



# ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

## St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



### RIGHT HERE IN OUR MANGER

Sunday’s liturgy doubled as our annual Christmas program, and as always it was delightful. Organizers Rita Ford and Emily Stover once again mixed music, dance and storytelling to share the Christmas tale. And once again, the audience could marvel at how the young participants – who in their early years could do little more than toddle around dressed as adorable sheep – soared in confidence and talent. Many thanks to everyone who took part.



Rita has her own thank-you list. She wrote: “Thanks to Emily Stover, who came up with ‘Sounds of Christmas,’ and to Andrew Stover, who provided many of our sound effects. They did such a wonderful job with the kids. Thank you, Bastian, Armand, Ceilia, Violet and Graham. Thank you, Pastor Tom, for providing the instruments. And special thanks to Colleen, who is always willing to fill in where needed. Thank you, Astrid, for your beautiful violin rendition, and you, Isabel, for your singing and guitar music. Also, thanks to Karl and Katharine, who helped make our program a



success with their always wonderful music. Our world is a beautiful place with music, poetry and laughter.” *(Photos by Colin Hackley)*

# LET’S HEAR IT FOR THE DECORATORS

The Christmas program wouldn’t have been nearly as memorable without the efforts of those who showed up the day before to decorate the tree and the poinsettia-rich altar area. Many thanks to:

- Pastor Tom (way up on a ladder)
- Margaret Bowers
- Judi Duffy
- Linda Eshleman
- Rita Ford (looking nervously toward that ladder)
- Jacob Nallapu
- Billie Reardon
- Carol Santos
- Anita Sawh
- Barbara Sullivan
- And Susan Warren. *(Photo by Susan)*



# IF YOU’RE STILL ESTIMATING...



Yes, there’s still time for you to turn in your estimate-of-giving cards for next year. Already, the pledging news is encouraging.

“I’d like to express my appreciation to the congregation for the terrific response in returning the estimate-of-giving cards to the Finance Committee and the Church Council,” Pastor Tom says. “We are still compiling figures, but it’s safe to report that we will surpass last year’s pledges, and I am hopeful we will meet our collective 10%-giving-increase goal for 2026! I praise God for everyone’s generosity!”

Blank pledge cards are available in the narthex, if you need one. Or, easier still, just send a note to Office Manager Rita with your estimate of giving.

# A FAREWELL TO ANN

Reminder: The celebration of life for Ann Hingst is scheduled for 1 p.m. Saturday, across the street at Faith Presbyterian. A reception will follow at St. Stephen. Instead of flowers, Ann suggested memorials to St. Stephen, Big Bend Habitat for Humanity, The Kearney Center, Second Harvest of the Big Bend, the Ann & Emory Hingst Fund at the Community Foundation of North Florida, or a favorite charity. *(Ann is shown here in Colin’s congregational photo from 2024)*



## GOOD NEWS FOR MANNA

By Jamie Martinez

As our recent newsletters have explained, #GiveTLH is a community effort underwritten by philanthropist and businessman Rick Kearney that spotlights local nonprofits. Manna on Meridian, the food pantry that St. Stephen and other congregations support, was one of six finalists for micro-grants. The GiveTLH results were announced Dec. 10, and Jamie was there. Here is her report.



I showed up in my best dress recently to the Osceola Grill, on FSU's campus, for the GiveTLH award show. I had a view of Doak Campbell Stadium as I socialized with my fellow Manna volunteers for the first hour. The anticipation built as a decadent and delicious dinner and dessert were served. As the last dessert plates were carried away, they started playing the heartfelt videos that had been made to promote and highlight each charity organization. The video for Manna highlighted the impact we have on our local community. It was so thrilling to hear Shellie and Burt in the video, and it renewed my hope that Manna might have a shot at winning some money.

Finally they announced the winners, and my heart soared when they announced that Manna had gotten third place and won \$2,500 from Rick Kearney and the Beatitude Foundation! As they took the picture of our group with the trophy, I knew that the extra money would allow us to help many more people in the coming months.



I hope that this win will inspire others to get involved. I have been volunteering at Manna since I was in high school. I continue to help because of the tangible difference that I can make. Everyone at Manna is committed to helping those in need, and the leadership is always looking for how to stretch resources further to help more people.

First place went to Redemptive Love Farm and Rescue, which received \$10,000 in grant funding and \$10,000 in marketing services from Bowstern Marketing. The Blessing Cup, which provides shelter, food, clothing and financial assistance for what it calls "the elderly poor," came in second and received a \$5,000 grant. For more information about GiveTLH, or to watch the nominee videos, visit <https://givetlh.com/>. For more about Manna, visit <https://www.facebook.com/p/Manna-on-Meridian-100087135126205/>.

## DIFFERENT PATH, SAME DESTINATION

"I judge people by how they treat me, and Rob Reiner was a Godsend in my life. We got along great, we loved each other.... He was always on my side. When people would say to me, 'What do you think of his politics?' I would say, 'I think Rob Reiner is a great patriot. Do I agree on many of his ideas on how that patriotism should be enacted, to celebrate the America that we both love? No. He doesn't agree with me either, but he also respects my patriotism. We had a different path to the same destination, which was a country we both love.... Because you disagree with people doesn't mean that you have to hate people.'" (James Woods, actor and Donald Trump supporter, quoted in Variety)



## UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

Wesley Holdcraft - 12/18  
Rita Ford - 12/18  
Carol Santos - 12/26  
Kate Stuart - 12/29  
Tom Holdcraft - 12/29  
Mike Martinez - 12/30  
Linda Eshleman - 01/04  
Lynn Gunderson - 01/04  
Karen Olson - 01/05

## BEFORE YOU GO...

- The next congregational meeting is Sunday, Jan. 18, says Pastor Tom.
- Want to become a member of St. Stephen? Seven other folks are doing so soon, and it's always nice to have company when you're up there by the altar, taking that important step into membership. Please let Pastor Tom know if you'd like to have that conversation with him.
- Interested in attending a weekly Bible study? We're starting one at 10 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 8. We'll study the Gospel of Matthew.
- Offering envelopes for 2026 are in the narthex. Pick yours up, please.
- We home worshippers love it when someone waves to the camera during the Sharing of the Peace. It makes us feel seen!
- This is the final newsletter of the year. Many thanks to Pastor Tom, Lori Zengel, Rita Ford, Colin Hackley, Caroline Collins, Sharon Simmons, Margaret Bowers, Susan Warren and the many others who have contributed mightily to making this year's newsletters possible! See you next year.
- Oh, and the photo? It's a quick, behind-the-scenes look at what amazing things can happen when you help decorate the sanctuary for Christmas. Pastor Tom just happened to have his camera ready Saturday morning when, suddenly, from out of nowhere, a Chewbacca-like creature resembling Rita started inexplicably chewing on Judi's fingers. We're happy to report that Judi is fine, and Rita is fine ... but Chewbacca has not been seen since.



## SERVING THIS WEEK

**Pastor Tom Holdcraft**, Preaching and Presiding; **Audrey Post**, Assisting Minister; **Rob Schiffer**, Cup Minister; **Stephanie Leitch**, Lector; **Ben Bush and Sandy Lamb-Daniels**, Tech Team; **Linda Eshleman and Barbara Sullivan**, Altar Guild; **Patricia Handschy and Rob Schiffer**, Counters; **Simone Schuster**, Cantor; **Denise Bookwalter**, Announcements

## COMING UP

### Today:

Noon - Al-Anon meets in Pastor Emory Hingst Memorial Fellowship Hall, aka Hingst Hall (HH)

7 p.m. - AA meets in HH

### This Friday:

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

### This Sunday:

9 a.m. - Bible study

9:30 a.m. - Choir

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

### Monday, December 22:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

### Tuesday, December 23:

5 p.m. - NA meets in HH

### Wednesday, December 24:

5:30 p.m. - Choir

6 p.m. - Christmas Eve Service



If you have news or photos to share,  
please send them to Rita at  
[sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com](mailto:sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com).

Don't forget our Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee>.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, ELCA