

SERMON

Pastor Tom's post-vacation sermon last Sunday was sort of a State of the Union address – and spending time with it is a great way for you to prepare for Sunday's meeting. To see the video: <https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee/videos/136945555229698>. If you'd rather read it, see below.

“... So what are my priorities concerning St. Stephen, you ask? First and foremost ... is to be sure that the coming repairs and renovations are done with utmost safety and longevity in mind. I understand the frustrations expressed by some about the length of time it is taking. Honestly, I also wish that the projects could have been completed by now. Yet these kinds of decisions, especially in a church, cannot be made with extreme haste.... [In addition] we have been doing this [amid] disruptions connected to COVID. Videoconferencing is not as good as in-person meetings. Decisions about the building and fundraising for the project take time....

“But we are now on the verge of receiving contractor estimates and the selection of our general contractor. Once construction starts, we will move our worship to the fellowship hall. [We will still live-stream the service.] We will need to worship in the fellowship hall for about six to eight Sundays, perhaps more, so we'll need to be flexible.... It is not just a movement from one space to another, but plans to set up an altar



and provide good sound and music will take a lot of volunteer expertise.... I have no doubt that we can achieve this challenge together. Look how well we have fared this past year and a half. There wasn't perfection every time, there were moments of sweating a few minutes before church as some unforeseen problem reared up. But we moved forward in love and mutual purpose, trusting in one another – and through a lot of prayer we made it.

“When the renovation is completed we will move back into our beloved sanctuary, and there will be a terrific opportunity to encourage those who have been reluctant to return to live worship to come back to a newly renovated space. We will keep the same precautions in place: mask-wearing while singing, refraining from shaking hands and hugging unless both parties know the other is vaccinated, shorter services. We recognize this re-entry will be slow because COVID has affected each of us in different ways. And while church online is effective and spiritually motivating, ... there is no replacing the physical benefits of being together in person when it is safe to do so. You may remember me telling the children [one Sunday] that I was happy they were there because a pastor can't do children's sermons without children. The same can be said about church. Church happens best when people are present.

“The next priority is to give each of us time to get to know one another again. I am so thankful that a lot of you have been reaching out by phone to each other, or connecting on social media, but others have been disconnected from people they were used to seeing each Sunday. Simply put, we need to reintroduce ourselves to each other. I need to hear from you how this time of separation has affected you, and you need to hear how it has affected me. Everyone will be different, but everyone has a story to tell, a God experience to share and a burden to express.



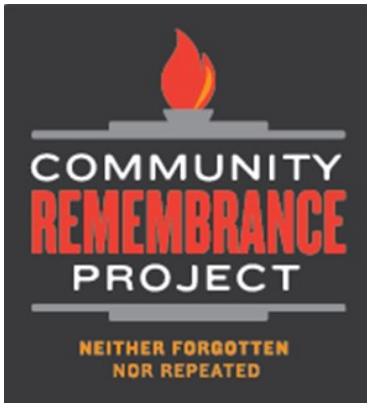
“I have heard from more than one person that they may want to try a different ministry in the church. We need to feel comfortable sharing these ideas. So, once the main sanctuary project is completed, we will want to gather after church (it will probably be around food) once a month to fellowship and get to know one another again. To listen to each other (and to the Holy Spirit) and discern where we are being called. To come to the fullness of how God's Work is going to be done through Our Hands.

“We are at a reset point in our individual lives and in the life St. Stephen. I picture a compass that is spinning without a sure point directing us where to go. That’s OK, because that is God’s way of telling us to stop and listen. To get our heads on straight in quiet time of reflection and retreat. To renew our relationships with each other and listen to where the other person is, and get a sense of what they are feeling, and to use the time to listen to where God is calling us.

“And, finally, my plans are simply that ... mine. What makes this congregation of St. Stephen great is her people ... your principles and priorities! God’s work of love and forgiveness through each of you. It is not I nor any pastor, but the work of God’s Spirit in you, that will be the momentum for what is coming next. Amen!”

A SACRED SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE

Tallahassee has had its share of hate-based, race-based tragedies. This Saturday afternoon, four lynchings will be immortalized in the dedication of a historical marker and in an interfaith remembrance service. We know these men’s names: Pierce Taylor (1897), Mick Morris (1909), Richard Hawkins (1937) and Ernest Ponder (also 1937). The marker will be placed at 3 p.m. under the oak tree at East Gaines and South Meridian streets. The service of remembrance will follow at the Cascades Park Amphitheater. This event is sponsored by the Tallahassee Community Remembrance Project, which Pastor Tom joined when he was called to St. Stephen three years ago.



THANK YOU, ST. STEPHEN SAINTS

During announcements last Sunday, Karen Olson took the microphone to express her thanks for the ways in which St. Stephen people minister in the community. She began by naming several people in particular:

“I want to thank the many people in our congregation who are on the front lines [with COVID]. I was thinking last Sunday particularly of Kirsten Ebbesen, who was sitting right here – she’s a nurse at TMH and has been dealing head-on with the coronavirus. And we all know Susan Warren does the same, also at TMH.” Later, in a note, Karen also expressed her thanks to front-line funeral home workers, especially Jan Harrison and Margaret Bowers.



“And we have so many teachers in our congregation,” Karen continued in her spoken remarks. “Obviously Colleen and Terri and Andrea Notley. And so many retired teachers: Ruth Hartung, Emily Ruddell, Sharon Simmons. And we only thank the teachers once a year!

“Our entire being of this church has been not to call people back but to send them out and to recognize what they’ve been doing in their everyday lives.... I would like to urge all of us to start thanking people for what they’re doing in their work and their volunteer activities and their neighborhoods and with their own friends and families. That is what truly, truly matters.”

Here at newsletter headquarters, we agree with Karen and love to tell the stories of our members’ lives. So one way to take Karen up on her invitation is to send a note to us about someone at St. Stephen whose efforts you’ve appreciated. Most volunteers are too bashful to tell us what they’ve been doing in their community, but their friends and family members can! These stories can inspire us, as Karen inspired us Sunday.

MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES

- **Juan Andrada**, a Panama City resident (and member of Pastor Tom's previous congregation), worshipped with us in person Sunday, and he had praise for the people who make our virtual worship possible. "Of all the services I've seen online," he said, including those from much larger congregations, "this church's was the most polished one.... So evidently this congregation cares." Take a bow, Pastor, Paul van der Mark, Jonas Holdcraft, musicians and the rest of the worship team.
- **Don't forget:** The ECHO backpacks are due July 25. "Please put a tag or sticky note with the student number or your name on the backpack," Andrea Notley says. "And thanks." Want more information? Contact Andrea at Notley90@comcast.net or 850-443-5293, or Erin at erinkenney8@gmail.com or 850-459-7744.
- Haven't sent in your photo for our new directory? Lori's eager to add it. Her contact information is at the bottom of this newsletter.
- 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 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 - 07/27
Benjamin Claussen - 07/29

UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday:

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

Noon - Congregational meeting

Wednesday, July 21:

Noon - Bible study (online)



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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