



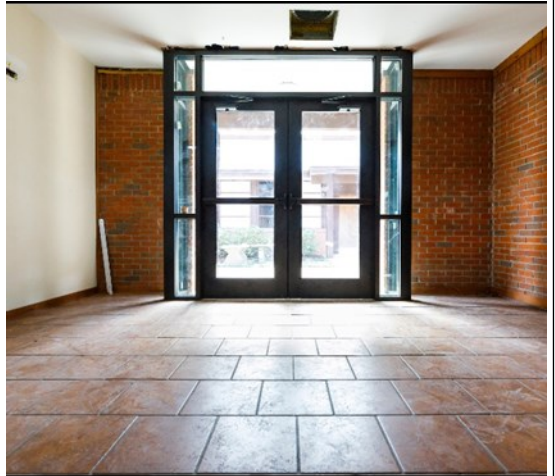
ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



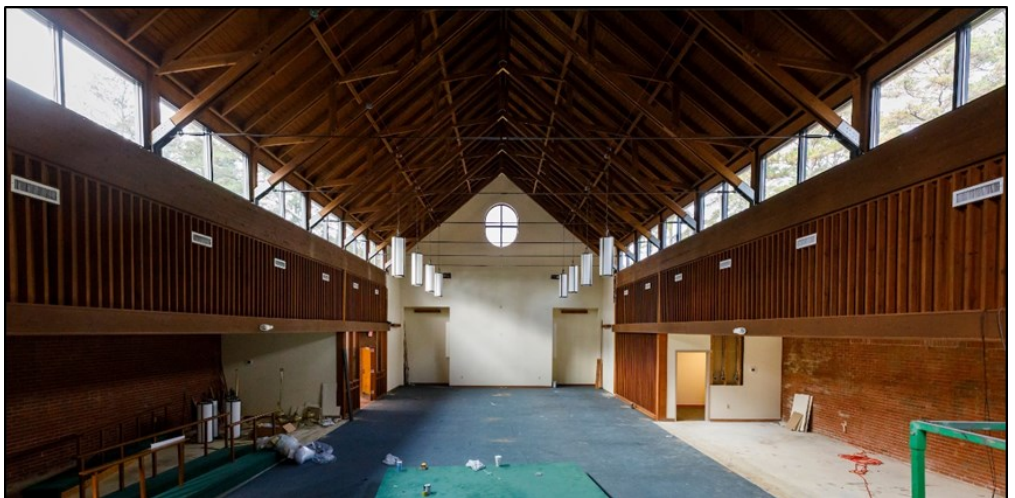
MORE GLIMPSES OF OUR REFRESHED SANCTUARY

Those new lights are glorious, aren't they? As you can see, there's still some patching to do on the drywall – plus other details that will take a while. Still ... we've come so far! And look how bright the narthex is now, thanks to those new doors that you can actually see through. What a magnificent change.



One other bright spot is that all of this repair and remodeling work is paid for. Newsletter after newsletter, we've announced, "All we need is X dollars more!" Not today. "Can one be excited about zero?" Pastor Tom asks. "In this case, YES! We have reached – actually, surpassed – our Capital Campaign goal. The amount pledged is either already in hand or en route to St. Stephen. What a glorious Christmas gift from the congregation. Once again, we have proved that together we can achieve great things! Thank you to everyone who made contributions and prayed for this result."

The photo below is what you see if you stand in the choir section and look toward the back wall. Heavenly view, isn't it? *(Photos by Colin Hackley)*



BIG MEETING SET FOR NEXT MONTH

By President Val Sullivan

The Church Council met Sunday and worked on a very healthy budget for 2022.



The next version of the budget will be presented at the semiannual congregational meeting Jan. 23, immediately following our service that day. That budget will be sent out to members before the meeting to give you time to read and digest it.

Also during that meeting, we'll be accepting nominations for the Council positions of communications coordinator and Council president as well as Synod Assembly representatives. If you're interested in learning about any of those positions, please contact Pastor or me.

HOLDCRAFT NEWS

Wesley Holdcraft, middle son of Pastor Tom and Colleen, graduated Dec. 10 from Troy University in Troy, Alabama. He majored in mathematics, minored in biology and has been accepted to Troy as a graduate student in pursuit of his master's degree in math for secondary education. Wesley, your mom and dad are very proud.



SPECIAL CONCERT AT GRACE

Our sisters and brothers at Grace Lutheran are hoping for a good turnout for their upcoming piano concert. On the Wednesday after Christmas, Jackie Yong,



Grace's keyboard/piano/organ specialist, will present a Christmas program and even share a bit of his home story. For him, home is Malaysia. He's in Tallahassee pursuing his doctorate at FSU's College of Music. The free concert begins at 3 p.m. Dec. 29 at Grace,

2919 Miccosukee Road. For details, call 850-877-5423.

EXCERPT FROM SUNDAY'S SERMON

"... [John] inspired his audience to prepare for Christ, to be ready for the Messiah. Prepare by being cleansed in baptism and get ready for the One more powerful than he to come near. In the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the one that comes later in Jesus' story, we read how a fire is kindled in you. The Holy Spirit is stoked and building inside of you and changing you for the better from the inside out.

"Just as fire is kindled, so is the Spirit – and this is good news! This is John's way of saying: Rejoice! Because most times that fire is introduced in the Bible it signifies the presence of God, not of eternal damnation. Fire is the sign of God's presence; proof God is near.

"Look, deep down, we all know that there are things in us and in our world that need to be scrubbed clean and burned away. What is it in you that needs to be burned away? What is it in our world that needs to be cleansed? These are the honest questions of Advent. Honest questions lead us to pause and consider that the Lord is near ... and that is reason to rejoice!"

Want to read Pastor Tom's sermons? Go to <https://ststephenlutherantally.com/>, look for the dropdown menu called "More," and click on "Sermons."

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/kRCwdqUdhaD87B1aRkLuNCXSTByoFb55Ji-p70fRwEdRLCXre8PVXgxWcRuQmJjS.51jMjfQTqChEppp>

'THANK YOU, ST. STEPHEN': UPDATE FROM PASTOR LESLEY RADIUS

Among the remarkable St. Stephen members who've gone on to become pastors is Lesley Radius. The other day, Susan Warren pointed out that – even though Lesley had been serving at St. Matthew's Lutheran in Fort Worth since April 2020 – she was officially installed just four days ago, thanks to COVID. We watched the joyous video and had a few questions, so we asked Lesley to fill us in. This is her inspiring update.

It's hard to believe that today it's exactly 20 years since Pastor Emory and Bishop Mansholt put a red stole around my neck and proclaimed me called by both God and the church to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. The number 20 seems to be important regarding my life in ministry. My installation at St. Matthew's, Fort Worth, was 20 months after I arrived. My call started April 1, 2020 (April Fools' Day), just as the depth of the pandemic was being realized and the realities of how we needed to live for a while were being experienced. For 12 months, we did not worship in person in the sanctuary. It was all online. On April 25, 2021, at our first in-person worship service, I introduced myself to them as their pastor and cried from the pulpit when I started to preach – realizing that there were real people in the pews. Finally, we could begin to imagine how God might call us to be church together.

COVID was certainly a stretching experience for us all. We learned new ways to connect. We learned what it meant to have online worship. We learned to have funerals that were in-person for the family and online for all other guests.



The other thing we learned here during COVID was that our Episcopalian siblings in Christ were losing their church. The Anglican church (very conservative) sued the Fort Worth Episcopal Diocese and, after 12 years, won the lawsuit. It was awarded owner-

ship of seven churches in Fort Worth (worth approximately \$100 million). St. Christopher called right after Easter asking if we might share our space. So on April 25, we opened our doors to them, and we have been sharing worship, office and Christian education space since then. We have a joint worship service at 8 a.m. on Sundays and then we each have our own service after that. We're starting to share ministry opportunities. Who knows how God is calling St. Matthew's and St. Christopher together in mission and ministry?

As I think about these last 20 years, I have to thank the St. Stephen church ladies, led by Agnes. For six years, the ladies encouraged me to consider parish ministry even though I kept saying no. Thank you, St. Stephen, for walking with me through the discernment process and then through seminary. I always knew I had a home and a place to which I could come back. I knew I had people who loved and cared about me and supported me in this unbelievable journey.

I have served seven churches in four synods, all with the same purpose: to proclaim boldly that Jesus loves us! Today, I get the privilege to boldly proclaim that Jesus loves the beautiful people of St. Stephen who sent me on my way. It has been the adventure of a lifetime filled with mountains and valleys, but always God's amazing and never-ending love and the love and support of St. Stephen. Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas.

To watch the video: <https://www.stmatthews-elca.org/watch>

HAIKU CORNER

By Lex Lutheran



BETTER THAN A CANE

When we hold hands now,
it's not just sweet – it's a way
to keep from falling.

'JAKE, WHAT SHOULD I PUT IN MY YARD?'

In no time at all,
he'll say which plants, how many
and where they should go.



WHEN WE ALL GATHER TO CHRISTEN OUR FIXED-UP SANCTUARY

Sharing of the Peace
will have to go on at least
six or seven hours.

MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES

- Palms Deaf Church is coming to the Florida-Bahamas Synod in 2022. You can become one of the Partners in Mission to help make it happen. Visit [https://](https://files.constantcontact.com/5601f7c4501/0a27a05c-a4e5-4ee9-902d-6bad62a249ce.pdf)



PALMS DEAF
— CHURCH —

files.constantcontact.com/5601f7c4501/0a27a05c-a4e5-4ee9-902d-6bad62a249ce.pdf to read more. To watch an informative video, visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6eFgHuPH_k. If you have any questions, contact Pastor Rob Carlson at robc@fbsynod.org.

- Reminder from Karen Olson: The famous “Festival of Lessons and Carols” will be broadcast live from Kings College in Cambridge, England. It's at 10 a.m. on Christmas Eve on the WFSU-FM classical station, 91.5.



- 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

Cheslyn Donaldson - 12/17
Rita Ford - 12/18
Wesley Holdcraft - 12/18
David Kennell - 12/24
Pastor Tom - 12/29
Kate Stuart - 12/29
Mike Martinez - 12/30
Linda Eshleman - 01/04
Karen Olson - 01/05
Vince Muchuruza - 01/07
Marsy Miller - 01/10
Mary Anderson - 01/11
Mason Bonfanti - 01/11
Sharon Gordon-Girvin - 01/11
Erin Kenney - 01/11
Mark Canning - 01/13



UPCOMING DATES

This Sunday:

10 a.m. - Worship, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Friday, December 24:

4 p.m. - Worship with communion, Christmas Eve

Sunday, December 26:

10 a.m. - Worship, First Sunday of Christmas, Christmas Lessons and Carols

Monday, December 27:

Office closed for Christmas



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>.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, ELCA
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The Rev. Tom Holdcraft, Pastor

*Edited by Lex Lutheran. Designed by Lori Zengel, office manager, sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com.
Website: <http://www.ststephenlutherantally.com/>*

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