



*Let us worship God.
Darkness covers the earth,
and thick darkness, the peoples.
The poor cry out for bread,
and the weak suffer violence.
But God's light shines
through an infant child.
We have seen his star at its rising
and have come to pay him homage.
He is like showers that water the earth,
like rain that falls on the mown grass.
Thanks be to God!*

(Brian Wren, "Through an Infant Child" in Advent, Christmas and Epiphany - Liturgies and Prayers for Public Worship, 2008).

As I write, we are in the final stages of preparing to celebrate Christmastide, the holy season that begins on Christmas morning and ends on January 6. This is the season when we bask in the glow of the Incarnation: the word becoming flesh, God becoming one of us, moving into our lives and neighborhoods for good. Each year as Christ is once again reborn in our hearts, we are reconciled and united with God.

As you celebrate the 12 days of Christmas, I invite you to look, listen, and feel.
Where you do see, hear, and experience Christ's presence in your life?

The 12 days of Christmas include a number of additional feast days that we will be observing here at St. Stephen's.

Wednesday, December 28, 6:30pm (The Feast of the Holy Innocents, Matt. 2:16-18)
A Blue Holiday Service of remembrance, healing, and hope.

Sunday, January 1, 10:00am (The Name of Jesus, Luke 2:15-21)
As we enter the new year we reflect on what it means to bear Christ's name.

Wednesday, January 4, 6:30pm Epiphany Worship & Games Night
This festival commemorates the visit of the Magi (Wise Men/Kings) to the Christ child (Matt. 2:1-12).

As Christmas gives way to Epiphany, as 2016 gives way to 2017, we are called to take the light that shines through the infant child into every corner of our community and world where darkness, hunger, and violence threaten God's children. Come, let us follow!

Christmas-New Year's-Epiphany Blessings to you all!

Pastor Ritva



Update on Realizing Our Vision: *Abundantly Blessed to Share Abundantly*

Our goal for 2017 is to begin realizing the vision of the strategic plan we adopted in January 2016: to grow vibrant children's and youth ministries, increase member engagement, develop a comprehensive outreach plan, build up our neighborhood ministries, and make our current facilities more accessible. Our Stewardship Ministry calculated the total cost of moving forward on all these goals as \$44,000, and challenged every household to increase their giving by \$33 per month in the new year.

Our Council members unanimously accepted this challenge, as did John and I. As of December 15, the Financial Secretary reported receiving 63 pledges. 38% of these — 24 households — had accepted that challenge, generating a projected increase of about \$12,000 in income for 2017. That represents a 6.4% increase, which is certainly a cause for celebration.

To all who have made these commitments, thank you for your leadership and your investment in the vision and mission of St. Stephen's.

Yet, even as we give thanks, we anticipate the Council will have to make some difficult decisions about which initiatives will go forward in 2017 and which will have to wait until we can afford them.

Our Stewardship Team and our Council encourage all who have yet to turn in a commitment card to do so, and to prayerfully consider accepting the challenge to increase your household giving by \$33/month or more as you are able.

God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything you may share abundantly in every good work.

(2 Corinthians 9:8)

Pastor Ritva,

on behalf of the Council and Stewardship Team

The 2017 giving envelope boxes are in the narthex for families to pick up.

If you don't have a box of giving envelopes but would like some, or if you don't plan to use yours, please contact Jenny Weber (jenny.a.weber@gmail.com).



On this cold winter's day as I sit and write to you, I am thinking about light and warmth. During the month of January we bring a close to Christmas and the start of a new year. As Christians, Christmas comes to an end on

January 6 as we celebrate Epiphany. If you go to dictionary.com for the definition of epiphany, it talks about our Christian festival, but the second definition states this, "an appearance or manifestation, especially of a deity." This is definitely something I long for every day as a follower of Jesus. I want to experience the appearance of Christ. But wait, maybe I am experiencing it but not looking for it in the right places or defining it exactly correct.

The third definition may shed some light on my dilemma: "A sudden, intuitive perception of or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something, usually initiated by some simple, homely, or commonplace occurrence or experience." I think that Christ appears in the commonplace, in the simple. This is exactly what I am trying to help the youth learn. I strive to help them to see that their epiphany of Christ may be found in the simple and commonplace aspects of life, in the people they meet.

Mark Howland, Youth & Young Adult Minister

Your St. Stephen's Endowment Committee will hold an "Endowment Sunday" on February 12. We will hear from a pastor, whose congregation has a substantial endowment, speak on the topic *"What an Endowment Can Do for Your Congregation."*

In addition, there will be an **Endowment Brunch between services** and a **Temple Talk at each service** giving general information about the endowment. The committee also will announce a goal for increasing the fund.

Lyle A. Kleman, Endowment Committee Chair



Happy New Year! I am nearing the halfway mark for my internship and would like to introduce you to an upcoming offering that I have developed as my internship project this year. The season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday

on March 1. At that time we'll begin a Lenten Labyrinth experience that will shape the worship life and learning opportunities across the congregation during that time. For those who want to go deeper in study and connect to a small group, I invite you to consider signing up for the Lenten Labyrinth Online Experience. I have been working with a colleague who is also in the internship program to develop and design an online course for our congregations to participate in together.

Join us for the Lenten Labyrinth Online Experience:

- ◆ Gather online in a diverse community with people from St. Stephen's and Prairie Faith Shared Ministry in WaKeeney, Kansas, at your own convenience and pace.
- ◆ Take time to more deeply immerse yourself in Scripture as we follow the lectionary readings throughout Lent, especially the Gospel of John.
- ◆ Nurture your faith by exploring and engaging spiritual practices; rediscover familiar ones in new ways.
- ◆ Connect your faith to your daily life through exercises and activities that challenge and send you to live your faith in the world.
 - Course is eight weeks, February 22 to April 18.
 - Internet access is required.
 - No cost for this offering, but registration and commitment is required. Participants may choose to purchase additional resources at their own expense.
 - Offering is made possible by Wartburg's "Seminary for Everyone" initiative.
 - More information will be forthcoming in the next few weeks.

Vicar Kristi Grieder

Mark your calendars!
**UPCOMING
EVENTS**

Wednesday, January 4, 6:30pm
Epiphany Worship & Games Night

Sunday, January 8
9:15am New Member Class (Room 11)
Noon Bible Brunch at Lion Bridge
3pm House Blessing, *followed by...*
4-6pm Open House at Pastor Ritva's & John's,
4010 Wyndham Woods Court, SE

Tuesday, January 10
5:30pm Worship & Music Team Meeting
6:30pm Ministry Teams Meetings
7:00pm Youth Ministry Team Meeting

Wednesday, January 11, 7:30pm
High School Youth Gathering

Thursday, January 12, 6pm
WomenWineWisdom, Via Sofia's

Saturdays, January 14 & 21, February 4 & 11, 2-4pm
University of Religion course: ***The Life and Ex-
ample of Prophet Muhammad***, sponsored by
the Inter-Religious Council of Linn County. Regis-
tration sheets on clipboard in narthex.

Sunday, January 15, 9:15am
New Member Class

Wednesday, January 18
7:15pm Mentor Meeting
8:15pm Confirmands/Mentors Meeting

Sunday, January 22
9:15am New Member Class
Noon Bible Brunch at Lion Bridge

Wednesday, January 25, 7:30pm
High School Youth Gathering at Orange Leaf

Saturday, January 28, 10am to 4pm
Co-Exist Event at Illuminations:
11am – Pastor Ritva to speak on the Reconciling
in Christ Movement within the ELCA

Sunday, January 29
9:15am Annual Meeting
1-6pm ConFEST for Confirmation Students
at Muscatine

LORD
Hear Our
Prayers



Members

Steve Thomas	Shirley Coates
Mick Butz	Dave Goepfert
Lee Tramutolo	Cathy Goepfert
Pete Hansen	Gertrude Lee
Ken Kaiser	David Hagen
Joan Petersen	Berdella Pitz
Toni Lee	
Judy Nye	<i>Friends</i>
Harriet Hemphill	Pat Schnitzel
Suzanne Schmidt	Glenna Houtz

Relatives

Terry Swalve	Jerime Mitchell
Trent Rosberg	Pr. Zach Johnson

Serving in the military and/or overseas

Nick Wheeler, Army National Guard (grandson
of Gail & Dan Husmann)

Alex Grafft, Army National Guard

*Please contact the office or use a Prayer Request
card (in your pew rack) to place your loved one's
name on this list for two weeks and/or request
prayer of the Monday Prayer Team.*

***If your loved one desires a pastoral visit, please
contact Pastor Ritva.***

We welcome:

Cameron Nohea Terukina, born December 2,
son of Chris and Sally Terukina!

Charlotte Rose Munro, born December 16, in
Malawi, Africa, granddaughter of Melanie and
Charles Munro.

Giving Voice for Iowa Children & Families Lutheran Day on the Hill

Families living in poverty. Iowa children who go hungry. Former refugees building new lives.

These kinds of issues are rarely the center of attention at the Iowa State Capitol. Let's change that!

Please consider joining Lutheran Services in Iowa (LSI) and the three Iowa synods of the ELCA for Lutheran Day on the Hill, an annual day of advocacy in Des Moines to uplift the needs of our neighbors. The event will be held on Tuesday, February 21. Visit www.LSIowa.org/advocacy next month for event details, online registration and an online toolkit for your congregation, including how to participate in this year's congregational letter-writing campaign.

If you are new to advocacy, come learn more about the legislative process and your role as a citizen. If you've attended before, join us again. We hope this year's schedule will also allow you more opportunities to connect with legislators.

Our Mission: Lutheran Services in Iowa responds to the love of Jesus Christ through compassionate service. LSI is an affiliated social ministry partner of the Iowa congregations of the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and a member of LSA (Lutheran Services in America). We proudly serve people of all ages, abilities, religions, sexes, gender identities, national origins, ethnicities, races, and sexual orientations. Learn more at www.LSIowa.org and www.facebook.com/LSI.iowa.

A New Harmony

Zach has always had a love of the outdoors. In his free time, he can usually be found in his backyard, mowing the lawn, or making sure his snow blower is working properly before the first snow. But when Zach began working with his hourly support staff, Shane, he found a new love: music.

Shane is with LSI's Services for People with Disabilities. Each week, the duo works together to help Zach stay active in the community, practice his coping skills, and achieve his personal goals. Music therapy has become a major part of their time together. *"We play guitar quite a bit,"* Shane says. *"I think music therapy is very important. It just helps calm the soul down."*

During each session, Shane teaches Zach a few new chords or strumming patterns that Zach can practice on his own. *"I know when I've had a long, bad day at work, I get kind of angry rather quickly,"* Zach says. *"If I can, I go to my room and grab my guitar and start strumming some chords. I'm not much of a singer, but I've started putting some words with some of the jamming out I do."*

Seeing Zach's new appreciation for guitar is just one way Shane is constantly inspired to come to work. *"A lot of motivation for hourly work is you only have a short amount of time with the individual, and it has to change their life,"* he says. *"When we can use our time to utilize music like Zach has, it can be a great coping skill, and it's working for him."*

Operation Turkey Sandwich – Wednesday, November 23



Making Chrismons – Sunday, November 27



*Women, Wine, Wisdom Christmas Party –
Thursday, December 1*



*Caroling at
Prairie Hills
Senior Living
& St. Luke's –
Sunday,
December 11*



St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, ELCA
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Cedar Rapids, IA 52403-3021

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Staff Directory

Pastor
Youth & Young Adult Minister
Pastoral Intern
Office Manager
Music Director
Piano Accompanist
Premises Keeper
Council President
eNews Editor

Rev. Dr. Ritva Williams
Mark Howland
Kristi Grieder
Susan Hallock
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Sunday Morning Schedule

8:00am First Worship Service
9:00am Coffee & Fellowship
9:15am Education Hour
Through August 20:
10:00am Second Worship Service
Beginning August 27:
10:30am Second Worship Service

Wednesday Evening Schedule

6:30pm Worship



**St. Stephen's
Lutheran Church, ELCA**

To Know, Live, and Share Christ.
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St. Stephen's Lutheran Church (ELCA) is a **Reconciling in Christ** congregation that welcomes diversity, which enriches, nurtures, and challenges our life and ministry.

***Come and join us as
we know, live, and
share Christ
together in love.***

