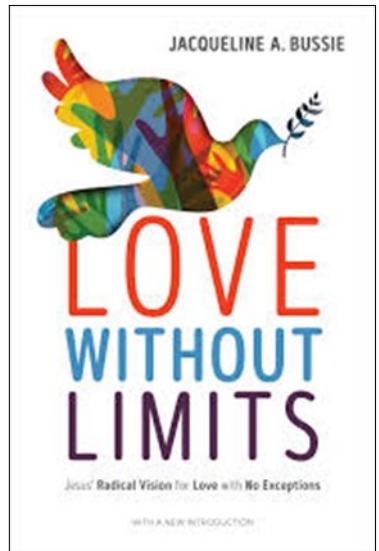
- The Noisy Offering this Sunday is designated for the Alzheimer's Project. Last Sunday, Mindy Towler (pictured here) devoted a Ministry Minute to acquainting us with the good work that Alzheimer's Project does in our community. (Photo by Colin Hackley)

STRIVING TOWARD GOD'S AGAPE LOVE

A book review by Dave Suhrweir

An angel is a messenger from God. Recently, the message came to me in the form of a book titled "Love Without Limits." The author is Jacqueline A. Bussie, a religion professor at Concordia College and the director of the Forum on Faith and Life. Bussie points out that the English word "love" may be expressed in various ways: *philia*, a love for one's friends; *eros*, a love for one's sexual partner; *storge*, a love for one's family; and *agape*, the unconditional love that God gifts to all people. This book is essentially her autobiographical journey toward an expanded agape life.

Bussie presents this journey in the form of messages from the people in her life. She shares many of her eureka-enlightenment moments from family, friends, students and strangers. She tells of how she misjudged individuals because she had not been aware of their life experiences, and how she had evaluated categories of people based upon one-story stereotypes. She shares her insights on grief, on people with a "scruffy faith" and on loving people you don't even like. Bussie's writing style comes across as a personal conversation with the reader. It is down-to-earth, often humorous and always thought-provoking.



"Love Without Limits" quickly leapt to the top of my list of favorite books. No matter where you are on your journey toward agape, somewhere in this book you will be hit with an especially meaningful and emotional message that feels as if it's written precisely for you.

"Love Without Limits" is available in hardcover, paperback, Kindle and audio. I thank two angels, Outreach Committee Chair Sharon Simmons and Pastor Tom Holdcraft, for presenting God's message to me in the form of this book.

EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM'S SERMON

... Whether it is by wind or breath, God's Spirit goes where it wills. The Spirit will blow loudly at times and breathe quietly in others. Our prayer is: "Take not your Holy Spirit from us, O Lord." As we pray this, we are particularly mindful of those who are affirming their baptism today. Astrid, Colton, Graham and Will have satisfied the requirements and responsibilities for completion of Confirmation 2024 at St. Stephen Lutheran Church.

"Lord, take not your Holy Spirit from them." This day is special but it is not so much a day of graduation as it is a step in the right direction. It is the start of a new journey.

Today is an important rite of passage as you each move into adulthood, but never will we fully understand all of the mysteries of our faith. Yet, what I do know is this: Today might be the last day you'll be in church for a while. I hope it isn't. You might even wish to deny it. But my experience has proved it to be true.

So, I will tell you what my pastor told me long ago. The light will always be on at the church for you. This church's door, and the doors of other churches, will always be open for you because God's Spirit remains with you in this world whether we think she is or not....



BEFORE YOU GO...

- So what's happening in the photo above? If you squint just a bit, and fire up your imagination, you can see that those are tongues of flame above everyone's head. It's the fire of the Holy Spirit, come to life at St. Stephen on Pentecost Sunday – which Pastor Tom described to the children as the sometimes overlooked Very Important Day in the church calendar. *(Photo by Colin Hackley)*

- We're gathering the names of all recent St. Stephen graduates – all levels, all kinds, all right? Please send your graduation news to Office Manager Lori, at sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com.



- If you have an anniversary, birthday, special memory or special St. Stephen person or program you'd like to honor, celebrate by sponsoring the altar flowers for our service. Sign up on the flower chart, out by the nametags, or ask Lori to sign you up. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!

UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

Paxton Oates - 05/23
Sandy Larson - 05/24
Jake Hartung - 05/25
Blake Simmons - 05/25
Bevin Reardon - 06/03
Billie Reardon - 06/03
Susan Hehn - 06/11
Billie Oates - 06/14
Tim Larson - 06/16
Martin Guttenplan - 06/19
Ruth Hartung - 06/23
Steve Kunst - 06/23
Sandy Davis - 06/28



COMING UP

Today:

Noon - Al-Anon meets in fellowship hall (FH)

7 p.m. - AA meets in FH

This Friday:

9:30 a.m. - TOPS meets in FH

7:30 p.m. - Cassandra White in FH

This Sunday:

9 a.m. - Book study

9:30 a.m. - Choir practice

10 a.m. - Worship, The Holy Trinity

4 p.m. - Congolese Christian worship in FH



Monday, May 27:

Office is closed in observance of Memorial Day

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH

7 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH

Wednesday, May 29:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH



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>.

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The Rev. Tom Holdcraft, Pastor