



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



WEED-PULLERS, UNITE

*Calling all gardeners! We'll have a weed- and vine-pulling session between 8 and 10 a.m. Saturday. Please bring gloves, a hat, water and bug spray. The focus will be on the front azaleas and trees along North Meridian Road.
(File photo by Colin Hackley)*

WHEN THE PENTECOSTALS SHOWED UP...

By Pastor Rob Rose, the bishop's new assistant for administration. He wrote this piece for E-Spirit, the weekly publication of the Florida-Bahamas Synod. It tells the story that Pastor Tom touched on in Sunday's sermon. But Pastor Rose was right in the middle of that Spirit-filled moment at the Synod Assembly. What a story.

One of my responsibilities is making sure Synod Assembly happens in the best possible way. [Two weeks ago] was my first in-person assembly.... When we were setting up Friday morning, there was this incredibly loud drum set booming from the room beside us. I texted our contact at the hotel and asked that the drums be turned down, and they were. On Friday night and Saturday, I noticed a lot of singing and cheering could be heard echoing through the wall that separated our Synod Assembly from the group next door. Sheesh, they were loud.

I discovered on Saturday morning the group next door was a Latina women's Pentecostal retreat. Realizing I had been quick to judge, I made it a point to stop by after our session on Saturday. I stood in the hallway and explained who we were and told one of the leaders ... that even though their style of worship was more "energized" than the Lutherans, we supported how the Spirit moved through them. I also said if they got any complaints to just continue to worship God as they were being called. The leader thanked me dearly and asked if I wanted to come and see it for myself.... We went inside and she explained these women were from all over the USA and the world. The theme of this event was "My Secret Place" – a place these women can go and talk to God, open their souls, share anything, and be loved.

As I looked across the room, 600 women had their hands raised as they prayed. Some of the women had their hands on the wall that separated the Lutherans and the Pentecostals. Everything that was going on was in Spanish and, sadly, I only speak English. But the energy of their prayers, the power of God, and the intensity of their faith filled the room. My host asked if she could interpret for me.... She listened for a moment and then looked at me and said, "They are praying for you. They are praying that God would bless everyone in your group. That God will bless your pastors and all that you do. They are praying for the blessings of the Holy Spirit to shower down on you." Tears began to fall from my eyes.... I was humbled by their passion and care for folks they did not know. I was moved as they lifted up prayers on our behalf, and I repented of my judgment of their noise level. The worship of God can be both a solemn event and a passion-filled event.

The leader of the entire group saw me at the side of the room. As the only Anglo, the only man and the only person dressed in clerics, and standing 6'3", I really did stand out. She called me to the stage, and I knew in my heart there was no denying her. I went up to the stage, tears still flowing, and she gave me a big bear hug ... and asked me to greet the women.... I said to them, "The Bible tells us that there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. I say there is no Latin or Anglo, Lutheran or Pentecostal in Christ. Baptized into the family of God, we are made children of God by the water and Holy Spirit. We are all called to change the world for the better as children of God." The women cried out in joy....

Sunday morning, I brought Bishop [Suarez] over to see and meet everyone. Bishop spoke Spanish to the attendees and some of the organizers. They were thrilled to meet him, and he was just as joyful. Bishop had to go get dressed for closing worship, and I asked him if I could invite their leader to come greet our assembly. "Absolutely," he replied. When we got the Eucharist, the solemn moment was beautiful and dignified.... [As the presiding pastor] lifted the bread and said, "This is my body given for you," the women next door could be heard cheering. When [she] lifted the chalice and said, "This is my blood given to you and to all for the forgiveness of sin," again the women next door cheered. To me it sounded like the angels in heaven rejoicing for the world-changing gift of grace, the body and the blood of our Lord and Savior.

Towards the end of our service, their leader, Neycha Gomez, came over. She and Bishop had an exchange in Spanish and then she greeted the assembly. She spoke in Spanish but had an interpreter. She told us that God had placed on her heart that she should pray for the believers on the other side of the wall. She said she also prayed that it would be well received and that they would know the love the ladies had for us. And,



she said, as soon as she prayed this – at this moment she stopped talking to the assembly and turned and pointed at me and said – "God confirmed it all when this man showed up." More tears. As she left and walked down the aisle the Assembly spontaneously started singing "Halle, Halle, Hallelujah."

... It is amazing how God will use us if only we are friendly to our neighbors and celebrate our differences. May you be blessed by the Holy Spirit.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR JUNE 26

By President Denise Bookwalter and Pastor Tom

On Sunday, June 26, we will have a congregational meeting in the sanctuary following the Sunday service. This midyear meeting is a time to review our budget, fill vacancies on the Church Council and address any other business from the congregation. Please watch for the agenda by the end of this week. You're welcome to join us in person or follow the Zoom link that will be sent June 24.

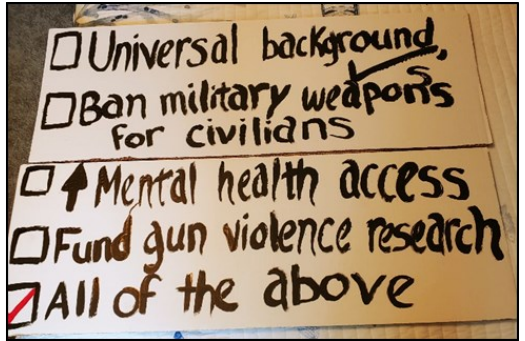


DEAR SENATOR: LET'S TALK ABOUT GUNS

By Pastor Tom

There's still time to urge our Florida U.S. senators to engage in bipartisan conversation to pass common-sense gun legislation approved by the U.S. House. We've sent 14 letters to Sen. Marco Rubio and eight letters to Sen. Rick Scott. We don't want dear Rick to feel left out! So please join us in the fellowship hall for a few minutes after church Sunday to write your message of hope. There are sample letters available to help you write the letter in your own words, plus envelopes with addresses already printed.

(Terri Schmitt created this sign for last weekend's march to the Capitol, where she, Beth and Dwight took turns carrying it. Here are some of Terri's thoughts on gun violence: "St. Stephen has many current and former teachers. Today teachers are on the front lines of a battlefield. I do worry that one of us (teachers or students) will be victims in a future mass shooting. Please, write a letter or two. It just may save lives. In our gun violence epidemic, consider the intersections of race, LGBTQ status, classism, policing and environmentalism. Help me break through this tangled web and rebuild our society.")



IF YOU CAN'T BE THERE SUNDAY...

You're certainly welcome to write letters to our senators on your own, rather than as part of our group letter-writing effort in the fellowship hall. If you're eager to have your voice heard but you're not sure what to say, consider using this template that Pastor Tom put together.

Date:

Dear Senator [Rubio or Scott],

2022 is proving to be another tragic year of gun violence upon our people. Our children and elderly are suffering. Our population feels fear and hopelessness – because our own government cannot even come to the table to discuss, let alone develop, shared ideas and values for safety and welfare of our most vulnerable. As a Christian, and a voter in the state of Florida, I ask you to please reconsider your silence in the face of such tragedy. Show us you care by reaching across the aisle to end the sale of rapid-fire, assault-type weapons and body armor. These items should not be in the hands of anyone but trained military experts. Senator, please be a part of the solution and use your influence and position to help bring an end to mass shootings.

With sincerity, prayer, and a wish for loving action,

Signature:

Name:

City of residence:

Email address:

On the other hand, if that's too scripted for you, consider using these prompts from Pastor Tom.

Date:

Dear Senator [Rubio or Scott],

[Introduce yourself and say why you're writing this letter. You may want to mention your current or past career; public influence; etc....]

[Have facts or statistics from reputable sources. Example:

"Over 200 mass shootings already in 2022." (NPR)

"There are two gun control bills stalled in Senate." (H.R. 8 & H.R. 1446)

"Currently, federal law does not require that unlicensed gun sellers operating online or at gun shows conduct background checks prior to the purchase of arms." (The Hill)]

[Explain how the issue of guns touches or affects you personally.]

[Explain how the senators' vote will have real-world consequences.]

[Above all, keep the tone non-threatening, calm, and to the point.]

[Thank the senators for their time and attention. Remind them of the importance of their position.]

Signature:

Name:

City of residence:

Email address:

Here are the mailing addresses:

Senator Marco Rubio

284 Russell Senate Office Bldg.

Washington, DC 20510

Senator Rick Scott

502 Hart Senate Office Bldg.

Washington, DC 20510

PREPARING KIDS TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL

By Andrea Notley

Backpack information is here! Please consider participating, because every child wants a new outfit and backpack to start school. There are two ways you can help. You may adopt a student by getting information from Erin Kenney or me and buying a backpack, then filling it with two outfits, socks and underwear. Or, if you don't want to shop you may donate money. The backpacks will be due back by July 17! Please contact me @850-443-5293 or Erin @850-459-7744 for more information. Thank you!

BACK TO SCHOOL **ECHO**
CLOTHING DRIVE



We need you!
Our Kids are headed back to school in August.
Would you join ECHO in providing clothing and supplies?
Contact Us for additional details to help us NOW!
phone: 850-224-3246 ext. 207 or kpride@echotlh.org

COVID UPDATE

In her job at the FSU College of Medicine, Audrey Post has access to the latest information on how COVID is affecting Florida's health. Here's some information that a faculty member sent out Monday morning.

- Florida's COVID-19 cases kept climbing last week as two new variants spread across the state. Average daily cases from June 4-10 hit 10,630 last week, up 4% from the prior week. COVID-19 hospitalizations are creeping up as well. As of Friday, Florida hospitals had nearly 3,000 confirmed COVID-19 patients, up 13% from the prior week.
- The omicron BA.4 variant has arrived in Florida. The state's first three cases were detected near Miami. The new variant and its cousin, BA.5, were responsible for a recent surge of infections in South Africa. Early data indicates that the two omicron subvariants are more infectious and better able to evade existing immunity than previous versions of the virus. They may soon become the dominant strains in the U.S. The BA.4 variant accounts for 4% of infections in the Southeast, and BA.5 accounts for 9%, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



HAIKU CORNER

By Lex Lutheran



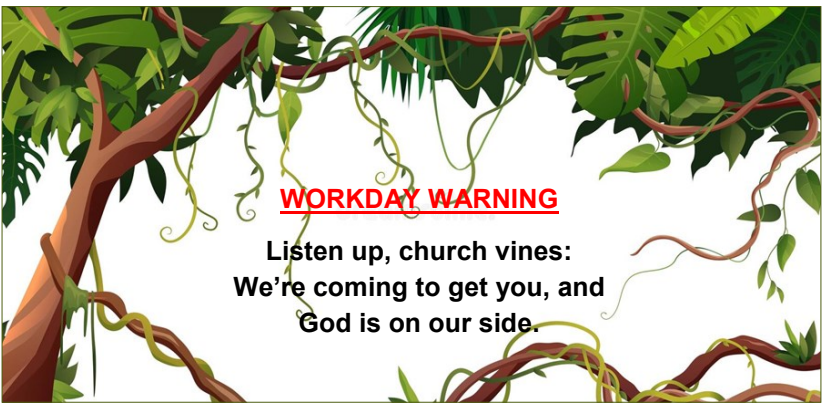
A MEMORABLE CELEBRATION OF LIFE

The final song played
at Bobbi Schiffer's service
was "Born to Be Wild."



BREAK OUT THE MACHETES

Our neighbor moved out.
His grass stayed behind. It keeps
growing and growing...



WORKDAY WARNING

Listen up, church vines:
We're coming to get you, and
God is on our side.

MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES

- No newsletter next week!
- Have any questions for our Church Council members? They're listed on our website, <https://ststephenlutherantally.com/about-us>.
- 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

Tim Larson - 06/16

Martin Guttenplan - 06/19

Ruth Hartung - 06/23

Steve Kunst - 06/23

Stephanie Barber - 06/26

Sandy Davis - 06/28

Sarah Barton - 07/03

Karl Barton - 07/04

Tom Buchanan - 07/13

UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday, June 19:

9 a.m. - Book study

10 a.m. - Worship, Second Sunday after Pentecost

Sunday, June 26:

9 a.m. - Book study

10 a.m. - Worship with communion, Third Sunday after Pentecost

11:00 a.m. - Congregational meeting



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

*Edited by Lex Lutheran. Designed by Lori Zengel, office manager, sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com.
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