



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

SUCH MEANINGFUL MINISTRY

Dear St. Stephen,

This is a note of deep appreciation to all the helpers who so graciously served families and the church during the three funerals over the past month. Your quiet strength, compassion and hospitality reflected the love of Christ Jesus in every detail — from preparing the sanctuary, to greeting family and friends who were grieving, to providing rest and food, bringing comfort in ways we don't always see. In moments of sorrow, your service became a ministry of hope and healing. Thank you for being the heart, hands and feet of the church. The Lord blesses me with your kindness.

Pastor Tom



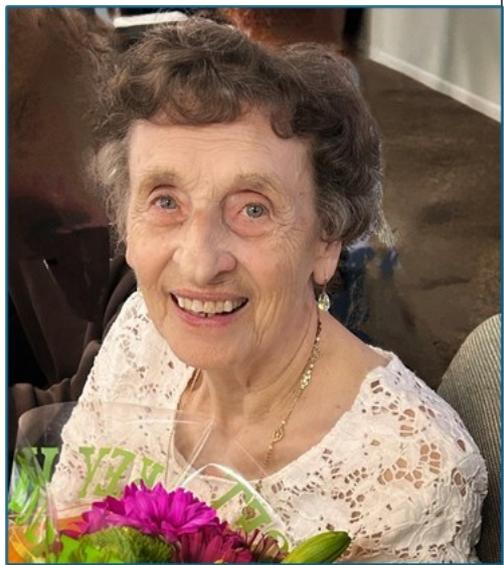
IT'S NOT TOO LATE TO DONATE

As of Wednesday, we had raised a breathtaking total of \$1,482 for Capital Tea, the trans support group spotlighted at our recent Ministry of Reconciliation Sunday celebration. In case you haven't had a chance yet, this Sunday is the final day to make your donations for Capital Tea through St. Stephen. You may deliver or mail a check; use the Venmo app @stephen-saint; or use PayPal. Whichever option you choose, make it payable to "St. Stephen Lutheran Church" and designate it for "Capital Tea." After this Sunday, you may donate directly to Capital Tea at <https://capitaltea.org/>.



MEET A NEW MEMBER: MARGARETE DECKERT

Margarete Deckert (pronounced "Marguerite") joined our congregation last month. She's a retired teaching assistant who until recently worshipped in the Roman Catholic tradition. In 1988 her husband, Fred, retired from IBM in New York state and they moved to Tallahassee, home of daughter Caroline Collins. Caroline, longtime St. Stephen member, interviewed her mom so the rest of us could get to know her. Read on!



PREVIOUS CONGREGATIONS: "I was raised Roman Catholic in Germany. As a child, one of six siblings, I was the one with the extra energy, so each year on the Feast of the Three Kings I climbed the 612 icy steps to Kloster Engelberg to bring home holy water for our family. After we came to the U.S. in 1953, faith remained central in my life, especially as we raised our daughters."

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: "When my daughters were growing up, I loved sewing their clothes, gardening, cooking and baking. With Fred, I enjoyed hiking, square dancing and running. As we slowed down, we joined Premier Gym, where I replaced running with swimming laps."

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO VISIT ST. STEPHEN: "When we were living at Mulligan Park, I would get rides to the Catholic church with a neighbor. So

when we moved to an assisted-living place about two years ago, I lost my ride and missed going to church. Caroline offered to pick me up and bring me with her to St. Stephen. Right away, I liked Pastor Tom and his lovely, friendly family. Colleen, Jonas and Judi as well as the ushers and other people at St. Stephen made me feel welcome. The liturgical prayers, music and communion were all comfortingly similar to the worship experience I was used to.”

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A MEMBER: “Pastor Tom has been a compassionate presence during some of the most difficult moments of my life — through Fred’s illness and death, his burial and celebration of life, and my own hospitalization this past summer. Members of the St. Stephen family also stepped in to help, offering hospitality and care. Their kindness made me feel that I truly belonged. When I was unable to attend worship for several months, Pastor Tom brought me the Eucharist. Now that I am back on my feet and able to worship in person again, joining felt like the right next step.”

CLOSING THOUGHTS: “As my joining date approached, I found myself wondering whether becoming part of a Lutheran congregation would feel



disloyal to the Catholic faith of my upbringing, which was so central to my parents and our family life. I still hold that faith close and wanted reassurance that this step honored, rather than diminished, what they had given me. As is my habit whenever I have a burden on my heart, I turned to prayer. In my booklet of devotions there is a novena to St. Thérèse that asks for a heavenly rose as a message of love. It wasn’t until later, when I was rereading those prayers, that it

occurred to me that my sign WAS delivered — in the form of a beautiful camellia bloom that Caroline had brought me earlier that day. It was a message of reassurance that returned my peace of mind.”

Look for Margarete’s contact information in our directory. If you don’t have that, check with Rita in the church office.

GOOD CAR NEWS

By Pastor Tom

I’m pleased to announce that almost \$4,000 has been raised to cover the cost of repairing a member’s car! In the midst of our collection, we received unexpected news from the mechanic: The vehicle was unrepairable. However, just as we experienced that bad news, a person in our church stepped forward to offer their used vehicle at no cost! What a blessing! The money collected will be used for title and registration costs and any other repairs that may be needed upon inspection. Thank you again to all who donated and prayed for a positive outcome. God is great!



CATCH STEPHANIE IN ACTION ... TWICE

You can enjoy some of Stephanie Leitch’s creative artistry in the next few days. “Both events are great for kids, as well as kids of all ages,” Stephanie says. Saturday morning, she’ll be giving a lecture at the Challenger Center as part of Florida State’s ambitious Festival of the Creative Arts. Specifically, she’ll be part of an event titled “It’s the Weather!,” sharing a new perspective on weather’s visual history. It sounds fascinating, as you’ll see if you follow this link: <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/entertainment/things-to-do/2026/01/29/science-music-weather-come-together-at-fsu-festival-of-creatorexplre-weather-and-more-at-fsu-festival/88369388007/>. It’s hard to pin down an exact time she’ll be in the spotlight, but she’s estimating 11 a.m. or noon.

Also this weekend, Stephanie will be the narrator in the Tallahassee Irish Step Dancers’ production of “The Snow Queen” at Theatre



Tallahassee. “It’s a fun show,” she says, adding: “My boyfriend dances with the troupe, and I’ll have to fake Irish steps during the curtain call.” Performances are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 2 p.m. Sunday. Ticket prices vary, with a minimum of \$16.13. You can get your tickets online or at the door. Visit <https://tallahasseearts.org/event/the-snow-queen-presented-by-the-tallahassee-irish-step-dancers-4/>.

GRATITUDE VS. HOPE

This is from the Believing newsletter published weekly by The New York Times. Here, editor Lauren Jackson quotes from an essay by Kevin Kelly, a co-founder of WIRED, on hitchhiking and kindness:

I’ve slowly changed my mind about spiritual faith. I once thought it was chiefly about believing in an unseen reality; that it had a lot in common with hope. But after many years of examining the lives of the people whose spiritual character I most respect, I’ve come to see that their faith rests on gratitude, rather than hope....

The faithful I admire are not certain about much except this: that this state of being embodied, inflated with life, brimming with possibilities, is so over-the-top unlikely, so extravagant, so unconditional, ... that it is indistinguishable from love.

A SAVE-THE-DATE REMINDER



On Saturday, April 11, we’ll gather for a spiritual retreat at the Goodwood Carriage House. The theme is “Waiting for Eden: Holding Onto Hope in Hard Times.” And it’s free. The keynote speaker will be Jacqueline Bussie, whose latest book is “Love Without Limits: Jesus’ Radical Vision for Love With No Exceptions.” The next day, April 12, she will be the guest preacher at our liturgy. This Sunday, Susan Hehn will provide details on how to register for the retreat. Deadline for registration is March 15.

OUR HUNGER FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS: EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM’S SERMON

[I]nstead of working to focus on all of [the Beatitudes], I’m going to select the one that I believe is most specific to the need of our St. Stephen community on this day and in this age. And I am led to ... “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness means having a visceral desire for justice. In a time of unrest, violence and turmoil, this kind of desire puts bodies on the line and brings forth resolve to speak up and confront systemic oppression, especially on the poor and marginalized. It leads people to speak honestly and openly. To denounce hostile aggression, death squads and the disappearances of innocent people. It leads us away from the disastrous move that allows for the extremely wealthy to take the reins of government decision-making and national policy.

Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is equating the necessary desire for food and water with the necessary desire for justice and fairness. Groups of suffering people came to Jesus then, and they/we come to Jesus now. As we hold our breaking hearts together and watch videos of unarmed people being dragged, tackled and shot in the street, we struggle to understand how these actions have come to this day and this country, as in the days of executions behind the Iron Curtain of East Berlin and the Berlin Wall. That wall separated democracy from authoritarianism.

As this violence builds around communities, we must gather strategies and practices that keep us from becoming numb and apathetic. We must speak, gather together in prayer, open ourselves to the Living Presence that draws us to movement and clarity. We must learn to train ourselves to see and name violence but not become violent. We must prepare our response to lies without being cynical, and propel ourselves to stay tender in the presence of suffering.

BEFORE YOU GO...

- The OWLs will gather for this month's lunch at 11 a.m. Tuesday at the Lively Café, at St. John's Episcopal downtown. Please contact Barbara Sullivan or Audrey Post to let them know whether you plan to join in.
- You might want to leave home early Sunday morning. The annual Tallahassee Marathon is taking place, and in years past some of us have been held up at major intersections by kindly police officers making the world safer for huffing and puffing runners. Please drive carefully.
- Need the contact information for a St. Stephen member? Use your digital directory. Don't have it on your phone? Office Manager Rita can fix you up.
- Please remember that you can look up past sermons or newsletters that you missed. Visit our website: <https://ststephenlutherantally.com/>.
- 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 name tags, or ask Rita to sign you up. Include the \$40 with your regular offering. And then take the flowers home!
- And here is the classic car of the week, possibly (if God performs a miracle) the car that will take the OWLs to lunch next week. It's a '52 Chevrolet! It just so happens that the family of young Lex Lutheran had a '52 Chevy way back when – though it certainly wasn't red, and he doesn't remember seeing smartly dressed spectators oohing with delight, or spotlights beaming from on high.



SERVING THIS WEEK

Pastor Tom Holdcraft, Preaching and Presiding; **Rob Schiffer**, Assisting Minister; **Jen Dritt**, Cup Minister; **Judi Duffy**, Lector; **Caroline Collins and Sandy Lamb-Daniels**, Tech Team; **Anita Sawh and Rita Ford**, Altar Guild; **Billie Reardon and Rob Schiffer**, Counters; **Pastor Tom**, Cantor; **Jan Harrison and Patrick Kennell**, Ushers; **Denise Bookwalter**, Announcements

UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS

Barb ODonnell - 2/5
Ben Bush - 2/11
Chris Reece - 2/15
Patrick Kennell - 2/18
Jackie Mustian - 2/25
Lisa Medley - 2/25
Judi Duffy - 2/27
Rob Schiffer - 2/28
Jan Harrison - 3/2
Jim Christianson - 3/3



COMING UP

Today:

10:00 a.m. - Bible study

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: Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

11:15 a.m. - Outreach meeting

Monday, February 9:

5:00 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

Tuesday, February 10:

5:00 p.m. - NA meets in HH

Wednesday, February 11:

5:00 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

7:00 p.m. - Choir

Thursday, February 12:

10:00 a.m. - Bible study



If you have news or photos to share,
please send them to Rita at
sslc@ststephenlutherantally.com.

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

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, ELCA