



# ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

## St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



*Here we have some familiar faces in a gorgeously unfamiliar setting. That's Jennifer Buchanan on the left and husband Tom on the right. Between them are their son Michael and his new bride, Sandya. They're posing beneath the ornate "Mandap" where the wedding ceremony took place last month.*

## A BIG, BEAUTIFUL HINDU WEDDING

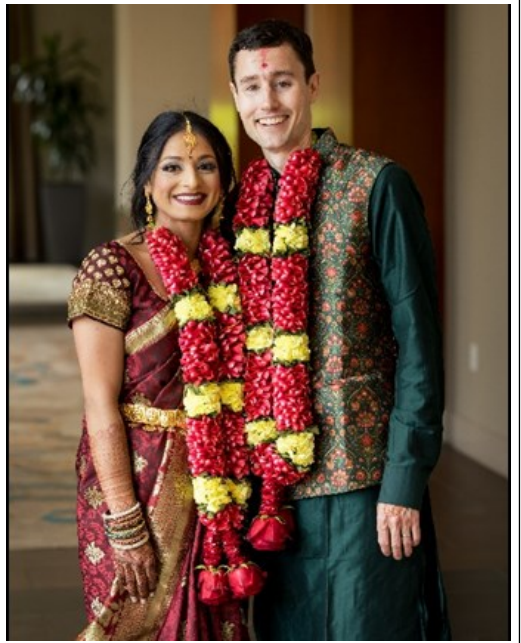
By Jennifer Buchanan

*In late June, Jennifer and Tom Buchanan traveled to Southern California for the destination wedding of a lifetime – when their younger son, Michael, married Sandya Das. For the Buchanan family, the wedding was a marvelous immersion in a whole new culture. We asked Jennifer to paint a picture for us.*

The smell of jasmine wafting through the air from the sprigs behind the women's ears. California sun and sea breeze (sans humidity) enveloping the wedding party. Delighted guests in every color of the rainbow congratulating the families of the beautiful couple, there to make a commitment that will bond them to each other forever as equal partners in life. Melodic chants in Sanskrit from the priest as a small ritual fire dances and spreads its scent through the Mandap (or sacred canopy). Prayers for removal of all barriers to a healthy, happy and prosperous life. Blessings from God for mutual love, respect for one another, longevity, friendship, strength, stability, tenacity and healthy children.

So, yes – Michael and Sandya's Hindu wedding was different for these Lutherans. Different, yet surprisingly familiar. Focused on love of God, called by a different name in a 5,000-year-old ceremony that predates Christ's time on Earth, praying that a higher power brings blessings to a newly married couple. Families joining together in a powerful, meaningful way. As we focused on these sensations during the two-and-a-half-hour ceremony, we felt welcome, comfortable, joyful, at peace and focused on doing what the priest directed. We knew the Spirit was there, especially when our St.-Stephen-born-and-bred son was able to match the priest's Sanskrit chant exactly, down to his intonation. (How, exactly, did he do that?) It's true that, technically, we didn't know the meaning of the words, yet we understood enough.

As Pastor Emeritus Emory once said, "I appreciate the 'many mansions' . . . imagery of Jesus [John 14:2]. I don't like the mansion part, but I like the idea that we don't knock others' religions. We accept them as they are." Being able to do so in practice as we watched Sandya and Michael celebrate their marriage filled our hearts and made us grateful for all religious communities. Especially for St. Stephen, where you have truly been the "hands of God" so many times for our family through the years.



## OUR MANNA MAN STEPS DOWN

By Sharon Simmons, outreach coordinator

Mike Martinez's connection with the Manna on Meridian food pantry began when he volunteered as a bagger. Then, in September 2016, he became St. Stephen's liaison to Manna. Now, nearly six years later, he has stepped down.



His duties included serving as our representative with other churches supporting Manna; recruiting volunteers to sort, bag and distribute food to clients; training volunteers; procuring food donations from churches, businesses and agencies; and being there to hand out food. During his time, the demand for the food pantry grew. When Mike started in 2016, Manna gave out an average of 200 bags of food a month. As we went into pandemic days, that monthly number grew to 270 bags.

Mike officially "retired" in June, but the Martinez family is still involved: Both of his children, Daniel and Jamie, are continuing in their dad's footsteps as volunteers at Manna. Cassandra White has assumed Mike's position as St. Stephen liaison and would welcome other volunteers from the congregation.

Mike's dedicated service was honored at the end of last Sunday's liturgy. As you might know, peanut butter is one of the staples in the Manna pantry – so Mike received a jumbo jar of "MIKE" peanut butter, along with the thanks of a grateful congregation. Well done, good and faithful servant!

## HEY, SMALL-TIME FARMERS...

By Cassandra White



Are you overwhelmed by vegetables? Are zucchini running you out of your home? Have some of your plants taken "be fruitful and multiply" very literally?

Then bring your surplus to the Manna on Meridian donation drop-off at Faith Presbyterian Church before noon tomorrow (Friday) so we can distribute the produce Saturday.

Help others and rescue yourself!



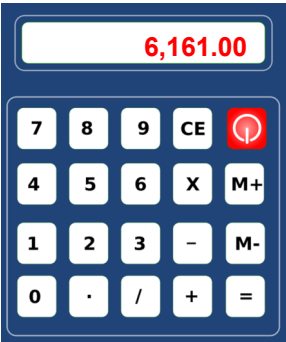
# BACKPACK DRIVE IS ALMOST OVER

By Andrea Notley

Still planning to participate in ECHO's Back-to-School Clothing Drive? Better hurry. All backpacks are due back to church on or before this Sunday, July 17. Please remember to put your name on the backpack so it'll go to the right child. Also, gift receipts are appreciated. Thank you so much for your generosity. St. Stephen always makes my heart happy.

# JUNE FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

St. Stephen's offerings for the month totaled \$15,523. Budgeted expenses for the month were \$21,684. According to this measurement, then, we finished the month \$6,161 in the red. Notice that this snapshot is using "budgeted expenses." We'd rather use actual expenses, of course. However, the actual expenses were unavailable when this newsletter rolled off the press. So Pastor Tom added some context: "We are currently spending fewer dollars each month than what we budgeted. So we're likely to wind up with a smaller deficit for June (or none at all) once we can look at the final numbers."



Pastor also provided this furniture update: We've collected \$6,030 for the new chairs in the sanctuary, which means we still need to raise a little over \$2,000. Speaking of those chairs ... at the congregational meeting, someone wanted to know the average price per chair. The answer, Pastor Tom reports, is \$67.12. "That's the total expense for everything: hymn racks, shipping – plus a chair dolly. The total price for everything is \$8,054. We bought 100 regular chairs and 20 chairs with armrests. It was really a good price for good-quality chairs. Now we just have to wait for them!" We hope to be sitting in them by October.

# VOTING IS AN ACT OF FAITH. ACT NOW!

Less than a month from now, early voting begins for Florida's primary elections. A week and a half from now, voter registration ends. Are you ready?

Leon County's elections website ([www.leonvotes.gov/YourVoterinfo](http://www.leonvotes.gov/YourVoterinfo)) contains a goldmine of voter information. That's where you can:

- View a sample ballot.
- Request a mail ballot.
- Review/update your voter registration information.
- Learn where your precinct votes on election day.
- And more.



But time is running short. If you haven't registered to vote, do so right away. The deadline is July 25. Election day is Aug. 23. Early voting is Aug. 13-21.

Don't have internet access? Want to talk to someone in person? The Leon County Supervisor of Elections Office is at 2990-1 Apalachee Parkway. It's open weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The phone number is 850-606-8683.

One more thing: The *Tallahassee Democrat's* special primary-election section will be printed and inserted into the paper on Sunday, Aug. 7. You'll be able to access the same information – and much more – at [www.tallahassee.com](http://www.tallahassee.com).

**Tallahassee Democrat.**  
PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK  
Tallahassee.com



Finally ... the *Democrat*, WFSU-FM and the League of Women Voters have teamed up to provide candidate forums in recent weeks, and more will be available soon. To watch replays or to find out more about the forums, visit <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/politics/2022/06/17/leon-county-tallahassee-candidates-elections-races-debate-forum-democrat-wfsu-league-of-women-voters/7614433001/>

Recent years have demonstrated how much damage a misguided officeholder can do. Have faith. Do your part. Vote.

## ST. STEPHEN'S PETS: OLIVE'S STORY

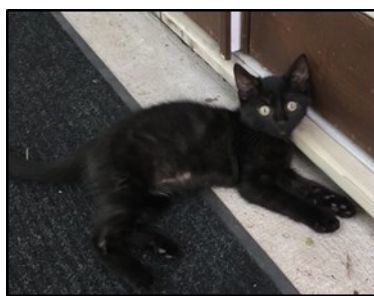
By Pastor Tom

*This is the first of what we hope will be a never-ending stream of pet profiles.*

Here are two pictures of Olive (Ollie). The picture of her as a kitten is at our back door in Panama City. She found her way to our backyard about five years ago. We weren't sure if she was lost or just passing through, so we set up a little bed and gave her some shredded leftover chicken we had in the refrigerator.

We were all in love with her right away but not sure if we wanted to take on another cat. Our previous cat, Idgy, had lived 16 years and died while we were in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, at the seminary.

Well, we couldn't find any "missing black cat" signs in the neighborhood. So after we



scratched, she's a sweetheart.

*We're dying to share photos and stories of you and your favorite pet(s). Please send them to Office Manager Lori (see below).*

took Olive to the local vet to be checked out, we adopted her. Or perhaps I should say that she adopted us.

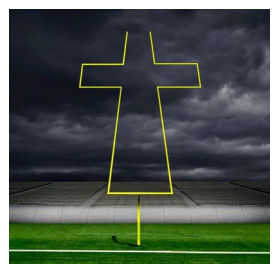


Ollie has a wild side. She's been known to attack visitors – even drawing blood from my mom and my dad on occasion. But to those who rescue, feed and get to know where she likes a little

## 'I DON'T WANT TO SEE A HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL COACH PRAYING AT THE 50-YARD LINE'

*Excerpt from column by Anne Lamott published July 8 in The New York Times*

... How do people like me who believe entirely in science and reason also believe that prayer can heal and restore? Well, I've seen it happen a thousand times in my own inconsequential life. God seems like a total showoff to me, if perhaps unnecessarily cryptic.



When I pray for all the places where we see Christ crucified — Ukraine, India, the refugee camps — I see in my heart and in the newspaper that goodness draws near, through UNICEF, Doctors Without Borders, volunteers, through motley old us....

I wake up praying. I say a prayer some sober people told me to pray 36 years ago, because when all else fails, follow instructions. It helps me to not fixate on who I am, but on whose. I am God’s adorable, aging, self-centered, spaced-out beloved. One man in early sobriety told me that he had come into recovery as a hotshot but that other sober men helped him work his way up to servant. I pray to be a good servant because I’ve learned that this is the path of happiness. I pray for my family and all my sick friends that they have days of grace and healing, and I end my prayers, “Make me ever mindful of the needs of the poor.”

Then I put on my glasses, let the dog out to pee and start my day. I will have horrible thoughts about others, typically the Christian right or the Supreme Court, or someone who has seriously crossed me, whose hair I pray falls out or whose book fails. I say to God, as I do every Sunday in confession: “Look — I think we can both see what we have on our hands here. Help me not be such a pill.”

It is miserable to be a hater. I pray to be more like Jesus with his crazy compassion and reckless love. Some days go better than others. I pray to remember that God loves Marjorie Taylor Greene exactly the same as God loves my grandson, because God loves, period. God does not have an app for Not Love. God sees beyond each person’s awfulness to each person’s needs. God loves them, as is. God is better at this than I am....

Do I honestly think these kinds of prayers were heard, and helpful? Definitely....

I have the theological understanding of a bright 8-year-old, but Jesus says we need to approach life like children, not like cranky know-it-alls, crazily busy, clutching our to-do lists....

## HAIKU CORNER

By Lex Lutheran

### LOOK WHO WAS IN OUR BACK YARD

This zebra longwing  
is the state butterfly. Nice.  
A royal visit.



### COATS OF MANY COLORS

Seeing Jen and Tom  
above, I’m thinking that we  
need a new dress code.

### GOD, HEAR OUR PRAYER (IF YOU CAN!)

The rain crashing down  
during Sunday’s prayers was God’s  
noisy offering.





## MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES



- Our bottled-water collection continues at church until a week from Sunday. Bring cases of water to the fellowship hall. This is our joint initiative with New Mt. Zion AME Church to provide water for Kearney Center clients.
- Have any questions for our Church Council members? They're listed on our website, <https://ststephenlutherantally.com/about-us>. Also, remember that Council meetings are open to everyone.
- 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](mailto:sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com) or call 850-385-2728.



## UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS



Jonas Holdcraft - 07/15  
Margaret Bowers - 07/19  
Corine Brathwaite - 07/19  
Emily Ruddell - 07/20  
Kirsten Ebbesen - 07/26  
Ian Medley-Miller - 07/27  
Ben Claussen - 07/29  
Astrid van der Mark - 08/02  
Doug Mann - 08/06  
Sharon Simmons - 08/09  
Caroline Collins - 08/14

## UPCOMING DATES

**This Sunday, July 17:**

**10 a.m.** - Worship, Sixth Sunday after Pentecost - We welcome Byron Greene

**Sunday, July 24:**

**10 a.m.** - Worship, Seventh Sunday after Pentecost - We welcome Pastor Candace McKibben

*\*Pastor Tom will be out of the office on July 14 - 24.*



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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