

Highlights



Quilts For Sale (details on page 4)
Sunday, April 26 -and- Wednesday, April 29



Nordic Walking BEGINS
Tuesday, April 28 (7:00-8:00pm, details on page 4)



Spring Church Clean-up Day
Saturday, May 2 (9:00am-12noon, details on page 4)



All Music Sunday & Mother's Day!
Sunday, May 10 (9:30am, details on page 4)



Musical Ventriloquist
Thursday, May 14 (10:00am, details on page 4)



Mom's Morning Out
Sunday, May 16 (10:00am-1:00pm, details on page 5)

CHURCH MATTERS

Message from Pastor James and Pastor Juli

Greetings, siblings in Christ!

In recent months, national political tensions have hit close to home in our area. Alongside the immediate impact on our broader community, many people have felt the strain that can come when neighbors, friends, and even fellow church members hold different political beliefs and perspectives on current events. While the specific events that spark these conversations may change from time to time, the challenge of navigating political disagreement is not new for our society or for the church.

This, of course, includes our congregation. People experience these tensions in different ways, and not everyone feels the same about how the church speaks to issues connected to public life.

As your pastors, we want to acknowledge that this tension is real and honor that faithful Christians may see and respond to it differently. The church has lived through seasons of disagreement before, and by God's grace it will continue to do so while remaining rooted in Christ and in love for one another.

Years ago, a former bishop in the Northeastern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA described the church's relationship to politics in a helpful way. Because the church is called to be engaged in the world, we cannot always avoid topics that have political implications. The gospel calls Christians to feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger, and stand with those who are vulnerable or oppressed. When we speak about these things, it may sometimes sound "political," simply because these issues also appear in public debates and policies.

At the same time, the bishop cautioned that the church should not be partisan. Our calling is not to declare that one political party is the faithful one, or to suggest that God belongs to one side of the political spectrum. Our commitment as pastors is to ground what we say in Scripture and the teachings of our faith, not in party platforms.

At the same time, we also believe the church has a responsibility to help our community wrestle with the questions and challenges of our own time. This, too, reflects the witness of Scripture. Jesus spoke about truths that are eternal and universal, but he also spoke directly to the realities of the world around him - the needs, struggles, and injustices present in his own day. In the same spirit, the church continues to reflect on how the teachings of Christ guide our lives as Christians living in the world today.

Scripture itself acknowledges that living faithfully together is not always simple. The apostle Paul frequently wrote to the earliest Christian communities about internal disagreements and struggles. In one of his letters he encourages the church to "be of the same mind," united in love and humility (Philippians 2:1-4). Yet the very fact that Paul had to write such words reminds us that the church has never been a community of identical opinions. From the beginning, Christians have wrestled with how to live out the gospel in a complicated world.

(Continued...)

CHURCH MATTERS

Our hope is not that every person in the congregation will see every issue in exactly the same way. Rather, our hope is that we can remain grounded in Christ while treating one another with humility, respect, and love.

As pastors, we want to say clearly that we care deeply for every person in this congregation, regardless of political beliefs or affiliations. Our calling is to walk with people in faith, to listen, to pray, and to care for one another as members of the body of Christ. Even when disagreements arise - and even when relationships become strained - we trust in the grace of God that continually calls us toward forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. As Lutherans, we believe deeply that God's grace is always at work among us, inviting us back into relationship with God and with one another.

We also recognize that this balance is not easy. For some, even brief references to issues connected with public life can feel uncomfortable. At the same time, others sometimes feel discouraged when the church remains silent about suffering, injustice, or the needs of our neighbors. As leaders in the church, we try to navigate this tension carefully and thoughtfully, always seeking to remain faithful to the gospel.

Because we care deeply about the health of our congregation, we also encourage direct and open conversation. If something in a sermon, teaching, or ministry raises questions or concerns for you, we invite you to speak with us directly. Healthy communities grow through honest dialogue, and we welcome those conversations.

The church has never been a place where everyone thinks exactly alike. Instead, it is a community gathered by Christ, where people of many backgrounds and perspectives pray together, serve together, and learn what it means to love God and neighbor.

Thank you for being part of this congregation and for the many ways you live out Christ's love in the world.

Grace and peace,
Pastor James and Pastor Juli

The Annette Johnson Memorial Chair

Next time you are in the sanctuary, take a look at the south wall near the organ. You will see a chair behind the back row of pews. This is the Annette Johnson Memorial Chair. Annette was a long-time member of St. Stephen, and as she got older, she found it difficult to sit down in and get up from the pews. She bought this chair, which she sat in during worship. After her death, her family donated it to St. Stephen, so that other people having difficulty could be comfortable during worship. The chair can be moved to other parts of the sanctuary, so you can still sit in our favorite section. Please feel free to use this gift as was intended.



HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Blessing of the Quilts (4/26) Quilts on Display & For Sale (4/26 & 4/29)

Quilts will be on display in the sanctuary on Sunday, April 26 and on Wednesday, April 29. They will be offered for sale before and after worship services. This sale is a fundraiser which keeps this ministry going. Unsold quilts will be donated to local shelters.

Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (4/28 & 5/26)

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 April 28, we are meeting at Jimmy's (1132 Co Rd E East, Vadnais Heights). RSVP by 4/26. On May 26, we meet at the Blacksmith Lounge (17205 Forest Blvd. N., Hugo). RSVP by 5/24.



Nordic Walking Club

Please sign up on the Welcome Desk in the narthex if you are interested in joining our Nordic Walking club. All ages welcome. Dogs welcome too. We meet Tuesdays (7:00-8:00pm) at different locations. Season dates: April 28 - August 25. Flyers (with schedule and directions) are available in the info racks near entrances.

Spring Church Clean-up Day (5/2)

It is time to clean up from winter's effects on our grounds. Our annual Spring Church Clean-up Day will be Saturday, May 2 (9:00am-12noon). **Please** come and help Diane & Paul Swanson in sprucing up the church (inside and outside) and help us avoid contracting this work to an outside company. Bring a rake and a friend. Many hands make light work! **Tasks include:** removing trash/debris from grounds and under bushes, sweeping the parking lot, raking lawn on west side of building, dusting woodwork, cleaning counters and tables, dusting pews, cleaning windows and screens.



Mother's Day / All Music Sunday (5/10)

Join us for a special Mother's Day service with musicians, the choir, bell ringers, and more on Sunday, May 10 (9:30am). We appreciate our moms so let's celebrate!



Musical Ventriloquist

We welcome Musical Ventriloquist Kevin Doely to our "Come & Be Curious" event on Thursday, May 14 (10:00am). Audiences are laughing out loud at Kevin's life like vent figures and puppets. Kevin serves as the senior pastor of Faith Lutheran Church in Coon Rapids and regularly uses ventriloquism as a means to encourage and educate. He will be featuring a special "Laugh for Life" show with heart-warming routines that are full of wholesome humor, music, and stories along with special guests Johnny Cash and Elvis! Come and join in the laughs! To **RSVP**, sign up in the narthex or contact the church office at 651-777-1107 by May 7th.



HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Choir Schedule

The Senior Choir will be singing on Mother's Day/All Music Sunday, May 10. We resume practices on Wednesdays (7:00-8:00pm) in the fall. If you are interested in joining the choir in the fall, please contact Kari at ballatahosmer@gmail.com

Faith Ed—Pre-Confirmation FINAL (5/20)



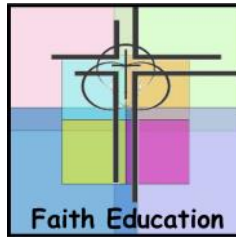
For youth (grades 3 thru 5), Pre-Confirmation is at St. Stephen (5:30-6:15pm). This is the FINAL class until fall.

Youth Group – FINAL (5/13)



For youth (grades 7-12), our final gathering is on May 13 (7:00-8:00pm) at Redeemer.

Faith Ed – Sunday & Wednesday School FINAL



For children (preschool thru grade 5): Sunday School's final session is on May 17 (9:45-10:30am), starting up again in the fall. Wednesday School's final session is on May 20 (5:30-6:15pm), beginning again in the fall.

Faith Ed—Confirmation FINAL (5/20)



For youth (grades 6 thru 8), Confirmation is at Redeemer (7:00-8:30pm). This is the FINAL class until fall.

Register NOW for VBS!



Register children now for this year's Vacation Bible School (VBS) titled: "Faith Detectives: God's Clues All Around Us". VBS will be only four days this year and held at Redeemer on June 22-25 (9:00am-12noon). On Wed., June 24, gather for our VBS BBQ (5:15pm) and GAP Worship (6:00pm) at St. Stephen. Register online at: <https://form.jotform.com/260054432525146>.



Couples Golf League

If you are interested in joining a Couples Golf League that will begin in May, please contact Mike Trenda at mike.trenda@gmail.com or 651-324-9568. Time and days to be determined. High to low handicap welcome. 9 holes/week.

Synod Assembly (5/15-16)

The Saint Paul Area Synod's 2026 Synod Assembly will be held May 15-16 at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Mahtomedi. During the assembly we will worship together, consider resolutions, elect people to leadership roles and experience being part of a wider church. We look forward to hearing feedback from St. Stephen members who will be attending this year.

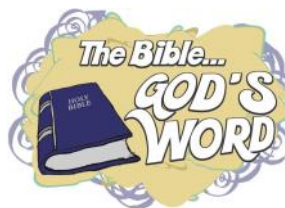
Mom's Morning Out (5/16)



Attention moms! Do you need a morning to yourself? We have the answer for you. St. Stephen will provide free childcare and fun for children ages 2 thru 9 on Saturday, May 16 (10:00am-1:00pm). A meal is included, group size is limited, and pre-registration is required - contact the church at 651-777-1107 or office@ststephenwbl.org.

VBS Volunteers Needed!

We cannot run this program without you! If you would like to volunteer, or if you have any questions, please contact Melissa at: mwhitman@redeemerwhitebear.org



God's Word Bible Discussion Group

God's Word Bible discussion group, led by Phyllis Ballata meets in the library on Thursdays (1:00-2:00pm). We are discussing "God the Father".

HAPPENINGS & OPPORTUNITIES



Pentecost Sunday (5/24)

Pentecost derives its name from the Jewish festival celebrating the harvest and the giving of the law on Mount Sinai fifty days after Passover. Fifty days after Easter, we celebrate the Holy Spirit as God's presence within and among us. In Acts the Spirit arrives in rushing wind and flame, bringing God's presence to all people. Paul reminds us that though we each have different capacities, we are unified in the Spirit that equips us with these gifts. Jesus breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples, empowering them to forgive sin. We celebrate that we too are given the breath of the Holy Spirit and sent out to proclaim God's redeeming love to all the world. If you wish, **wear red!**



Fellowship Group (ONGOING)

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.

Church Photo Directories

We still have directories that some folks haven't picked up yet. Please contact Tami in the church office if you would like your directory.

Memorial Day Church Office Closed (5/25)

The church office is closed on Monday, May 25 in observance of Memorial Day (honoring those who sacrificed their lives while serving in the U.S. military). Office hours are Monday thru Thursday (9:00am - 3:00pm) and Friday (9:00am - 12noon).



Outdoor Worship Begins (6/3)

Wednesday is a perfect time to invite family members and friends to our community potluck BBQ (5:15pm) and casual, outdoor Grace & Praise (GAP) worship service (6:00pm). Many people say they would attend a church if they were invited, so here is a great opportunity to extend that invitation! Watch for signs marking designated pet areas. We gather on the north lawn beginning June 3 (weather permitting), so remember to bring your lawn chair or blanket.



For pets and their people too!



Wednesday Potluck BBQ's

During the summer, our Wednesday meals change to Potluck BBQ's. The church provides the meats and buns. Mealtime is 5:15-6:00pm. Choose as many food items, tasks, and Wednesdays as you like by **signing up in the kitchen** or contact the church office (office@ststephenwbl.org, 651-777-1107) to bring/do the following:

- ◆ 3 bags of chips
- ◆ Side dish
- ◆ Dessert
- ◆ Prep (4:00pm): boil brats, thaw burgers, mix lemonade.
- ◆ Grilling (4:45pm)
- ◆ Set-up (5:00pm): chips, side-dishes, desserts, condiments, plates, cups, etc.
- ◆ Clean-up



APPRECIATION

Lenten Lunches & Meals... Thank you to all who made lunches and meals on Wednesdays throughout Lent.

Property Team... Thank you for your commitment to keeping the building and grounds in shape. Thank you for the new hallway lights!

Cards from Church... Thank you to our member who devotedly sends out cards on behalf of the church to folks who are ill or whom we wish to thank. We appreciate your caring for our church family in this way.

Easter Flower Garden... Thank you to all who purchased plants for the Easter Flower Garden and to those who donated their plants for our homebound members.

Decorating Sanctuary... Thank you to those who lovingly decorated the sanctuary for Palm Sunday and Easter services.

Garage Sale... *Thank you, grateful, aren't really enough to say, for how awesome the Garage Sale was because of all the help and donations everyone provided. Even the weather helped encourage people to get out and enjoy a special event. We had some great items, good food, wonderful help, and an indoor location. The next sale was to be in June, but after much consideration and input by many, most thought it would be best to wait until September. So please mark Sept. 19th on your calendars for the next sale. We will start collecting items mid-August. Again, many thanks, God bless you all (workers and buyers)! - Sue Lemon.*

Youth Trip Fundraiser—Note... *Thank you guys for thoughtful donation for the Charleston mission trip. I am super excited for this opportunity to help out however I can. Sincerely, Alyssa K.*

Youth Trip Fundraiser—Note... *Dear congregation of St. Stephen, I am so honored to be a part of this church family. I'm thankful and very blessed to get a chance to help and to go to South Carolina. I'm always grateful to be getting help from the church family. Being part of this church has truly meant a lot, and I'm really grateful for the support, kindness, and encouragement I've received from everyone. I appreciate the effort that many people took to always lend a helping hand. This means so much to me. Blessings, Matthew*

Pictures... Easter Day Worship, Sue Lemon making kid's crafts, Palm Sunday, Quilters, home-made Christmas ornaments, new lights, Lector Matthew, Florence Bye's 100th birthday party, and Cruisers performing at Nights of Columbus Christmas Party.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHURCH MATTERS

Pastors' Discretionary Fund

St. Stephen is a very generous congregation. One of the ways that generosity is expressed is through the Pastors' Discretionary Fund. When we get requests for assistance from members of the community, this is the fund we draw on. We don't fulfill every request - for example, requests for food assistance are now referred to the White Bear Area Food Shelf, where we have an ongoing partnership. But we regularly receive requests to meet other needs. We have guidelines (approved by the council), and we use our best judgement in deciding when to say yes.

As examples, we have given money to members of St. Stephen who needed assistance with rent or house payments; helped to pay for needed medications, bought shoes for kids to wear to school; paid for a car repair to enable the owner to get to and from work; and many, many other things. Some money goes to members, and some money goes to people from outside the congregation. We do limit ourselves to White Bear Lake residents.

The Pastors' Discretionary Fund is not a budgeted expense. That means that we don't get regular amounts from our annual budget. It is funded entirely through designated gifts. We do receive regular gifts from Neighbors Helping Neighbors, which we appreciate very much. They are consistently the largest donor to this fund.

If you are interested in making a gift to St. Stephen above your regular giving, and want to make sure your gift does the most good, please consider the Pastors' Discretionary Fund. Either Pastor James or Pastor Juli would be happy to answer any questions you have about how this fund is used.



GENERAL INFORMATION

In This Issue

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Calendar (back cover)

The Steppingstone Newsletter...

Is distributed monthly. If you have any items for the **June** issue, please send them to office@ststephenwbl.org by Sunday, May 10th. 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

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Children & Families Ministry Director ▪
Sue Lemon—651-429-5861

**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, Congregational & Community
Care and Staff Relations**
Robin Eberlein—reberlein@msn.com

Previous President and Secretary
Kathy Stickler—kstickler23@gmail.com

Vice President and Fellowship
Jackie Colaizy—jaqe_c@comcast.net

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Adult Learning
Angel Stafsholt—astafsholt@gmail.com

Bookkeeper
Cindy Bittner—treasurer@ststephenwbl.org

Children, Youth, & Families
Sue Lemon—651-429-5861

Finance
Nancy Finley—nfnsammi2022@gmail.com

Financial Secretary
Brad Wilm—RuthaBradj@gmail.com

Mission and Benevolence
James Muske—pastorjames@ststephenwbl.org

Outreach (previously Evangelism)
Karen Smith—karen.sawyer.smith1@gmail.com

Property
Mike Trendera—mike.trendera@gmail.com

Stewardship
Matthew Tilahun—debkassa@gmail.com

Treasurer
Mary Beth Skunes—treasurer@ststephenwbl.org

Worship & Music
Bob Whelehan—rjwhelehan@aol.com



ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH
A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY BRINGING GOD'S LOVE TO THE WORLD.

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

Indoor Service with Music Variety
9:30am IN-PERSON
(Services are live-streamed and online)

Wednesdays

Casual Outdoor Worship Service
6:00pm IN-PERSON
(Community BBQ at 5:15pm, \$5/pp)

APRIL

- 4/26 Blessing of the Quilts (Sun/9:30am)
- 4/26 Quilts on Display and For Sale (Sun/9:00-11:00am)
- 4/28 Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (Tues/11:30am)
- 4/28 Nordic Walking (Tues/7:00-8:00pm) **BEGINS**
- 4/29 Quilts on Display and For Sale (Wed/5:00-7:00pm)

MAY

- 5/2 Spring Church Cleanup Day (Sat/9:00am-12noon)
- 5/3 Food Shelf Collection (Sun)
- 5/6 Food Shelf Collection (Wed)
- 5/6 Choir Rehearsal (Wed/7:00-8:00pm) **FINAL**
- 5/7 Worship & Music Meeting (Thurs/6:00-7:00pm)
- 5/10 Content Deadline for June Steppingstone (Sun)
- 5/10 Mother's Day / All Music Sunday (9:30am)
- 5/11 Church Council Meeting (Mon/7:00-8:30pm)
- 5/13 Faith Ed: Youth Group at Redeemer (7:00-8:00pm) **FINAL**
- 5/14 Musical Ventriloquist (Thurs/10:00am)
- 5/15 Synod Assembly at St. Andrews (Fri) *through Sat, May 16*
- 5/16 Mom's Morning Out (Sat/10:00am-1:00pm)
- 5/17 Children's Ministry Appreciation Day (Sun)
- 5/17 Faith Ed: Sunday School (9:45-10:30am) **FINAL**
- 5/18 Pastor-led Bible Study (Mon/10:00-11:00am) **FINAL**
- 5/20 June Steppingstone Distribution Day (Wed/9:00am)
- 5/20 Faith Ed: Pre-Confirmation (Wed/5:30-6:15pm) **FINAL**
- 5/20 Faith Ed: Kickin' It! (5:30-6:15pm) **FINAL**
- 5/20 Faith Ed: Confirmation (Wed/7:00-8:30pm) **FINAL**
- 5/24 Pentecost Sunday – **WEAR RED!**
- 5/25 Memorial Day (Mon) Church office **CLOSED**
- 5/26 Christian Singles Lunch Bunch (Tues/11:30am)

JUNE

- 6/3 GAP Summer & Community BBQ (Wed/5:15pm) **BEGINS**