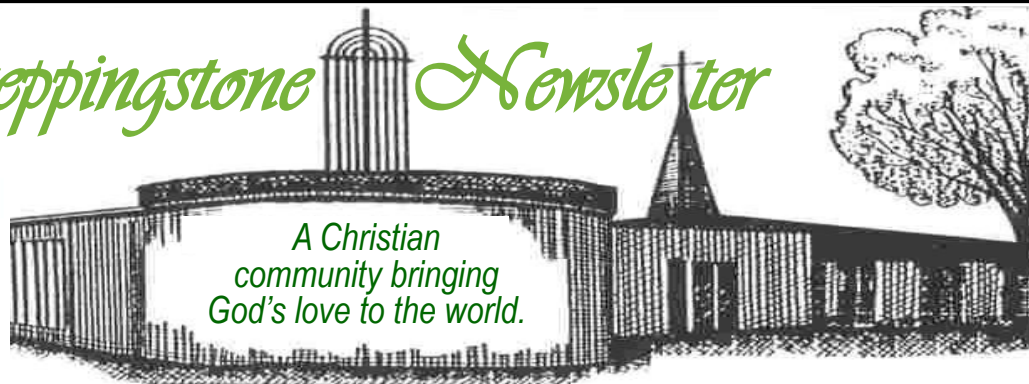




Steppingstone Newsletter



February & March, 2025

Highlights



Dignity for Daughters Presentation

Sunday, Feb. 2 (10:30am, details on page 3)



Christian Singles Lunch Bunch

Feb. 25 & March 25 (11:30am, details on page 3)



Ash Wednesday Services

March 5 (12noon & 6:00pm, details on page 4)



Braided Bread Sales BEGIN

March 16 (Tanzania Fundraiser, details on page 4)



Wednesdays During Lent

(3/12, 3/19, 3/26, 4/2, 4/9)

Lenten Service & Lunch at St. Stephen
(12noon) (12:30pm)

Lenten Service w/Dinner at Redeemer
(6:00pm)

CHURCH MATTERS

Church Council Highlights

The church council met on January 13th to address the following:

- ♦ **Authorized** the 2025 budget to present to the congregation for approval at the Annual Meeting on January 26th. The budget calls for greater revenue and spending in 2025 and is aided by a General Fund carryover of a \$846 surplus. This represents a great turnaround from last year, in which the Fund carryover was a deficit of \$50,408.
- ♦ **Received** a report from Marla Amborn, Chair of Evangelism/Outreach. Marla's report highlighted our outreach accomplishments in 2024 and strategies for 2025.
- ♦ **Received** a report from Craig Johnson describing our network environment and recommendations for maintaining it. A recommendation for a Cloud-based data backup was approved by the council.
- ♦ **Approved** going forward with a plan for sharing noon and evening Lenten Services this year with Redeemer.
- ♦ **Approved** hiring a Wednesday Child Care Coordinator for the nursery during the GAP worship service.



- Respectfully submitted, Ted Field, Council President

A Stewardship Update

(Previously appeared in our December 31st Weekly Update)

Another year of church finances has ended but something was different this year. It is customary in December for St. Stephen members to receive a special appeal letter from the pastor and finance committee asking to help make up a deficit in the church's budget. Several members have approached me recently to ask, "Where's my letter?"

The answer is our generosity is at work. Generosity is not a response to the church asking for money and in 2024 we all stepped up our generosity with gifts from our hearts. In doing so, we showed our devotion to the creed that true stewardship is more about a giver's need to give than a church's need to receive. We were good stewards of God's work in our lives.

Final figures for 2024 show that we began this year of great transition with an operating fund deficit of \$50,000, a deficit we feared would grow, but stepped forward generously to end the year with the deficit cut in half. Remember the barometer in the narthex this past spring? Remember how it tracked our progress tackling the deficit early in the year rather than late? Our 2024 finances are ending in a much better place than where they started.

There are two lessons from this year to carry into 2025. One is to keep up our generosity and continue to give in accordance with what our hearts tell us is proportionate to our life's blessings. The other is to give *early* rather than late. When our gifts are spread out over the year, rather than coming in a late-year surge, our cash flow and ability to avoid plunging into deficit are greatly improved. We need to follow these lessons in 2025 to keep our finances healthy.

A hearty thanks and celebration to everyone is well deserved. Blessings to everyone on their stewardship journey in 2025.

- Ted Field, Stewardship Ministry Team



HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES

Dignity for Daughters Presentation (2/2)

Dignity for Daughters (DFD) is a non-profit organization affiliated with the St. Paul Area Synod and their outreach programs in Iringa, Tanzania. DFD combats period poverty and empowers students in the Iringa region. Period Poverty is defined as a lack of access to menstrual products, hygiene facilities, waste management and education. Karen Smith, a board member of DFD, will give a presentation (10:30am) in the Fellowship Hall immediately following the Sunday worship service. Please join her to learn about what this group is achieving in the Iringa region and why it is so important. I hope to see you there!



Retiree's Breakfast (2/13 & 3/13)



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.



Monthly Hymn Sing at Dubliner Pub (2/17 & 3/24)

Featuring:
The Fleshpots
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=JR0KGi>) Note: March 17 rescheduled to March 24th.

Office Closed (2/17)

The church office is closed on Monday, February 17 in honor of President's Day. Regular office hours are Monday-Thursday (9:00am-3:00pm) and Friday (9:00am-12noon)

Quilting for a Cause in February & March

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-2/20, Fri-2/21, Thurs-2/27, Fri-2/28 and in March: Thurs-3/20, Fri-3/21, Thurs-3/27, Fri-3/28.



Quilters Need Sheets

The quilting group will be gathering in the A-B Room to work on quilts and are in need of top sheets of all sizes. Please drop sheets (new and like new) off at the church office. Thank you for your donations!

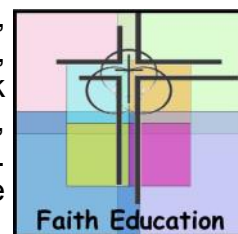
Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (2/25 & 3/25)

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 February 25, we will be gathering at Chili's Grill & Bar (1800 Beam Ave, Maplewood, MN 55109). RSVP by 2/23. Our location for March 25 will be determined soon.



Faith Ed Schedule

Children's Wednesday School, Pre-confirmation, Confirmation, and Youth Group are on break March 5 for Ash Wednesday, March 12 for spring break. Wednesday Faith Ed will be held at Redeemer during Lent.



HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Ash Wednesday (3/5)

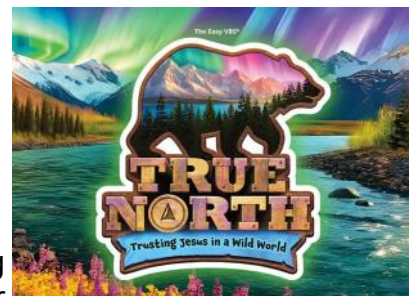
On Ash Wednesday we begin our forty-day journey toward Easter with a day of fasting and repentance. Marking our foreheads with dust, we acknowledge that we die and return to the earth. At the same time, the dust traces the life-giving cross indelibly marked on our foreheads at baptism. While we journey 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.)

Vacation Bible School: Volunteering & Registering Kids

We are anticipating a large turnout for Vacation Bible School this year (June 23-27) and we cannot run this program without you! If you would like to volunteer, please contact Melissa at mwhitman@redeemerwhitebear.org or look in upcoming e-blasts for a link or QR code and link to our online sign-up. Registration for VBS begins on March 15!



Braided Bread - Tanzania Fundraiser (3/16-3/30)

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. Pick-up will be on April 12 (10am-12noon). Look for more details in Weekly Update e-blasts.



Easter Garden Orders DUE (3/30)

Please fill out an Easter Flower Garden order form, along with your payment, into the office door mail slot by Sunday, March 30 if you wish to have your dedication (in memory, honor, or celebration) in the bulletin on Easter. The flowers you order will decorate the altar and may be taken home after the 9:30am service on Easter Sunday. If you choose to donate them, they will be delivered to our home-bound members. (See page 8 for the order form.)



Fellowship Group Schedule

The Fellowship Group is on BREAK from Ash Wednesday (3/5) through Lent (3/12-4/16) returning on Wednesday, April 23rd.

Daylight Saving Time (3/9)

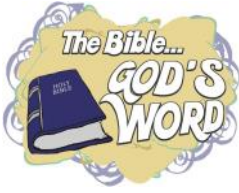
Spring forward by setting your clocks one hour ahead at 2:00am on Sunday, March 9.



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



HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



God's Word

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

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



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. Sign up in the kitchen or contact the church office at 651-777-1107 or office@ststephenwbl.org to get onto the schedule.

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) 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.

Lost & Found

If you have lost any items (jewelry, clothing, keys, umbrella, etc.) in the last two years, please contact the church office and describe what you are missing. 651-777-1107 or office@ststephenwbl.org

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.

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 is 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!

Volunteer Helpers for Funeral Luncheons

Please consider volunteering to help with funerals at St. Stephen Church. Positions to choose from include food prep and set-up from 9:00-11:30am.



Serving food and clean up 11:30am-2:00pm. Making a pan of bars/cookies to serve at funeral lunch. Please contact Judy Ruth at 651-426-0869 to volunteer or for additional information.

HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Tanzania 2025

The dates have been set for St Stephen to travel to Tanzania in August 2025 as part of our Bega Kwa Bega (BKB or Shoulder to Shoulder) partnership! We will depart on Monday August 11 and return on Wednesday August 27. A specific itinerary is still being finalized but includes visiting our partner parish Lukani from August 15-17, learning about other BKB affiliate activities in the Iringa region as well as visiting Ruaha national park near the end of our trip. We currently have seven St. Stephen members planning to travel in this group, including a mix of first time and experienced travelers. If you have any interest in participating please reach out to one of the group leaders (Ken Smith, Karen Smith or Betsy Clark) **before January 31st**.

Neighborhood Band Seeks Retired Musicians

Rich, our next-door neighbor, is inviting retired musicians to join their band, Liechtenstein Nein, to play polka and waltz. If interested, call him at 651-242-1040.



God Spoke

In the beginning of God's creating
 God spoke
 and from the vibration
light sparked into the chaos
 hydrogen fueled the stars
 stars forged the metals,
 stone
 earth!
 rimrock and arch
vibrating with the sound of God's voice
 greenstone and shale
ringing with the resonance of creation
 seastack and sand
vibrant with the memory of God's speaking
 sky!
 sundog and haze
 nimbus and dark
inflused with the vibration of God's song
 seas!
 maelstrom and wave
 cascade and marsh
awash with the roar of God's voice
 life!
 plankton and kelp
 mangrove and reed
 bluestem and gentian
 mesquite and sage
alive with the sound of the Ancient of Days
 goldfinch and whale
 lemur and human
pulsing with the echo of God's chanting
 It is woven into us
 it is innate in all of us
it is vibrating in everything—
 the voice of God
And all creation
 sings back
 the antiphon:
 Blessed!

Susan Palo Cherwien (1953-2021) from "New Songs:
I" in *From Glory into Glory*, 2009

Winter Weather and Church Closings

It's that time of year! 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. It is rare that we have to close on a Sunday (it's only happened once in 35 years), but if we feel we need to cancel a Sunday service we will do everything we can to relay the message to our members, including posting a notice on our website.

APPRECIATION

Thank You To:

- ◆ All who composed 2024 annual reports!
- ◆ The hospitality committee for putting together a very nice anniversary reception on January 5th for Pastor Juli's 25th Ordination Anniversary.
- ◆ All the funeral luncheon volunteers (photo).
- ◆ All who cleaned up the church and packed away Christmas decorations on January 7th.
- ◆ Our mail carrier, Sarah, for her wonderful service and smile (photo).
- ◆ Our Children's Ministry volunteer for decorating the hallway bulletin board (photo).



From the Food Shelf: Dear friends at St. Stephen Lutheran Church,

On behalf of the White Bear Area Food Shelf, I want to express our deepest gratitude for your recent donation of \$500. Your generosity and compassion play a pivotal role in advancing our mission of providing essential food and support to our neighbors in need.

The past few years have presented unprecedented challenges, marked by inflation and a reduction in food support resources. These factors have placed new and increased financial burdens on many local families. In response, our organization has swiftly adapted and realigned our strategies to address the evolving needs of our community. Despite the heightened challenges, your unwavering support has been instrumental in ensuring that we can continue our vital work. I am pleased to share some recent statistics with you, highlighting the impact of your contribution:

- ◆ Total visits to our food shelf have surged by nearly 60% compared to last year at this time, underscoring the growing need within our community.
- ◆ Each month, we are welcoming an average of 6,233 visitors to our food shelf, illustrating the ongoing influx of individuals and families seeking assistance.
- ◆ The inauguration of our new Community Market at the end of January 2024 has been a transformative development, effectively doubling the number of people we can serve and significantly expanding our outreach within the community.

Your steadfast support enables us to make a tangible difference in the lives of those we serve, and we are immensely grateful for our partnership in this mission. Together, we can continue to provide hope and assistance to our neighbors in need, empowering them to overcome adversity and thrive.

With heartfelt gratitude on behalf of those we serve,

 Perry Petersen
 Executive Director

THANK YOU ST. STEPHEN
 LUTHERAN CHURCH FOR YOUR
 GENEROUS SUPPORT!

EASTER FLOWER GARDEN ORDER FORM

Easter Flower Garden 2025

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 30

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.

GENERAL INFORMATION

In This Issue

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Happenings & Opportunities (3-6)
Appreciation (7)
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Prayers (9)
Announcements (10)
General Information (11)
Calendar (back cover)

The Steppingstone Newsletter...

Is distributed monthly. If you have any items for the **April** issue, please send them to office@ststephenwbl.org by Monday, Mar. 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

Lead Pastor ▪ James Muske
pastorjames@ststephenwbl.org

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

~

Children & Families Ministry Director ▪
OPEN

**Communication & Administrative
Coordinator** ▪ Tami Heart
office@ststephenwbl.org

Custodian ▪ Paul Swanson

Digital Ministry Director ▪ Zach VanDyke
zrv10000@gmail.com

Funeral Luncheon Coordinator ▪ Kathy Anderson
kathleen856@q.com

GAP Worship Director ▪ Justin Woodruff
jwoodruff@homfurniture.com

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

Senior Choir Director ▪ Kari Ballata
ballatahosmer@yahoo.com

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

Church Office Hours

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

Council & Leadership

President

Kathy Stickler—kstickler23@gmail.com

Previous President

Ted Field—FieldJackson@msn.com

Council Secretary

Betsy Clark—eaclark001@comcast.net

~

Adult Learning

Scott Ziemann—scott.ziemann@century.edu

Bookkeeper

Cindy Bittner—treasurer@ststephenwbl.org

Children, Youth, & Families

Sue Lemon—651-429-5861

Fellowship

Jackie Colaizy—jage_c@comcast.net

Finance

Nancy Finley—nfnsammi2022@gmail.com

Financial Secretary

Brad Wilm—RuthaBradj@gmail.com

Mission and Benevolence

James Muske—pastorjames@ststephenwbl.org

Treasurer

Mary Beth Skunes—treasurer@ststephenwbl.org

Many of the positions are pending the outcome of the annual meeting, including, but not limited to the following: Vice President, Congregational & Community Care, Evangelism, Property, Staff Relations, Stewardship, and Worship & Music.

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

- 2/2 Adult Forum: Dignity for Daughters (Sun/10:30am)
- 2/2 Food Shelf Collection (Sun)
- 2/5 Food Shelf Collection (Wed)
- 2/6 Worship & Music Meeting (Thurs/7:00-8:00pm)
- 2/10 Church Council Meeting (Mon/7:00-9:00pm)
- 2/13 Retiree's Breakfast (Thurs/9:00-10:00am)
- 2/17 President's Day / Church Office **CLOSED** (Mon)
- 2/17 Monthly Hymn Sing at Dubliner Pub (Mon/7:00-9:00pm)
- 2/20 Quilting Group (Thurs/9:00am-3:00pm) *also on 27*
- 2/21 Quilting Group (Fri/9:00am-3:00pm) *also on 28*
- 2/24 Every Meal (Mon/6:00-8:00pm) *details coming soon*
- 2/25 Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (Tues/11:30am)
- 3/2 Food Shelf Collection (Sun)
- 3/5 Ash Wednesday Services (12noon & 6:00pm)
- 3/5 Food Shelf Collection (Sun)
- 3/5 ON BREAK: Faith Ed - and NO MEAL tonight
- 3/6 Worship & Music Meeting (Thurs/7:00-8:00pm)
- 3/9 Daylight Saving Time BEGINS (Sun/2:00am)
- 3/10 Content Deadline for April Steppingstone (Mon)
- 3/10 Church Council Meeting (Mon/7:00-9:00pm)
- 3/12 Lenten Service (Wed/12noon) *also on 19 & 26*
- 3/12 Lenten Lunch (Wed/12:30pm) *also on 19 & 26*
- 3/12 Lenten Service w/Dinner at Redeemer
(Wed/6:00pm) *also on 19 & 26*
- 3/12 ON BREAK: Faith Ed
- 3/13 Retiree's Breakfast (Thurs/9:00-10:00am)
- 3/15 VBS Registration BEGINS (Sat)
- 3/16 Braided Bread Sales (Tanzania Fundraiser) BEGINS
- 3/20 Quilting Group (Thurs/9:00am-3:00pm) *also on 27*
- 3/21 Quilting Group (Fri/9:00am-3:00pm) *also on 28*
- 3/24 Monthly Hymn Sing at Dubliner Pub (Mon/7:00-9:00pm)
- 3/25 Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (Tues/11:30am)
- 3/30 Easter Flower Garden Orders DUE (Sun)