



Steppingstone Newsletter



*A Christian
community bringing
God's love to the world.*

Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

January, 2025



**For I know what I have planned for you, says the Lord.
I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you.
I have plans to give you a future filled with hope.**

- NET Bible - New English Translation

CHURCH MATTERS

Church Council Highlights

The church council met on Monday, December 9th, and discussed the following:

- ♦ The first draft of a 2025 budget was presented by Mary Beth and discussed. The budget includes increases in both revenue and expenses compared to last year, with greater revenue resulting from envelope income and rent we receive from Presbyterian Church In Cameroon and Kingdom Restoration Ministries. Expenses increased due in part to loan repayment for the parking lot repairs. It should be noted that some of the expense reductions of 2024 still apply next year, such as expenses for staff, children/youth ministries, postage, and garbage pickup. The budget is to be finalized in three weeks when our year-end operating fund carryover is known.
- ♦ There was a discussion about the ongoing study to share responsibilities for our GAP worship service with members of Redeemer Church. There is no expected schedule for a shared service. Further evaluation is needed.
- ♦ The council decided to move the annual congregational meeting on January 26th to a start time of 10:45 am. With this schedule change, members will not need to leave church after worship and return at 12:30 to attend the meeting, as has been done in the past. It is anticipated that the meeting will last approximately one hour and adjourn by 12noon.

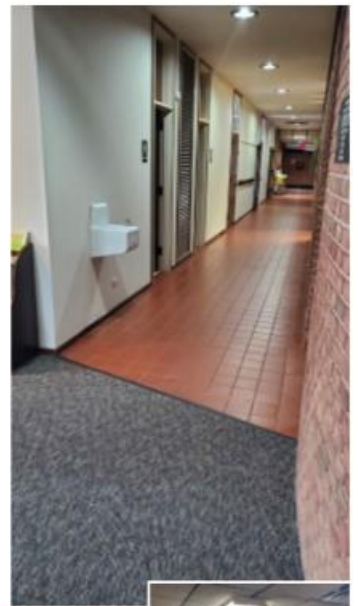


Respectfully submitted, Ted Field, Church Council President

Have You Noticed Upgrades to the Church?

Over the past many months, the Decorating Committee has been hard at work brightening our interior spaces. Of course, the biggest change is new carpet in the narthex, south entrance, and office area. But what about smaller things? Check out new cushions on the benches in both the north and south entryways. What about the black and white photo of the original congregation - framed and hanging above the coffee table in the narthex? And, of course, back in May of 2023, the entire church was repainted the same color which makes our spaces seem bigger and brighter.

Thanks to all those who have helped make these and many more updates to our St. Stephen home. This makes the space more comfortable for us and more welcoming to the new members we hope to see in 2025 and into the future! The group who helped make these things come to fruition include Denise Ashley, Ted Field & Anne Jackson, Jill Sandvik, Tom Scott, Karen & Ken Smith.



St. Stephen 2024 Christmas Garden



Sharon Anderson in honor of my parents Merlyn & Lois Chesney.

Bev and Ev Ammons in celebration of our children, grandchildren,
and great-grandchildren!

Curt & Darlene Blegen in honor of family.

Judee Bramscher in memory of my husband Fred Bramscher
and parents Ervin and Mary Grosskopf.

Lee Branwall in memory of Arlene, Lee Jr., and Davin Branwall,
and Michelle (Branwall) Harty.

Betsy & Brent Clark in celebration of family.

Mike Dignin & Cheryl Skrypez in celebration of family.

Perian Fischer in memory of my mom Ann Wessel, my step-dad Chuck
Wessel, my step-mom Jean Dressen, and my nephew Matt Slaby.

Linda Hetland in memory of mom and dad.

Karina Lawrence and Family in memory of Annette & Charles Johnson.

Susan Klante in memory of my parents Nancy & Raymond Luedtke.

Betty Rombach in memory of Charlie Parker.

Dan & Judy Ruth in celebration of family!

Anita & Loren Schreader in memory of family.

Paul and Karen Schultz in honor of Jason's care-giving staff at his home
who provide loving and supportive care!

Bonnie Stewart in memory of my parents Leland and Minnie Knight.

Diane & Paul Swanson in celebration of Jesus' birth.

Gretchen & Mike Trendera in memory of Scott Trendera and Virginia Sundeen.

Unknown Giver in memory and honor of our loved ones.

HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES

Office Closed (1/1, 1/20)

The church office is closed on Wednesday, Jan. 1 and Monday, Jan. 20 in honor of New Year's Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Regular office hours are Monday-Thursday (9:00am-3:00pm) and Friday (9:00am-12noon)

Annual Reports Due (1/5)

Please promptly submit your 2024 annual reports to the church office at office@ststephenwbl.org anytime **on or before** Sunday, January 5.



Anniversary Reception for Pastor Juli Thompson (1/5)

Immediately following worship, please join us for a reception to celebrate Pastor Juli's 25th Ordination Anniversary!

Christmas Clean-up Day (1/6)

All hands on deck! Simply show up on Monday, Jan. 6 (9:00am) to help us put the decorations away and tidy up the church.

Retiree's Breakfast (1/9)

Attention all retirees! You are invited to join other retirees from church for breakfast (2nd Thurs/9:00-10:00am) at Perkins in Maplewood on County Road D.



Communion Assistant Training (1/12)

You are ALL WELCOME to be a part of the Communion Assistant team. No prior experience necessary! You will need to participate in training prior to being part of the team. Please gather in the sanctuary following service on Sunday, January 12, around 10:30am. The training will take no longer than 30 minutes.

Communion Kits Available for At-Home Worshippers

If you are not able to attend worship services in person and wish to participate in communion at home, please contact Pastor Juli at julia.a.thompson@gmail.com. She can deliver pre-filled communion cups (with wafers) to you so you can self-serve as you follow along online.

Monthly Hymn Sing at Dubliner Pub (1/20)

Fleishpots of Egypt (Lutherland's Most Acclaimed Bluegrass Band) leads this hymn sing (7:00-9:00pm) on the **THIRD** Monday of every month at Dubliner Pub (2162 University Ave., St. Paul, 55114) at University and Vandalia. Get there early (6:30pm) to get a table. Beer and pizza available and/or bring your own snacks. More info at: (<https://www.facebook.com/share/PKH9NJufre7PSWsk/?mibextid=JRoKGI>)



Quilting for a Cause (1/22, 1/23, 1/30, 1/31)

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 January: Thurs-1/22, Fri-1/23, Thurs-1/30, Fri-1/31.

Annual Meeting w/Potluck Desserts (1/26)

Attention all congregants, we strongly encourage you to attend

this year's Annual Meeting on **Sunday, January 26, 2025.**

We will gather in the Fellowship Hall for desserts immediately following worship. Annual Meeting Time: **10:45am - 12noon.**



HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (1/28)

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 28, we will be gathering at The Little Village Pub (2670 Co Rd E East). **RSVP by 1/26.**

Computer Network Guru Needed!

We need your help to secure a Computer Network Guru for our church, can start immediately. This is a paid position. If you have the skills and the time or if you know of someone who does or a company that would be a good fit, please contact Jill Sandvik (612-327-1896 or Jill@mapstoremn.com) or Mary Beth Skunes. Skills needed: Setup & Install Computer / Network Accessories, Server Installation and Configuration, Server Migration, Desktop and Laptop Support, Desktop Application Software, Printers and Peripherals Setup / Troubleshooting, Access Points/Wireless, Network Setup and Configuration, Break/Fix Support, Virus Removal, Secure Internet service and possibility to go cloud based, Training and support, Provide email support and hosting.. (or secure from 3rd party), Copier printer integrated. We have 7-8 computers (not all are networked), and other tech issues that arise.



Pastor-led Bible Study

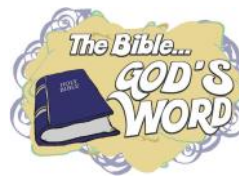
Led by Pastor James on Mondays (10:00-11:00am) in the library.

Winter Weather

Just a reminder that if WHITE BEAR LAKE school district cancels school or cancels evenings activities, St. Stephen will close for the day/evening as well. In the event that it snows and school is not canceled please use your own judgement on whether or not you should drive to church. If we feel we need to cancel a Sunday or Wednesday service we will do everything we can to relay the message to our members, including posting a notice on our website.

Faith Education

- ♦ **Sunday School...** at St. Stephen (9:45-10:30am) for Preschoolers thru grade 4.
- ♦ **Wednesday School...** stay tuned.
- ♦ **Nursery...** at St. Stephen (5:30-7:30pm) on Wednesdays beginning January 8, 2025. Staffed by Briana Klingbeil. For Preschoolers thru Kindergarten.
- ♦ **Pre-Confirmation...** at St. Stephen (5:30-6:15pm) each Wednesday in the Youth Building for grades 3-6.
- ♦ **Confirmation...** at Redeemer (6:30-8:00pm) on the first and third Wednesdays in January for grades 7-8.
- ♦ **Youth Group...** at Redeemer (7:00-8:00pm) on the second and fourth Wednesdays for grades 7-12.
- ♦ Faith Ed is **ON BREAK** on 5th Wednesdays.



God's Word

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

Fellowship Group

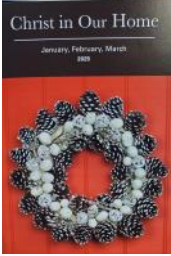
All are invited to gather in the narthex on Wednesdays (10:30am) to share news, lift each other up with encouragement, and simply just visit! This is an informal group and walk-ins are welcome. Contact Judee Bramscher (651-269-6122) if you have questions.

Sing, Sing, Sing! 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



HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Christ In Our Home

Devotional Booklets for Jan / Feb / Mar are available in info racks near both entrances. Please feel free to take as many as you like and offer them to others who may find comfort in reading them.

Please Pick Up Your 2025 Contribution Envelopes in the Narthex

Boxed contribution envelopes are available for pick-up in the narthex (arranged alphabetically) for congregants who donate using envelopes. Thank you for picking up your box today and saving the church postage.

Getting Events onto the 2025 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 2025 calendar.

Do You Have Computer Skills?

If you have computer skills, we especially could use your help in the church office for three hours per week (12-3pm) on either Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays. Duties include answering phones, helping with mailings, and various projects. Please contact Tami at office@ststephenwbl.org or 651-777-1107 if you have any interest or questions.



Sponsor Altar FLOWERS

If you wish to sponsor flowers, please sign up in the narthex or contact Tami in the church office at office@ststephenwbl.org or 651-777-1107 and let us know the date (any Sunday in 2025) 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.

Be a Worship Disciple: LECTOR

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!

Be a Sunday GREETER

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.

SNACK Sponsor Sign-Up

If you wish to sponsor snacks for Sunday, please sign up in the narthex. If you wish to bring your own snacks (ex: cookies, bars, fruit, donuts, muffins, etc.), indicate that on the sign-up sheet by checking the yellow box and fill out a small reminder for yourself. If you wish for the church to provide snacks, please use a snack envelope. The cost is \$20. Fill out an envelope with your name, let us know what your dedication is, the date you wish to sponsor, and drop envelope with your \$20 into the office door mail slot.



Volunteer Opportunity To Be Church Treasurer

Put your accounting skills to good use by volunteering to be our church treasurer! Responsibilities include: processing bills, vouchers, assigning expenses to accounts, designated fund accounts entries, making checks, payroll administrator, preparing financial and designated fund account reports, preparing and maintaining budget, monitor church's cash flow, proof ledger entries, prepare for audits, and report to Church Council. If you are interested or have questions, please contact Mary Beth Skunes (treasurer@ststephenwbl.org) or Ted Field (fieldjackson@msn.com)

APPRECIATION

Thank you to:

- ◆ Those who decorated the altar for Thanksgiving!
- ◆ All who lit the candles during advent.
- ◆ Thank you to all who helped announce the coming of Christmas through the hanging of the greens church decorating.
- ◆ Thank you to White Bear Floral for providing our Christmas trees and the potted greens at our main entrance!
- ◆ To all who put up the nativity scene and hung the star light.
- ◆ All who ordered Christmas Garden Poinsettias this year; making our sanctuary a joyful and beautiful place to worship!
- ◆ Those who decorated the altar with our Christmas Garden Poinsettias and labeled them for pick-up, and to all who donated their plants to our home-bound members.
- ◆ The Senior Choir, accompanists, musicians, and others, for their musical performances during Advent.
- ◆ All who contributed to a Christmas gift for Pastor James and Pastor Juli.
- ◆ All who baked or purchased cookies & bars, assembled trays, and/or delivered decorated trays to our home-bound members! Your outreach efforts mean so much to those who feel comforted knowing that we are thinking about them during Christmastime.
- ◆ To the members who gifted cards and donations to help other families during this season of giving.
- ◆ To our Communion servers.
- ◆ To the entire congregation for the many ways they continue being “A Christian community bringing God’s love to the world.”
- ◆ To the hard-working volunteers who have been making improvements around the church (see page 2 for details and pictures).
- ◆ Living Nativity pictures (see next page).



(Editor's note: Please forgive me if I missed mentioning our appreciation of someone or group. It's hard to keep track of all that folks are doing around the church, which is a great problem to have when you think about it. Please know that all you do is appreciated!)



APPRECIATION

- ♦ **Living Nativity...** Thank you to all who participated in our annual Living Nativity! We especially wish to thank the Boy Scouts, Parkview UCC, Kingdom Restoration Ministries, and the Fools for Christ for filling entire shifts and character roles. From all the cookie bakers, costume makers, and everyone in between, we are so grateful for your efforts in making this a really meaningful community outreach event!




PRAYERS

Jesus said “My Father’s House shall be a House of Prayer.”

Help Keep Us Informed

Please help keep us informed of any concerns that you would like our congregation to be praying about, including those serving in the military and any deaths among family members, by contacting the church office at 651-777-1107 or office@StStephenWBL.org



**Prayer Request** (add or remove from the Prayer List)

ADD _____

This person is... ☐ Member ☐ Family ☐ Friend ☐ Self

Your name _____

Reason for prayer _____

May we share this with the congregation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

REMOVE _____

Update _____

A Christian community bringing God's love to the world.



Prayer Request Cards

Prayer Request Cards are located in the sanctuary pews. Feel free to place your request in an offering plate/basket, drop into the church office door mail slot, or cut out and mail this one to the church. Please keep us updated on those you have asked us to add to our prayer list.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Blessing a Home at Epiphany

On January 6, the Christian church celebrates the festival of Epiphany, which remembers the visit of the Magi to the newborn Jesus. For many years, Christians have also marked the season of Epiphany as a time for friends and family to gather and offer a blessing for the home.

In addition to spoken blessings and scripture readings, following an eastern European tradition, a visual blessing may be inscribed with white chalk above the main door; for example, 20 + CMB + 25. The numbers change with each new year. The three letters stand for either the ancient Latin blessing *Christe mansionem benedicat*, which means “Christ, bless this house,” or the legendary names of the magi (Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar).

The blessings can be held just at the entrance to the home, or those gathered can process from room to room, blessing the house with incense or by sprinkling water, perhaps using a branch from the Christmas tree.

Pastor Juli and I invite anyone who may wish to have their house blessed in January to sign up at church or to contact the office – we would love to stop by and help you start your year off right!

- Pastor James



GENERAL INFORMATION

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The Steppingstone Newsletter...

Is distributed monthly. If you have any items for the **February** issue, please send them to office@ststephenwbl.org by Friday, Jan. 10. Newsletters are also available in information racks near both entrances or via email.

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

Staff

Council & Leadership

Church Office Hours

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

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

What's Happening

Sundays

9:30am Worship Service
9:45am Faith Ed
(Services are live-streamed and online)

Wednesdays

5:15pm Community Meal (\$5/pp)
5:30pm Faith Ed
6:00pm Grace & Praise Worship

Calendar Highlights

- 1/1 New Year's Day - **OFFICE CLOSED** (Wed)
- 1/2 God's Word Bible Discussion – **ON BREAK**
- 1/5 Annual Reports **DUE** (Sun)
- 1/5 Pastor Juli Thompson's 25th Ordination Anniversary Reception (Sun/10:30am)
- 1/5 Food Shelf Collection (Sun)
- 1/6 Christmas Clean-up Day (Mon/9:00am)
- 1/7 Staff Meeting (Tues/12:30-1:30pm)
- 1/8 Fellowship Group **RESUMES** (Wed/10:30am)
- 1/8 Staffed Nursery **OPENS** (Wed/5:30-7:30pm)
- 1/9 Retiree's Breakfast (Thurs/9:00-10:00am)
- 1/9 Worship & Music Meeting (Thurs/6:00-7:00pm)
- 1/10 Content **DUE** for February Steppingstone (Fri)
- 1/12 Communion Assistant Training (Sun/10:30-11:00am)
- 1/13 Church Council Meeting (Mon/7:00-9:00pm)
- 1/20 Martin Luther King Jr. Day - **OFFICE CLOSED** (Mon)
- 1/20 Monthly Hymn Sing at Dubliner Pub (Mon/7:00-9:00pm)
- 1/22 Quilters (9:00am-3:00pm, *also on Fri/23, Thurs/30, Fri/31*)
- 1/22 Pre-Confirmation - **ON BREAK** (Wed)
- 1/23 Steppingstone Distribution Day (Thurs)
- 1/26 Senior Choir Performing (Sun/9:30am)
- 1/26 Annual Meeting of the Congregation (Sun/10:45am-12noon)
- 1/28 Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (Tues/11:30am)
- 1/29 Pre-Confirmation - **ON BREAK** (Wed)