



# ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH

A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY BRINGING GOD'S LOVE TO THE WORLD



## 2024 Annual Report

St. Stephen Lutheran Church 2025 Annual Meeting

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**St. Stephen Lutheran Church**

## **2025 Annual Congregational Meeting Agenda**

**January 26, 2025 (Fellowship Hall)**

Call to Order, 10:45am	Ted Field
Opening Devotions	Pastor James Muske
Approval of the 2024 Congregational Meeting Minutes *	Ted Field
Pastor's Report	Pastor James Muske
Election of 2025 Council members	Ted Field
Introduction of Continuing Council Members	
Introduction of Council Nominees	
Congregational vote *	
Expression of appreciation for outgoing Council Members	
Election of Church Council Officers *	Ted Field
Election of 2025 Nominating Committee *	Cheryl Skrypez
Installation of 2025 Church Council	Pastor James Muske
Outreach Ministry Report	Marla Amborn
Treasurer's 2024 Report *	Mary Beth Skunes
2025 Budget	Mary Beth Skunes
Review of 2025 budget	Mary Beth Skunes
Congregational vote *	
Blessing	Pastor James Muske
Adjourn	Kathy Stickler

\* requires Congregational vote

St Stephen Lutheran Church  
**2024 Congregational ANNUAL Meeting Minutes**  
January 28, 2024

Marla Amborn called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm. There was a quorum with 51 voting members in attendance. Constitutional requirement – quorum is 20% of 2023 average weekly attendance which includes in-person (average 90) and online (average 14).

**Additions to Agenda** – Marla Amborn

Add to the end of agenda (after 2024 budget vote) opportunity for questions and comments.

*MOTION: A motion was made to allow additional agenda item of open forum question/comments following 2024 budget vote by Ted Field; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Diane Swanson. Voted on and approved unanimously.*

There was a question as to why we can't have next year's annual meeting scheduled immediately following Sunday worship service. Marla asked if this should be something we should vote on and there was agreement.

*MOTION: A motion to schedule the 2025 annual meeting to follow shortly after the Sunday worship service was made by Mary Beth Skunes, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Gretchen Trender. Voted on and approved unanimously.*

**Opening Devotion** – Pastor Karri Anderson

**Psalm 33:22 – “Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.”** My devotion is on “Hope.” Hope is a condition of the human spirit, a sense that things will work out, confidence that our difficulties will end at some point. Hope can be tested sometimes too. With our challenging budget we are feeling that this year. Many things can take a toll on hope, sometimes we can be more fearful than hopeful and need to work on that. Hope gives us strength to continue, sustains us when we are suffering. How do we build our confidence? We need to express our fears and anxieties with each other, that is what community is all about. If fear is bottled up, it grows greater and causes more fear. Hope increases when shared. That is when community is built. Hope is kindled when remembering past difficulties and to see God is here with us. Hope is kindled when we sing. Question: As we look toward the future, when has this congregation struggled in the past when things might have looked hopeless, but the congregation came through that? Answer: The situation when a group was trying to oust Pastor Dan years ago. It failed and many people left causing a financial strain, but we are still here and Pastor Dan stayed for many more years! We need to put our faith in Christ, show us the way forward, we don't have to feel helpless. Sometimes the direction forward may not be where we want to go but the path taken ends up being the better path. Question: How do you generate hope in your daily life? Answers: Be out in nature, be thankful for what is right in your life, thank those around you, focus on the positive, pray, listen to your grandkids. We find hope in community, lifting each other up. I thank everyone for being here today and I think St. Stephen has an amazing future ahead of you.

**Approval of the 2023 Congregational Annual Meeting Minutes** – Marla Amborn

Adjustments: None noted.

*MOTION: A motion to approve the 2023 Annual Congregational meeting minutes as written was made by Lee Branwall; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Mike Trender. Voted on and approved unanimously.*

**Pastor's Report** – Pastor Juli Thompson

Call me when you are in the hospital, don't make me read your mind. I spent some time as solo pastor prior to Pastor Karri coming. Any questions about what my role is? Question: What did you find the most interesting and different in the month of December while you were pastoring alone? Answer: There are a number of



different things that the primary pastor has responsibility for that were new for me in this role –planning services, keeping track of staff, and lots of other things, lots of decision making. Two points – the biggest challenge that we have in this country is loneliness and isolation. Visitation pastor is to keep people connected. Another thing is our budget process – I want to reiterate, we are fine, yes, we have a deficit, but it is not a huge crater that will swallow us whole. This deficit during leadership change is expected and we will get through it! We had a number of requests of help in December from people – gas cards, gift certificates to NHN, other ways we use the pastor’s discretionary fund. I want to help the church be more up front to the congregation so that we all are more aware. Jill Sandvik comment: I want to recognize that you did a great job in December keeping us going. Answer: Thank you on behalf of the whole team. Lots of people helped. Karen Smith made a comment: I see the need in the community, I’m in the office once a week, I can say we get at least 2 calls every day I’m there from people asking for help.

### **Report on Pastoral Transition Process** – Marla Amborn

- Appreciate everything Pastor Juli has done during the period of December when we were between interim pastors. We will be giving the congregation updates along the way.
- Last January Pastor Jim announced he was going to retire. A visioning retreat was held last February but scheduled before he announced his retirement. Visioning retreat was hosted by Pastor Justin Grimm of SPAS.
- In March we were assigned Rolf Lowenberg-DeBoer from SPAS as our interim pastor contact person.
- We celebrated Pastor Jim’s legacy with a dinner that included the bishop, and we had other celebration services. There was a barbeque and joyful outdoor worship for his final service on Wednesday evening, May 31. He had 30 years of ministry here.
- We put together the Mission Exploration Team (members Cindy Scott Chair, Robin Eberlein, Marla Amborn, Cheryl Skrypez, Ken Smith, Betsy Clark, Ted Field. The group collected information from the congregation, laid out a visual history so people could add to it. We conducted 16 cottage meetings with 100 people participating. We conducted an on-line Holy Cow survey with 130 people participating. All info was gathered, and the MET team wrote up the ministry site profile. This document was turned in to the Synod on January 5.
- A call committee was elected at the November Council meeting. Karen Smith and Kathy Stickler are co-chairs of this group. Other members are Lee Branwall, Mike Trenda, Deb Yusef, Brad Wilm, Marla Amborn, Robin Eberlein, Ted Field. The group has put together a list of questions to present to pastoral interviewees, we will do a practice interview with a retired pastor. The group is actively meeting every other week. Two pastor names were given by this congregation to throw into the mix of potential candidates. Mike Trenda (member of the call committee) stated that there are pastors who are interested in coming here.
- We had Interim Pastor Sharon Kelly July through November; she was not quite aligned with what this congregation wanted so we were able to bring Interim Pastor Karri Anderson on board in January.

### **Election of 2024 Council Members** – Marla Amborn

Good council this last year, worked well as a team. Thank you to all who served on council.

#### **Introduction of Continuing Council Members**

Introduction of continuing Council members Scott Zieman, Ted Field – 2024 Council President, Kathy Stickler, (3 year terms expiring January 2026); Marla Amborn (3 year term expiring January 2025), were made.

#### **Introduction of New Council Nominees**

Introduction of Council nominees Jackie Colaizy, Nancy Finley, Susan Lemon (3 year terms expiring January 2027); Denise Ashley, Phyllis Ballata (continuing on Council with 1 year terms expiring January 2025), were made.

*MOTION: A motion to approve the 2024 council members (continuing council members and new council members) was made by Karen Smith; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Mike Trendera. Voted on and approved unanimously.*

#### Expression of appreciation for outgoing council members

Thank you to outgoing council members John Rohr, Cheryl Skrypez, and Bethany Zenner, for their consistent dedication to our church family.

#### Election of 2024 Church Council Officers – Marla Amborn

Betsy Clark – Council Secretary  
Kathy Stickler – Council Vice-President  
Mary Beth Skunes – Treasurer  
Brad Wilm – Financial Secretary

*MOTION: A motion to elect 2024 Church Council Officers was made by Mike Trendera; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Ken Smith. Voted on and approved unanimously.*

#### Nominees for the 2024 Nominating Committee – Betsy Clark

Lee Branwall  
Ron Johnson  
Cheryl Skrypez – outgoing council member

*MOTION: A motion to accept the 2024 Nominating Committee Members was made by Randy Amborn; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Kathy Stickler. Voted on and approved unanimously.*

#### Installation of 2024 Church Council and Church Officers – Pastor Karri Anderson

The 2024 church council members and church officers were presented to the congregation and officially installed.

#### Treasurer's 2023 Report – Mary Beth Skunes

Full 2023 Treasurer's Report posted in the 2023 Annual Report.

Balance sheet on page 23 of the annual report was reviewed. Mary Beth pointed out that St. Stephen's TOTAL ASSETS is \$2,569,930.74. This is a healthy number and despite our budget struggles right now, we will survive this! There were no questions from attendees regarding the 2023 Treasurer's Report.

*MOTION: A motion to accept the 2023 Treasurer's Report was made by Jill Sandvik; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Viki Bosin. Voted on and approved unanimously.*

#### Review of 2024 Proposed Budget – Mary Beth Skunes

Proposed 2024 Budget on page 24 of the annual report was reviewed:

- Proposed budget lists the request for the \$30,000 increased income highlighted in green ("additional income needed") and the \$30,000 spend-down highlighted in green (\$29,659.93 actual "step down budget reduction for 2024") to be made through budget cuts or increase in outside revenue.
- Short-term goal is for the congregation to provide this additional income by May 1, 2024, so that cash flow remains healthy through the summer when donations are traditionally lower.

- Year-end goal is to end the 2024 year with no more than the 2023 year-end deficit of \$-50,000 (“2023 carryover balance”).
- We are going to a system of GENERAL giving so that all income goes into one pot:
  - Benevolence will still be there but will have a line item in the general budget.
  - Capital will still be a fund ON ITS OWN. Deposits into this fund for 2024 will only be from Neighbors Helping Neighbors. We do have a few expenses for 2024 that will be taken out of this fund. We have not made a decision on whether the last set of furnaces will be replaced in 2024 or whether we will wait. Council will have responsibility for that decision.

Questions regarding the 2024 Proposed Budget were raised by the attendees:

- Kathy Anderson: Has money been coming in to the special fund? Mary Beth answer: We have received around \$3,500 so far. Brad Wilm asked that we keep the congregation informed about the progress of this fund. Perhaps a temperature chart in the narthex? It was agreed that this would be done. Finance will also provide a monthly report in the worship bulletins addressing income and expenses for the month.
- Cindy Bittner: After May if someone still wants to give to the special fund will it go into the fund? Mary Beth answer: Yes.
- Dan Ruth: Will there be a list of things happening if we don’t make the additional income needed? Mary Beth answer: Yes, we do have a plan for that. We will keep everyone up to date on what things may be affected.
- Loren Schreder: We were \$50,000 short last year. How will we be dealing with that shortage? Mary Beth answer: Some of the cuts we will make will move forward into 2025. We will be chipping away at the \$50,000 throughout 2024 and into the following years. We have to cover that \$50,000 through the cash reserve fund which is available for that purpose.
- Unknown person: What was budgeted for the last set of furnaces? Ken Smith answer: Around \$47,000 which will need new estimate when ready to install.
- Randy Amborn – Some of us have been exploring renting out space at the church. This could make a difference.
- Viki Bosin – Viki said that this congregation steps up when asked. She asks every year for funds to support Relay for Life. She presented a goal and we doubled that! Viki also noted that people can make their minimum distribution contributions at any time (don’t have to wait until the end of the year) and should do it before May 1.

Congregational Vote on the 2024 Proposed Budget:

*MOTION: A motion to pass the 2024 Proposed Budget was made by Char Redepenning; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Kathy Anderson. NO FURTHER DISCUSSION ENSUED. Voted on and passed with 50 YES, 1 NO. Motion approved by majority.*

**Comments and Questions (added agenda item)** – Ted Field

- Jill comment: I want to thank leadership for the last year. It’s been challenging. Awesome job for getting us through the chaos. I have proudly served as chair of finance team for many years, Ted is now chair. We would like some support in finding additional revenue for the church. I would like to form a committee to help us look at this.
- Ted (incoming Council President) comment: Ever since the pandemic, we haven’t gotten back to our connectiveness pre pandemic. I want to bring that back. If you have any ideas on what we activities can do together, I will make that happen.

**Adjourn** – Ted Field, 2024 Council President

*MOTION: A motion to close the 2024 congregational annual meeting was made by Gretchen Trender; 2<sup>nd</sup> by Jill Sandvik. Voted on and approved unanimously.*

Ted Field adjourned the meeting at 2:02 pm.

**Blessing** – Performed by Pastor Karri Anderson

Respectfully submitted,

Betsy Clark, Council Secretary



## Lead Pastor – James Muske

### 2024 Annual Report

*<sup>9</sup> God didn't intend for us to suffer his wrath but rather to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>10</sup> Jesus died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with him. <sup>11</sup> So continue encouraging each other and building each other up, just like you are doing already... Comfort the discouraged. Help the weak. Be patient with everyone. <sup>15</sup> Make sure no one repays a wrong with a wrong, but always pursue the good for each other and everyone else. <sup>16</sup> Rejoice always. <sup>17</sup> Pray continually. <sup>18</sup> Give thanks in every situation because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-19)*

Grace and peace to you, siblings in Christ! Many thanks to God and to all of you for being called as your new lead pastor at St. Stephen!

As I have only been with you for barely 5 months, I will rely on others to speak to the entirety of 2024, but I want to begin by thanking all of you for the warm welcome you have extended to Mary and me since beginning my call in mid-August. It has been a pleasure to get to know this congregation and its community, and I look forward to continuing to get to know all of you more in the year and years ahead.

Special thanks to our staff – Pastor Juli, Tami, Melissa, Paul, Kari, and Cindy – our church council – Ted, Marla, and all the rest – and for all our wonderful volunteers, too many to name. Thanks also to the call committee – Karen, Kathy, and crew put a very welcoming face on this congregation. I continue to be blessed by the kindness, wisdom, and patience you share with me!

Even in this brief time, I have also been blessed to experience some of the great ways that our community lives out its faith – through events like Rally Sunday, the Music Festival & Auction, the Holly Boutique & Bake Sale, and the Living Nativity, and newer traditions like the Blessing of the Animals in the park and the community Trunk or Treat!

Of course, worshipping God together is at the heart of St. Stephen Lutheran Church. Both Sunday morning and Wednesday GAP worship services offer something important to our community. I am constantly grateful for the incredible talent of all our musicians. Our music and worship leaders put in an incredible amount of work, not just in practicing the music, but in planning and organizing.

This is especially true as we continue to partner with Redeemer Lutheran. Shared worship services, such as Reformation Sunday and Thanksgiving Eve this fall, take extra time to plan and prepare. Thanks again to Kari and our choir for helping lead these collaborations. Thanks also to Melissa and Pastor Dan for our shared Christian Education efforts.

As we look to the year ahead, one goal is to continue to explore partnership possibilities with Redeemer. I know folks often have questions about what end result we are looking for with this relationship. I genuinely believe, though, that this is not something for a pastor or even a council to just decide on their own. This is a discernment process for the congregation as a whole.

Both Pastor Dan and I have previously served in congregations that have explored partnerships, but we also know there isn't one model that works for every church. Our goal is to help our congregations discern what kind of community God is calling us to be. So, for now, we all can keep our hearts, minds, and ears open, so that we can listen to one another and to the Spirit.

Partnerships can help us draw on each other's strengths, help us to better steward our resources, and give us a critical mass of people to certain kinds of ministry, but that doesn't mean they don't come with some growing pains and extra work. That is why patience, grace, and prayer is so important in the discernment process. We will endeavor to find a good balance between the joys that come with shared ministry and the hard work it often takes to make it possible.

But that discernment isn't just something that happens in our heads, it works best when we engage and build these relationships in earnest. Challenge yourself this year to attend both shared events and those hosted by Redeemer. Introduce yourself to someone new. Extend an invitation to events that we host. Let us live into that image of the body of Christ, made of many members, each with their own gifts and role to play.

Of course, besides our relationship with the folks from Redeemer, we also host two other worshipping communities. Many thanks to Ted, in particular, for helping coordinate our role as host to the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon and Kingdom Restoration Ministries. We would do well to continue to explore ministry sharing with these two groups too.

Coordinating the various aspects of our community is no small task. Thankfully, I have many gifted partners in this task. Continuing to refine how we communicate as a congregation will be another one of my goals for this upcoming year. As we are coming out of a time of pastoral transition and as we explore partnerships, it is important that folks are on the same page and that we have a clear path for discerning and making decisions regarding the ministry of our congregation. Healthy communication is essential for encouraging and building one another up.

Finally, another goal for 2025 will be to strategize and engage in more evangelism and outreach. Marla Amborn, our gifted member and pastor, will be helping spearhead some of these efforts, but we will need your help too! Evangelism always has this dual nature – encouraging us to be welcoming people inside our walls and encouraging us to go outside those walls and into the world. So, keep those eyes and ears open for more word on these efforts too!

As we reflect on 2024 and look forward to 2025, we do well to hear again those words of Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians. We live together in Christ – Paul presents that as a given. Christ has already joined us together, and now we are to live into that new life. So, we build one another up! We help, we show patience, we extend grace. We rejoice, pray, and give thanks. And we never forget that the fire of the Spirit is a light we are meant to share. We don't quench it in others and we don't hoard it for ourselves. We celebrate and share it!

So, again, many thanks to God and to all of you for this Spirit-filled community! I am excited for the year ahead, and to all that God may have in store for us!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor James Muske

## **Visitation Pastor**

### **Annual Report 2024**

2024 has been a very busy year for St Stephen. We are all aware that we went through the process of calling a new lead pastor. My call at St Stephen is half time. My primary focus is visitation, and I preach about once a month and lead worship about once a month, with the explicit intention of making people familiar with me, so that I'm not visiting as an unknown person. Because of the call process, and the lack of an interim pastor for part of the year, I ended up doing a lot less visitation than I would like, as I filled in in other areas.

I assisted Marla Amborn in co-ordinating a summer series on the theme of "Outreach" for our Wednesday evening GAP service. We invited speakers from around the community, both to help us learn more about different ministries and to help us understand how other congregations had worked on outreach. This was well received and the speakers were informative and really gave us a lot to think about.

I also stepped in to assist Pastor Dan Streeper and Melissa Whitman with the confirmation classes last spring. It was a real pleasure to work with the confirmands for those weeks, and to co-officiate their Affirmation of Baptism this past fall.

I have continued to call on members of St Stephen, especially when they are ill or hospitalized. (A reminder – please call me or the church office if you are in the hospital! Even if I don't get there before you go home, I want to know so I can follow up with you.) I am continuing to try to visit everyone at home, although in the years I have been here I think I have gotten through about half the congregation. If I haven't been to see you yet, I'll get to you, I promise!

I also lead worship services monthly at Willow Wood and The Waters, local senior living communities. I participated in a Bowen Leadership Training series of workshops organized through the St Paul Area Synod. I also participated in several workshops through ISAIAH, a synodical ministry partner. I have been working with volunteers in the congregation to build a core team with ISAIAH to address local issues. I am co-ordinating a series of grief support groups with other ELCA congregations in the East Central conference. I have been attending clergy prayer and text study groups through the synod and the conference as well. I was able to co-officiate a Blue Christmas service this year, and am planning to incorporate this into our Christmas season at St Stephen next year, I hope also with our collaborative partner, Redeemer. (Blue Christmas is a service designed for those who are grieving, lonely, or otherwise not feeling

the joy of the season. It is quiet, contemplative, and addresses the fact that for many, Christmas is one of the most emotionally difficult times of the year.)

Technically early in 2025, but I finished out the year celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination. Thank you to all who were able to stop by and celebrate with me and my family. I have been blessed to serve God and this community.

My plans for 2025 are focused on visitation. I have also been accepted into a Doctor of Ministry program at Iliff Theological Seminary in Denver, CO. This will be in Prophetic Leadership, and focused on ways that congregations can address what has been called the “epidemic of loneliness” in contemporary America. I look forward to seeing what comes next at St Stephen.

- Submitted by Pastor Juli Thompson

## Church Council President

### 2024 Annual Report

Our Christian lives following Jesus are like a journey, and just like any journey from time to time we look back to see where we've been or forward to see where we're going. We see the path we've taken to get to where we are currently. We see the twists and turns in our path.

Ours has been a remarkable journey. Four years ago a storm in the form of a pandemic struck us without notice. We struggled to keep our mission going and were forced to modify how we worshipped and worked together. For a while we recorded or livestreamed worship services in front of empty pews. Other activities were cancelled. When we could finally return to the sanctuary, we sat six feet apart. Spaces had opened between us—literally and figuratively—and we found ourselves in a place we didn't want to be. It took time but slowly we began to recover and find each other again. Two years later we were almost back to normal. But we still hadn't completely closed the spaces. We still had work to do.

Two years ago we regaled in a celebration of Pastor Jim's retirement and looked back on his 30 years as our lead pastor. At the same time we looked forward to what was next, an unknown path of bends and uncertainties. We began an 18-month pastoral transition, something we had never faced before. The work was hard but led by many dedicated volunteers we accomplished a lot. All of us were involved, attending cottage meetings and participating in surveys and discussion to determine what we thought God's plan for us was. We moved on, curious about what lay ahead.

Last year we hit a severe financial bump but bravely took it on and beat it with our generosity. Then, we resumed many pre-pandemic activities, like the progressive dinner and Nordic walking. We attended a Twins game together and resumed Trunks 'N Treats with crowds of children. Unexpectedly, Kingdom Restoration Ministries and Presbyterian Church in Cameroon entered our lives as brothers and sisters of Christ.

Then, finally, six months ago, we reached a crescendo in our comeback. We were rewarded big-time for our persistence and duty as God sent us Pastor James to lead us forward on our journey walking with Christ. We were back and we were excited.

Where does our journey take us next?

We have challenges to face but we're stronger now. I find meaning for us in a Biblical passage that speaks to overcoming tough times, *"Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* (James 1:2). That's us.

A significant challenge we face is to grow our membership. Extending outreach to our surrounding community and welcoming our neighbors will be hallmarks of our mission ahead. We've already prepared for this challenge by improving the appearance of our church property to make it more inviting: new carpeting, painting, upholstering, landscaping, and replacing our aged parking lot. By continuing to livestream worship services, we reach our neighbors. With Live Nativity at Christmas and Wednesday night GAP on the north lawn in the summer, they know about us when they pass by.

What's next?

*Radical hospitality* is a phrase for us to become familiar with. As an adjective, *radical* means "to affect the fundamental nature of something." So, offering hospitality in a radical way means offering hospitality in a fundamentally different way. It requires a shift from the simple practice of welcoming others to join us to an outward movement to stand with them. It requires that we see the world from the perspective of the people we're welcoming. I look forward in the coming year to learning about the various ways we can practice this together.

Blessings to all of you for making St. Stephen such a wonderful place to worship, serve, learn, and enjoy fellowship. And thank you for trusting me to be the president of our Christian family this past year. It has been my pleasure. I look forward to continuing our journey together with steadfastness, as we work together serving our church's mission.

Submitted by:

Ted Field

Church Council President



## **Adult Learning**

### **2024 Annual Report**

We had a few opportunities to get together, learn and fellowship this year.

Pastor Julie led a discussion on Christian Nationalism. We had a book launch with one of the churches who use our building. Pastor Thomas Dowie of Kingdom Restoration Ministries wrote a book titled “The Spirit of the Ministry”. Please contact the church if you are interested in this book.

We had solid attendance at one of Redemer’s adult education presentations last spring where the Minnesota Twins curator gave a very informative talk on his fifty plus years collecting and keeping track of Twins memorabilia. This led to a connection with him and around a dozen of us went to a Twins game and met him before the game to get a private tour where he showed us many items of sports and music that have occurred at the stadiums the Twins have played in.

We look to get more ideas from the congregation for speakers to share their unique gifts and talents in a particular area in 2025 and beyond.

## **Children and Families Ministry**

### **2024 Annual Report**

The St. Stephen staff and church council send Paul Schultz their heartfelt appreciation for the many years he served as our Children and Families youth director. He deserves our thanks for his unselfish service and in particular the important role he assumed in the success of our Vacation Bible School, which we held not just for our own children but those in our surrounding community also.

Starting late last year, we began to move in a different direction, not only without Paul's leadership but with a lower number of children to serve with the program.

Sue Lemon stepped up to lead Sunday School during the worship hour for those children seeking to learn more about the Bible and what it means to follow Jesus in faith. Classes will continue in 2025 as we acknowledge the vital need to offer a Sunday Children's program to new family members.

In January 2025 we will be stepping up our Wednesday programming related to children and their families. A Wednesday night school will be held to teach children at a young age what it means to live a life of faith. Also, for parents who wish to attend the Wednesday night worship service while their children engage in learning activities, nursery services will be offered during worship.

As our church leaders consider ways to improve all our ministries by sharing them with Redeemer church, we will seek ways to expand our Children's ministry, too, by inviting Redeemer children into our Wednesday night programming.

Children and Families Ministry Team

## **Evangelism**

### **2024 Annual Report**

St. Stephen doesn't currently have a designated Evangelism Ministry Team. However, evangelism is an important aspect of our ministry. In 2024 there were a series of evangelism efforts that were made involving a large mix of people.

#### **Summer Wednesday Preaching Series**

We made use of the time between pastors to focus on evangelism in our Wednesday evening GAP worship services. We invited a series of guest speakers to address ministries they have been involved in that have an evangelism or outreach focus. Speakers included:

- July 10 – Joy McElroy – Cherish All Children
- July 17 – Rev. Dana Nelson – Rice Street Garden
- July 24 – Rev. Chris Bellefeuille – Reconciling in Christ as Outreach
- July 31 – Melissa Whitman – Neighborhood Outreach
- Aug 7 – Rev. Scott Simmons – Outreach with Schools
- Aug 14 – Julie Hoff – Daily Work
- Aug 21 – Rev. William Siong – Eternal Flame Lutheran Church (the newest church in the St. Paul Area Synod)

The goal for this sermon series was to share evangelism and outreach ideas that have been successful in other contexts to inspire members of our congregation on a range of possibilities. It accomplished that, though it would have been nice to have more people hear these interesting speakers at the weekly GAP worship services.

#### **Marketfest**

This summer we partnered with Redeemer hosting a booth at Marketfest in downtown White Bear Lake. Over the seven weeks of Marketfest, St. Stephen and Redeemer hosted the first week together and then each congregation hosted three weeks separately. We provided arts and craft projects to engage kids and families, candy, and information on programming at St. Stephen. It provided time to talk with members of the community and get our name out. We realized that it takes good planning and a large enough team to make the best use of this opportunity. If we choose to have a presence at Marketfest in the future, we learned that we need to have better signage and give careful thought to activities and materials to distribute and have at least four people each week to staff the booth. It was a good start, and we are grateful to Melissa for organizing this and for those who participated in it.



## Night to Unite

After having taken a break from Neighbors Night Out during the pandemic, this year we hosted the newly named Night to Unite national event on August 6, 2024. To get the word out, we hand-delivered 600 door hanging invitations to houses within several blocks of St. Stephen. We also advertised it through posters at local merchants and a large banner on the south side of our building, through our website and email updates, and through other online organizations.

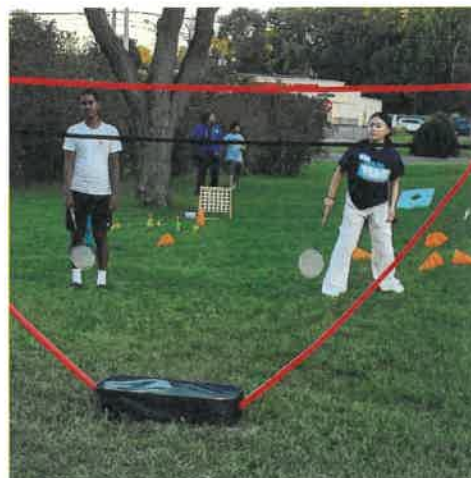


The event took place on a beautiful summer evening on our north lawn. We welcomed participants as they arrived, gave them nametags, and provided information on St. Stephen. It was set to the backdrop of the joyful music of the Lichtenstein Nein German band that practices in our building. We got a Thrivent Action Team grant that helped pay for a barbeque potluck and



publicity. To make it fun and engaging there were lawn games for kids and families and visits from the local police and fire departments. We also held a White Bear Lake trivia contest with Cup and Cone gift certificates given to the winners. It was the first public event attended by Pastor James, a week before he officially began serving as our lead pastor. We had a good turnout and served food to about 135 people and along with more who participated but didn't eat.

There was a healthy mix of people from the neighborhood, members of our congregation, and some people from KRM. The event had a positive feel to it and was a good way to connect with our neighbors.



### God's Work Our Hands



On September 8 we made sandwiches and packed lunches for Union Gospel Mission as part of the ELCA's God's Work Our Hands annual service project. We made about 300 ham or turkey sandwiches, and packed them in lunch bags with tangerines, chips, and Hershey's kisses. We learned some things about quantities of



ingredients that are needed, which should help our planning in the future. Special thanks to Betsy Clark and Kathy Anderson for organizing the food, and to Diane and Paul Swanson and Jackie and Paul Colaizy for delivering the sandwiches, and to the many volunteers who helped pack meals. Jesus told us that "as we do for the least of these we do for Jesus himself." We trust that these efforts were blessed and that those receiving the meals felt nourished by God's love.

### Trunk or Treat – October 25

This year, the Trunk or Treat event was held in the parking lot of Mariner Middle School on Friday evening, October 25<sup>th</sup> with a number of community groups participating. The church council decorated a vehicle and gave out candy to about 400 kids and bookmarks with St. Stephen information. Several other members of the congregation also decorated their vehicles and distributed candy. In the future we could have a bigger impact if we grouped all of the St. Stephen vehicles together and had some signage with our name. We had plenty of candy but ran out of bookmarks. We're glad the event was so well attended. It shows there are lots of kids nearby! We hope to participate again next year with a better idea of how many kids to be prepared for.

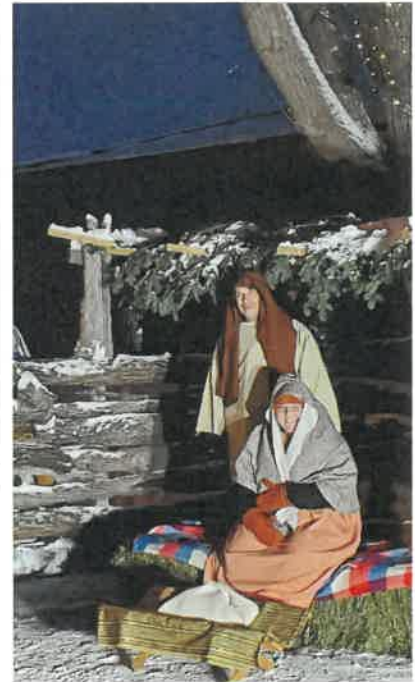


### Live Nativity

Our biggest and longest running evangelism/outreach event is the annual live nativity which was held this year on December 14. We shared the Christmas story through people playing the parts of the holy family, shepherds, wise men, and angels, and also welcomed people into our fellowship hall to share cookies, warm drinks and fellowship. A mix of people from our congregation and others who share our ministry space portrayed the characters. Many from the congregation donated delicious home baked Christmas cookies. Steve Holz provided Christmas music on the piano and Sue Lemon hosted Christmas arts and crafts activities for kids. At the



event some families asked about Sunday school, so the next day Sue led Sunday school for some kids who had attended the Live Nativity event the night before. Thank you to everyone who helped make this event possible and all who attended. It was a wonderful way to share the Christmas story with those in our community.



### **Evangelism/Outreach**

This was a learning year for us regarding evangelism and outreach. We recognize the need to increase our evangelism and outreach efforts and plan to continue strengthening our outreach to the community in the coming years. This year we had St. Stephen tee-shirts made which were worn by a few people at the Night to Unite and more at Rally Sunday. For future events where the general public is invited such as at Marketfest, Night to Unite, the Music Festival and Auction, etc., the tee-shirts will be a good way to identify St. Stephen people. We also purchased some feather flags to display in our parking lot and around the church grounds conveying messages of welcome and information such as where to park. A special thank you to Kathy Stickler for coordinating the making of tee-shirt and purchasing of feather flags.





Now that we have Pastor James with us it will be a good time to increase our evangelism and outreach. In 2025 we will seek to recruit an Evangelism Ministry Team. This group will develop a plan to focus our efforts on reaching out to our local community and welcome people to be part of our ministry. If you might like to be part of this important effort, please contact me, one of the pastors, or anyone on the church council. May God continue to bless our efforts as we reach out to the community to share his love with the world!

Respectfully submitted,  
*María Amborn*

# Fellowship

## 2024 Annual Report

### HOSPITALITY COMMITTEE EVENTS

The hospitality committee consisting of Kathy Anderson and Sue Lemon hosted the following Sunday reception events:

- March 31 – Easter Sunday
- May 19 – Volunteer Appreciation
- June 16 – Interim Pastor Karri Anderson's last day
- August 18 – Pastor James Muske's first Sunday preaching
- September 29 – Pastor James Muske Installment
- November 3 – All Saints Sunday

### FELLOWSHIP EVENTS

#### Nordic Walking Club (organizer Ted Field):

The Club met weekly on Tuesdays between April 30 and August 27. It was a small but dedicated group who participated.

#### Bunco (organizer Mary Beth Skunes):

On Saturday, March 23, twenty people participated in Bunco. Medals went to JoAnn Ford for "most wins", to Lisa Klingbeil for "most losses", and to Brian Klingbeil for "most buncos". It was a fun and successful event.



#### Progressive Dinner (organizers Pam & Dan Prokosch):

On Saturday, May 4, after a 5-year hiatus, the Progressive Dinner was back with twenty people participating. Pam and Dan opted for a French theme selecting and purchasing the dinner menu items and wine and delivering it to the dinner host homes the night before. The menu was chicken cordon bleu, rice pilaf, green beans, bread, and wine. Participants started in the church narthex bringing appetizers to share and got to make their own citron presse lemonade and pose for pictures wearing their new berets provided by the Prokosch's. They then progressed to host homes for dinner with one participant providing a salad and finally to host homes for dessert with one participant providing the dessert. It was a "magnifique" evening!



**Lutheran Night at the Twins (organizer Ted Field):**

On Monday, August 12, fifteen people attended the Twins versus Kansas City Royals game at Target Field. A bonus was that the Twins beat the Royals 8 to 3!!



**Rally Sunday Outdoor Worship Service and Picnic (picnic organizer Betsy Clark):**

On Sunday, September 15, the congregation enjoyed an outdoor worship service and picnic on the north lawn with their new pastor, James Muske. Music was provided by the Revival Band (Brenda Steady, Director) and the Senior Choir (Kari Ballata, Director). We had a good turnout of around 90 people who enjoyed an awesome worship service followed by a potluck picnic, live music by the Revival Band, and kid-friendly lawn games.



**33rd Annual Music Festival and Auction (organizer Betsy Clark):**

The 33rd annual Music Festival and Auction on Saturday October 12 was a great success. We had approximately 80-90 people present at various times. The event raised approximately \$5,500 for our church! It included music by The Old Guys Play the Blues and Tunoe African Arts Troup, a silent auction, and a live auction. Thanks go to the many people who donated, who volunteered at the event, and who provided homemade desserts.



Thanks to all those congregation members who helped make these events a success!

Submitted by,

Betsy Clark, Fellowship Chair

## **Finance**

### **2024 Annual Report**

As 2024 ends we look back on all the wonderful things we have accomplished through the year.

New carpet and painted walls have helped beautify our church.

We also resurfaced our parking lot. We believe it has been more than 40 years since this was last done. We borrowed the money for this but the payments are doable.

We also have rent money coming in from the other two churches that helps our finances.

In addition to revenue that supported a lot of good work at church this past year, the revenue from our congregation's generosity greatly reduced the debt of our operating fund. We started the year with a \$50,000 deficit but were able to cut that in half.

All is helpful. We want to thank all of you for all you give to the church in money and time. Please continue to give.

God Bless!

## **Stewardship**

### **2024 Annual Report**

This past year the congregation lived by our stewardship message, "Stewardship is more about a giver's need to give than a church's need to receive." The congregation stepped up with an outstanding display of its generosity.

Generosity has become the catchword of our stewardship ministry. It applies to St. Stephen disciples in Christ, beginning with our faith in a God of Abundance, and not one of scarcity. If God is abundant, so we can. Our need to give generously stems from the recognition of the blessings we have received from an abundant God. A wonderful cycle is created when we give generously; we are blessed and we give in proportion to our blessings, and when we give from our blessings we make God's work happen, which results in greater blessings, and so on. This is how our generosity works.

Whenever we fear God's work at St Stephen is limited by St. Stephen's financial strength, we step up in generosity. That's what we did in 2024. As a result of our bountiful gifts, for the first time in many years we ended the year without a deficit in our fund that supports God's work. We start 2025 in a better place than before.

Thanks to everyone for being generous stewards of the ministries of St. Stephen.

Ted Field  
Stewardship Chairman

## **Library**

### **2024 Annual Report**

The library was well used in 2024 hosting Wednesday Bible Study, staff meetings, and other gatherings.

New carpeting was installed in October.

We continue to subscribe to the following magazines: Christian History, Biblical Archaeology Review, and Guide Posts.

The library displayed a nice selection of books and DVD's for the Advent/Christmas season and also decorated for Christmas.

We purchased six "Great Courses" series:

"The History and Archaeology of the Bible"

"The Book of Genesis"

"Great Figures of the New Testament"

"Understanding the Old Testament"

"Understanding the New Testament"

"How Jesus became God"

Each course is 24 lectures, running 30 minutes per lecture. They are available to be checked out for viewing.

We welcome donations of books, CD's, and DVD's of a religious nature. Please leave them in the church office with a note to donate.

- Submitted by Kathy Anderson

# Neighbors Helping Neighbors

## 2024 Annual Report

Our mission: Neighbors Helping Neighbors is a clothing thrift store, established in 1992, to help provide support to the community for those in need. It is run by an unpaid management team and a group of volunteers who give their time to operate and maintain the store. The inventory is made up of donations from neighboring communities. 100% of net proceeds are donated to local charities.

In 2024, Neighbors Helping Neighbors donated the following:

- \$3000 to White Bear Area Food Shelf
- \$1000 to Mahtomedi Food Shelf
- \$2000 to North St. Paul Food Shelf
- \$2000 to Hugo Food Shelf
- \$2000 to Pastor's Discretionary Fund
- \$1000 to White Bear Lake Senior Center Meals on Wheels
- \$200 to Relay for Life
- \$2000 to Tubman North Star Youth Outreach
- \$1000 to St. Andrew's Food Shelf
- \$500 to White Bear Lake Angel Fund
- \$600 to Pantry Reimbursement
- \$1000 to Bear Care Clinic
- \$1000 to Lutheran World Relief Hurricane Helene

Neighbors Helping Neighbors rents its space from St. Stephen Lutheran Church for \$700/month plus utilities.

Hours of operation are Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays (10:00am-4:00pm) and Saturdays (10:00am-1:00pm); closed on most US-observed holidays, and, under some circumstances may be closed on other days.

- Submitted by Kathy Anderson



## Property

### 2024 Annual Report

We were very busy in 2024 with many maintenance and property upgrades for both our church building and grounds. Thanks to core property committee members Mike Trenda, Tom Scott, Bill Kneip, Ron Johnson and Paul Swanson as well as many other volunteers! Please know that many people take care of the building and grounds at St Stephens. My apologies to anyone I have failed to specifically acknowledge!

A great deal of building maintenance goes on behind the scenes and is usually not noticed by most congregants. Thank you especially to Mike Trenda and Tom Scott! A particular focus within our building in 2024 was on cleanup and renovation. Repainting of the offices and other high traffic areas of the church as well as replacement of the carpeting in the narthex and offices was led by the *decorating committee*. Since they don't write a separate annual report I'd like to acknowledge them here. Thank you for making our building so much more inviting!

One additional priority this past year (and continuing into 2025) has been to go through the truly impressive amounts of "stuff" that has accumulated in our building. Rooms and rooms full of "stuff". Many people have helped during 2024 to inventory, collect and, when appropriate, dispose of accumulated items. Thanks especially to Karen Smith, Ted Field, Tom Scott and Jill Sandvik (the master of Facebook Marketplace).

The improvements to our grounds have been quite noticeable. We have a new parking lot (!!!). Also, as an Eagle Scout project, JT Baltzer and his team completely redid the landscaping on the south side of the building facing County Road E. Judee Bramscher takes care of the beautiful flower garden at the north entrance to the parking lot. These projects and others greatly improve the curb appeal of St Stephen as we look in 2025 and beyond to grow our congregation. The property team also brought in 11 yards of black dirt and smoothed the north lawn to provide a safer walking surface for church events. Unfortunately, the battle against creeping charlie will continue well into 2025.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ken Smith



## **30<sup>th</sup> Annual WBL Relay for Life 2024 Annual Report**

Relay for Life is one way the American Cancer Society collects donations to support cancer research and cancer care. The White Bear Lake Relay for Life is celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> year on Friday, July 26, at North Campus, beginning at 5:00 pm. Our team, the Spirit of St Stephen, and our congregation have always considered this event to be both an important ministry for our church and a worthy outreach activity for our community.

Thanks to our team members – Dave Bosin, John Strand, Marla Amborn, Jackie Colaizy, Paul Colaizy, Sue Lemon who was joined by her granddaughter and great-granddaughter, and Dan & Judy Ruth.

Thanks, also, to our sponsors: Neighbor Helping Neighbor, Women in Ministry, Randy & Marla Amborn, Everett & Beverly Ammons, Darlene Blegen, Dave & Viki Bosin, Brent & Betsy Clark, Paul & Jackie Colaizy, Dan & JoAnn Ford, Thomas Mardaus, Betty Rombach, Dan & Judy Ruth, Paul & Karen Schultz, Ken & Karen Smith, Paul & Diane Swanson.

And a big thanks to the more than 36 church members who purchased over 100 Luminaries.

– submitted by Viki Bosin, Team Captain

## Senior Ministry

### 2024 Annual Report



- OWLS (Older Wiser Lutherans): Is a group of seniors that try to get together for activities. This past year we had lunch at the VFW and our Christmas party in December at the Lake Elmo Inn.
- Retiree's Breakfast: the second Thursday of the month we meet at Perkins on County Road D at 9:00am.
- Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (previously known as WW Lunch Bunch): We are a group of single Christians without spouses who go out to lunch on the last Tuesday of every month. This year, we ate at Jimmy's, Little Village Inn, Chili's, TGIF, Blacksmith, Sak's, and Johnny Kitchen & Bar.
- Fellowship Group (pictured above): We are a group of seniors that meet weekly at 10:30am in the narthex on Wednesdays. We have good conversation and lots of laughter.

If you are interested in any of our groups or have suggestions on places to go and things to do, please feel free to call me at 651-269-6122.

- Submitted by Judee Bramscher

## Social Media

### 2024 Annual Report



**Facebook...** St. Stephen continues to actively engage on Facebook with the most responded to posts being our advertisements for our events. Without “boosting” a post (which costs money) we typically see 7-10 “likes” and 2 “shares” for St. Stephen events. When posts are “boosted” we get upwards of 50 “likes” or “interests” and 7-10 “shares”. We average about 125 engagements a month on Facebook. Our most engaged Facebook post of the year was for the music auction.



**YouTube...** We continue to use YouTube as the platform to livestream our services, adding Wednesday night streaming this past summer. We also livestream funerals upon request. The average viewing rate of Sunday morning services are about 45 views per livestream (a “view” is considered when a video is watched for more than 1 minute), and 35 views per livestream on Wednesday night. Our most viewed services are on during holidays. Our most viewed video of the year was the video created by the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering Participants with 115 views.

Submitted by Melissa Whitman

## **Staff Relations**

### **Annual Report**

In a year of great transition and change, Staff Relations had more work to do than usual. Appreciation is extended to the committee members—Betsy Clark, Ken Smith, Mike Brien, and Lee Branwell—for their work in 2024. Here are some of the matters that the committee took on this year.

1. Standardizing our personnel policy to match Redeemer's. This has become important as we share a Youth Ministry Director and prepare for perhaps more staff sharing in the future.
2. Examining the benefit packages we give all our staff to confirm their fairness and assure they are proportional for staff who are less than full-time.
3. Establishing a fair salary package for Pastor James that is in accordance with Synod guidelines
4. Weighing in on staff raises for 2025, especially given that we did not offer staff raises in 2024 due to financial constraints.

There is more work for the staff relations committee in 2025, including developing a procedure for conducting staff performance reviews and ensuring our temporary musicians receive fair compensation for their support of worship services.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ted Field  
Church Council Liaison to Staff Relations

## Tanzania

### 2024 Annual Report

St Stephen's partnership with our sister congregation Lukani parish remains strong! A big thank you to everyone who supports this important outreach ministry. This partnership is part of the broader Bega Kwa Bega (BKB) joint program between the St Paul Area Synod and the Lutheran Diocese of Iringa, Tanzania.

Our partnership with Lukani started in 2000 and in 2001 St. Stephen sent our first mission team to visit. Since then, seven additional groups have traveled to Africa to continue building that relationship, most recently in 2022. The next St. Stephen group will visit Lukani in August 2025. Please contact Pastor James, Betsy Clark, Karen or Ken Smith if you're interested in learning more about this mission trip. We are also extending an invitation to members of Redeemer with an interest in the BKB partnership.

The water system which was dedicated in 2019 continues to serve the village with clean and safe drinking water. **Thank you** to the members of our congregation who supported this large capital program which was designed by the University of Minnesota students and installed by St Paul Partners. An extension of the system to the final unserved part of Lukani village has been designed and is under consideration for funding.

As always, the St Stephen congregation continues to support secondary school scholarships for ~15 students with money from benevolence as well as individual contributions. We also provide through benevolence \$1000 each year for capital projects which are prioritized by Lukani parish leaders. **Thank you for your ongoing support!**

Bwana Jesu asifiwe (praise Jesus)

Submitted by Ken Smith





## **Women in Ministry**

### **2024 Annual Report**

Kathy Anderson and Anita Schreader are Co-chairs of the Funeral Luncheon Committee. There were five funerals handled. We continue to emphasize service as well as safety for all volunteers.

Our Quilting Group met January through early April. We made approximately 40 quilts of various sizes. Some were sold at St. Stephen others were donated to Lutheran Social Services, Solid Ground and given to a local nursing home.

Our Holly Boutique was very successful. We were able to provide brunch and lunch menus along with a choice of packaged foods. There was a large selection of lovely handcrafted items and "Christmas Remembered" items. We made about \$4,800 less expenses. We were able to donate the following:

- \$500 to White Bear Area Food Shelf
- \$500 to Tubman Alliance
- \$500 to Lutheran Social Services - Homeless Teens
- \$500 to Lutheran Social Services - Greatest Needs
- \$400 for eight Aldi gift cards.
- \$1000 to St. Stephen for debt reduction
- \$315 for VBS snacks
- \$150 to American Cancer Society Relay for Life
- \$500 for library carpeting
- \$500 to Pastor discretionary fund
- \$240 to the St. Stephen youth for the Youth Gathering

This year with the help of the congregation, we put together 28 cookie trays for our homebound members and cookies for the Living Nativity event.

Every month 25 to 30 cards are sent to members of St. Stephen who are on the prayer list.

- Respectfully submitted by Kathy Anderson

## Worship and Music

### 2024 Annual Report

The Worship and Music Team continued to help plan and support worship at St Stephen in 2024 as the congregation welcomes Pastor James Muske.

#### Successes

- All Music Sunday in May; Rally Sunday in September.
- A congregation that fully welcomes Pastor James and Mary!
- **Sharing the worship space with Presbyterian Church of Cameroon and Kingdom Restoration Ministries.** St Stephen shares the sanctuary and fellowship hall with two other congregations each Sunday. Thank you to St Stephen congregation for accommodating PCC and KRM as they develop and grow their worshipping congregations.
- **Collaboration with Redeemer Lutheran Church** In 2024, St Stephen continued collaborate and support music-making between both St Stephen and Redeemer Lutheran Church. We continue to combine choirs for several worship services: Good Friday and Thanksgiving, 2024. Worshippers seem to enjoy the larger choir, and with more choristers, we can sing more complicated pieces. We are looking forward to additional collaborations in 2025 with interest in resuming the Bell Choir.
- The Team started planning for Sunday praise worship services to begin in February 2025.
- **Online Worship services are “normal”** We continue the video recording and online streaming of St Stephen Sunday morning worship services from the sanctuary! Zach Van Dyke continues as our very gracious and reliable Digital Ministry Director and has enlisted very capable help in delivering a high-quality product. Zach will be taking a break in 2025 with his deployment with the National Guard. We’ve hired a replacement but look forward to Zach’s safe return.
- **Refreshing the worship space.** We’ve done a little recarpeting in the sanctuary and have been decluttering. Thank you to Altar Guild chair Cheryl Skrypez for her dedicated care of Altar Supplies, volunteers, banners, sacristy, time and talent!

#### Challenges

- There are steep learning curves with technology—we are always stretched to learn more, acquire more or upgrade digital equipment.
- We continue to evaluate the sustainability of both existing and new projects so they match our ability to support them with fewer volunteers and financial resources.

Submitted by Anne Jackson and Brenda Steady, Co-Chairs

## **Youth and Families Shared Ministry**

### **2024 Annual Report**

St. Stephen and Redeemer Lutheran Churches continue to share youth programming as well as special event children and families programs. This has been a strong ministry.

**Youth Group-** We average 7 youth, twice a month on Wednesday evenings for youth group (4 from Redeemer, 3 from St. Stephen). This is a slight decline due to several graduates and not no middle schoolers to move up this school year. The high school youth want better participation and have been bringing more friends every week. Youth group attendance is higher when we have service projects, we are planning more service projects before school dismisses.

**Confirmation-** This school year we had our first shared Rite of Confirmation/Affirmation of Baptism service hosted at St. Stephen with 3 youth Confirmed (2 from St. Stephen, 1 from Redeemer). We hope to continue a shared service.

This year we have 7 middle schoolers in our Confirmation program who will have their Affirmation of Baptism service in the 2026/27 school year (5 from Redeemer, 2 from St. Stephen). Pastor James Muske and Pastor Dan Streeper are the primary teachers for Confirmation.

**Pre-Confirmation (3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade)-** This year we have 8 children that regularly attend pre-confirmation (6 from St. Stephen, 2 from Redeemer). We also have 3 children that attend about once a month, and the children are starting to invite friends. In January we changed our schedule to include twice a month worship as part of the class, giving the kids opportunities to take part in worship (greeting, acolyting, reading, etc.). The 6<sup>th</sup> grade children are excited to enter Confirmation next year.

**Vacation Bible School-** VBS has been a shared ministry with Redeemer since 2018. Due to spacing, and the preschool program at Redeemer we moved the program to Redeemer this summer. Because of Lake Area Discovery Center being housed at Redeemer we will continue to utilize Redeemer for Vacation Bible School. This year Christ the Servant also shared VBS with us. We had almost 70 children enroll this year, making it our highest attended VBS since before the Covid pandemic.

**Trunk or Treat-** This year we hosted Trunk or Treat at Mariner Middle School and it was a wild success with 34 “trunks” from church and community members, clubs, and non-profits. We shortened the event time by a half hour to 1.5 hours and had the most children we’ve ever had come through with at least 405 children. We will continue to host at Mariner Middle School as long as the district allows us.

Submitted by Melissa Whitman

# 2024 Church Council Nominating Committee Report

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE:**

Members of the 2024 Nominating Committee were:

- Cheryl Skrypez
- Lee Branwall
- Ron Johnson

Nominees for the 2025 Nominating Committee requiring election by the congregation are:

- John King
- Kathy Anderson
- Marla Amborn

## **COUNCIL:**

Thanks to the following Council members who have served:

- Denise Ashley – Served 2 consecutive 1 year terms
- Phyllis Ballata – Served 2 consecutive 1 year terms
- Marla Amborn – Served a 3 year term

Continuing Council Members in 2023:

- Scott Zieman – 3-year term expires Jan. 2026
- Ted Field – 3-year term expires Jan. 2026
- Kathy Stickler - 3-year term expires Jan. 2026
- Nancy Finley– 3-year term expires Jan. 2027
- Sue Lemon - 3-year term expires Jan. 2027
- Jackie Colaizy 3-year term expires Jan. 2027

**Nominees for 2025 Church Council requiring election by the congregation:**

Three-Year Term expiring Jan. 2028:

- Karen Smith
- Mike Trendera
- Robin Eberlein

Church Council Officers requiring election by the congregation:

- Betsy Clark, Council Secretary
- Brad Wilm, Financial Secretary
- Treasurer – open position

Mary Beth Skunes, will not be continuing as Treasurer. A replacement is being sought for this position.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Skrypez, Ron Johnson, Lee Branwall  
2024 Nominating Committee

## Incoming Church Council BIOS

### Robin Eberlein

I have been a member of St. Stephen for 18 years now. I have been involved in many different areas of ministry, including Christian Education from preschool - confirmation and even a little adult education over the years. I was on Council once before where I served on the Congregational and Community Care Committee. Most recently, I served on the Mission Exploration Team and then the Call Committee. Joining the Church Council seemed like the most logical next step in helping St. Stephen move into a new chapter, so when asked, I gave an enthusiastic, "Absolutely!"

I have a master's degree in Congregational and Community Care from Luther Seminary. My undergrad degree was in Business Management & Marketing from Augsburg. I hope to use my skills and education to help drive St. Stephen into a very healthy future! When I first visited St. Stephen 18 years ago I felt like I was being called to be here. I still feel that way today. Thank you for giving me this opportunity!

### Karen Smith

As a 40+ year member of St. Stephen, I am honored to serve on Church Council for the second time. For those who were here and remember that far back, Mac McCollar was president during my first go-round! I'm excited to work with all the dedicated folks on council as well as Pastor James. This is a time of transition and I believe I can make a positive impact as we move forward.

A little about myself; I am retired, married to Ken for 45 "wonderful years", and grandmother to six amazing young people. My Mom is moving to the Waters at the end of this month and will be 96 in February. The St. Stephen's family is a major source of joy in my life and I am happy to join the council to help in a small way as we continue the good work we do as a congregation.

## **2024 Treasurer's Report**

In 2024, we had a big challenge to overcome our 2023 deficit of -\$50,406.21. With prayerful considerations and some digging in, we were able to topple that challenge in 2024. Thank you to Jill Sandvik for reviewing and changing our contracts for garbage, internet, and insurance to save money. Thank you to Tom Scott for cleaning out closets and finding items that Jill could sell. Thank you to Cindy Bittner, Paul Schultz, Marla Amborn, and Paul Swanson for reducing or taking no salaries for the duties they perform. Thank you to Ted Field for his hard work in negotiating rental contracts to share our space with other Christian groups. Finally, thank you to all our congregants that are practicing radical generosity in your donations to St. Stephen. With all this combined, we were able to end the year with a positive balance of \$846.35.

## **2025 Budget**

This year will have challenges of its own. Things to remember as you look at the budget:

- We have a full time head pastor and ½ time visitation pastor (a salary increase was given 4<sup>th</sup> quarter).
- Staff is receiving a 5% salary increase (no raise was given last year).
- The parking lot loan is \$1,100 a month.
- Costs in general are going up.

**St. Stephen Lutheran Church**  
**Balance Sheet**

**As of December 31, 2024**

**Dec 31, 24**

**ASSETS**

**Current Assets**

**Checking/Savings**

**10 Bank Accounts**

11 MB General Fund Checking	48,324.87
12 MB Money Market Account	28,389.57
13.25 Svg MB CD 740772104	60,000.00
15 Svg MB CD 306509	25,275.00
17 Endowment Fund of ELCA	29,878.89

**Total 10 Bank Accounts** 191,868.33

**Total Checking/Savings** 191,868.33

**Total Current Assets** 191,868.33

**Fixed Assets**

**20 Property**

21 Church Facility	1,326,700.00
22 Land	564,000.00
23 Other Buildings	24,000.00
24 Youth Building	474,000.00

**Total 20 Property** 2,388,700.00

**Total Fixed Assets** 2,388,700.00

**TOTAL ASSETS** 2,580,568.33

**LIABILITIES & EQUITY**

**Liabilities**

**Current Liabilities**

**Other Current Liabilities**

**Parking Lot Loan**

**Parking Lot Loan** 57,210.44

**Total Parking Lot Loan** 57,210.44

**Payroll Liabilities** -1,826.97

**Total Other Current Liabilities** 55,383.47

**Total Current Liabilities** 55,383.47

**Total Liabilities** 55,383.47

**Equity**

**Opening Balance Equity** 880,062.91

**Unrestricted Net Assets** 1,481,503.50

**Net Income** 163,618.45

**Total Equity** 2,525,184.86

**TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY** 2,580,568.33

**St. Stephen Lutheran Church**  
**Proposed Budgets**

	<b>2024 Original Budget</b>	<b>2024 Revised Budget</b>	<b>2024 Actuals</b>	<b>2025 Budget</b>
<u>Income</u>				
Carry Over Balance	\$ (50,408.21)	\$ (50,408.21)	\$ (50,408.21)	\$ 846.35
Regular Giving	\$ 316,690.00	\$ 316,690.00	\$ 334,305.00	\$ 328,796.00
Other Giving	\$ 29,750.00	\$ 29,750.00	\$ 45,726.98	\$ 48,050.00
Additional Income Needed	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 37,945.42	\$ 46,253.13
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 326,031.79</b>	<b>\$ 326,031.79</b>	<b>\$ 367,569.19</b>	<b>\$ 423,945.48</b>
<u>Expenses</u>				
Pastors	\$ 149,251.36	\$ 129,220.78	\$ 130,082.81	\$ 163,904.92
Staff & Contractors	\$ 122,748.57	\$ 114,648.57	\$ 114,306.61	\$ 117,230.55
Office Administration	\$ 17,900.00	\$ 17,120.00	\$ 14,973.71	\$ 16,600.00
Church Administration	\$ 22,700.00	\$ 22,700.00	\$ 28,621.22	\$ 40,860.00
Church Operations	\$ 31,200.00	\$ 31,200.00	\$ 25,796.86	\$ 26,800.00
Maintenance	\$ 16,450.00	\$ 14,035.00	\$ 15,301.17	\$ 15,150.00
Children's Ministry	\$ 2,350.00	\$ 1,725.00	\$ 1,193.68	\$ 1,500.00
Youth Ministry	\$ 5,300.00	\$ 2,700.00	\$ 3,452.82	\$ 2,850.00
Worship & Music	\$ 10,425.00	\$ 10,425.00	\$ 8,740.12	\$ 11,250.00
Evangelism	\$ 3,950.00	\$ 3,790.00	\$ 2,784.58	\$ 4,150.00
Fellowship	\$ 3,750.00	\$ 3,750.00	\$ 3,329.13	\$ 3,250.00
Stewardship	\$ 650.00	\$ 650.00	\$ 304.43	\$ 350.00
Congregation & Com Ministry	\$ 250.00	\$ 250.00	\$ 35.70	\$ 250.00
Adult Learning	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ -	\$ 1,000.00
Benevolence	\$ 18,175.00	\$ 18,175.00	\$ 17,800.00	\$ 18,800.00
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 406,099.93</b>	<b>\$ 371,389.35</b>	<b>\$ 366,722.84</b>	<b>\$ 423,945.47</b>
<u>Capital Fund</u>				
Beginning Balance	\$ 100,627.94		\$ 100,627.94	\$ 68,528.91
Income	\$ 8,400.00		\$ 82,516.00	\$ 8,400.00
Expenses	\$ 12,000.00		\$ 114,615.60	\$ 10,000.00
<b>Capital Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$ 97,027.94</b>		<b>\$ 68,528.34</b>	<b>\$ 66,928.91</b>
<u>Cash Reserve Fund</u>				
Beginning Balance	\$ 47,791.37		\$ 47,791.37	\$ 47,841.37
Income	\$ -		\$ 50.00	\$ -
<b>Cash Reserve Fund Balance</b>	<b>\$ 47,791.37</b>		<b>\$ 47,841.37</b>	<b>\$ 47,841.37</b>
<u>Special Designated Accounts</u>				
	<u>YE Balance</u>			
800 Special Designated	\$ 19,802.00			
810 Funding Accounts	\$ 6,566.95			
802 Tanzania Accounts	\$ 19,437.32			
830 Memorial Accounts	\$ 595.55			
<b>Total Spec. Designated</b>	<b>\$ 46,401.82</b>			

If you need information on a specific account please see Mary Beth Skunes.

\* This low balance is because of a -\$4,670.61 in General Memorials for purchase of carpeting.





**Lake Wapogasset**  
LUTHERAN BIBLE CAMP, INC.



**Camp Wapo**



**Ox Lake**



**Wilderness  
Canoe Base**

715.268.8434  
lakewapo.org

## Congregational Report 2024

**Thank you for being a Partner Congregation!** We are deeply grateful for the ongoing support and dedication of so many congregations that enable thousands of individuals each year to experience community and deepen their faith at Camp Wapo, Ox Lake, and Wilderness Canoe Base. We celebrate a year full of impactful moments with campers and retreat guests, and we are thankful for the generosity of our donors, the prayers of our supporters, and the commitment of YOU - our partner congregations.

**Summer 2024** This summer, we had the privilege of welcoming nearly 4,000 campers and families to Camp Wapo, Ox Lake, and Wilderness Canoe Base, and over 11,000 guests year-round. Our summer staff was exceptional - demonstrating flexibility, resilience, and taking on key leadership roles. They met every challenge with energy, grace, and servant hearts. We are always seeking passionate young adults to join our team, and we encourage you to send anyone who might be a great fit our way! We're now hiring for summer 2025—if you know someone who would be interested, please reach out! You can contact Michael at michaelw@campwapo.org or Mari at maris@campwapo.org, or visit lakewapo.org/employment to apply.

**Site Plans Strategic Initiative** We continue to make progress on our Strategic Initiative, centering on comprehensive site plans. This important work will guide our decision-making process and help us prioritize deferred maintenance and program development. We're excited about several projects scheduled for this winter and spring that will have an immediate impact on the upcoming summer. These plans are designed to enhance and support transformative outdoor ministry experiences for everyone who comes to our camps.

**Donor Engagement** In 2024, partnership giving remained steady, while annual giving fell short of our intended goal. However, designated giving saw an increase, leading to an overall rise in contributions compared to 2023. We are currently in the leadership phase of the Room for More campaign to complete the dining hall/meeting space project at Camp Wapo. Soon, we will launch a congregational effort, reaching out to you - our partner churches. Joel Abenth, Director of Donor Engagement, will be working closely with congregations, individuals, and families who wish to support the camp in various ways. If you'd like to explore how you can contribute, please contact Joel at joela@campwapo.org.

**Retreats and Events in 2024** Our non-summer season has been filled with a variety of retreats. Notable highlights include hosting large groups of students from the University of Minnesota-Duluth and Wheaton College just before the summer season kicked off at Wilderness Canoe Base, as well as two big middle school fall retreats at Camp Wapo. We offer a range of options for both programmed retreats and facility rentals if you're looking to organize your own event. Retreat opportunities can be found at lakewapo.org/news-events. For more details or to schedule your retreat, please contact Ryan at ryanb@campwapo.org. Additionally, we welcomed over 500 guests for our Memorial Day Pancake Extravaganza, celebrated the 22nd year of the Wapo Golf Tournament, and hosted over 1,200 guests and volunteers during Advent, including 8 performances of the 35th annual Christmas Dinner Theater, "A Stranger for Christmas."

**Rhythms of Faith** This summer we were thrilled to be selected as an exemplary ministry site participating in the Rhythms of Faith Project, a nationwide research initiative seeking to use the camp experience as a catalyst for family faith practices. This project is coordinated by Wheaton College's Center for Leadership Development (HoneyRock) and Sacred Playgrounds, and funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. The results from our part of the research and across all the camps that participated are so affirming of the work we do in outdoor ministry and how it impacts families, churches and communities. We'll continue to share those results throughout 2025.

**2025 Theme** Inspired by Romans 15:13, our 2025 theme is **Breathe**. *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."*

Whether it is singing around the campfire, in community with others, or in moments of quiet reflection, the Holy Spirit is our constant companion, leading us, comforting us, and helping us grow in faith and courage.

We look ahead with eager anticipation and a sure sense of hope. See you at camp in 2025!



*"Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you: I have said to the Lord,  
'You are my Lord, my good above all other.'" Psalm 16:1 (ELW translation)*

As we come to the close of 2024, these are complicated days in our world. I think most congregations in this synod are faring better than many other organizations and institutions when it comes to focusing on a core mission, living out their values, and being financially stable. Yet, anxiety is widespread and lots of people are angry and disappointed, fearful and disenchanted. All these dynamics create a perfect context for witnessing to the good news from God. We have much work to do but we know that we work best when we act as **church together** in this synod.

This past year the synod staff and the Synod Council adopted this mission statement and core values:

***As followers of Jesus, we are called to accompany faith communities  
and equip leaders for God's mission in the world.***

***Our core values are – authenticity, connection, compassion, and curiosity.***

This understanding of our mission allows us to focus staff time and budget dollars to create the most lasting impact in our common work. The core values thread through the way we interact as synod staff and the way we show up in conversations with congregations and the wider public.

In summer 2024, I hosted five Listening Sessions to hear directly from Lutherans like you where you find hope in your congregation and also the worries that weigh on you. Over 100 persons participated and 50 people joined a Zoom presentation to hear what I had learned.

Here are two strategic steps we are taking as a synod to respond to all that I heard: In 2025 we will inaugurate a year and a half emphasis on worship renewal in congregations. This will be funded in part by an ELCA Churchwide grant with an emphasis on inviting our neighbors to join us in worship experiences. Secondly, as a synod, we will encourage and support efforts to make respectful conversations a hallmark of congregational life. You'll hear more about both initiatives in early 2025.

During 2024, the synod staff over saw call processes and transitions with more than 30 congregations. Several of those included the calling of multiple rostered ministers. This means that nearly a third of the congregations in the synod were in a time of transition this past year. I am grateful for all who have served on a call committee, for our interim pastors, and for faithful members who trust that we are always being called forward into God's mission for us as the church.

I was privileged to ordain four persons in 2024, including Pastor Wesley Kimball, serving as associate pastor at All Saints in Cottage Grove; Pastor Pepe Demarest, serving as pastor for the Recovery Church in St. Paul

with the United Methodist Church (a full communion partner); Pastor Ruthie Mhanga, serving as associate pastor at Gustavus Adolphus in St. Paul; and Pastor Nathan Lyke, serving as associate pastor at St. John's in Lakeville.

Three of these candidates were from the Saint Paul Area Synod where we currently have 24 persons in the candidacy process to serve as pastors or deacons in the ELCA. I am grateful for those who serve on the Candidacy Committee, for those who mentor and encourage our candidates, for our seminaries and intern sites, and all who support persons as they discern how God is calling them to live out their vocation in the church and world. This is work we all share, knowing that for many the seeds of wondering about becoming a pastor or deacon begin during the elementary school years.

A highlight in 2024 was welcoming Eternal Flame Lutheran Church to recognized congregational status during the Synod Assembly in May. This vibrant congregation, rooted in the growing Hmong community in the East Metro, began as a mission start many years before. The financial support and prayers of many have accompanied this process, as well as our shared work with the ELCA, led by our Director of Evangelical Mission, Pastor Justin Grimm. Also in 2024, St. Mark Lutheran in St. Paul marked its holy closure as a congregation, after more than 100 years of witness on West 7th Street in St. Paul. There are now 106 congregations in the Saint Paul Area Synod with just over 100,000 baptized members.

The Planting Hope Campaign, a synod-wide initiative to support congregational vitality, youth development, and outreach efforts in the synod, continued to bear fruit. With our partners at Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, we celebrated the opening of the Early Learning Center-East Side in August, thanks to a \$1 million investment from the campaign. \$100,000 was shared with congregational vitality efforts this year; over \$50,000 was used to fund paid summer internship for nine young adults. To date over \$1.7 million dollars has been raised for The Planting Hope Campaign. I want to thank all who have donated to the campaign while continuing significant mission support, which allows us to do so much together.

God continues to bless our congregations with people and financial resources. The gifts of time, talent, and treasure enable us to live into God's mission in ways no one congregation could do in isolation. This includes support of our mission starts and redevelopment congregations. In 2024 these included Shobi's Table, Foundation of Life, Eternal Flame, Cristo Rey, St. Paul – Wyoming, Lutheran Church of Peace – Maplewood, and Christ the Servant – Vadnais Heights. An exploration of a possible mission start in Rosemount began in 2024.

Finally, I know you join me in thanking those who serve on the staff of this synod. They include Rachel Holsten, Mary Smith, David Roinas, Kirsten Levorson, Rolf Lowenberg-DeBoer, Justin Grimm, Kirsta Lind, Leslie Ortiz and Patricia Lull. Together with Synod Council members, deans, committee members, congregational leaders, and all of you, we have been able to do much to share God's good news to a world, so eager for hope and direction.

I am grateful to serve as the bishop in this time and place, knowing that God alone is our hope and refuge, as the Psalmist proclaims. May we live out that deep truth with joy and confidence in the year to come.

Yours in God's Service,



Bishop Patricia Lull



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# A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDING BISHOP ELIZABETH EATON



Dear friends in Christ,

All around us, we see signs of God's love and goodness. A person who has stepped away from church for many years steps back into a congregation, feeling the call of the Holy Spirit. Young adults feeling isolated in a digital-first world start gathering in person in a small group, enjoying the warmth of a hug and a new friend asking about their week. A mother plants a garden, and it yields fruits and vegetables, giving her nutritious food for her kids and extra produce to sell at the local market. Everywhere we look, we see signs of Christ's love. In Psalm 93, we read: "More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the Lord! Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O Lord, forevermore" (4-5).

God's love is a majestic thing, and it moves us to share it in word and deed. The ministries of our congregations, our synods and the ELCA churchwide organization are all working together to share God's love with people in our neighborhoods, across our country and around the world.

I am so grateful for you, dear church. Your generosity to each of these three expressions of the church — your congregation, your synod and the churchwide organization — has bolstered the church's ability to share the message of God's love to people who are longing for it. Through your

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“More majestic than the thunders  
of mighty waters, more majestic  
than the waves of the sea,  
majestic on high is the Lord!  
Your decrees are very sure;  
holiness befits your house, O  
Lord, forevermore.”

—Psalm 93:4-5

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financial resources, your time volunteering and accompanying others, and your voices, you've helped carry this message of God's majestic love. Thank you, dear church. As we look ahead to the coming year, I encourage you to stand steadfast in God's promises, sure of God's love and goodness.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth A. Eaton". The script is fluid and cursive.

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America







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