



Where we meet as God's People of Joy  
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# for all the SAINTS

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I want to say thank you. Thank you for all the ways you live out your faith in so many places of your lives that I can't even imagine. Thank you for the ways you share that when we come together. And thank you for taking it seriously that gathering to receive God's promises in Christ is indeed important! I truly give thanks to God for you.

I offer that thanks partly because I get on a kick; the Thanksgiving holiday always strikes me as a good reminder, a helpful push toward gratitude. And once started, it's tough to stop. When you begin attending to thankfulness, it keeps on rolling. So partly it's this good time of year.

But it's also biblical. Lately I've been noticing how much thanksgiving there is in our Bible. Particularly, Paul began his letters to his congregations by giving thanks.

This last week on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent, we heard the start of his first letter to the church in Corinth: *"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind."* (1 Corinthians 1:4-5)

The beginning of his first letter to the church in Thessalonica is also really fitting: *"We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3)

It is surprising how strongly such giving of thanks for congregational life opens Paul's letters (*see also Romans 1:8, Philippians 1:3-5, and Philemon 4-5*). That provides me with a good example and strong encouragement to give thanks for you, too.

It's not new, though; reading these thanks of Paul's, I was realizing that I felt the same way. In line with that fitting opening to the Thessalonians, this also seemed like a good place to assure you that you are indeed remembered constantly in prayers. In addition to my own prayers, on behalf of Pastor Tim and the rest of the staff, I want to tell you that we spend a lot of time thinking about you and your labors of love. You are the central focus of our staff devotions each week, and much more. You should know how much thanks we give to God for all of you.

The Thessalonian introduction is also fitting because as an outline of what follows. The thanksgiving is a hint at larger circumstances for the letter. In the case of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, there was concern about those who had died and whether that meant they would miss Jesus' return. It seems to have been a concern about a delayed promise and the finality of death. So right at the start, Paul began by giving thanks to God for their "steadfastness of hope" in Jesus. Even when they were despairing and worrying, even when the very purpose of the letter was to strengthen their hope, Paul began by giving thanks for the little bit of hope they have. God was already working where they needed it most.

## Thanks

With that model, in these days perhaps I'd write to you in this way:

*Nick, a messenger of the good news, to the saints of St. Stephen's in Monona: grace to you and peace in the Lord Jesus. In all circumstances of your lives, amid busy days of this season and in excitements and frustrations of daily life, I give thanks to God for you because of the promise of God's presence and the joy of Christ's incarnation and the life of the Holy Spirit that has come to dwell in you richly.*

+ nick

+ nick

### PS – Pastor Sharing

Bill McKibben mostly writes on climate change and our culture, but his *Hundred Dollar Holiday* is a delightful little book, with some of the history on how we've celebrated Christmas and what is important now. Instead of our current grinch-es, "those relentless commercial forces who have spent more than a century trying to convince us that Christmas does come from a store, or a catalogue, or a virtual mall on the Internet," he promotes a simpler and merrier season.

## Year-End Gifts

The Charitable IRA Rollover is set to expire at the end of 2011 so the time to act is now. If you have reached age 70 1/2, this means that you can give directly from your IRA. This gift can benefit the ministries you love, without having to recognize the distribution as income on your federal tax return. Now is a great opportunity to make a year-end gift, especially if you are waiting to take your IRA required minimum distribution. For more info, contact the ELCA Foundation today at 800-638-3522 or [www.elca.org/foundation](http://www.elca.org/foundation).

Remember that all giving to be recorded for 2011 needs to be received in the church office before Dec. 31st.

## Facets of Faith Update

As of this printing, 154 households have submitted a pledge for 2012, totaling \$332,650. This includes 10 households pledging for the first time! Thank you for your giving, your growth and goals, and your attention to this important Facet of Faith that enables us to do great things in the name of Christ!

## Our Life Together

### The Stone Soup Kitchen Garden Recipes

*We Nourish, Teach & Serve*

It's that time of year when we are faced with lots of sweets! Here is a recipe for a sweet treat that is actually good for you. Dark chocolate is rich in flavonoids, powerful anti-oxidants that prevent cholesterol from gathering in arteries, reduces the risk of blood clots and slows the immune response that leads to clogged arteries. Look for 60-70% cocoa on the label!

#### Recipe of the Month—Cherry Almond Chocolate Cluster

1 c. whole almonds (toasted and coarsely chopped), 1/2 c. dried cherries (coarsely chopped), and 6 oz. dark chocolate

Melt chocolate in top of double boiler over simmering water on low heat. Stir in almonds and cherries. Spoon heaping teaspoon-sized clusters onto wax paper-lined baking sheet. Refrigerate until set, about 20 min. Store at room temperature. Makes 24.

### Cecilia Singers Concert

Cecilia Singers will perform a Christmas Concert on Saturday, Dec. 10th, here at St. Stephen's, 7:30 p.m. A second concert at Good Shepherd Lutheran, Raymond Rd. will be held on Sunday, Dec. 11th at 3:00 p.m. This special concert features twenty-six singers performing a rich repertoire for the Christmas Season of a cappella and accompanied works including works by Thomas Weelkes, Sir Arnold Bax, Pierre Villette, Leo Sowerby, Peter Warlock, Sir David Willcocks, William Hawley, Edwin Fissinger, Alfred Burt, and a wonderful arrangement by Craig Hella Johnson. Organist Theodore Reinke, Pianist Beth Wilson, and Harpist Mary Ann Harr will accompany the ensemble. Tickets can be purchased in advance for \$15.00 (\$12.00 Students & Seniors) at Willy St. Co-Op (east & west), Orange Tree Imports on Monroe St., & The Pink Poodle on Odana Rd., or for \$18.00 at the door (\$15.00 Students & Seniors) the day of the event. For more information, contact Joseph Testa, Artistic Director for Cecilia Singers at [jetesta@att.net](mailto:jetesta@att.net).

### Organ Notes from Alex Whitaker

At the 10 am service on December 18<sup>th</sup>, I will be playing Olivier Messiaen's *Dieu parmi nous* (God Among Us) from *La Nativité du Seigneur* (The Nativity of the Lord) for the postlude. *La Nativité*, written in 1935, is a set of nine pieces or "meditations" on the birth of Christ. The final movement, *Dieu parmi nous*, is a loud toccata that has become a frequently performed staple in the organ repertoire. The piece is based on two melodic ideas that are presented in the opening. The first is a descending line in the pedal and the second is a contrasting lyrical melody first played on the string stops on the organ. Both of these melodies can be heard throughout the piece. Because Messiaen developed his own musical language, his music is filled with unique harmonies and rhythms. *Dieu parmi nous* is one of my favorite pieces in the organ repertoire and is also one of the pieces that inspired me to play the organ.

## Our Life Together

### Women's Spiritual Formation

The Women's Spiritual Formation group will meet only once in December, on Thurs., Dec. 8, at 4 p.m. in the Church Library. We will spend the first half hour discussing the fourth chapter of the book, *Creating a Life with God, The Call of Ancient Prayer Practices*, by Daniel Wolpert. After the discussion, we will practice Apophatic Prayer, which is described in that chapter. Women's Spiritual Formation will meet on the January 12<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> when we will continue our discussion on prayer practices with the fifth chapter of the book which focuses on The Examen. The book is easy to read and understand. Anyone who is interested in deepening their prayer life is welcome to come and join this spiritual journey.

### Women's Bible Study

The Women's Bible Study will meet Thurs., Dec. 15 in the church library starting at 1 p.m. Even if you have not attended before, please consider attending this next meeting. As we move into the middle section of Mark's Gospel, even more is revealed about who Jesus is in relationship to God. This session explores Jesus' power over hunger, storms, demons, and infirmity. His travels will also take him far from home and open up discussion of Jesus' relationship to people beyond Israel.

### The Whole Bible

Among great devotional opportunities, the 2012 edition of our Read Through the Bible guide is now available.



### Women's Kayaking Trip!

Join us Aug. 17-20, 2012 to kayak the Apostle Islands sea caves, sandy beaches, and historic lighthouses. This trip is for beginners or experienced paddlers. This trip is now open also to non-members with a deposit of \$110 until the limit of 16 participants is reached. Questions? Call Lisa Hansen at 838-7929.

### Don't Over-Indulge

Over the busy holiday season, we may be tempted to eat too much, drink too much and shop too much. Ladies, join us for a discussion on how to say "no" to holiday over-indulgence on Tuesday, Dec. 13<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. We will meet at the home of Teri O'Connor (5513 Pheasant Hill Road). Bring your Bold Café mug and a white elephant gift (recycled and humorous please!) to exchange. You may read the topic ahead of time at [www.boldcafe.org](http://www.boldcafe.org) – the hot topic for December.

### St. Stephen's Women & Friends!

Beat the Winter Blahs!

Save the date...Sat., January 28 for an all day inter-generational women's retreat at St. Stephen's. More details to follow, but plan on a session and worship led by our own Rev. Sara Yotter, massage, breakout sessions, yoga, great food and more.

## Our Life Together

### Confirmation in December

Remember – during the first three weeks of December, families join students for special Advent gatherings. Evenings run 6:30 to 8:00, starting with supper, moving to evening prayer, and concluding with family conversations.



### Advent Evening Prayer (and supper)

Your favorite Christmas carols and the stories behind them are again the focus of midweek Advent worship each Wednesday to Dec. 21, 7:00-7:30. Plus, get ready for this summer's trip with beautiful Holden Evening Prayer. You are also welcome to join us at 6:30 for simple suppers before worship.

### Decorating on December 10

Trim up the trees, deck the halls, and join in making our community beautiful and ready for celebrations! You can come early to string lights outdoors whenever it's warm. Then, plan to join us on Saturday morning, Dec. 10, as we decorate inside the church for Advent and Christmas. We will gather at 8:30 a.m. Now is also the time to think about donating a tree (\$20 offsets the cost). Poinsettia orders are due Dec. 4.

### Fair Trade Sale

As you're thinking of gifts, remember many fair trade items we have that give twice! Help farmers and artists in Palestine with olive wood carvings, soaps, and tasty oils. *Products are on sale!* You may also like simply to give in honor of someone; through ELCA Good Gifts, you can give a goat!

### The Year of Water

On Dec. 4, UW students will lead the Adult Forum at 9:10, guiding us in to the 2012 Year of Water. It is a chance to think how we as individuals and as a congregation can conserve. What little things can you do? What big projects should we try?

### Sunday School Program

In preparation for their annual program at the 10:00 service on Dec. 18, Sunday School classes will be working on costumes, practicing acting, and learning carols. A CD will be available soon to practice at home. Dress rehearsal is at 9:00 on Dec. 17. Thanks to Mari Mitchell for working on this year's script!



### Christmas Worship

Some of the best-loved worship gatherings of the year – great carols, candles, and more – be sure to extend an invitation for family, friends, and others to join you in celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus.

**Christmas Eve** services (Saturday, Dec. 24) are at 4:00 (especially great for families!), 5:30 (the most liturgically rich) and 10:30 (with Adult Choir and GosBells). Bring in Christmas cookies to show St. Stephen's hospitality!

A beautiful, simple service on **Christmas Day** (Sunday) at 10:00 is worth pausing celebrations at home, celebrating "The Word made Flesh!" Please note this change from regular Sunday services.

# Our Life Together

## Coping with Grief

If you've lost a loved one, the holidays can be painful, no matter when the loss occurred. Here is some coping advice:

- Be prepared for intense feelings. It is normal to feel angry, panicked, depressed, guilty, fearful or lonely, even if you have not felt that way in a while.
- Seek support from friends and family members. Talk about how you're feeling, and what they can do to help.
- Plan holiday activities that will bring you pleasure. And minimize those that may be difficult. If holiday shopping will now intensify your grief to do it alone, give cash gifts instead. If decorating your home will conjure up good memories of your loved one, be sure to do it.
- Decide how you want to handle holiday traditions. For some, keeping the same traditions is comforting. For others, it's easier to cope with the loss of a loved one by developing new traditions.
- Take time to remember your loved one in a special way. You may want to share family stories over a meal or volunteer for a charity that your loved one supported.

## Crochet/Knit Ministry

The main group normally meets the 1st and 3rd Sundays from 1-3 p.m. with a drop-in group meeting the 1st and 3rd Friday from 3:30-5:00 p.m. Both groups meet in Fireside. For info, call Karen Baier (279-5648).



## Summer Canoe Trip

We have dates for another trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in northern Minnesota. For around \$400, join youth and adults in beautiful, rugged canoeing July 1-6. Deposits are due by Jan. 15.



## Holden Village 2012 Deposits Due

Now is your chance to experience a most amazing Lutheran place for yourself. The beauty of wilderness, worship, delicious meals, and great travel are coming soon! The group from St. Stephen's will catch the train from Columbus on Sun. afternoon, Aug. 5. We'll spend parts of five days in the mountains, and return home on Monday, Aug. 13. Total cost will be around \$700. A deposit of \$100 is due before Dec. 31. Brochures are available at church.

## The Road Home

December 8

Please note that our next evening hosting the Road Home homeless families is on Thurs., Dec. 8. Schedules are busy this month, so if you can be there to help make the time special for those families, it will certainly be appreciated. Sign up at church.

## Prayer Vigil for Peace

Prayer Vigil for Peace meets Tue., Dec. 20, at 5:30 p.m. to reflect on and pray for peace in Bethlehem.



### Recently Hospitalized

Mildred Muth, Bill Kopplin, Bob Seiler,  
Karen Johnston, Lorrان Celley, Dan Post,  
Evelyn Hansen, Jill Kerwin, Katie Duffey,  
Tom Moran, Paul Baumann, Charles Hitt, Jr.

### New Mortgage Information

Original Balance (10/1/2010)	\$1,361,512
Interest Paid to Date	47,659
Principal Paid to Date	21,265
Remaining Balance	\$1,340,247



### Birth Congrats –

Henner Jon Robelia, son born to  
Jonathan & Eva Robelia on Oct. 25

Lyla Avery Hamilton, daughter born to  
Cory & Erin Hamilton on Nov. 9

Leo Sylvestre Casado, son born to  
Danielle & Ramon Casado on Nov. 17

### Preparing the Way

(thru 8th quarter – November 2009  
thru October 2011)

Pledged to Date	\$ 285,386
Received to Date	\$ 258,686



**Food Pantry Need –** The Pantry is in  
need of the brown grocery bags .



### Baptism—

Mia Jamison Blum,  
daughter of Rachel DuBois & Jeff Blum

Jace Tyler Clist,  
son of Jeremy & Jenae Clist

Braeden Allen Dietz,  
son of Kia Grueneberg & Brad Dietz

Allen James Payton,  
son of James & Sarah Payton

*Please continue to pray for these children  
who have new life in Christ.*

### Church Office Closings

Due to Christmas & New Year's falling on a  
weekend, the church office will be closed  
Monday, Dec. 26 and Monday, Jan. 2.



### Annual Reports

It's time to be getting your end-of-year  
reports ready for the Annual Meeting on  
Jan. 29, 2012. All **(copy ready) reports** that  
are to be included in the Annual Report are  
***due in the church office by Tuesday, Jan 3.***



**Sympathy –** to those who mourn the  
death of Roger Gunderson, Cynthia

Burnside, Ardis Wheeler, Rhonda Meyer-  
DuBois (Teri O'Connor's sister-in-law)

### Prayers for Deployed Military

Please keep in prayer the following people  
currently serving in the military:

Chris Hudson deployed to Kosovo

Greg Post deployed to Germany

If you know of others to add, please call the  
church office.

## With a Thankful Heart

- to Confirmation Extravaganza drivers
- to all who help with meals at church and away
- to families who read Bible stories and pray together
- to Sunday School students and teachers for making baptismal blankets and Ruth Circle for embroidered cloths
- to Jim Reichling for fanfares
- to all who spread the word and shared postcards on the Invitation Walk
- to those who pay attention to grounds and the building during changing seasons
- to decorators
- to the Gifts & Resources Team – Mark Weerda, Bev Fuller, Phil Rohs, Tom Boehnen, and Drew Anderson – for Facets of Faith work
- to Bill Brendler for Bible study CDs
- to the crew who records Sunday worship
- to all who donated to the Homeless Ministry. Those donations will be put to good use. Many folks do not have warm clothing and your generosity has helped immensely. Keep them coming!!
- to all musicians who helped with the services during the month of November
- to all who made the 3rd Annual Fall Bazaar a success – to Committee members (Kriss Besch, Ann Schroeder, Karen Kordela, Becky Mitchell & Brent Ruffridge), to all who donated items, worked booths or in the kitchen, to those who came and bid and bought items. We were able to raise more than \$1,400 for the Food Pantry and more. Thank you for participating!

At Wil-Mar, 105 people had a delicious pre-Thanksgiving lunch thanks to the generosity of so many from St. Stephen's. People who cooked or provided turkeys: Lois Offerdahl, Joann Esser, Phyllis Miller, Steve Day, Barb Kepler, Carol Wiskowski, Lois Beld, Ray Cattell, Jane Dohler, Connie Newman, and the Brendlers, Winans, and Seilers. The servers/preparers/clean-up crew were students: Sara Moldenhauer, Jack Moldenhauer, Nick Leske, and Annika Heyworth. They were assisted by Jim Knutson, Phyllis Seiler, Angela Heyworth, Joann Esser and Barb Kepler. The meal was a huge success and thank-you's were in abundance!

The One-A-Week Blood Club at St. Stephen's has been VERY successful in meeting its goal this year!! As of Sept. 15, our goal of 53 donations was met and as of Nov. 15, we had reached 70 donations! This is more than our entire production of 2011. The American Red Cross is still desperately in need of more donations particularly in the A-, O-, and B-categories. ARC is sponsoring a major celebration at the Alliant Ctr. for its holiday blood drive in December. It is a great party! I wish to thank all of you for your contributions this year. We have many who diligently donate 3-4 times each year. It is equally important to see the new contributors this year. Keep it up!! Don't forget to sign the Donor Book when you give to ensure that St. Stephen's receives credit for its donations. Thanks again.

– Stanley Nielsen

*"O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray; cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!"*

*(O Little Town of Bethlehem, stanza 4.)*

"Oh, come to us, abides with us" is our theme for the Advent season. One of the reasons I like this theme is that it is a reminder of what this season is all about. Advent is a season of expectation and anticipation. During this season of Advent, we spend time pondering the expectations of the "Word made flesh" to be born on Christmas. This anticipation often gets lost in all of the other preparations that we get involved in during the course of these few weeks before Christmas. I do not want to rant about the "reason for the season." (That phrase, itself, has even become a way for selling things!) Jesus' coming is going to happen, whether we are ready or not. This is the heightened anticipation in these first few Sundays of Advent and their scriptural readings. Be alert, be watchful, stay awake, because you never know when it will happen.

I remember one of my religion professors at St. Olaf stopped Lisa and me in the hallway under Boe Chapel one day and said, "Do you know that the kingdom is coming!" It kind of freaked us out as 20 year olds. And yet, it was a gentle reminder that regardless of whether we think about it or not, Jesus is coming again and it is not up to us to decide

when that will happen. Nobody knows but the Father, as we learned from our Gospel reading from Mark this past week.

Martin Luther writes about this kingdom coming in The Small Catechism as he explains the 2<sup>nd</sup> petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come." "In fact, God's kingdom comes on its own without our prayer, but we ask in this prayer that it may also come to us." So understanding that the fulfillment of God's creative purposes in Jesus coming again is a God driven movement frees us up to live in the moment that is now.

This is where the faith gets interesting. How does believing that Jesus is coming again soon impact our daily living? What do we do to get ready? How do we live in the now? In the midst of the chaos and turmoil that often defines this season, where do we see God at work? How might that make a difference in our daily journey? How might it affect our outlook?

This poem by Phillips Brooks that became the hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem," reminds us of a God that is not absent, but present and active in God's creation. Jesus has promised to abide with us throughout our whole lives, especially in the moments that we struggle. Jesus' presence with us means that our lives are not simply something to endure, but rather lived out purposefully. He has promised his presence with us even now. In the gift of God's Holy

## *Abide with Us!*

Spirit we learn what it means to live each day as God's redeemed children. In a song on my new CD called, "You are Here," which I wrote for Ascension Day, I used these words, "*In the lost and forsaken tossed aside without thought.*"

*Help me be the hands and feet that you bought.  
Grant me the joy that comes in serving.  
Teach me, Lord, just how to show mercy.  
Send me out with your story that the world needs to hear.*

*You are here, you are there.  
You are here, you are there.  
Your presence fills this world  
everywhere with your love."*

As we celebrate this season of Advent, let's spend some time thinking about what it is that we expect. Talk with your families about what it means to be faithful followers of this Savior to be born. How might this living out of our faith change what we think about ourselves and others this year? It is a good time to remember that Jesus is coming again, soon. Thanks be to God!

May God's promise of his continual presence be a blessing in your life, both now and in the days to come. Happy Pondering!



Pastor Tim

## Help Fight World Hunger

Thinking of stocking stuffers? Why not purchase the new Tim Hansen Project CD "Is Anybody Listening?" All of the money from the sales of the CDs goes to the ELCA World Hunger Appeal to help feed hungry people around the globe. They are available in the narthex for \$10. Check out the other THP recordings while you're there, as well as other handcrafted goods from Palestine!

## Men's Bible Study

Come and spend some time messing with the different Nativity stories found in scripture. Why are they different? In what ways are they similar? What difference does this make for your life today? We meet on December 8<sup>th</sup> at 8 p.m. at Tully's II on Monona Drive. Haven't been with us before? No problem-- just a laid back opportunity to learn more about our faith in a relaxing atmosphere. See you then!

## St. Stephen's Award

Recently in worship, the St. Stephen's Award was given for the 25th time. The award serves as a way to say "thank you" to people who have served the congregation and lived as strong examples of faith, and by their witness to strengthen all of our work as the Body of Christ. It was fitting, then, to recognize Sally & Glen Lee for their gracious and faithful service to this congregation and beyond in the name of Jesus Christ.

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