



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



THIS SUNDAY: WOW!

- If every church weekend were this busy, we'd be permanently, ecclesiastically fried. But once a year, at Christmastime? Glorious. Here's what's going on:
- Saturday, 10 a.m.: Gift-wrapping. These are the Giving Tree presents that Andrea and Cindy bought with our donations. Please let Andrea know if you plan to be there, so she can have enough doughnuts and coffee.
 - Saturday, 10:30 a.m.: Decorating the tree and the worship area.
 - Sunday: Deadline for returning your Giving Tree gifts, wrapped, with a tag on them (male or female, age and Giving Tree family number).
 - Sunday, during the 10 a.m. liturgy: Children's program.
 - Sunday, immediately after the liturgy: Congregational photo. We want as many members as possible in the picture – including you hard-working volunteers who will be setting up the potluck. Once photographer Colin Hackley gets everyone corralled (inside the sanctuary, not outside), it shouldn't take too long. *(The cropped picture above is from 2022.)*
 - Sunday, immediately after the photo: Potluck.
 - Whew.

GOOD NEWS ABOUT NEXT YEAR'S GIVING

By Pastor Tom

As of Tuesday, we had received 39 estimate-of-giving cards for 2025. Three other households give through Vanco and have not requested a change for 2025. Thirteen other households pledged support in 2024 and are still financially giving, but they haven't filled out a card yet. That makes a total of 55 households that are expected to financially contribute to St. Stephen's mission and ministry. The total pledged amount for 2025 so far is \$228,610! For 2024, by comparison, we had 48 households that pledged for a total of \$192,220. That's an increase of almost 18%!



Other encouraging statistics: 20 households say they're able to increase their giving in 2025. And four households are pledging for the first time. These are clear confirmations that God is active in this congregation!

With thanksgiving, we humbly recognize how important giving is to our faith formation. With clarity, we view these figures as support for the values that St. Stephen holds. With purpose, we will steward these resources to continue to proclaim the Gospel, administer the sacraments, form relationships and help those who suffer economically.

Thank you, Holy Spirit. And thank you, St. Stephen, for being active and engaged in the ministry of Jesus Christ.

(Estimate-of-giving cards are in the narthex and can be dropped into the collection plate. You also have the option of pledging directly to Office Manager Lori via email or phone.)

... AND AN UPDATE ON THIS YEAR’S GIVING



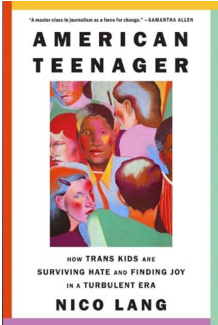
Well, this news is not quite as rosy as the item above. We still have a bit of work to do to finish 2024 in the black. Office Manager Lori reports: “Our giving has dropped in October and November (less than 18,000/month, when we need to be at \$23,052/month to meet budget). I haven’t reconciled November expenses yet, so as of Oct. 31, our non-restricted giving YTD was \$213,791.71 and our expenses were \$226,745. To make ends meet, we’ve had to dip into the GAP fund, which now has a balance of \$2,861. Mission support is up-to-date.” For those of us who’ve fallen behind in our pledges and who are financially able, this is a gentle reminder to make December a bountiful month for St. Stephen. Thank you.

LOOKING FOR A BOOK TO INSPIRE YOU?

Here are excerpts from publicity information that landed on our desk.

Media coverage tends to sensationalize the fight over how trans kids should be allowed to live, but what is incredibly rare are the voices of the people at the heart of this debate: transgender and gender-nonconforming kids themselves. For a groundbreaking new book, journalist Nico Lang spent a year traveling the country to document the lives of transgender, nonbinary and genderfluid teens and their families. Drawing on hundreds of hours of on-the-ground interviews with them and the people in their communities, “American Teenager: How Trans Kids Are Surviving Hate and Finding Joy in a Turbulent Era” paints a vivid portrait of what it’s actually like to grow up trans today.

From the tip of Florida’s conservative Panhandle to vibrant queer communities in California, and from Texas churches to mosques in Illinois, “American Teenager” gives readers a window into the lives of Wyatt, Rhydian, Mykah, Clint, Ruby, Augie, Jack and Kylie, eight teens who, despite what some lawmakers might want us to believe, are truly just kids looking for a brighter future.



“An evocative and authentic story of the love and resilience of transgender teens and their families. Lang’s storytelling is intimate and illuminating, walking a tightrope between the complex narratives of trauma and joy, without ever leaning too heavily into one and discounting the importance of the other.” (Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality)

“American Teenager: How Trans Kids Are Surviving Hate and Finding Joy in a Turbulent Era,” by Nico Lang, Abrams Press / October 8, 2024, U.S. \$30.00 / CAN \$38.00, ISBN: 978-1-4197-7382-2. Also available as an e-book.

EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM’S SERMON

... There was a bicycle shop in a little town that was constantly busy with the run-up to Christmas. On this particular day, a young boy wandered into the shop. He was dirty-faced, poorly dressed and obviously not from a well-to-do family. At first the staff was worried he might shoplift something, but soon it became clear that he was just looking around. He’d come in, peruse the new bicycles that were waiting to be bought as Christmas gifts, and then stand out of the way to watch the repair people work.

One day, after a large group of customers left with their purchases, he made a beeline over to the repair shop side of the business. He laid a rusty old bolt on the counter in front of them. “Excuse me,” he said politely, “can you put a new bike on this bolt?” Like us, the men there laughed at what he said. Only a child would think of putting a bike on a bolt instead of a bolt on a bike. Like ours, the laughter wasn’t intended to be mean or harmful, but the little boy was cut to the quick. He didn’t understand, but he knew he’d said something wrong, so he backed out and left the shop. The employees tried to catch him, but he was gone.

About a week later he came back. This time, though, he was even more reluctant to make eye contact with anyone in the store, but the girl at the counter saw him and let the repair shop know he was back. One of the guys called to him, “Hey kid!” The boy looked up. “You forgot your bolt the other day.”

And with that he wheeled out and presented the boy a bicycle built entirely out of scrap parts that the workers had salvaged on their own time....

SO MANY WAYS TO SERVE

In case you didn't get a copy of this at church Sunday, here's something our friends on the Church Council would like us to fill out.

Ministries of the Congregation

Name: _____

Please check the opportunities that interest you and meet your spiritual gifts. You can also circle individual items on the chart. Please add any additional talents you wish to share at the bottom. Thank you!

OPPORTUNITY WILLING TO SERVE

Buildings: Vacuuming, light bulb replacing, painting, small repair

Grounds: Leaf blowing, garden/landscape, fountain care, playground repair/upkeep, etc...



Outreach: Pack backpacks, Christmas Giving Tree shop and/or wrap presents, Manna volunteer, deliver donated goods as needed



Care & Hospitality: Set up/clean up for receptions, make coffee, write letters/birthday cards, home visit team, prayer team, fellowship

Counter/Finance: Offering counter, audit team, input weekly giving



Worship & Music: Choir, instrumental gifts, lector/worship assistant, greeter/usher, tech team, Children's Time, set up/clean up communion

Youth: Movie/Pizza night, confirmation

Young Adult: Small-group formation, Bible Study mixers



Other Talents: Please list

BEFORE YOU GO...

- As Cassandra White announced the past two Sundays, the third annual Hologays Market is scheduled for noon to 6 p.m. Saturday outdoors at the Gardens at LeMoyne, 125 N. Gadsden St. The Hologays Market features 20+ local LGBTQIA+ artists, makers and performers from Florida's Big Bend. You're invited to "enjoy festive shopping, warm treats from Tallahassee's own Toasty Taiyaki, interactive art projects, and more!" For additional information, visit www.queertallahassee.com/hologays.



- The recent Noisy Offering collected more than \$300 for Haitian Christian Ministries, thanks to the testimonials of volunteers Susan and Rudy Hehn.



- 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, out by the nametags, or ask Lori to sign you up. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home! The 2025 chart is now available.

UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS



Laura Sullivan - 12/14
Rita Ford - 12/18
Wesley Holdcraft - 12/18
Carol Santos - 12/26
Pr. 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
Mary Andersen - 01/11
Mason Bonfanti - 01/11
Sharon Gordon-Girvin - 01/11
Erin Kenney - 01/11
Mark Canning - 01/13

COMING UP

Today:

Noon - Al-Anon meets in fellowship hall (FH)

7 p.m. - AA meets in FH

This Friday:

9:30 a.m. - TOPS meets in FH

This Saturday:

10 a.m. - Gift wrapping session for the Giving Tree

10:30 a.m. - Decorating the sanctuary

This Sunday:

9 a.m. - Book study

9:30 a.m. - Choir practice

10 a.m. - Worship, Third Sunday of Advent/
Children's program

11:15 a.m. - Congregational photo

11:30 a.m. - Potluck

4 p.m. - Congolese Christian worship in FH



Monday, December 16:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH

7 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH

Tuesday, December 17:

5 p.m. - NA meets in FH

Wednesday, December 18:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in FH

7 p.m. - Choir practice



If you have news or photos to share,
please send them to Lori at

sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com.

Don't forget our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee>.

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The Rev. Tom Holdcraft, Pastor