



SONGS OF ST. STEPHEN

Lyrics written by Ron Hartung
for St. Stephen Lutheran Church
1984-2021

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Fun songs (*Most of these were written for the annual talent shows at St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Tallahassee, Florida.*)

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Serious songs (*Most of these were anthems written for the church choir. Several are from the Arise liturgy. Just about all of them were set to music by the incomparable Tom Buchanan. We've been collaborating off and on since the mid-1980s. In the photo below, he's the guy on the right. Sitting on the piano bench, I appear to know something about music. As Tom would tell you, I don't. I'm just the word guy.*)

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SONGS OF ST. STEPHEN (FUN ONES)

ABOUT OUR PASTORS

EMORY'S ISLE

(Sung to the tune of "Gilligan's Island")

Come, hear our tale of a fateful day for Pastor and his flock.
Five visitors came in that day for a 10-minute talk. A 10-minute talk.
"We're looking for a place," they said, "where sermons aren't too long.
A place where no one ever feuds, a place where we'd belong."

Our pastor heard their every word, then started with his spiel
about macaroons . . . and Texas, too . . .
Bishop Gomez . . . and his wife . . .
Mother Teresa . . . and the rest . . .
They thought, "Is this guy real?"

The visitors glanced at the clock. The pastor chatted on.
Before they knew it, day turned into night and then was gone. And still he chatted on.
He talked about his ministries, of Habitat and more.
He talked so much he didn't hear his guests begin to snore.

When they awoke, they couldn't seem to recall who they were.
So Pastor said, "Hey, stay with us, you lucky visitors."
And now they're charter members. They've taken on new names.
Like Susan Hove . . . and Shulers, too . . .
Like Hilmar . . . and his wife . . .
They've all stayed put, just like you,
here on Emory's Isle.

1984, approximately, for Pastor Emory Hingst

THERE'S NO PASTOR LIKE OUR PASTOR

(Sung to the tune of "There's No Business Like Show Business")

There's no pastor like our pastor. Yes, our pastor is swell.
One day he rolled into town from Vernon,
said Missouri Synod got him down.
Next thing that we knew that boy was burnin'
with faith and turnin' this place around.

There's no sermon like his sermon. It starts but never ends!
Once he thought he should explain a phrase in Greek —
and kept explaining, about a week.
We don't care: We love to hear our pastor speak.

His voice rings with God's song. Our love for him's so strong.

There's no people like Hingst's people. They smile 'cause they are loved.
If we saw ol' Satan walking through our door,
we'd laugh — ha! — at him and chuckle some more.
That's because we know what we are living for.
Yes, E. Hingst lets us know that God's the star of our show.
1988, for Pastor Emory Hingst

YOU CAN HEAR OUR PASTOR SING A HUNDRED MILES

(Sung to the tune of "Five Hundred Miles")

If you miss the note he's on, you will know your note is wrong.
You can hear our pastor sing a hundred miles.
A hundred miles, a hundred miles, a hundred miles, a hundred miles.
You can hear our pastor sing a hundred miles.

Not a squeak in his verse, not a pause in his refrain.
Lord, we need a dozen voices just like his.
We need one, we need two, we need three, we need four,
we need five dozen voices just like his.

Though you may miss your cue and sing faster than we do,
oh, your voice is such a beauty, Emory!
A hundred miles, a hundred miles, a hundred miles, a hundred miles.
You can hear our pastor sing a hundred miles.
1988, for Pastor Emory Hingst

WE'VE GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO YOUR FAITH

(Sung to the tune of "We've Grown Accustomed to Your Face")

We've grown accustomed to your faith. You try to live the life you preach.
We've grown accustomed to your fight for justice day and night.
You march. You sing. (You liberal thing.)

It's second nature to you now. You'd rather rabble-rouse than teach.
Just like your hero, Martin Luther, you're a pretty gutsy man:
He nailed his list of theses; then the feces hit the fan.
We've grown accustomed to your God,
accustomed to your heart, accustomed to your faith.

We've grown accustomed to your pace. It makes the rest of us seem swift.
We've grown accustomed to the rate at which you show up late.

You have your own unique time zone.

Yet look at all the ways that you give our community a lift.
You found this neighborhood and said, "This is where yuppies ought to dwell."
That's why we're all invited here: You have more land to sell.
We've grown accustomed to your smile,
your 60 years of joy, accustomed to your pace.
1994, for Pastor Emory Hingst's 60th birthday, sung in his home

SING THE HYMN FASTER

(Sung to the tune of "Bind Us Together")
I am your pastor, and I can sing faster
than you. They taught us at pastor school.
I am your pastor, and if you sing faster,
then you could become pastor, too.

You sing only one speed. I'm a five-speed, at least.
I can be on "Alleluia" while you're on "This is the feast."

(Refrain)

Think of how it could be if you picked up your speed.
We could do "Mighty Fortress" in less time than the Creed.

(Refrain)
2003, for Pastor Pam Wellons

HI, PASTOR MARDA! AND WELCOME, WOODS!

(Sung to the tune of "Over the River and Through the Woods")
Hi, Pastor Marda! And welcome, Woods! It's good to have you here.
Remember the day you said you would stay? We all jumped up to cheer.
Here at St. Stephen we love the fact you're not an interim.
(That's not to say, in any way, we don't love Pastor Jim.)

We have some idiosyncrasies, as maybe you've observed.
This song is too short to fully report: We hope you're not unnerved.
We understand that you've spent time in the dark, dank Matthew Room.
The atmosphere in there, we fear, is like that of a tomb.

Thanks for your sermons, dear Pastor M. They really pack a punch.
And, by the way, we've wanted to say, we'll soon ask you to lunch.
We have a question about one bit of churchy stuff you do.
We've never prayed with hands upraised; we'll need to think it through.
2009, for Pastor Marda Messick and Woods NeSmith

GOD, PLEASE BLESS OUR PASTOR MARDA

(Sung to the tune of "Will You Let Me Be Your Servant?")

We, throughout two months of weeping, felt like hair without a comb – messy, flat and so neglected. Oh, we're glad our pa-a-astor's home.

Woods, please won't you be our baker? We've missed you both, we confess. These sabbaticals are stressful. You're relaxed but we-e-e're a mess.

God, please bless our Pastor Marda as she tiptoes back this way. Help us be a loving church that listens to your Wor-r-rd, we pray.

2013, for Pastor Marda Messick

PRAISE GOD FOR 50 YEARS OF LIFE

(Sung to the tune of the Doxology)

Our boyish Pastor Tom today
is turning 50. "Him? No way!"
He'll eat his cake – and after that,
still not 1 ounce of body fat.

Amen.

2019, for Pastor Tom Holdcraft

THIS IS PASTOR TOM'S FIRST TALENT SHOW

(Sung to the tune of "There Is a Balm in Gilead")

This is Pastor Tom's first talent show. It's bound to bring him down.
This is Pastor Tom's first talent show. Will he dress as a clown?

He cannot juggle – can he? Does he know how to dance?
Could he be a magician? Squirt seltzer down his pants?

This is Pastor Tom's first talent show. It's what we've waited for.
Will he laugh along with all us fools? Or hightail out the door?

2019, for Pastor Tom Holdcraft

YOU'RE JUST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

(Sung to the tune of you-know-what)

You're just too good to be true. Can't take our eyes off of you.
You smile so effortlessly, like Hugh Grant and Janet Leigh.
But it's much more than your face. You both are filled with God's grace.
Pardon the way that we feel. You seem too good to be real.

Now let us speak of your sons. Lord knows, they look like the ones
that Norman Rockwell would paint – each one a wholesome young saint.
Next year, we might have some gripes. You might have irked us. But, yipes,

this year, we guess you can tell: We feel as lucky as hell!
2019, for Pastor Tom Holdcraft and his family

THE WONDERS OF THE DOLLAR STORE

(Sung to the tune of "O Little Town of Bethlehem")

I love my local Dollar Store. There's everything I need.
Things may be cheap. They may not keep. They may not be guaranteed.
But, oh, the shelves are lovely. They groan beneath the weight
of tons of stuff. Can't get enough! Go shopping? I can't wait.

I don't just shop at Dollar Store. I crave diversity.
When I feel hip, my shopping trip will focus on Dollar Tree.
If Jonas needs new glasses, if Colleen wants a ring,
that's where I'll go. It's great, you know! That's why I stand and sing!
2020, as sung by Pastor Tom

ABOUT OUR BUILDINGS

NARTHEX

(Sung to the tune of "Downtown")

When you're alone and life is making you lonely
you can always go (to the) narthex!
People there scurry till your whole world turns blurry.
It's a hoot, I know, (in the) narthex!

And you can find 'bout any kind of list to sign your name on.
For altar flowers and coffee hours and for the softball game on May 29.

The easel is king back there,
back where the ushers decide who will get folding chairs.
(It's the) Narthex! Where the fake stained glass is.
Narthex! Where Pastor's costume lives.
Narthex! Where all the late people wait.

So if you find you're in a line to shake hands with the pastor,
and though you sigh and wail and cry, the line won't move no faster, just look around.

The room where you find yourself,
where stacks of old synod *Sonshines* are stuck on a shelf
(is the) Narthex! Call it a waiting room. Narthex! Mildew is its perfume.
Narthex! Now it's there waiting for you.

1988, when we worshipped in what later became the education building

TOTE THAT BUCKET, LIFT THAT PAIL

(Sung to the tune of "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore")

Tote that bucket, lift that pail, alleluia. The council bought a roof on sale, alleluia.
The roofer said he'd roof us fast, alleluia. He never said the thing would last, alleluia.

"I'm no expert," Emory said, alleluia. "But shouldn't all these nails have heads?" Alleluia.
Strong winds came the other day, alleluia. Part of our roof's in Biscayne Bay, alleluia.

Council cried, "The price was right!" Alleluia.
"Thought it'd last more than one night!" Alleluia.
Our holey roof is all we've got, alleluia. So pick a safe, dry sitting spot, alleluia.

And if it rains, remember that (alleluia) the green book makes a nifty hat, alleluia.
Tote that bucket, lift that pail, alleluia. The council bought a roof on sale, alleluia.
1985

THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

(Sung to the tune of, well, "The Church's One Foundation")

The church's old foundation is floating out to sea.
She is a strange creation; she sloshes endlessly.
At least, though, when we sought her, Bill Taylor was our guide.
With Bill's own cash we bought her. And when Bill left, we cried.

The church's new foundation is ready to be built.
We seek new inspiration. Oh, mortgaged to the hilt!
The congregation's sleeping. The Council cries, "How long?"
But soon our night of weeping will be our morn of song.

The church's true foundation is neither brick nor stone.
The one and true foundation is Jesus Christ alone.
No architect can equal the splendor of His sight.
The building that we seek will reflect His blazing light.
1993

PLEASE, LET'S BRING BACK THE PEWS

(Sung to the tune of "Crown Him With Many Crowns")

Please, let's bring back the pews. They served our church so well.
These chairs should be packed up on a truck and sent straight back to hell.
The devil made these chairs to wreck our liturgy.
He laughs each time they crack and moan. He burned our warranty.

Each time a visitor sits down, we hold our breath.

We wonder if the chair will collapse and scare the soul to death.
They're padded seats, we know, and softer than the pews —
but softness isn't everything. Blue chairs give us the blues.

Wait — we forgot to tell about the hymnal racks.
Lord, save us from that flimsy wood. We're having heart attacks!
They're failing one by one. Our chairs, once joined, are free.
O, toss them out! Return the pews to their old majesty!
1998

ODE TO THE SHADES

(Sung to the tune of "I Can See Clearly Now")

I can see clearly now. What glaring news!
I don't have sunlight scorching my baby blues!
I love those little shades that Hilmar made.
It's gonna be a nice, nice sunshine-free day!

Back when we built this place, we didn't know
just where December's sun would want to go.
Now, no more winter squinting! All are gay!
It's gonna be a nice, nice sunshine-free day!

We don't have anything against the sun
'cept when it keeps us from the Holy One.
After the winter, shades will hide away
'til we need a nice, nice sunshine-free day.

Someday those shades might start to misbehave,
letting the sun back into our Lutheran cave.
Until that time, we love them and we say:
It's gonna be a nice, nice sunshine-free day!
2004

MILDEW

(Sung to the tune of "Always")

We will have mildew always. With a greenish hue, always.
Though you pound and rub and you scream and scrub,
mildew will prevail always, always.

In our closets and hallways, mildew reigns supreme always.
No, the Altar Guild can't proclaim it's killed.
But the fight goes on always.

Not for just an hour, not for just a day,
not for just a life, but always.

2013

ROOFING BLUES

(Sung to the tune of "Sixteen Tons")

It began one mornin' when the sun didn't shine.
Sky was angry, was an ominous sign.
When the clouds unleashed their fateful drops,
the pastor said, "Better grab some mops!"

Roofin' day, and what did we get?
The tarp was useless, and the vicar was wet.
The plasterboard was puffy, and the paint was stained.
Our mildew soon will blossom again.

There were some folks runnin', and some folks cried.
We saw Steve comin' and we stepped aside
Rolled up his sleeves, he cursed the rain.
And, oh my Lord, we were righteous again.

Roofin' day, and what did we get?
The tarp was useless, and the vicar was wet.
Our plasterboard is better, and the paint is dry.
But Sue still keeps one eye on the sky.

2013

BUILDINGS HOLY, BUILDINGS LOWLY

(Sung to the tune of "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly")

Buildings holy, buildings lowly, fragrant as a cattle stall.
Lord, we muddle through a puddle after every nasty squall.
Air is musty, mildew lingers, metal's rusty, wrinkled fingers.
Dehumidify us, Lord! Dehumidify us, Lord!

Every member can remember: 20-12 was mighty tough.
Roofers started, then departed, but their tarps were not enough.
Winds were whipping, shingles missing, rafters dripping, Lutherans hissing.
God, why do you soak us still? God, why do you soak us still?

2015

GET ME TO THE CHURCH ON TIME

(Sung to the tune of the well-known song from "My Fair Lady")

We have a workday in the morning. Ding-dong, the bells are gonna chime.

Grunting and sweating! Don't be forgetting to show up at the church on time.

I gotta be there in the morning. Phil, Steve and T.J. will be primed.
Digging and chopping, painting and mopping. Oh, get me to the church on time.

There might be doughnuts; save me a few.
Without my doughnuts, don't know what I'd do!

For we have a workday in the morning. Oh, the results will be sublime.
Hats, gloves and loppers; let's have a whopper!
So get me to the church, dear St. Stephen church,
for Pete's sake, get me to the church on time!
2016

TEAR DOWN OUR GUTTERS

(Sung to the tune of "Good Night, My Someone" from "The Music Man")

Tear down our gutters. They've failed us so. They weren't installed right. They overflow.
We've held our tongues, but at last we say: Please tear down our gutters today!

Tear down our portico. It's not well. We think they imported it from Hell.
A leaky eyesore, a gaping wound – it's a mess. Please tear it down soon.

Despite our mildew, despite our leaks, despite our building that groans and creaks,
we think our little encampment's dear. God, perform a miracle here!
2016

O LISTEN TO OUR SOGGY TALE

(Sung to the tune of "O Little Town of Bethlehem")

We used to have a waterfall parked right outside our door.
When it would rain, guests would complain. It soaked them to their core.
The downspouts couldn't handle the gutters' mighty stream.
At last we found our hopes had drowned – a biblical bad dream.

As if the water weren't enough, the mildew made things worse.
It stained our walls. Our darkened halls and classrooms bore its curse.
"Good Lord, why do you smite us?" we wept on soggy knees.
And then we prayed. "Come to our aid and disinfect us, please."

Then, lo, the dark clouds parted and the sky began to clear.
Michele, Mark, Bill, TJ, Sue, Phil and Steve said: "We are here!"
They performed exorcisms. They drove demons away.
The sun's returned! The tide has turned! It's "Love Your Gutters" Day!
2017

ABOUT CHOIR AND MUSIC

DUTIFUL CHOIR BOSS

(Sung to the tune of "Beautiful Savior")

Dutiful choir boss, king of the music stand. Son of a gun, you're a birthday boy.
Truly we sing for thee. Truly we sweat for thee. But all you say is, "Well, not bad"

Dutiful choir boss, musical masochist. Pain grips your ears when we wreck a hymn.
Most choirs are better. Most choirs are surer. But face it, pal: We're all you've got.

Fair are the altos, fair the sopranos. Even the basses aren't half-bad.
Tenors are different, though. They sing where notes don't go.
So, on your birthday, they just hummmmmmmmm.

1988, for Tom Buchanan when he was choir director

ANN IS AN ALTO OF STRENGTH

(Sung to the tune of "God Is Our Refuge and Strength")

Ann is an alto of strength. She'll find her note in times of trouble.
Though the tenors quake as they fight for high E, though the basses roar and foam:
We will not fear.

Try to conceive the choir without Ann, an awesome loss of one.
She is our Ann. Hers is a voice we truly need.

Yes, she can gripe. Yes, she can moan. She's no picnic.
But she's a dear. We love her here. We will cry about her leaving all year long.

Ann was an alto of strength. She's leaving us in lots of trouble.
The sopranos screech as they search for the key. Look at Katharine roar and foam.
Now we will fear. Now we will fear.
Now we will fear. Ann, help us here!

1999, for the farewell to Pastor Emory and Ann Hingst

WHAT A SMALL CHOIR WE ARE

(Sung to the tune of "Dona Nobis Pacem" and "What Child Is This?")

WOMEN:

We are few, scared of you. Small choirs are tricky.
The Mormon Tabernacle Choir really has it made.
Weee haaave so darn few voices. Whaaat iiif some of them get lost?

SOLOIST:

Suddenly, there you are, singing a solo.

WOMEN:

What a small choir we are. We should just give up.

MEN:

What choir is this that squeals and wails while most of you are sleeping?
Sopranos screech while tenors reach for notes that have everyone weeping.
This, this is St. Stephen's choir. We're not big. Not good. Sing to here*, no higher.
Run, run while you still have time. Or we'll hurt you all with our bad anthem.

WHOLE CHOIR:

We are few, and we do frown while we're singing.
What a sad choir we are. Clap now -- or we'll cry.

(* Hold hand out about at chest level)

2002

KATHARINE IS THE ONE

(Sung to the tune of "Brighter Than the Sun")

Brighter, brighter than the sun is the talent of our musical one.
Deeper, deeper than the sea is the gratitude washing over me.

How I love to watch Katharine touching those keys.
She produces sounds that drown my inner miseries,
with a combination of power and finesse.
Is she keyboard queen? Oh, the answer is yes.

(Refrain)

After 20 years, could be time for something new.
Maybe youth retreats and the children's sermons, too?
No, we need her here on each Sunday morn
leading choirs in song, helping music be born.

(Refrain)

2010, for Music Director Katharine Gossman

ANTHEMS, CHANTING

(Sung to the tune of "Sunrise, Sunset")

SOPRANOS:

Where are the altos I once sang with? I hear no tenor and no bass.
Did they all climb into a bus and drive to Grace?

ALTOS:

Here we are, sisterly sopranos. We are the altos from your past.
How did our choir disappear so fast?

ALL:

Anthems, chanting. Anthems, chanting. Oh, we loved it so!

But singers' schedules got too crowded, and so our choir had to go.
Anthems, chanting. Anthems, chanting. Every Sunday morn!
God, how we'd love it if we could see our mighty little choir reborn.

MEN:

Katharine was always extra patient when we'd create unholy noise.
She understands we're only human. Naughty boys.

(All)

It's tough to lead a shrinking choir. That's why our group had to adjourn.
Katharine, is there a chance we could return?

ALL, A CAPPELLA:

Anthems, chanting. Anthems, chanting. Oh, we loved it so!
But singers' schedules got too crowded, and so our choir had to go.
Anthems, chanting. Anthems, chanting. Every Sunday morn!
God, how we'd love it if we could see our mighty little choir reborn.
2014

O SOME OF US DON'T SING SO WELL

(Sung to the tune of "O Little Town of Bethlehem")

When some of you hear music play, you instantly start to sing.
A blessed sound floats all around, like nightingales on the wing.
You take your voice for granted. You think all are so blessed.
But that's not true. We envy you. We can't sing. We're depressed.

We hesitate to sing too loud, for fear you'll be alarmed.
Yes, tests have shown that when we drone, small children can be harmed.
We know which notes to aim for. Alas, our aim's awry.
We make B-flat B-"what-was-that!" You giggle, but we cry.

St. Stephen welcomes everyone. Can you accept us, too?
We love each tune that you all croon. May we be crooners, too?
For when you stand beside us, your voices lift ours high'r.
Then God can hear, and knows that we're a part of Earth's great choir!
2016

ABOUT CHURCH LIFE IN GENERAL GOD'LL TAKE ME ANYWAY

(Music by Tom Buchanan)

I always go to church but I will never be a saint.
And just the thought of hellfire, well, it makes me want to faint.

I love to be forgiven but I can't seem to forgive.
My pocket tries to lock itself when it hears, "Time to give!"

But that's OK. God'll take me anyway.
Yeah, that's all right. God'll lead me to the light.
Well, glory be. God'll take and make an angel out of me.

I have the best intentions but my record is the worst.
I try to think of others but, oh brother, I come first.
Though millions are proclaiming Truth, I don't have much to say.
As if that's not enough, I even mumble when I pray.

(Refrain)

I ought to greet new members but I hardly ever do.
Instead I stay in hiding, rarely sliding from my pew.
Whenever I confess I say, "I promise I'll be good!"
That lasts an hour, no longer. I'd be stronger if I could.

(Refrain)

1986

MARILYN

(Sung to the tune of "Camelot")

The copier's been sobbing for a month now.
The typewriter is weeping from within.
They know that life won't be the same around here: No Marilyn.

She's seen the skeletons in all our closets.
She's typed, not griped. Yes, smiled through thick and thin.
She's hounded Pastor so he'd meet his deadlines. That's Marilyn.

Marilyn! Marilyn! If we dump Pastor, will you stay?
Marilyn! Marilyn! Please! Pity us, we pray!

For years she's been St. Stephen's secret weapon.
God sent her here to save us from our sin.
But now God's telling her, "Steer clear of Lutherans. Run, Marilyn!"
She put the "organized" in our religion.
Without her, we can't tell Line 2 from 1.
She tells the ushers when they have to ush next: That's Marilyn.

Marilyn! Marilyn! We know it sounds a trifle odd,

but Marilyn, Marilyn, we're almost certain that you're God.

She often took her work home from the office.
She stayed with us through easy times and rough.
In short, there's simply not another church that's got
a secretary half as good as our dear Marilyn Huff!
(1990-something, for our retiring secretary)

RANZINGER!

(To the tune of "Goldfinger")

Ranzinger! He's the man, the man who's the council prez. Do what he says.
Mr. Ranzinger! Pastors come and go, but this guy stays. He wants a raise.

Any day now, he'll be on the run with the Council Contingency Fund.
But until that day, he is our captain – along with Irene.
I mean it.

Ranzinger! Sugar-free martinis he prefers: Shaken, not stirred.
Ranzinger! He thinks Bobby Bowden is a saint. You think he ain't?

If we need a new building, ask him. If the heaters are chilling, ask him.
In fact, he's the guy the Holy Spirit gets his orders from. He's Mr....

Ranzinger! Knows our budget. Knows how much you give. Knows where you live.
Ranzinger! He revokes commandments just like that. He's one cool cat.

Ranzinger!

1990-something, for President Gary Ranzinger

WE ARE ST. STEPHEN

(Sung to the tune of "The Friendly Beasts")

We are St. Stephen, bustling and bold. We built this place with mortar and mold.
Our pastor's almost 60 years old. And our new building is on hold.

I am the pastor, vibrant and fit. In Texas my sermons were a huge hit.
I speak in Greek for the fun of it. I'm glad I'm not in that choir skit.

We are the Altar Guild, you see. We polish, we scrub, we set up for free.
We wash little glasses endlessly. You eat and run; we stay till 3.

We are the teachers, weary and worn. We've been with your kids since they were born.
They threw crayons at us Christmas morn. We've had enough. You have been warned.

We are the youth group. Leave us alone. We have our own room. Leave us alone.

Your ideas are boring. Leave us alone. We're young; you're not. So leave us alone.

We are the mowers, dirty and tired. Where's that lawn service that we hired?
We mow when we want, when we feel inspired.
Might mow, might not. What — like we'll be fired?

We are St. Stephen, wildly unique. Our ducts, they slosh; our pews, they creak.
This song's gone on about a week. Last verse! "Thanks be to God," we speak.
1993 or so

IT WAS A VERY GOOD YEAR

(Sung to the tune of, yes, "It Was a Very Good Year")

When it was '56, it was a very good year.
It was a very good year for listening to God ... and starting a church.
No building or pews ... no leaks to be fixed
when it was '56.

When it was '61, it was a very good year.
It was a very good year for building a place where we'd share our faith.
It sparkled so white ... and was mildew-free —
till roughly '63.

In our first 20 years, we had four pastors here.
First Pastor Walker arrived, then Rhoden, Landwere ... and finally Graf.
We built on this rock ... but began to look vexed.
We asked, "God, who is next?"

When it was '76, it was a very good year
because from out of the west, a pastor named Hingst soon rode into view.
He'd preach about justice ... and live what he'd say.
It was a very good day.

When it was '81, it was a difficult year.
A group of unhappy members walked out of church ... and never returned.
It was over a hymnal ... and so much more.
We were one house no more.

But all in all, it seems, we have had very good years.
We've given birth to such things as Shop & Share and more ministries.
We've had God-sent music ... at least until now.
Yes, we have grown somehow.

Now it is '96. It is a very good year.

It is a year to think back on vicars and friends who've worshipped and gone.
Their faces now blend with the new faces here.
Thank God for very good years.
1996, for our 40th anniversary

THE VOICES OF ST. STEVE

(Sung to the tune of "Crown Him With Many Crowns")

PASTOR:

I used to spend my days as a librarian.
I came to church occasionally when friends were marryin'.
Imagine my surprise. God changed my major. Wow!
I used to check in reference books. I check my Good Book now.

USHERS:

Some people come to church in too much of a rush.
God calls on me to slow them down. That's what I do: I ush.
I hand out bulletins. I kiss your baby's cheek.
I shine your shoes. I wash your car. I want you back next week.

VISITOR:

Please, usher, take my hand! The sun is in my eyes.
The morning light's so dazzlingly bright, I'm almost paralyzed.
I visited today to see what I could learn.
But blinded by this dev'lish glare, I doubt that I'll return.

INTERIOR DESIGN COMMITTEE:

Oh, ye of little taste, we're here to set you straight.
These colors, well, they just won't work; these rows should all be straight.
Come, people – work with us! Designing is a gift!
God called us here to spruce you up and give this joint a lift.

ALTAR GUILD:

They are the Altar Guild. They watch as you commune.
Those crumbs you drop, those drops you spill will spoil their afternoon.
Oh, sure, you think they're sweet, but sweet's not how they feel.
You'd better mind your manners now or they'll withhold your meal.

CHOIR:

No doubt you wonder why we face the wall to sing.
We wonder the same thing ourselves. It's slightly unnerving.
The cross is straight ahead. And – oh yes! – so are you.
But straight ahead is tough for us. We like an organ view.

YOUTH LEADER:

I think I know your kids better than even you.
But all that is about to change. Here's what I plan to do:
I'm going to lock you in. You'll sleep here on the floor.
What joy! What fam'ly bonding time! That's what you hired me for.

STEWARDSHIP:

Get out your wallets now. You'll give until it hurts.
We want big bucks from all you adults and change from little squirts.
Our God will not be mocked! He knows what you withhold!
Don't make me send goons after you. You'll give what you are told!

YOUTH:

Hi. We're the ones you've known since we were toddlers here.
Now we are teenaged, and it seems you're scared to get too near.
Don't worry: We won't bite or beg for your spare change.
We share your faith. It's just your mu-sic sounds a little strange.

PROCLAIMING:

You prob'ly think I'm nice. Don't be fooled by this grin.
I'm four whole feet of solid steel. Trust me: I play to win.
So let's get something straight: I want those name tags on.
That's you, and you, and you, big boy. Are we all clear? Right on.

OPERATIONS COMMITTEE:

I'm Operations. Help! Who stole my red leaf blo'er?
Who hid my hammer, swiped my paint and made holes in the door?
This building is my curse. I tend it constantly.
I quit! That's it! I'm outta here. I've joined Epiphany.

CONGREGATION:

Dysfunctional we are! Yet somehow, by God's grace,
we manage to pray side by side and take care of this place.
But who takes care of us? I mean, besides Don Dowd?
We're in our Savior's gentle hands. No worrying allowed.
2002

THE USHER

(Sung to the tune of Simon & Garfunkel's "The Boxer")

He is just a newsboy, and his story's seldom told.
He has squandered his existence on a futile quest to please some distant editors.
They may know best, but a man shoots what he wants to shoot
and tries to fake the rest. Hmm-mm-mm

When he left his home and his family, he was no more than a boy.

Well, no less than a boy, either –
in a quiet way, a specimen of Husker beef.
Looking out on a big world with a camera in his eye,
searching for the image that would make you cry.

Lie, lie, lie
Pass the birthday cake, or is it birthday pie?
Colin's 41, so much more young than I.

Asking only union wages, he comes looking for a job but he gets no offers.
Just a come-on from the church on Pinewood Avenue.
Miss Betty knows, there were times when he was so lonesome
he took some photos there. La, la, la, la, la, la, la

In the clearing stands an usher in a pair of biking shorts.
And he carries the reminders of every guest who chewed him out
or slapped him when he asked her to put money in the till.
"I am quitting! God, I'm quitting!" But the usher ushes still.

Lie, lie, lie
Colin's 41 today, and we pray
That he'll pass his Spanish exercise someday.

Lie, lie, lie
He's a friend who'll do 'most anything you need.
He'll get Lutheran-of-the-Year, it's guaranteed.

Lie, lie, lie
In a Jetta red as anger, he will come –
as mild-mannered as the heartland that he's from.
2002, for Colin Hackley's 41st birthday

THAT'S ST. STEPHEN!

(Sung to the tune of "That's Amore!")

When the sun hits your eyes and you're just paralyzed,
that's St. Stephen.
And the thermostat's range seems a little bit strange,
that's us, too.

And the chairs have a little tilt, just a little tilt, that's the way they're built
for St. Stephen.
But we're glad. We think they're not bad. Better than we had back when we were sad.
We got even.

When the rain hits our roof, we become Lutheran soup. Wring your socks out.
But tonight we are dry. There's no reason to cry – not so far.
We're so easy to please. Macaroni and cheese is our favorite.
Go ahead – laugh it up. Someone else will clean up.
That's St. Stephen!
2003

THE SNAP-KRACKLE-POP TRINITY

(Sung to the tune of the Rice Krispies jingle)

Christ – what a happy sound! Christ is the happiest sound I've found.
You may act nice, twice, thrice, but Christ makes the world go 'round.

I say it's Spirit, the mystic sound. You've got to have Spirit or the lost aren't found.
I hear it, you hear it, they hear it, we hear it 'cause Spirit makes the world go 'round.

I insist on Creator's sound! The best is missed if it's not around.
You'd best not bother if you don't have the Father. Creator makes the world go 'round.
Christ, Spirit and Creator!
2003

DON, GO AWAY

(Sung to the tune of "Dawn, Go Away")

Don, go away – we're no good for you.
Oh, oh, Don, we ask more than we should from you.
Leave us. Don, believe us.
Think how much fun life could be if you weren't here until 3.
Just think what your future could be without this ministry! Y-y!

Don, go away! Please go away!
We'll fall apart, but it's better that way-ay-ay. Oo-oo-oo.

Don, you know we'll be the death of you.
All these chores will keep squeezing the breath from you.
Before YOU say that you LIKE it,
We want you to think! All those trips down the aisle –
Crucifer done with such style.
Plus worship assistant and acolyte teacher and more! Ore-ore!

Don, go away – we'll get by somehow! Don, turn away – we're all cryin' now!
Don, change the light bulbs before you go!
Don, will this mike make it through the show?
Don, write down things that we ought to know....

2003, for Don Dowd

WILL YOU BE OUR SECRETARY?

(Sung to the tune of "Will You Let Me Be Your Servant?")

Will you be our secretary? This is just the place for you.
How we pray that you can stay here longer than a week or two.

We will help you fold and collate; we will even sort the mail.
We don't care if you aren't Lutheran or if you are out on bail.

Lord, please send us someone quickly. Sue Williams has paid her dues.
We have got a nasty case of got-no-secretary blues.

2004

HERE'S TO OUR DEAR GRADUATE

(Sung to the tune of "Good King Wenceslas")

Susan Warren came one day just to join St. Stephen.
Nothing since has been the same. Pray she won't be leavin'.
Love her Bug convertible. Love her hunky for'ster.
Two glam daughters, one great sis – who could ask for more, sir?

She's a wise guy, yet she's still sweeter than The Ladies.
Battled cancer, yet she still runs like a Mercedes.
Now she is a graduate. She's an old-folks scholar.
When we're seniors, feeling low, we can simply call her.

"Bashful"? No, that's not the word.

"Introvert"? Not really.

"Loving"? Yes, she has a heart
that she shares so freely.

Susan Warren, you could say, never met a stranger.

She's a true original. Please, God, never change her!

2006, for Susan Warren's graduation

WHEN WE'RE 51

(Sung to the tune of "When I'm Sixty-Four")

You can wear blue jeans, come without shoes just one year from now.
No one will be asking you to reminisce, or to give the bishop a kiss.
Tuxes in storage, gowns packed away: Banquet days are done.
You won't deny it: Life will be quiet when we're 51.

Fifty years will pass before we have another blast
like this anniversary. We shall scrimp and save.

Who'll be on Council then? Leah, Bern or Gabe?

Goodbye to fliers begging for help from our Lutheran cooks.
No more e-mails asking you about the past. No more book sales. Life's not so fast.
Fifty-year fun is fantastic but can be overdone.
You won't deny it: Life will be quiet when we're 51.
2006, in the midst of our 50-year anniversary

WE HOPE GOD LIKES US AT ST. STEPHEN

(Sung to the tune of "Earth and All Stars")

Singles and fams! Folks of all flavors! Sing to the Lord a new song!
Here at St. Steve, we are all welcome! Sing to the Lord a new song!
God has done ma-a-a-avelous things. We hope God likes us at St. Stephen!

Chalice and cloth! Tiptoeing servants! Sing to the Lord a new song!
Altar Guild saints beat up on mildew! Sing to the Lord a new song!
God has done ma-a-a-avelous things. We hope God likes us at St. Stephen!

Shiny red books! Loud screeching Lutherans! Sing to the Lord a new song!
Organ and flute! Wish we had bongos! Sing to the Lord a new song!
God has done ma-a-a-avelous things. We hope God likes us at St. Stephen!

Big tubs of food! Val's pals are cooking! Sing to the Lord a new song!
Soon at Good News, folks will cry, "Chow time!" Sing to the Lord a new song!
God has done ma-a-a-avelous things. We hope God likes us at St. Stephen!

Chattering kids! Bewildered teachers! Sing to the Lord a new song!
Crayons and tears! Fingerpaint Noahs! Sing to the Lord a new song!
God has done ma-a-a-avelous things. We hope God likes us at St. Stephen!

Weeds and all plants! Blistering workdays! Sing to the Lord a new song!
Cloudbursts and leaks! Who stole the shop-vac? Sing to the Lord a new song!
God has done ma-a-a-avelous things. We hope God likes us at St. Stephen!

Silence and prayer. Loving embraces. Thanks to the Lord for this church.
Presents from God in such abundance. Thanks to the Lord for this church.
God has done ma-a-a-avelous things. We know God loves us at St. Stephen!
2007

IT'S SUSAN'S BIRTHDAY

(Sung to the tune of "Morning Has Broken")

Think back to when you first talked to Susan. Remember she was painfully shy.
Seems to be coming out of her shell, no? Now she will tell her 40s goodbye.

Yes, it is Susan's 50th birthday. What a fine senior Susan will make.
Time for a party to celebrate her! Bunches of candles, fistfuls of cake.

Fam'ly's important to Birthday Susan. She is the sister of Kate Perdue.
That means that "Sue Perdue" is her real name. Super-dee-due-per, zippity-doo.

As you can see, we've run out of lyrics. Oh, that's so shameful! It's so absurd.
Here, take the mike and give it to Susan. She's never been at a loss for words.

Lift high your glass and toast our dear Susan. Fifty has never looked so divine.
St. Stephen's sweetheart, loved by so many:
Amusin' Susan, your friend and mine.
2008, for Susan Warren

HOW CAN WE BE SILENT?

(Sung to the tune of the anthem "How Can We Be Silent?")
How can we be silent when it's time for sharing the peace –
if one hand remains unshaken, if the hugging will not cease?
How can we be silent till we've greeted every last soul?
Look – those visitors seem worried. They think we're out of control.

We can't stop the spirit bubbling up inside us.
Face it – we're all peaceniks. We cannot be silent.

What would Jesus say now if he shared our peace nonstop?
Would he praise us to the heavens or report us to his Pop?
Are there other Lutherans who, like us, get carried away?
Or is this just at St. Stephen? Should we brace for Judgment Day?

(Refrain)
2009

HOME WITH PHIL AND SUE

(Sung to the tune of "Home on the Range")
Oh, give me a home where the Williamses roam and the rent is unbeatable, too.
Rebecca is grand as your new neighbor, and a nice dog might be snooz-ing with you.

Home with Phil and Sue! It has worked for a pastor or two.
They've opened their door, saving thousands or more
for St. Stephen – a fine thing to do!
There's nothing so sweet as that mom-in-law suite in the solitude of Concord Road.
Our next vicar might bunk there more than one night.
They're so gen-er-ous. Think what they're owed!

Home with Sue and Phil! They have not even sent us a bill.
Yes, all of us go to the parties they throw.
They're the best. Shall we keep them? We will!
2010

I COULD SHAKE HANDS ALL NIGHT

(Sung to the tune of "I Could Have Danced All Night")

I could shake hands all night, hug Luth-er-ans all night,
And still come back for more.
A high-five might be fun. Fist bump's another one
I've never tried before.

I'd never known church could be so ... athletic. It gets so loud. Some might take fright.
I only know when she says "Pass the peace" to me
I could shake hands, hands, hands all night!

So much commotion. It's a holy hubbub. I love it, but the shy take flight.
I ... only ... know ... that we could spend eternity
by shaking hands, hands, hands ... all night!
2010

DON'T EVER LEAVE US, EDITA!

(Sung to the tune of "Don't Cry For Me, Argentina")

Don't ever leave us, Edita! The truth is we're lost without you.
You keep things going here. You are essential.
The rest of us are just inconsequential.

If you weren't with us, Edita, then who would scold naughty Nathan?
You'd better skip your trip back to St. Thomas.
Nathan might come to church in his pajamas.

Please cut the cake now, Edita! You're 75 – amazing!
Thank you for serving us. Thanks for your laughter.
Please be our ref-er-ence in the hereafter.
2010, for Edita Joshua

I TEACH YOUR CHILDREN

(Sung to the tune of "Climb Every Mountain")

I teach your children! They're all so dear.
But I have some pointers I'd like to make clear.

This is the Bible! Parents, my dream

is that you will read it with your little team.

Their biblical smarts are not all they could be.
Some of them think the Ark was in "Toy Story 3"!

I teach your children! They wear me out.
Please teach them to listen. Please lend me your clout.

We soon will install hidden cameras in class.
Then you parents will see how your darlings can sass!

I taught your children! Now, I am free!
What is my next project? Find my inner ... me!

2011

WILL YOU COME AND FOLLOW ME?

(Sung to the tune of, well, "Will You Come and Follow Me?")

Will you come and follow me and join the Altar Guild?
Will you help me shine the brass – make sure the wine is chilled?
Busting dust is really fun! In a jiffy, you'll be done.
You will cherish everyone who's in the Altar Guild.

Will you come and follow me and take some photos, please?
Or just hold my extra lens and tell the kids, "Say cheese!"?
When the sun is not enough, you can grab my lighting stuff.
So if you're a Canon buff, come take some photos, please.

Will you come and follow me as I do Synod biz?
Will you help me bridge the gap between "What was" - "What is"?
Will you help me tell the crowd, "Let us all Believe Out Loud!"?
Yes, I've checked, and you're allowed to do some Synod biz.

Will you come and follow me and work the nurs'ry shift?
Oh, forget about your cares! Give your whole day a lift.
There's a special seat Up There for those who do kiddie care.
Or at least that is my pra'er when I'm on nurs'ry shift.

Will you come and follow me next time a cloudburst strikes?
Will you grab a mop and stand with me and holler, "Yikes!"
When our trees all start to fall, when our AC systems crawl,
I just might give you a call. I am the Fix-It Guy.

2011

COLIN IS 50

(Sung to the tune of "Morning Has Broken")

He performs magic with jumbo lenses. The world that we all see as a blur becomes so lovely captured by Colin. He is God's fav'rite photographer.

Colin's the nicest Midwestern fellow. Whatever friends need, he will provide. And as an usher, he is unequaled – as long as Graham is there by his side.

They say he's 50, but if you ask me, young Mr. Hackley looks 32. If he has vices, they are well-hidden. He is a bit too good to be true.

Happiest birthday wishes we send him. Isn't this party filled with great joy? If we cloned Colin, we could have photos taken by him of the birthday boy!
2011

ST. STEPHEN'S SWEET

(Sung to the tune of Billy Joel's "You May Be Right")

Years and years I wandered lonely. Figured God had snubbed me only. Sundays were the saddest days of all. Life had left me in the lurch till I found this cozy church where the usher chief is only 3 feet tall.

Now I chat with Katharine on the phone. I love Edita's macaron-i. Sat beside the bishop at a meal. And the bishop said to me, "You are blessed as you can be, for this congregation is the real deal."

The pastor's sweet. The vicar's dandy. But it could be the com-MUN-ion bread that seals the deal. Oh, Anna's neat, and Steve is handy. It's such a tiny church, you know, but it can't be beat.

Remember how it was back when, we had a string of int'rims, then a classy pastor said she'd lead our flock. She said, "Marda – that is me. And as far as I can see, we've been chosen to be partners in this walk."

Now think of all that she has taught us, all the joy that she has brought us, We love Woods and Lady – oh, it's true. Same with Nathan and with Don. Plus Alyssa, Rick and Jon. And there's Sandy, Sandy, oh, and Sandy, too.

Yes, Sarah's sweet, and Leah's dandy.

But it could be the com-MUN-ion bread that seals the deal.
Sue Canning's neat. Gladys is randy.
It's such a tiny church, you know, but it can't be beat.

2012

OH, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL YOUTH GROUP

(Sung to the tune of "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'")

There's a lock-in tonight at St. Stephen. There's a lock-in tonight at St. Stephen.
The pizza is ordered, the movie is set. For young Christians, this is as good as it gets.

Oh, what a glorious youth group. My, how their young faces shine.
But, uh-oh – I had forgotten: Most of those children are mine.

There's a conflict tonight with our schedules.
There's a conflict tonight with our schedules.
There's ballet, gymnastics and flute. I'm afraid
we can't make the lock-in. It must be delayed.

Oh, what a glorious youth group. Too bad the group is so small.
Actually, without the Bartons, there'd be no youth group at ah-all.
There'd be no youth group at all!

2013, as sung by Karl Barton

LUTHERANS

(Sung to the tune of "People")

Lutherans, people who are Lutherans
are the luckiest people in the world.
We're Christians, needing other Christians.
And yet somehow we're much more swell. Look at us – you can tell.
We are much more Lutheran than Luther.

Marda's a very lucky pastor.
She's the luckiest pastor in the world.
We're her people, her special St. Steve people.
She called the Synod, we hear; said "Barbra Streisand is here!"
Our walls may have some mold, but bold are St. Stephen's chosen people!
Pastor Marda's people! She's the luckiest pastor in the world!

2014

EDITA, THAT'S WHO

(Sung to the tune of "It Had to Be You")

It had to be you. Edita, that's who.
St. Thomas was home; God asked you to roam and find someplace new.

A place that could use a drill sergeant who's
a tough-loving saint. A creampuff you ain't. You've paid your dues.

Whenever you leave, all we do is grieve.
The potluck is bare. We sit and we stare. Oh, woe is St. Steve!

For nobody else has faith like you.
And when you pray, your prayers come true.
We're blessed to have you. We love you, we do. Edita, that's who!
2014, for Edita Joshua

PHIL'S JUST TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

(Sung to the tune of "You're Just Too Good to Be True")
Phil's just too good to be true. He'd never wimp out on you.
Enormous job or small task: He'll do whatever you ask.
With any project, he's great. What will they do at the state
now that he's hung up his tie? Enjoy retirement, guy!

Pardon us, Phil, if we say that we're ecstatic this day.
Think of what you can achieve spending free time at St. Steve!
Scrub walls and floors. Pour concrete. Massage the president's feet.
There's nothing you cannot do. We thank sweet Jesus for you!

Phil's not just handy, you see. He's also gentlemanly.
The nicest guy you could meet. The women all say he's sweet.
He handles people with care. And still has all of his hair.
He knows the right thing to do. Phil's just too good to be true.
2015, for Phil Williams

MY ST. STEPHEN FRIENDS (2016)

(Sung to the tune of "My Favorite Things" from "The Sound of Music")
We come to church for the following reasons:
Altar Guild beauty that flows through the seasons.
Solos by Nathan at Christmas and Lent.
Williamses hosting each major event.

Ruth's potluck themes that are festive and clever.
Small groups and OWLs. At a loss for words? Never.
Karl's flute that leaves us all music'ly fed,
before he hoists our kids over his head.

When the world is dark and frightful, when my heart is sad,
I simply remember my St. Stephen friends, and then I don't feel so bad.

Preludes by Katharine that start the tears flowing.
Beautiful babies who charm us while growing.
Cheslyn and Sarah and Leah and Sam.
Am I a Manna fan? You bet I am...

Happy to be part of a congregation
that has a red-shouldered hawk on occasion.
Susan, Mark, Gladys and Dave cracking jokes.
Ministry moments with underserved folks.

(Refrain)

Rita, Edita and Advent with chili.
Ridy and Ursula, Martha and Billie.
Leaders like Steve, Cheryl, Barb, Phil and Sue.
Jennifers? 3. Sandys? 4. And Vals? 2.

Marda, our shepherd, so gentle in spirit.
Music that stirs your heart each time you hear it.
Lovely young families and elders galore.
Dear God, what worshipper could ask for more?

(Refrain)

Warm-hearted greeters like Jan, Jamie, Karen.
Anna, Beth, Colin, Tom, Emily, Sharon.
Justice providers like Knab and like Dritt.
Michele, Woods, Shirley – they're just the right fit.

Times when we struggle with debt, death and cancer.
Times when we try so hard to hear God's answer.
Times when we wrestle with pains of our own.
Never a time we must go it alone.

(Refrain)

2016

HAVE YOU SEEN ST. STEPHEN'S SERVANTS?

(Sung to the tune of "Will You Let Me Be Your Servant?")

Have you seen St. Stephen's servants? Blessed with talents, one and all.
Having Katharine lead our choir's like having Rembrandt paint our wall.

Colin is a photo genius. Ruth's a diva of design.
Kar-I treats us to flute salad. Martha's banners age like wine.

Leaders, readers, ushers, teachers, cleaners, counters, finance pros.
Servants of St. Stephen work as one. That's how our faith life grows.
2019

I AM AN INTROVERT

(Sung to the tune of "We Are an Offering")

During our worship, I don't raise my hands. This is the way I was made.

I am an introvert.

You clap your hands during rousing hymns. I keep both hands on my book.

I am an introvert.

People like me don't want to be noticed by anyone
when in a crowd. We don't get loud.

You, on the other hand, are confident. You speak your mind without pause.

You are an extrovert.

You speak to strangers with warmth and wit. You come alive in a crowd.

You are an extrovert.

People like me don't want to be people like you – although
we'd love to try to be less shy.

I know it's hard for you to know me well. But I'm so grateful you try.

I am an introvert. I am an introvert.

2020

WHAT A BLESSING

(Sung to the tune of "Earth and All Stars")

Welcome to all. My, so much talent! Pray that God will be delighted this day.

Ah, what a show: Musical! Merry! Let your impeachment blues just melt away.

Here at this marvelous church, life is abundant. What a blessing!

This is where our siblings in Christ work, week after week making sure all's prepared.

Altar Guild saints clean up our messes, building strong bonds as their duties are shared.

Here at this marvelous church, we work together. What a blessing!

Buildings and grounds, always a challenge.

Wood can turn rotten and roofs are in doubt.

Weeds misbehave. Tame those azaleas! Still it's a gift to us, inside and out.

Here at this marvelous church, we are renourished. What a blessing!

Fellowship hall? Dingy and noisy. Not what they'd show you on HGTV.
But when fixed up, fragrant with chili, it's the best venue that you'll ever see.
Now at this marvelous church, God says it's showtime. One more blessing!
2020

ABOUT CALL COMMITTEES AND INTERIMS

HANG DOWN YOUR HEAD, ST. STEPHEN

(Sung to the tune of "Hang Down Your Head, Tom Dooley")

Came to us from prison — roughest job he'd had.
Now that he's done time here, jail don't seem so bad.

Hang down your head, St. Stephen. Hang down your head and cry.
Hang down your head, St. Stephen. Chaplain is sayin' goodbye.

Prison taught him reverence. He met Jesus there.
Here, he got hard labor. Lent can be a bear.

He's been a part-timer. What that really means:
"Part" of every day here. Days off? "In your dreams!"

(Refrain)

We'll sure miss his sermons, and his Bible lore.
He sure missed retirement. He's inching toward the door.
Well, now, boys . . .

Hang down your head and cry. Hang down your head and cry.
Hang down your head and cry. Chaplain is sayin' goodbye.
Hang down your head and cry. Hang down your head and cry.
(He's temporary)
Hang down your head and cry. Chaplain is sayin' goodbye.
Chaplain can't wait to fly. Chaplain is sayin' goodbye.

2000, for "interim interim" Pastor Warren Schave

CALL COMMITTEE

(Sung to the tune of "Secret Agent Man")

There's a group who had unbridled powers.
Every time they met, they went for hours.
They were our very best. They had a holy quest:
Find a pastor who could do "Chicago."

Call Com-mi-it-tee! Call Com-mi-it-tee!
You've painted us a profile and given us a name.

You spent months just trying to get started.
Half the people here were brokenhearted.
But then you hit your stride -- were Holy Spiri-fied.
Got three names. Scrapped two. And said: "It's Pammy."

(Refrain)

Now the Holy Spirit doesn't need you.
You've turned in your badge, as you agreed to.
Your work is done -- unless the pastor is a mess.
Then we get to blame you -- and start over.

(Refrain)

2001, for the Call Committee who recommended Pastor Pam Wellons

IF I WERE AN INTERIM

(Sung to the tune of "If I Were a Rich Man")

If I were an interim
Marty Luther Luther Marty Luther Luther Luther hey!
All day long you'd practice what I preached.
If I were an interim.

I'd never have to work hard.
Marty Luther Luther Marty Luther Luther Luther hey!
That's why God made people like Don Dowd --
So we interims could coast along.

I'd get to take my pick of cushy assignments, all under cool Midwestern skies.
Each church more polite than the one before.
I'd be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, promoting peace before your eyes.
By the time things floundered, I'd be out the door.

Oh, if I were an interim
Marty Luther Luther Marty Luther Luther Luther hey!
Think of all the miles I could rack up
On my little blue suitcase.

I'd always get to travel.
Marty Luther Luther Marty Luther Luther Luther hey!
See the USA the holy way:

See it as an in-ter-im!

July 2001, for interim Pastor Judith Wascher

LEAVING, BUT REMEMBER

(Sung to the tune of "Leavin' on a Jet Plane")

Well, your bag is packed, you're ready to go. The bishop's out in his red limo.
We hate to hold him up to say goodbye.
We have always known this day would come, the day when you would leave alone,
the day when we would tell you with a sigh:

Thank you for being here. You made our transition clear.
You have helped us more than you can know.
You're leaving, but remember: You're an honorary member.
We hate to see you go.

Oh, we waited months for you to come. We watched the clock and twiddled thumbs.
We even tried to build a golden calf.
You arrived in just the nick of time and guided us through this steep climb.
For a Yankee, you're a pastor and a half.

(Refrain)

Now the time has come to hug you. Aw, at least let Nathan hug you.
Just close your eyes. It won't be so bad.
Our interim is at an end. You were our pastor, are our friend.
We know we're going to miss you, so we're sad.

Thank you for being here. You made our transition clear.
You have helped us more than you can know.
You're leaving, but remember: You're an honorary member.
We hate . . . to see . . . you go.

July 2001, for interim Pastor Judith Wascher

MATCHMAKERS (A Plea to the Call Committee)

(Sung to the tune from "Fiddler on the Roof")

Matchmakers, matchmakers, make me a match! Find me a rev! Snag a great catch!
My soul's salvation is riding on you. So be careful what you do.

Matchmakers, matchmakers, I don't ask much! Give me the works -- just the right touch.
Someone like Jesus and also like me: Now that's what I want to see.

Adult ed could use a scholar. For Serving, get us one with a heart.
The rest of us promise we won't start picking the pastor you called apart.

Matchmakers, matchmakers, now hear my prayer. Pick us a pastor splendid and rare:
teacher and preacher and singer and saint – and then I'll have no complaint.

Adult ed could use a scholar. For Serving, get us one with a heart.
The rest of us promise we won't start picking the pastor you called apart.

Matchmakers, matchmakers, look at the clock. Roy's suitcase sits there on the dock.
Please ask the synod folks if it's allowed for us to appoint Don Dowd.

2007

FAREWELL SONG

(Sung to the tune of "Borning Cry")

We were there to hear your booming "Hi!" We were there when you arrived.
We were in transition time again and, by God, we've survived.
The new pastor coming to us soon will hear lots of tales of you.
You have helped us focus, helped us find what God would have us do.

Now we're here beside the SS Roy. Now we'll watch you sail away.
The horizon soon will swallow you. We don't know what to say.

Take our gratitude and take our love. You have led St. Stephen well.
You have shared our joys and healed our hurts much more than we can tell.

We'll remember well your booming "Hi!" We'll remember your bright smile.
And we pray that God will be with you through every wind-blown mile.

2007, for interim Pastor Roy Stackpole

TRANSUBSTANTIATION!

(Sung to the tune of "Oklahoma!")

"Trans-substantiation"! It's a word I love to say!
How it warms my heart. I feel so smart every time I say it. Hip-hooray!

"Trans-substantiation"! (It's a wafer made divine.)
"Hagiography" is new to me; it's a term I really can't define.

But friends don't know that, you see.
They're hagi-awestruck by me!

Whenever I-I-I-I-I use words from Philippi-i-i-i-i-i
my friends are thinking, "Gee, we're impressed by those Lutherans!
By those Lutherans – L-U-T-H-E-R-A-N! Go, Lutherans!"

2008, for interim Pastor Tom Frizzell's farewell

HE WAS OUR PASTOR

(Sung to the tune of "Blessed Assurance")

He was our pastor such a short time. Liturgies perfect, sermons sublime.
Wish we could keep him; wish he wouldn't go. We prayed to heaven. God told us no.

Want a good pastor? Get Tom Frizzell. Preacher and teacher, he is just swell.
He says he's ornery. We call it spice. With him to guide us, life has been nice.

He's in the Navy. We thought he'd be militaristic, stiff as a tree.
We were mistaken. He is fresh air. And he's a scholar beyond compare.

This is Tom's story, this is Tom's song. Now we're all whimp'ring all the day long.
This is Tom's story, this is Tom's song. He has a fan club; we all belong.

At water coolers all over town, we show off words that Tom passed around.
He loves the language, sure knows his Greek. Gave Gospels new life week after week.

God bless the future of Pastor T.
Another church now will get to see
how life is better when you're Frizzelled,
filled up with words that you've never spelled.

2008, for interim Pastor Tom Frizzell's farewell

CALL ME

(This is a song Pastor Marda might have sung when she heard that St. Stephen was seeking a pastor)

If you're feeling sad and lonely, little hopeless congregation,
send a message to me only. I'll send you my information.
Call me! Don't be afraid, but just call me!
You're RIC? No prob! Call me! Call me and I'll stick around.

Do you have potlucks? Well, then you're in luck!
Woods can make his pastries sing.
I, too, am itchin' to see your kitchen.
How much coleslaw should I bring?

I'm tight with the Holy Spirit. Heard about your vacancy there.
Interims are nice, but really don't you think that I should be there?
Call me! Then later you can install me!
Quiz me on Peter and Paul. We
don't have a moment to lose....

2009

CHOOSE ME FOR THE CALL COMMITTEE

(Sung to the tune of "Comfort, Comfort")

SINGER 1:

Choose me for the Call Committee. I would be the perfect pick.
I can spot an ideal pastor. I am reverent, smart and quick.
Holy Spirit, here I come! Note my deftness and aplomb!
I can help you work much faster as you search for our next pastor.

SINGER 2:

Please don't think that I am boastful, but I'd be a stronger choice.
Friends and relatives have told me that I speak with God's own voice.
I can help, church friends. Indeed, I alone have what you need.
Let us get this party started. Choose me, or be brokenhearted.

SINGER 1:

I'd do so much more than you would.

SINGER 2:

In your dreams! You've lost. I've won.

SINGER 1:

Jesus said I was his fav'rite.

SINGER 2:

He says that to ev'ryone.

UNISON:

Guess we'll have to wait and see.

Oh, what glory that will be!

Sorry that you'll be rejected.

I can't wait to be selected!

2017

WHO WILL OUR NEW PASTOR BE?

(Sung to the tune of "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore")

Who will our new pastor be? Alleluia. Pastor He or Pastor She? Alleluia.

For now, let's say Pastor They. Alleluia. We can't wait for that big day. Alleluia.

Will they preach with loving zeal? Alleluia. Be scared of a potluck meal? Alleluia.

Will they sing as angels do? Alleluia. Will they like me more than you? Alleluia.

Will they love our talent show? Alleluia. Or declare it's got to go? Alleluia.

Is the Call Committee pumped? Alleluia. Pray they won't let us be Trumped. Alleluia.

Who will our new pastor be? Alleluia. How much change can we foresee? Alleluia.

God, please send the perfect one. Alleluia. Send your Daughter! Send your Son!

Alleluia.

2018

ABOUT OUR VICARS

FAREWELL TO VICAR DAVID BERG

(Tom Buchanan wrote music for a general farewell song, and we would plug in verses detailing what we'd miss about each vicar or other person leaving)

Your Valley Vic philosophy of, "Hey, dude, I'm in ministry!"

Your playing, praying with the youth, your smiling way of speaking truth.

Your Constantly creative wife: Encouraging folks is her life.

But maybe most of all we'll miss the softness of Miss Kiki's kiss.

(1992, for Vicar David, Constance and their daughter)

FAREWELL TO VICAR ROBIN WHITLEY

Your gift for putting Gospel views in ducks, woodchucks and kangaroos.

How could a child be annoyed with owls who sound like Sigmund Freud?

Your youthful heart, your listening ear. The sermons you gave birth to here.

The beauty of your servant's song, which bids us, "Come, and sing along."

(1993)

O ROSE!

(Sung to the tune of "Arise!")

Arise, O Rose, be on your way! Ari-zo-na waits. What can we say?

You've shown the people here what faith-light reveals.

And your U-Haul will be like a book sale on wheels.

There she goes! O Rose!

Arise, O Rose, you're not alone. All your al-ler-gies will follow you home.

And so will our thanks for all that you've shared.

You'd preach and you'd teach — without being scared!

Heaven knows! Blow your nose! O Rose!

(1998, for Vicar Rose Commodore)

SING 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY' TO OUR VIC

(Sung to the tune of the Doxology)

Hey, Edwin, now you're 25. We thank the Lord that you're alive

and that you journeyed to St. Steve. Please tell us that you'll never leave.

Oh, by the way, there's one thing more. A homeless man is at the door.

He needs to speak with someone quick. Well, birthday boy, you ARE the vic.

And when you're finished with him, please review our church's policies on teaching Sunday School in Greek. Please have them ready by next week.

Amen.

2012

ABOUT OUR POTLUCKS

POTLUCK PRAYER

(Sung to the tune of the Doxology)

Spaghetti is our dish tonight. The sauce is green – can that be right?
On second thought, perhaps I'll wait: My meatball's crawling 'cross my plate.
Amen.
(1984)

FOR THE POTLUCK AFTER THE SHOW

(Sung to the tune of the Doxology)

Dear God, what have my churchmates done? They've slathered yam paste on a bun!
They've mixed anchovies with lamb stew! What will my little tummy do?
2010

LO, POTLUCK DRAWS NIGH

(Sung to the tune of "Lord, Today")

Lord, today we have said our prayers. Lo, potluck draws nigh.
We, your people who eat, so fearful, now are ready to cry.

Across the way, the crockpots all rage, bubbling with malice toward all.
Last year we lost some of our guests. Ptomaine, as I recall.

The day will come, the Lord promised us, when he will bellow, "Enough!
Out with this vile, obnoxious grub! How can you eat this stuff?"

Lord, today we have said our prayers. Lo, potluck draws nigh.
We, your people who eat, so fearful, now are ready to cry.
2010

THE POTLUCK'S READY TO BEGIN

(Sung to the tune of "The Feast Is Ready to Begin")

The crockpots hiss as you walk in. The potluck's ready to begin.
The kitchen doors are open wide. All kinds of dangers lurk inside.

Sing with fingers crossed for our meal tonight. Bring your Pepto and bring your appetite.
Notify your M.D. and next-of-kin. The potluck's ready to begin.
The potluck's ready to begin.

What's in that scary, steaming bowl? Could it be squirrel casserole?
The ambulance is standing by, in case some diners start to die.

(Refrain)

2012

POTLUCK NIGHT

(Sung to the tune of "Silent Night")

Potluck night. Potluck fright. Why's that stew green and white?

There's a bowl of mac without cheese. See the pea soup without any peas.

Glad I brought Oreos. Glad I brought Oreos.

Potluck night. Potluck fright. How is your appetite?

Satan's in those deviled eggs. Bite marks in the chicken legs.

Pray to God with each gulp. Pray to God with each gulp.

2013

ARISE, ARISE, IT'S TIME TO EAT

Arise, arise, it's time to eat! The meat loaf's here – minus the meat.

The veggies are black; they're shiny and hard.

The Jell-O was dropped in Graham's backyard. Close your eyes! Arise!

Arise, arise, the potluck's nigh. The bread will make Woods start to cry.

At least we have mac-aroni and cheese.

Now reach for the hot sauce. Just grab it and squeeze. Come on, guys! Arise! Arise!

2015

SONGS OF ST. STEPHEN (SERIOUS ONES)

THIS WATER FLOWS

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Gently, gently this water flows,
bringing love wherever it goes.

Hello, little one. God will touch you this day.
God will cradle you close and will bend down and say:
“Little one, see these two who are standing close by.
They will teach you of me. They will teach you to fly.
In their care you will bloom like a ripening vine.
For a time you’ll be theirs.
For all time you are mine.”

Gently, gently this water flows,
bringing love wherever it goes.

Hello, little one. Such a soft one you are.
Don’t cry – we’re nearby. We won’t ever stray far.
We’ll make you a trade, little God-sent delight:
a bit of our knowledge for some of your light.
We’re none of us perfect. We’re frightened. We’re flawed.
Remind us, please, how to be children of God.

Gently, gently this water flows,
bringing love wherever it goes,
wherever it goes, little one.

1985, for Jay Buchanan’s baptism

KNEEL ME DOWN

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Kneel me down now at your feet.
Kneel me down now at your feet.
Kneel me down, kneel me down,
at the altar kneel me down
for bread and wine, the loving sign
from you, God, and your Son.

Feed my soul with your holiness.
Feed my soul with your holiness.
Feed my soul, feed my soul,
with your promise feed my soul

with bread and wine, the loving sign
from you, God, and your Son.

Hear me sing of the peace I've found.
Hear me sing of the peace I've found.
Hear me sing, hear me sing
of your true love, hear me sing
of bread and wine, the loving sign
from you, God and your Son.

Keep this light shining in my heart.
Keep this light shining in my heart.
Keep this light, keep this light.
Shine right through me. Keep this light,
through bread and wine, the loving sign
from you, God, and your Son. Amen.
1985, from the Arise liturgy, revised in 1989

HYMN OF PRAISE

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

If God were an eagle, he'd swoop through the trees.
He'd flex all his feathers to catch the least breeze.
And people would shout, "Oh, what beauty in flight!"
If God were an eagle, so regal, so right.

If God were the wind, she'd run rings 'round the clouds.
She'd swirl 'round the world just caressing the crowds.
And people would sigh, "Oh, what gentleness there."
If God were the wind, whisp'ring in ev'rywhere.

If God were a mountain, a tower of stone,
it-would reach to the heavens, almighty, alone.
And people would cry, "Oh, what strength we can feel!"
If God were a mountain, a power so real.

God's more than a mountain, an eagle, the wind.
God stretches beyond where our hymns of praise end.
Almighty and yet delicate and light,
God came in the form of a baby one night.
And that is the reason our hearts burn so bright.
1985, from the Arise liturgy, revised in 1989

OFFERTORY

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

I reach in my pocket and pull out an offering
as if this gift were really mine.

It's not, Lord, I know, but I cling to it so
until my soul's voice can remind me that
whatever I have, Lord, is yours.

I visit with you for an hour on Sundays
as if it's a favor I do.

Lord, help me to see that to live faithfully
is to turn my days over to you because
whatever I have, Lord, is yours.

And now down the aisle comes a gift like no other.

The bread and the wine make me free.

The best gift of yours is the Son we adore.

The only gift I have is me. Take me.

Whatever I have, Lord, is yours.

1985, from the Arise liturgy

ARISE

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Arise, arise, embrace the day.

The world awaits – what will you say
to let the people know you're ready to live
by the power of this feast and to practice the peace
of our Lord? Arise!

Arise, arise, you're not alone.

The song you sing will follow you home
and hum in your heart. So if you begin
to forget whose you are, fix your eye on a star
and sing "Lord!" Arise!

1985, from the Arise liturgy

TRINITY

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

That God is my Creator, I believe, I believe.

I don't understand, but I believe.

That Jesus is my Savior, I believe, I believe.

I don't understand, but I believe.

That the Spirit is the flame that illuminates their names,
that they all three love me just the way I am,
that heaven's all around me, I believe, I believe.

I don't understand, but I believe.

I don't begin to understand, but I believe.

1985, from the original Arise liturgy

JOINED BY GOD

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Was it you who found me? Was it I who found you?

It is God who has guided our way.

It is God who has graced us with love and embraced us,
and God is the host here today.

In the days before God joined our hearts to each other,
we shone only dimly. But now

it is God who shines through us and lights up a new us.

We love, because God showed us how.

You are mine. I am yours. We are two. We are one.

You are mine. I am yours. We are one.

Today we leave our old selves behind. Today we become something more.

Today's our beginning. Today we start spinning
the life God fashioned us for.

And whatever may come in the years still unborn –
if our children are many or few, if our dreams fly or fail,
if our hopes sink or sail – it won't matter: I'll still have you.

You are mine. I am yours. We are two. We are one.

You are mine. I am yours. We are one.

1988

BORN TO BRING LIFE

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Born to bring peace to a world we ignited.

Born to bring light to a drizzly sky.

Born to bring love that we never invited.

Born to bring life. Born for us. Born to die.

Take and eat, this is his body. Take and drink, this is his blood.

See the cross beyond the stable. Symbols of life-changing bread.

Born that we'd follow the life that he led here.
Born that we'd see in his eyes what we craved.
Born that we'd hallow the blood that he shed here.
Born that we'd finally know we were saved.

Born that the Word might be visible to us.
Born that we'd see God alive here on Earth.
Born like the rest of us, fragile, so tiny.
Born like no other. Born Christ! Blessed birth!

1990, for Advent

WHEN VOICE MEETS VOICE

(No tune to this one yet, as I recall)

The Spirit gives us each a song to sing, and so we try.
A single voice lifts up, rings out, clear as an eagle's cry.
For all its beauty, though, the eagle flies and cries alone.
One voice cannot sing harmony. One voice sings on its own.

Two colors join to form a third, though neither knew they could.
Two flavors blend and are transformed; a taste is born, so good.
Two voices find each other as they're dancing through the air.
They create two-part harmony and dance with newfound flair.

And soon the two attract two more, and more, and finally
the song belongs to all of them, in four-part harmony.
They help each other find the notes and practice all four parts.
The Spirit gathers in their midst and nestles in their hearts.

The Spirit gives us ministries, the theme songs of our lives.
She bids us, "Seek another's voice, and when that voice arrives,
your ministry will have a sound that's fuller than before.
Your voice alone was beautiful. Your voice now is much more."

You can sing this song alone, but not the harmony.
If you minister alone, then there's no room for me.
We each have pieces of the song the Spirit loves to hear.
When voice meets voice meets voice meets voice, the Spirit's voice is clear.

1990

GRACE UPON GRACE

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

The world says the prize goes to those who are clever,

or ruthless, or mighty, or wealthy, or wise.
But you tell the world, "Let your heart sing a child's song."
The world never listens. And neither do I.

Yet you stay, and you say I am yours.
You shaped me and reshape me over and over again.
And I grow as I flow in your grace.

"Heaven," you whisper, "is already yours.
Why chase the salvation I've already brought?
Why fear the tomorrow I've already bought?
Trust me," you whisper. But trust we cannot.

Yet you stay, and you say we are yours.
You shaped us and reshape us, over and over again.
And you lift us with gifts of grace upon grace upon grace
upon grace upon grace.

1990

DARKNESS

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Darkness. All is darkness.
We thought he was the light. Now he is gone.

Darkness. All is darkness.
The cross has cost his life. Now we are lost.

Where is all the hope we tasted? Why does God let lives be wasted?
Better to have stayed alone than to have known his heart
and then lost it.

What will become of us? Who now will come for us?
God, are you done with us? Where is your hand?

Darkness. All is darkness. What will become of us? Now he is gone.
Now we're alone. God, so alone.

1991, for Good Friday

GIVE US LOVE

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

In a world of solo pathways, some that never intersect,
now two roads become one journey. Now two hearts, two lives connect.
Give us wisdom. May we learn from the pain of yesterday.

Give us faith. May tomorrow outshine even this new day.

Give us love. Give us life. Bless this husband, bless this wife.
Give us love. Give us love. Give us love.

Give us patience. May our hearts fill with peace when hurts arise.
Give us love. May we see your spirit in each other's eyes.

Give us love. Give us life. Bless this husband, bless this wife.
Give us love. Give us love. Give us love. Give us love.

1992, for the Hartungs' wedding

FROM THE DAY THAT I WAS BORN

From the day that I was born,
you have held me, rocked me, loved me.

I was hungry, and you fed me.
I was frightened, and you calmed me.
I was happy, you smiled with me.
I was lonely, you played with me.
I took chances, and you let me.
I was wrong, and you forgave me.
I was hurt, you always nursed me.
I was lost, you always found me.

Now when I imagine God,
I think of someone who loves me
as a mother, as a father,
loves me as you've always loved me
from the day that I was born.

1993

TO TOUCH GOD'S FACE

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Enter weeping, enter broken, limp into this place.
Come for comfort, come for healing, come to touch God's face.
Here we worship. Here we come to pray as one.
Life is worship: God – Creator, Spirit, Son.

Enter fragile, seated like a shadow in the pew.
Leave here strengthened, lifted by the souls surrounding you.
Enter grateful that you have a church that knows your name.
Open wide the door for those who don't know God by name.

Here we worship. Here we come to pray as one.
Life is worship: God – Creator, Spirit, Son.
1995, for the dedication of our new sanctuary

PASTOR

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Above us, below us, around us, throughout us, the music of God resounds.
Some hear it. Some fear it. Some scorn the true Spirit.
And some who are lost are found.
That is our choice: to turn our backs to God or fill our lives with God.

Pastor, shepherd, teacher, friend.
The choice you made is clear. You chose God.

That we, like you, might be selfless and joyful: Let us pray.
That we, like you, might kneel to give blessings: Let us pray.
That we, like you, might seek justice in action and prayer: Let us pray.
That we, like you, might be Jesus' face to a stranger: Let us pray.
That we, like you, might reach out to those most unlike us: Let us pray.
That we, like you, might learn to give comfort: Let us pray.
That we, somehow, might learn to live without you: Let us pray.

Pastor, shepherd, teacher, friend.
We knew someday, your races run, your time with us would end.
Go with God.
1999, for Pastor Emory Hingst's retirement

IT'S A BITTERSWEET DAY IN OUR WORSHIP SPACE

(Sung to the tune of "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood")

It's a bittersweet day in our worship space,
a difficult day as we try to face
our Jim blues, interim blues.

He has been a fine teacher and preacher who
would nurture our children and kid them, too.
He's leaving, and we're grieving.

We've always wanted to have a pastor just like Jim,
a kind and gentle and loving one, just like him.

So let's make the most of this very last day.

Since we're together, we lovingly say:
God, bless our Jim, watch over him.
He once was our pastor.

2008, for interim Pastor Jim Bezaire

THIS IS MY CHURCH

(Revised version of "This Is My Land," from the Lutheran Book of Worship)

This is my church, my favorite place to worship;
a place of peace and welcome unsurpassed.
This is my home, the church where God has called me.
Here are my hopes, my thoughts of members past.
But other churches have such sacred memories,
a worship home they know will always last.

The stained glass in my church's long lean window
colors the light that bathes our liturgy.
But other churches have their own sweet beauty,
and God must love each window equally.
So hear my song, O God of all the churches,
a song of peace for each community.

This is my prayer, O God of worship spaces.
Let me see mine as splendid but not best.
This building is a place we made to praise you.
But other buildings to our east and west
were also built by those who love you deeply.
And they, as we, live lives that you have blessed.
2012

YOU ARE WELCOME HERE

(Tune by Tom Buchanan)

Worship here beside me. Lift your voice with mine.
Contemplate the sermon, then share the bread and wine.
All of us have questions. God's not always clear.
So, whatever doubts you have, you are welcome here.

Jesus is my brother. He's the same to you.
I am saved by what he did, not by what I do.
All of us have questions, but this much is clear:
Longtime Christian, first-time guest, you are welcome here.

All of us have questions, times of doubt and fear.
We all seek the truth of God. You are welcome here.

2015

TO MY CONGREGATION: GREY SKIES AND BLUE

My prayers aren't always pretty, and my smile's not always real.
I'd love to join your laughter, but that's not the way I feel.
The anxious clouds of sadness come upon me without warning.
I never know just when, but sometimes here on Sunday morning.

Those clouds keep me from seeing the all-loving God you see.
They muffle the Good News you hear. It doesn't speak to me.
The sermons can ring hollow, and communion can be tough.
The chalice is half empty, not half full. It's not enough.

Not sad by choice, I'd love to be all smiles instead of grey.
And maybe next week I will be. Or next month. Not today.
So, God, if you can hear me through anxiety's dull roar:
Please heal me now, I beg you. Free my spirit. Let me soar.
2016

AT OUR SIDE

(Sung to the tune of "Day by Day")

Eight years now, you've been St. Stephen's pastor.
In that time, we've come to know your heart.
Through your sermons, God has come to life here.
Through your ministry, you've played a part
in the life of every single member.
We've known joys and sorrows. So have you.
We rejoice with you on your retirement.
Now we'll all be trying something new.

We've had members who have become pastors.
With you, it's the other way around –
moving from your place behind the altar
to join us, though still on holy ground.
We are blessed that you and Woods are with us.
If you'd left, oh, how we would have cried.
Blessed by God, we behold our new member.
Welcome, Marda. Worship at our side.

2016

LORD, COME SHELTER WITH ME

A Coronavirus Hymn

(Sung to the tune of "Let Us Break Bread Together")

Let us worship together from our homes. Reach out online together from our homes.

Life has changed from before. Now we shelter behind closed doors.
Oh, Lord, come shelter with me.

I confess, Lord, that I feel so afraid. I confess that I've worried more than prayed.
I wish this were a dream. I'm less faith-filled than I might seem.
Oh, Lord, come shelter with me.

Let us pray for the ill and those who've died. Let us pray for the families who have cried.
Let us thank those who care for the sick, stricken everywhere.
Oh, Lord, come shelter with me.

Let us hold hands together in our hearts while this illness still keeps us far apart.
One day soon, life will be somewhat more like it used to be.
Till then, Lord, come shelter with me.
2020

LET US NOW APPLAUD ISABEL

(Sung to the tune of "Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ")

Let us now applaud Isabel. As our cantor, she's sung so well.
She gave life to our prayers out loud, silver lining on COVID's cloud.

Thank you, Isabel. We can never tell
you how much you have meant this year. *(Repeat)*

When we worshipped at home, alone, your voice worked to uplift our own.
Now you're off to horizons new. Please remember that we love you.

Isabel, Godspeed! How you met our need.
Your pure voice was a gift from God. *(Repeat)*
2021, for Isabel Barton

MY ST. STEPHEN FRIENDS (2021)

(Sung to the tune of "My Favorite Things")

This past year's been such a strange aberration.
No crowded pews – not until vaccinations.
No more events in the fellowship hall. Oh, how we miss the sheer joy of it all.

No more big smiles – our masks totally hide them.
No more big hugs – there's a virus inside them.
No children's time, no more choir, no Arise. Our former laughter has turned into sighs!

But I have a quick solution when the world seems sad.
I simply remember my St. Stephen friends, and then I don't feel so bad.

Here's the good news, in a world that's so nervous:
Sundays at 10, Facebook brings us our service.
Kath-a-rine still sounds majestic online. All of the Bartons still sound so divine.

We still have hymns and communion and prayers,
Pastor, Church Council and faithful workday-ers.
Sure, we miss potlucks, but soon they'll return.
In a pandemic, there's one thing you learn:

When the world seems dark and frightful, when you're feeling sad,
you simply remember your St. Stephen friends, and then you don't feel so bad!
2021

