



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter



WANT TO ADD TO THIS PILE IN THE FELLOWSHIP HALL? Sunday is the last day to contribute full-size bedding to help out the local people who lost so much in a recent apartment fire. The biggest need now is blankets and comforters, either new or gently used. And what better gift can a church give than a comforter? *(Photo by Rita Ford)*

IF YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY PLEDGED...

Last Sunday, St. Stephen people started turning in their estimates of giving for 2026. If you haven't done so already, now is the time. In his stewardship message Sunday, Rudy Hehn reminded us why our giving to St. Stephen is so important. Below is an excerpt.



This is a special place and we want it to prosper. It needs money to do that. That was true 2,000 years ago. Jesus and the early church spoke of money often. And we continue to use your donations as a tool to fulfill our mission: Feed people who are hungry; make quilts for people who are cold; encourage one another through our worship and music; give infants in our community a car seat; make sure that every child has presents under their Christmas tree; donate school supplies so kids returning to school can succeed. We need a church that clearly says the gender of your spouse or partner does not matter to God, and that being queer is OK.

That's why we need to give back to St. Stephen. The past couple of years, we either have just broken even or have run a small deficit. The finance committee went through our budget carefully to be sure we made wise decisions about our expenses. We trimmed where we could and looked for the best way to use our funds. To do our best as a church, we need your help. What we are asking is a 10% increase in our giving in 2026. If you can give a little more than 10%, great. Your larger share will assist someone who perhaps is having a difficult time and cannot do more now. We also request an estimate of giving, to help guide the people constructing our budget. It can be on paper or in an email to the church office. You can even send it by passenger pigeon – just so long as it reaches us! As our previous stewardship speakers said, this is our home. Let's make it the best it can be.

A BIG WEEKEND

--Saturday morning: We'll be decorating the sanctuary, starting at 9:30 a.m.

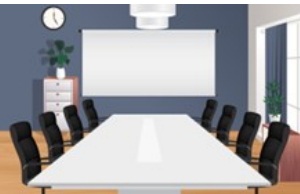
--Sunday morning: In that gaily decorated sanctuary, we'll have our annual Christmas program. Things are still coming together, but more than likely you can expect a Haydn concerto on flute by Astrid van der Mark; solos by Simone Schuster and Isabel Barton; top-drawer acting by Ceilia, Violet, Bastian, Armand, Elliot and Graham; and dance by you -know-who. And afterward, cookies and hot chocolate! *(Poster by Margaret Bowers)*



--Sunday morning: It's deadline time for turning in your Giving Tree packages, wrapped and labeled according to Andrea Notley's instructions. Drop them off in the Matthew Room.

NURSERY NEWS

Quietly, without fanfare, St. Stephen has added a small conference room – and subtracted a nursery. Inquiring minds listened to last Sunday's announcements and heard more than one reference to the "lobby conference room." Some of us who've been worshipping from afar thought, "Huh?" So we asked Pastor Tom.



"Yes, it sounds sad to say, but the nursery had become junky and unused," he replied. "Along with that, the heat and air in the Matthew Room finally gave out, and we needed a place for Sunday Bible Study and for Compassionate Friends to meet." So, at least for now, no nursery.

WHAT ANN WOULD SAY

By Greta Margaret Scavone
Dearest SSLC Family & Friends,

On behalf of Ann Hingst, thank you for your devoted and faithful support to her in every way imaginable throughout her illness – for your personal visits, text messages, phone calls, emails, greeting cards, letters and gifts, all of which flowed abundantly through Ann's remaining days in a constant stream of love that amazingly never ceased.



For the final eight and a half months of Ann's journey home, as her church family and cherished friends, you walked right beside her on a path where God's beauty and life's struggles seem to be mysteriously intertwined. You were her companions through the brightest rays of light and the darkest shadows. You were her smiles and laughter over shared memories of enduring bonds. You were her tears and comfort through the bittersweet moments that words dared not express. Ann was there! We were there!

And because we were there, we share the unique bond of having walked together with our beloved Ann in the shadow of a rainbow! See you on the other side of the rainbow, dearest Ann!



The celebration of life for Ann is scheduled for 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 20, 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.

EXCERPT FROM PASTOR TOM’S SERMON

Fire is mentioned in this section of Matthew in connection with the Holy Spirit, and it’s mentioned in connection with chaff at the end. The wheat is gathered and the chaff is burned with unquenchable fire. God’s fire is painful. It’s judgment language that, too often, is carelessly thrown around by irresponsible religious leaders.

The incredibly popular John the Baptist used the image of this “Other One” who’s coming with winnowing fork in hand. We immediately think of good people being separated from bad people. Thoughtless religious leaders weaponize this interpretation to note who’s in and who’s out, playing like they are God....

While we might conclude that John’s words here revealed he didn’t fully comprehend just what this “Other One” was about to do, we can also look deeper into the images ... to see that wheat and chaff are parts of the same cereal plant. So instead of dividing people, this interpretation leads us to see that we are the cereal plant, you and I. This Jesus, the One who is coming, will keep the valuable (precious, unique) you and me. The parts that make Tom, Tom, and the parts that make you, you, will be kept. Call it the soul, the self or the inner spirit. That’s kept safe and secure while the dry, scaly husk gets tossed, burned or blown away. That’s the good news of this text.

BEFORE YOU GO...

- Want to become a member of St. Stephen? Six 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. Stay tuned for further details.
- Offering envelopes for 2026 are in the narthex. Leaf through and see whether there are some with your name attached.
- The Tallahassee Youth Orchestra concert, featuring Astrid and other talented musicians, is scheduled for 2 p.m. Sunday at FSU’s Opperman Music Hall.
- David Kessler, author of “Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief,” is offering a free online grief support program to help the bereaved through the Christmas season. Caroline Collins urges all who are interested to sign up at <https://www.davidkesslertraining.com/holiday-grief-support>.
- 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!



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS



Maria (Ridy) Hofer - 12/11
Laura Sullivan-Hackley - 12/14
Wesley Holdcraft - 12/18
Rita Ford - 12/18
Carol Santos - 12/26
Kate Stuart - 12/29
Tom Holdcraft - 12/29
Mike Martinez - 12/30

SERVING THIS WEEK

Pastor Tom Holdcraft, Preaching and Presiding; **Beth Alexander**, Assisting Minister; **Loraine Sundberg**, Cup Minister; **Graham Reese**, Lector; **Mark Greeley** and **Caroline Collins**, Tech Team; **Susan Warren** and **Rita Ford**, Altar Guild; **Billie Reardon** and **Loraine Sundberg**, Counters; **Karl Barton**, 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. - No Choir

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

Monday, December 15:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

Tuesday, December 16:

5 p.m. - NA meets in HH

Wednesday, December 17:

5 p.m. - TIMA meets in HH

7 p.m. - Choir



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