



# ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

## St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



**Ordinarily Andrea Notley might seem a little camera-shy – but not at Christmas time. Here she is last Sunday, with maybe our biggest haul of Giving Tree presents ever. These presents will brighten the holidays for struggling families. “Thank you to everyone that participated,” Andrea says. “I love how everyone took their time and personalized the gifts. I know of someone who sewed doll clothes.” So many stories of our church friends spending hours searching for just the right outfit, just the right doll. “St. Stephen, you continue to make my heart happy,” Andrea says. “Thank you, thank you!” Many thanks to Andrea for coordinating this effort for the umpteenth year.**

*(Photo by Colin Hackley)*

## OUR FAVORITE KIDS, OUR FAVORITE STORY

The next three Sundays are special. On Dec. 31, we’ll have a New Year’s Eve session of carols and candles. On Dec. 24, we’ll have two services – one at the regular time, and a Christmas Eve service at 7 p.m. And THIS Sunday we have the children’s program, “Christmas Remix,” where a whole new set of voices will tell the traditional Christmas story. Organizer Rita Ford reports that this year’s skit will have (she hopes) a little bit of humor. She listed the participants:

- Blake Simmons will control the angel puppet that she created.
- Colton Allen will provide the angel’s voice, as well as music.
- Ceilia Greeley will portray Mary.
- Graham Reece will appear as Joseph.
- Violet Greeley will be the innkeeper AND will be the Wise Woman. (“The other two Wise Persons decided to move on,” Rita joked.)
- Elliot Reece and Bastian Stover are the shepherds.
- Armand Stover is the ever-popular sheep.
- Colleen and Jonas Holdcraft appear as soldiers.
- Colleen also was hand-picked to be emperor.
- And in a bold casting move, Rita will star as the villainous Herod.



Not surprisingly, Rita and Colleen also will perform a dance – while the choir sings “Mary, Did You Know?” Sounds like a special day. See you at 10 a.m.



## HELP BEAUTIFY OUR WORSHIP AREA


Before the show can go on, however, the sanctuary must undergo its Advent transformation. Mark Warren plans to bring the Christmas tree this morning. Saturday morning, beginning at 9, is when the rest of us are invited to decorate the tree, place the poinsettias, hang special banners, risk life and limb on church ladders and generally have a great time. Wanna help? You're invited.

## OUR FINANCIAL YEAR

Dear St. Stephen,

Our estimate-of-giving campaign for 2024 is at an end, and I'd like to share the results. A total of 39 households completed their pledge cards for 2024! That's a great number to celebrate! Of those 39, 17 households increased their estimate of giving from the amount they pledged in 2023. And eight households were new pledges who (though they gave financially) did not pledge in 2023.

The total dollar amount of pledges for 2024 is \$184,540. If all who pledged last year, but didn't get in their pledge for 2024, give the same amount as last year, the total will be \$203,040. I believe that's the most since I became your pastor. For this I give thanks to you and to God!



**2024 Estimate of Giving**

In support of God's mission for St. Stephen Lutheran Church:  
To be an active community that welcomes all people to nurture and share their faith and gifts with everyone, according to God's call.

NAME(S): \_\_\_\_\_

I/we pledge to intentionally give financially to the ministry of St. Stephen Lutheran Church:

(Please select one option)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ per week  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ per month  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ per year

I/we understand that this plan can be changed by notifying the financial secretary.

Our total expenses for 2023 will be around \$300,000. Although history shows we typically make up for shortfalls by the end of the year, next year our staff compensation expenses (salary, taxes and insurance) may require an increase in giving or cuts to our budget. Those expenses have increased because we've neglected to bring forward the increases in insurance over the past few years. You'll get the details at our January congregational meeting.

Thank you to everyone for prayerfully filling out estimate-of-giving cards for 2024. Also, thank you to everyone who contributes time, talent and treasure to the ministries of St. Stephen *without* completing pledge cards. God is gracious, and the same generosity flows through you and me.

In Christ,  
Pastor Tom

## CAROLINE'S CUCUMBERS (HELP!)

This week the Manna on Meridian food pantry had more produce donated than they can distribute Saturday morning. So they invited Wednesday's volunteers to take some with them for distribution to neighbors, friends and church communities. Among those volunteers was our own Caroline Collins, who now has a request for the rest of us:

"I have boxes of cucumbers, tomatoes, bell peppers and spaghetti squash in my car, and hope you will bring a bag Sunday morning to take some home with you after church service. (Hopefully it won't be raining like last Sunday.) Save on your grocery bill this week, and help prevent food waste!" *(Picture taken by noted produce photographer Caroline Collins)*





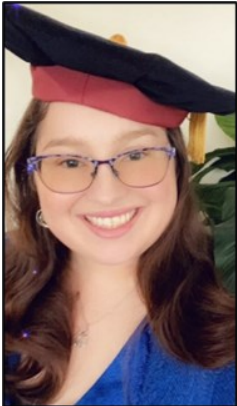
## NOISY OFFERING THIS SUNDAY

Last week’s Ministry Minute speaker was truly memorable. How many folks do you know who’ve quit a financially promising career to minister to homeless people – by becoming homeless themselves? That was James Barnett, founder of Neighborly. Here’s part of what the group’s website says: “Neighborly is a relationship-based poverty relief organization advocating for biblical justice. We provide ways for our supporters to feed, tell, heal, shelter, welcome, and clothe their neighbors.” Apart from that mission, what made James so memorable last week was that he seemed so darned upbeat – and that his wife and kids came with him. Again, from the website: “Kristin Barnett is the Operations Director and makes sure no envelope is left unlicked, no email is left unclicked, and no person feels left unpicked. She also writes in third person. Hello.”

It’s social ministry with a sense of humor. Last Sunday we all applauded. Now we need to reach into our pockets to help support Neighborly’s work in the world. When our children walk the aisles this Sunday with Noisy Offering buckets, that’s our invitation to toss in whatever change or bills or checks we can give. If you write a check, make it out to St. Stephen with “Neighborly” in the memo line. To find out more, explore <https://That’sNeighborly.org>; email [Hello@thatsneighborly.org](mailto>Hello@thatsneighborly.org); or call 904-420-7621.

## PAGING DR. WHITE

As some of you heard during last Sunday’s announcements, Cassandra White has finally finished her dissertation to earn her Ph.D. in Theatre Studies. Her graduation will be this Friday morning, and her mom is in town to see her walk. Cassandra’s dissertation title is “A Woman’s Worth: Selling Sex and Virtue in Antebellum U.S. Melodrama.” She’s excited to continue living in Tallahassee with more time for friends and activities. She’ll continue working for the Division of Arts and Culture managing music and individual artist grants. Congratulations, Cassandra!



## JEN REECE, EDUCATION SPECIALIST

*We asked Jen, too, to elaborate on her latest academic achievement. She’s pictured here with her university-approved team of assistant specialists: Chris, Graham and Elliot.*



In the field of education, there is a degree between the master’s and PhD level. That is what I finished up in August. I earned an Education Specialist (EdS) degree in Curriculum and Instruction in Special Education with a major in autism and significant disabilities. It was a two-year, part-time program that I was in as a KiDDS scholar grant recipient at Florida State. My culminating capstone project focused on the prevalence of students with Profound Autism in Florida schools at the state, local and my own school-based level and the training and in-service needs of teachers for these students focused on evidence-based and high-leverage practices for student learning.

## EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM'S SERMON

... In what ways are we beholding God, in the form of Jesus? It's not in the injustice of FSU not going to a Bowl Championship. How misguided to listen to politicians raise such calls for "justice" when people without shelter, food and mental-health care suffer in the shadow of the Capitol. Their voices cry out in the wilderness....

Not everyone will find the Gospel message attractive. Some will prefer war over peace, division over unity; some will prefer keeping hate and avoiding love. But our job, yours and mine, is this: to adopt different preferences. To point folks in the right direction. To pray that God blesses them while changing us. To tell of peace, for Jesus is near.



## HOLIDAY SCHEDULE

- Saturday, Dec. 16, 9 a.m.: Decorating the sanctuary.
- Sunday, Dec. 17, 10 a.m.: Worship, including children's Christmas program.
- Sunday, Dec. 24, 10 a.m.: Fourth Sunday of Advent worship.
- Sunday, Dec. 24, 7 p.m.: Christmas Eve service, with communion and candle-light.
- Monday, Dec. 25: Church office closed.
- Sunday, Dec. 31, 10 a.m.: Lessons and Carols.

## COMING UP LATER



- Jan. 21: Congregational meeting.
- Jan. 28: Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday.
- Feb. 11: Mardi Gras Talent Show.

## BEFORE YOU GO...

- We'll be decorating the chancel area with poinsettias for Christmas. Would you like to dedicate one (or more)? The cost is \$10, and the dedication list will be in the Dec. 24 and 31 bulletins. Just fill out the form in the narthex and place it with your payment in the offering plate, or email Lori with the information. The deadline is this Sunday, Dec. 17.



- If you have an anniversary, birthday, special memory or special St. Stephen person or program you'd like to honor, celebrate by sponsoring the altar flowers for our service. Sign up on the flower chart in the narthex. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!

## UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS



Laura Sullivan - 12/14  
Rita Ford - 12/18  
Wesley Holdcraft - 12/18  
Pastor Tom - 12/29  
Kate Stuart - 12/29  
Mike Martinez - 12/30  
Linda Eshleman - 01/04  
Lynn Gunderson - 01/04  
Karen Olson - 01/05  
Vince Muchuruza - 01/07  
Marsy Miller - 01/10  
Mary Andersen - 01/11  
Mason Bonfanti - 01/11  
Sharon Gordon- 01/11  
Erin Kenney - 01/11  
Mark Canning - 01/13



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>.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, ELCA  
2198 N. Meridian Road | Tallahassee, FL 32303

The Rev. Tom Holdcraft, Pastor

*Edited by Ron Hartung (alias Lex Lutheran). Designed by Lori Zengel, office manager, [sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com](mailto:sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com).  
Website: <http://www.ststephenlutherantally.com/>  
To unsubscribe please reply with "UNSUBSCRIBE" as the subject line.*