



Steppingstone Newsletter



February, 2024

Highlights



Annual Meeting & Potluck Desserts

Sunday, Jan. 28 (12:30pm desserts; 1:00pm meeting)



Christian Singles Lunch Bunch

Jan. 30 & Feb. 27 (11:30am, details on page 5)



Pastor-led Bible & Book Study

Wednesdays (9:00am, details on page 5)



Ash Wednesday Services

Feb. 14 (12noon & 6:00pm, details on page 5)

"Lament"



Wednesdays During Lent

(2/21, 2/28, 3/6, 3/13, 3/20)

12noon Service

(Word & Prayer)

Lenten Lunch

12:30pm -
following worship

6pm Service

(Holden Evening Prayer)

Lenten Meal

5:30pm -
before worship

CHURCH MATTERS

Message from Interim Pastor Karri Anderson

One of the things I love the most about interim ministry is the opportunity it gives me to sail on different “ships”. In each church I serve I get to witness the amazing variety of ways that God’s people gather together, worship together, and serve together. This image of the body of Christ sailing together through the waters of life comes from the early church when congregations would gather in the “nave” to worship.



The “nave” is the architectural term for the place where a congregation gathers for worship. It is taken from the Latin term —*navis* which means ship. (This is also where the terms navigation and navy originate.) The name came from the vaulted ceilings in early churches which resembled the shape of a ship’s keel.

When I board a new interim, most ships are floating aimlessly in the waves. Some of them are just drifting along not really sure where they are going. But many of them are in the midst of storms. The real challenge is not how bad the storms are, but how well each sailor has trained for the voyage and how well they work together to get through them.

Gary Wilburn, a Presbyterian pastor and author writes; *The fact is our religious ships are dead in the water. The answer is not bigger and better sails. It is how we listen to the wind in the riggin’ and how we position our sails to the wind. If anything is going to change, we need to take personal responsibility for our own spiritual voyage.*

If we want to be ready to catch the wind of God’s Spirit in our sails, we need to be ready when it blows. We need to know which sails to use and when, and how to watch for approaching storms. Sometimes sailing on the wind of God means we have to lower the sails and just hang on for dear life and sometimes it means we must wait patiently while no wind seems to blow at all. But no matter what the circumstances, our mission is to have our boats and our sails prepared to catch the wind of God – however it may blow. Our task as children of God is to do our best to position our sails to the Wind during this interim time.

As a community of faith, St. Stephen has already done so much to get ready for the next burst of God’s wind. Over the next few months, as we prepare for the coming of a new settled pastor, we will have the opportunity to more deeply develop the life giving habits that will help us carry out our mission statement of Bringing God’s Love to the World. We will continue to sail forward in faith together, living lives of worship, fellowship, service and learning. And as we sail we need to be continually anchored by prayer.

I am so excited and feel so privileged to sail with you on this voyage, and I pray that the preparation we do together will make us ready to set sail with the good news of Jesus Christ, into a waiting, hurting, needful world. Let the voyage begin.....

Together in Christ,
Pastor Karri

CHURCH MATTERS

Pastoral Transition Update



Call Committee Commissioned

The next step in our search for a new pastor has officially begun. Due to the hard work of those who conducted Cottage Meetings and gathered data from the Holy Cow surveys, we have formed a Call Committee. Now begins the process of identifying, interviewing, and calling a new pastor.

The Call Committee was officially commissioned on Sunday, January 7. The members include: Karen Smith (Co-Chair), Kathy Stickler (Co-Chair), Marla Amborn, Lee Branwall, Robin Eberlein, Ted Field, Mike Trendera, Brad Wilm, and Deb Yusef.

The team will meet biweekly on Thursdays. Our goal is to ensure the congregation is continually informed of our progress. Therefore, at the Sunday and Wednesday services after each committee meeting, a committee member will give a brief update. Updates will also be provided in the Weekly Updates email and the Steppingstone. The committee is

honored to be doing this important work on your behalf. Thank you for your continued support and prayer. With God's blessings to us all! - The St. Stephen Call Committee

Council Highlights:

- 1) 2023 was a big year for the church council. Sincere thank you to all the council members who have completed their term this year and for those who are continuing.
- 2) A sincere thank you to our outgoing President Marla Amborn and to the Executive Committee for a job well done at an important time in the life of our congregation.
- 3) Council approved a 2024 budget that will be presented at the annual meeting January 28.
- 4) Council spent time getting to know our new interim Pastor Karri Anderson.

GENEROSITY CHALLENGE 2024

Thanks to everyone who attended the special finance meeting on Sunday, January 7th. What you heard was that the financial challenge we're facing, what we call a *faith budget*, is something we've met before and that God's plan for us in 2024 is within reach if we're just diligent in responding to its needs. The budget to do His work in 2024 needs an additional \$30,000 above and beyond our normal stewardship generosity. This is an increase of only 10% from our normal giving. What's more, it's important that we respond to this call at the beginning of the year, not at the end, and so the finance team is asking for your immediate response to this challenge. Our success meeting this challenge needs to be measured separately from our normal giving, and to help we ask that you to identify your gift as such, as *Generosity Challenge 2024*. For your use we've prepared special envelopes that starting Sunday can be found throughout the church in the pews and on the welcome desk. Thanks for being good stewards of all our ministries. - St Stephen Finance Team



FEATURES & SPOTLIGHTS

A Faith Story from Randy Amborn

In corporate life when you suggest something in a meeting and there's a consensus it is a good idea, what often happens is you are told, "Great idea. You go do it." The same is true in church life. This is what happened in a church council meeting when I suggested that having St. Stephen members share their faith stories would deepen the ties in our congregation. So here I am. Telling my faith story.

Many of you know me as a musician, but my day job for 40 years was as a writer of technical manuals, sales brochures, video scripts, webpages, whatever. Colleagues and clients thought I was pretty good at it, and who am I to disagree? Still, I've always felt that the written word falls short in expressing certain things. For example, if a girlfriend is dumping you for a cooler guy, writing her a lengthy letter is rarely effective in reversing that direction. To my way of thinking, words cannot adequately describe faith, or its various flavors. So my faith story is a brief intro to the Theology of Randy.

When former St. Stephen Pastor Dan Brumm was a candidate for bishop, he probably scuttled his chance for election by his response to the question, "Who is your favorite theologian?" A safe answer would have been a name like noted writers Reinhold Niebuhr or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who have legions of devoted fans in the world of religion. Dan instead answered, "Hoagy Carmichael," the composer of *Georgia on My Mind* and other jazz standards. Dan gave cogent and faithful reasons, but the assembled Minnesota Lutherans could not get their heads around this. Bishop Brumm wasn't gonna happen.

But I have always liked his answer. If forced to declare at a tribunal, I'd call myself a non-doctrinal Christian/Lutheran. I'm not going to get into how literally we should take passages of Scripture, or the Bible as a whole. I just don't see that it works as a clear, task-oriented operators' guide to life.

But on the other hand, I can't find much spiritual protein in *New-Agey*, mega-churchy, pantheistic preaching or worship settings. Whether you are writing a manual, a song, or novel, it's the details that give it the punch. Picture a chariot made of fire which swooped outta the sky to give Elijah a ride. Elijah dissing the Prophets of Baal by dumping all that water before summoning the holy conflagration from the sky. Or from Revelations, the dimensions and paving material of the New Jerusalem: 1500 miles high, 1500 mile wide, streets of gold. These are the things that really get a hold on me.

So in my life today, I happily accept being Mr. Pastor Marla, having church music gigs or rehearsal about 75 days of the year, or spending a lot of my time schmoozing with Lutherans than my basically introverted self would prefer.

Dan Brumm once said something to the effect that, "If I died and found that religion was simply untrue, I'd still be better off for how it caused me to lead my life." In the same situation, I have enough doubt that it would not be completely shocking to me, but would reach the same conclusion.

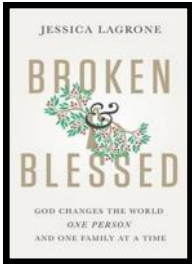
The Memphis soul singer turned Reverend, Al Green, has a Gospel song with the line "I've been blessed by my service to my savior." While a strict Lutheran theologian may fret this gets uncomfortably close to an earthly or heavenly reward for good works, even in times such as these it still rings true in my book.



Type the address into your computer's search bar to link to a Gospel tune I wrote and recorded with friends that generally echoes my faith statement.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wlszqg7IUio>

Share your faith story by sending it to Tami at office@ststephenwbl.org!

HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Pastor-led Wednesday Bible & Book Study

Join us in the library (9:00am) on Wednesdays for Bible Study (led by Interim Pastor Karri) to explore the book, "Broken & Blessed" by Jessica Lagrone.

Broken in so many ways, God chose the first families of the book of Genesis to do great things. How might God use us and our families despite our imperfections? Join us (*and invite others*)! Books can be purchased through [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



Annual Meeting & Potluck Desserts (1/28)

Mark your calendars and plan to attend the Annual Meeting on Sunday, Jan. 28 (1:00-2:30pm) with Potluck Desserts (12:30pm).



Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (1/30 & 2/27)

Please feel free to join our group for lunch on the last Tuesday of each month (11:30am). RSVP (required) on Sunday before event by contacting Judee Bramscher at 651-269-6122. On January 30th, we will be gathering at Jimmy's (1132 Co Rd E East, Vadnais Heights). RSVP by 12/28. On February 27th, we gather at the Little Village Pub (2670 Co Rd E East, White Bear Lake) – RSVP by 2/25.

Retiree's Breakfast (2/8)

Attention all retirees! You are invited to join other retirees from church for breakfast (Thurs/9:00-10:00am) at Perkins in Maplewood on County Road D.



Soup'er Bowl Offering (2/11)

Thank you for your free-will donations (collected after worship) and cans of soup for the White Bear Area Food Shelf to help our neighbors in need.



Ash Wednesday (2/14)

On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey through Lent to return to God, we have already been reconciled to God through Christ. We humbly pray for God to make our hearts clean while we rejoice that "now is the day of salvation." Returning to our baptismal call, we more intentionally bear the fruits of mercy and justice in the world. Please join us and INVITE OTHERS!

Ash Wednesday Worship Services (12noon & 6:00pm)

(Note: NO MEAL TODAY before service.)

HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES

Quilting for a Cause

Please join us in making quilts for battered women shelters, homeless shelters, the Holly Boutique, and to support this important ministry. We meet in the A-B Room (9:00am-3:00pm) on the following dates in February: Thurs-2/15, Fri-2/16, Thurs-2/22, Fri-2/23.



Office Closed (2/19)

The church office is closed on Monday, Feb. 19 in honor of President's Day. Regular office hours are Monday-Thursday (9:00am-3:00pm) and Friday (9:00am-12noon).

"Lament"



The Season of Lent

Our theme this Lent is "Lament". We will be exploring various kinds of lament found in scripture. Each week we will consider what it means to sit with our grief rather than

try to push it aside. We will discover that many faithful believers have wrestled with grief, sorrow, and questions for God about why the innocent suffer. Understand that lament is one of the more faithful things we can do. When we approach God with honesty and humility, and we admit that some things are too big for our hearts to bear, we will find there not a disapproving God but one who weeps with us. We will find a God who can take our grief and disappointment and transform them into holy joy and renewed hope. We will learn, ultimately, that Jesus' death on the cross—the place to which the season of Lent leads us—is the reason we never mourn as those without hope.

Wednesdays During Lent (2/21, 2/28, 3/6, 3/13, 3/20)

Join us and invite others:

**Lenten Service (12noon) & Lunch (12:30pm)
Meal (5:15pm) & Worship (6:00pm)**

Braided Bread - Tanzania Fundraiser (2/25–3/10)

Pick up date will be around Palm Sunday – look for more details in Weekly Update e-blasts. Please support our Tanzanian mission work by purchasing braided bread through our Tanzania mission team. Orders may be placed in-person in the narthex after Sunday worship or in the Fellowship Hall after Wednesday worship. Loafs are \$15. For every loaf sold, the Tanzania Mission Team will get \$6 (that's 40%)!



Looking Ahead to Vacation Bible School

We are anticipating a large turnout for Vacation Bible School this year (June 24-28) and we cannot run this program without you! If you would like to volunteer, please contact Melissa at

mwhitman@redeemerwhitebear.org or Paul Schultz at childrenmen@ststephenwbl.org or look in upcoming e-blasts for a link or QR code and link to our online sign-up.



Easter Garden Orders DUE (3/7) (See page 8 for the order form.)

Getting Events Onto the 2024 Calendar

Please contact Tami in the church office at office@ststephenwbl.org or 651-777-1107 to get all special events, gatherings, meetings, groups, etc. onto the church's 2024 calendar.

Readers Needed

We are in need of Lectors to read the scripture lessons during Sunday services. We welcome any age. No experience necessary. Individuals or pairs are encouraged to volunteer. Please choose any Sunday, sign up in the narthex and fill out a reminder card for yourself. Thank you for being a ministry disciple!

HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES

Sunday Greeters Needed

Please sign up in the narthex or let Judee Bramscher know if you would like to be a greeter on *any* Sunday. Simply be here around 9:00am to say "hello" to folks entering the church.

2024 Flower Sponsors

If you wish to sponsor flowers in 2024, please contact Tami in the church office at 651-777-1107 or office@ststephenwbl.org and let us know the date (any Sunday in 2024) and your dedication (in memory, celebration, or in honor, etc.). The cost is \$20 per bouquet. Simply mail in (1965 East County Road E, White Bear Lake, MN 55110) or drop off your payment.

God's Word Bible Discussion

God's Word Bible discussion group, led by Phyllis Ballata, meets in the Library on Thursdays (1:00-2:00pm). Walk-ins are welcome.

Cooks Needed for Wednesday Meals

We are in need of volunteers to prepare, cook, and serve (FOR 25 PEOPLE) Wednesday evening community meals. Get reimbursed for up to \$50. Mealtime is 5:15-6:00pm before our Grace & Praise (GAP) Worship Service. Choose one or as many Wednesdays as you like (through May of 2024). Sign up in the kitchen or contact the church office at 651-777-1107 or office@ststephenwbl.org to get onto the schedule.

GAP (Grace & Praise) Worship & Community Meals

Wednesday is a perfect time to invite family members or friends to join you at our community meal (5:15pm) and GAP (Grace & Praise) service (6:00pm) in the sanctuary. There are many people who say they would go to church if they were invited!

Fellowship Group

All are invited to gather (10:30am) in the narthex on Wednesdays to share news, lift each other up with encouragement, and simply just visit! This is an informal group; walk-ins are welcome. Contact Judee Bramscher (651-269-6122) with any questions.



New Voices Welcome Come Join the Choir!

Choir members and anyone who may wish to join the choir are invited back to the church on Wednesdays (7:00-8:00pm) for practice. If you wish to participate or have any questions, contact Kari at ballatahosmer@gmail.com

Christ in Our Home

Devotional Booklets for Jan/Feb/Mar are now available in the narthex in the information racks. Please feel free to take as many as you like and offer them to others who may find comfort in reading them.



APPRECIATION

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

- ◆ All who pledged support for all the ministries in the coming year at St. Stephen!
- ◆ All Committees & Teams who are working above and beyond while in our pastoral transition!
- ◆ The very small Christmas Clean-up crew (we will get you more help next year!)
- ◆ All who donated mittens and hats to the Mitten Tree.
- ◆ Our Stewardship team for great messages each week in bulletins and e-blasts.
- ◆ Those who supported our children and youth during the Heggie Pizza fundraiser.
- ◆ Boy Scouts Troop 494 for donating \$300 to the church!
- ◆ Funeral luncheon helpers who do a great job of Fellowship Hall hospitality.
- ◆ All who participated in our annual Living Nativity community outreach event! A more detailed account of appreciation and PICTURES can be found in the December 20th Weekly Update.

EASTER FLOWER GARDEN ORDER FORM

Easter Flower Garden 2024

Please indicate your choice of flower/plant:

_____	Azaleas	\$30.00
_____	Cyclaman	\$20.00
_____	Hydrangea	\$30.00
_____	Kalanchoes	\$20.00
_____	Lilies	\$15.00
_____	Mums	\$15.00
_____	Rieger Begonia	\$20.00
_____	Tulips	\$15.00



_____ I would like to donate \$20.00 to the general fund for flowers rather than order a specific flower/plant.



☐ I wish to KEEP my plant

☐ I wish to DONATE my plant

(If you wish to keep your plant, please feel free to pick it up AFTER the 9:30am Easter Sunday Worship Service.)

This plant is in (circle one): **memory / honor /celebration** of:

Your name/s as you would like to appear in bulletin:

Phone Number (in case we need to contact you): _____

Amount enclosed: \$_____ **Envelope #** _____
(Indicate "Easter Garden" on check)

Return this form and payment BEFORE Sunday, March 7th

Place into an offering plate, inside or outside mail drop, send via US mail, or contact the church office to make other arrangements.

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, 1965 East County Rd E, White Bear Lake, MN 55110
651-777-1107 or office@StStephenWBL.org

COUNTERS: Please note payment above and put this form into Tami's mail slot.

PRAYERS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

APPRECIATION

From Pastor Juli... *I want to thank everyone who expressed appreciation to me in the last month or so. When people spoke to me, I tried to convey that I am simply the "face of the team." There were many volunteers who came forward to help in many ways to get us through this time between interim pastors. That spirit of helpfulness and stepping up makes St Stephen a supportive community to belong to. I am also grateful to those who chose to express themselves by giving to the pastors' Christmas gift. I really appreciate it! I wish everyone a New Year filled with blessings.*

From Peggy Schaff and Family... Thank you everyone for your warm words and cards and gifts during Ted's passing, the memorial and luncheon for Ted Schaff. We appreciate everything everyone did to make it a memory of a celebration of Ted's Life.

From Solid Ground... *Thank you to the entire congregation and staff at St. Stephen for the gas cards. Your generous contribution assisted many families with their transportation needs to attend our annual holiday party, and we are forever grateful. We look forward to visiting the church in the future to share more about Solid Ground with anyone who might be interested in hearing about the ways we are engaging the community. – Tashemia Pratt, EMP Program Manager*

GENERAL INFORMATION

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The Steppingstone Newsletter...

Is distributed monthly. If you have any items for the **March** issue, please send them to office@ststephenwbl.org by Saturday, Feb. 10.

Newsletters are also available in the narthex information racks or via email.

Please let us know if you have a change of address so that we can update our mailing list.

Staff

Interim Pastor ▪ Karri Anderson
ipk@ststephenwbl.org

Visitation Pastor ▪ Juli Thompson
julia.a.thompson@gmail.com

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Children & Families Ministry Director ▪ Paul Schultz
childrenmin@ststephenwbl.org

Communication & Administrative Coordinator ▪ Tami Heart
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Custodian ▪ Paul Swanson

Digital Ministry Director ▪ Zach VanDyke
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Funeral Luncheon Coordinator ▪ Kathy Anderson
kathleen856@q.com

GAP Worship Director ▪ Justin Woodruff
jwoodruff@homfurniture.com

Nursery Caregiver ▪ Lisa Klingbeil

Organist and Senior Choir Accompanist ▪ Cindy Bittner
cynthia.k.bittner@gmail.com

Senior Choir Director ▪ Kari Ballata
ballatahosmer@yahoo.com

Wedding Coordinator ▪ Missy Kneip
mothergoose2954@yahoo.com

Youth & Families Ministry Director ▪ Melissa Whitman
mwhitman@redeemerwhitebear.org

Council & Leadership

President and Staff Relations

Marla Amborn—MarlaAmborn@gmail.com

Vice President, Finance & Stewardship

Ted Field—FieldJackson@msn.com

Previous President and Church Council Secretary

Betsy Clark—eaclark001@comcast.net

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Adult Learning

Scott Ziemann—scott.ziemann@century.edu

Bookkeeper

Cindy Bittner—treasurer@ststephenwbl.org

Children, Youth, & Families

Bethany Zenner—bethanyzenner@hotmail.com

Congregational & Community Care

Phyllis Ballata—pballata@msn.com

Evangelism

EVERYONE

Fellowship

Cheryl Skrypez—cskrypez@gmail.com

Financial Secretary

Brad Wilm—RuthaBradj@gmail.com

Mission and Benevolence

Pastor Karri Anderson—ipk@ststephenwbl.org

Property

Kathy Stickler—kstickler23@gmail.com

Treasurer

Mary Beth Skunes—treasurer@ststephenwbl.org

Worship & Music

Denise Ashley—deniseashley1@yahoo.com

Church Office Hours

Monday-Thursday 9am-3pm; Friday 9am-Noon



www.StStephenWBL.org ♦ office@ststephenwbl.org ♦ 651-777-1107

St Stephen Lutheran Church
1965 East County Rd E
White Bear Lake, MN 55110

What's Happening

Sundays

Worship (with band, organ, or piano)
& Faith Ed **9:30am IN-PERSON**
(Services are live-streamed and online)

Wednesdays

Grace & Praise (GAP) Worship
& Faith Ed **6:00pm IN-PERSON**
(Community Meal at 5:15pm, \$5/pp)

Calendar Highlights

- 1/28 Annual Meeting Potluck Desserts (Sun/12:30pm)
- 1/28 Annual Meeting of the Congregation (Sun/1:00-2:30pm)
- 1/30 Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (Tues/11:30am)
- 1/31 ON BREAK: Pre-Confirmation and Youth Group
- 2/1 Worship & Music Meeting (Thurs/7:00-8:00pm)
- 2/4 Food Shelf Collection (Sun)
- 2/7 Food Shelf Collection (Wed)
- 2/8 Retiree's Breakfast (Thurs/9:00-10:00am)
- 2/10 Content Deadline for March Steppingstone (Sat)
- 2/11 Soup'er Bowl Offering (Sun/9:30am)
- 2/12 Church Council Meeting (Mon/7:00-9:00pm)
- 2/14 Ash Wednesday Services (12noon & 6:00pm)
- 2/14 ON BREAK: Wednesday School, Pre-Confirmation, Youth Group, and NO MEAL tonight
- 2/15 Quilting Group (Thurs/9:00am-3:00pm)
- 2/16 Quilting Group (Fri/9:00am-3:00pm)
- 2/19 President's Day / Church Office **CLOSED** (Mon)
- 2/21 Lent Service (Wed/12noon) & Lenten Lunch (12:30pm)
- 2/21 Lent Meal (Wed/5:30pm) & Lent Worship (6:00pm)
- 2/22 Quilting Group (Thurs/9:00am-3:00pm)
- 2/23 Quilting Group (Fri/9:00am-3:00pm)
- 2/25 Braided Bread Sales (Tanzania Fundraiser) BEGINS
- 2/27 Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (Tues/11:30am)
- 2/28 Lent Service (Wed/12noon) & Lenten Lunch (12:30pm)
- 2/28 Lent Meal (Wed/5:30pm) & Lent Worship (6:00pm)