



# ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

## St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



## ‘LIKE A LONG-OVERDUE FAMILY REUNION’

If you haven’t worshipped in person at St. Stephen since early 2020, you might look at Colin Hackley’s photo from Sunday morning and think, “Where is everybody?” Before COVID, after all, we were averaging about 90 people in the sanctuary.

But if you’re among the hardy 12-15 people who’ve kept the lights on and the Spirit flowing in the sanctuary throughout this entire socially distanced chapter, you probably look at that photo and think, “Thank God! A crowd!”

Pastor Tom says 37 people gathered in the sanctuary Sunday morning, the first time in 14 months that relatively unrestricted corporate worship was possible. And, boy, was he thrilled.

“Wow! You’ve heard the expression ‘a sight for sore eyes,’” he said as the liturgy began. “Let me tell you, this is a beautiful sight.... It brings a tear to my eye. It’s so good to worship with all of you today.”

Even for those of us worshipping from home, it was a virtual reunion. Before the service began, there on our screen were the Cannings chatting with the Guttenplans, Karl Barton heading toward the piano, Kirsten Ebbesen and Patrick Kennell moving toward their seats, Susan Warren walking and waving, and Val Sullivan darting in amid the energetic hum of catch-up conversations.

As Pastor Tom announced last week, this is a gradual shift. Online worship will continue to be available, allowing all of us to keep worshipping even if we’re not quite ready to return to the in-person liturgy. Some restrictions still apply. Vaccinated people don’t need to wear masks; unvaccinated people do. And everyone needs to wear a mask while we’re singing. Hugs are discouraged, and Sharing of the Peace is much more guarded than in the past. You’ll find the complete details on our website: <https://ststephenlutherantally.com/>.

Please note: If you plan on worshipping in person Sunday, you need to let the church office know by Friday morning. You do that by visiting SignUpGenius: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0c45a4a62ea7fbc16-sunday>. As of early this morning, 10 of 50 slots were filled.

Here's what some of our favorite Lutherans had to say after Sunday's service:

- "I experienced a feeling of restoration seeing a 'crowd' at worship. One member told me that it looked like I had a 'glow.' The conversations I had after service around coffee and in the garden were reconnections with some I haven't seen since last year. The relationships were easily reignited!" *(Pastor Tom)*
- "Attending church Sunday was like being at a long-overdue family reunion! So happy seeing everyone. Also, singing together was wonderful, much better than singing alone at home!" *(Jan Harrison)*
- "I will never miss the opportunity to hug a loved one." *(David Butler)*
- "I was taken aback that a service that is so familiar in such a familiar spot felt overwhelming at times." *(Sue Canning)*
- "It was great to see the camaraderie again. Attendees looked genuinely happy to see each other, and it all made me remember why I chose to become a St. Stephen member in the first place. The reception afterward was a welcome and unexpected surprise." *(Hector Quinones)*
- "We attended service virtually as often as possible. Attending in person was AMAZING. We miss so many people, and to be able to sing with others!!! Missed it SO MUCH." *(Donna George and Rob Schiffer)*

Before we turn the page, let's remember to thank Pastor Tom, the musicians, the IT wizards and the handful of others who held the fort for more than a year, and who made it possible for the rest of us to worship together in a whole new way. What a blessing.



*There was even a reception in the fellowship hall afterward, thanks to Margaret Bowers. (Photo by Margaret)*

## MEANWHILE, LIFE WENT ON

*We asked for brief notes on what St. Stephen people had experienced while we've all been socially distant for more than a year. At first, we said we'd keep these notes anonymous. But they're too good! Thanks to all those who shared a glimpse of their recent life.*

- "I lost my first tooth and the Tooth Fairy came!" *(Vivi Halvorson)*
- "I built a raised garden bed and filled our porch with flowers." *(Vivi's mom, Elizabeth)*
- "I learned to lean on God when I felt overwhelmed (which was often!)." *(Elizabeth)*
- "I felt the full weight of gratitude: for having a job that let me work from home, for extra time with my family, for all of us staying healthy throughout the year." *(Elizabeth)*

- “During the last year, I started feeling anxious about the isolation and needed to find a venue to help me relax. I started painting with acrylic on canvas. I discovered that the entire process helps me reconnect with my inner self and with nature.” (*Hector Quinones, whose “Fantasy Prairie” is pictured here*)



- “While working at the hospital, I had the sad task of talking with families remotely while their loved ones were sick or dying in the ICU. I saw one man receive last rites via an iPad with only a nurse and me present. Heart-breaking.” (*Rudy Hehn*)
- “We learned that we will be grandparents again, #5 expected June 16.” (*Rudy and Susan Hehn*)

- “We renovated the bird haven outside our dining room window. And our youngest son came home for a week and helped us replace our deck. We enjoyed our time together.” (*Rudy and Susan*)



- “We became aware of how much we missed hugging and touching people.” (*Rudy and Susan*)
- “I let my hair grow out to a new style.” (*Barbara Ehlmann*)
- “I talked my wife into cutting my hair and I think she’s a great stylist.” (*Bryon Ehlmann*)

- “We took a lot of walks. We traveled but very cautiously. Donna is an aspiring bartender on the side. She has been dealing with depression and anxiety over all the loss due to COVID. Rob continued working at home, as he runs his own business. Jayden tried learning at home but was wildly unsuccessful. He’s back to success in the classroom and enjoying Scouts. Natalie started a new career with DBPR while she and Jayden moved into their new home.” (*Donna George and Rob Schiffer*)
- “My brown hair turned pale lilac – what fun!” (*Ridy Hofer*)
- “I retired, we became a one-car family, and I had surgery for skin cancer ... *inside my ear!*” (*Ron Hartung*)
- “Our adorable little spaniel died. Rest in peace, Missy.” (*Ruth and Ron Hartung*)

## EXCERPT FROM SUNDAY’S SERMON

“... What a powerful reminder for us today to know that [during] physical distancing Christ’s Spirit was with us – and now today, our first day of regathering in physical presence with one another, that same Spirit is present, and we are learning to be quiet.



“We encountered being dispersed, but that does not mean we were adrift or existing without purpose. Many God-inspired things were done in the last 14 months. I personally am so grateful for the love this congregation is not afraid to share. We are coming together now to tell stories of the things we experienced in our diaspora. To speak the experiences of loss and trauma that were and are real. To tell those stories to one another, to reconnect, and to listen.

“For God offers a new future – as things will be different than they were, but not the connection we have to one another nor the connection we have to God. This, we can be sure, is stronger than ever. Come, Holy Spirit, we are listening.”

## 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/8T\\_2zv1Ph-rLdXan9uCytZ0c6C0GdT6NYEVDVdS-fRFZ\\_Q01QQHw8IBckYKhlpWYo.q0\\_dVGBzjnKrlArG](https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/8T_2zv1Ph-rLdXan9uCytZ0c6C0GdT6NYEVDVdS-fRFZ_Q01QQHw8IBckYKhlpWYo.q0_dVGBzjnKrlArG)

## MISC.

- 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 2021 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](mailto:sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com) or call 850-385-2728.



## UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

TJ Oliveri - 05/28  
Pepper Stewart - 05/29  
Bevin Reardon - 06/03  
Billie Reardon - 06/03  
Billy Oates - 06/14  
Tim Larson - 06/16  
Ann DelRossi - 06/19  
Martin Guttenplan - 06/19  
Ruth Hartung - 06/23  
Steve Kunst - 06/23  
Stephanie Barber - 06/26  
Sandy Davis - 06/28

## UPCOMING DATES

### This Sunday:

10 a.m. - Worship with communion, The Holy Trinity

### Monday, May 31:

The office will be closed in observance of Memorial Day

### Wednesday, June 2:

Noon - Bible study (online)



If you have news or photos to share, please send them to Lori at [sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com](mailto:sslc@ststephenlutherantally.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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