



St. Stephen's Lutheran Church

To Love, To Invite, To Serve • 2024 Year in Review

From Our Pastor

46Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number.....Acts 2:46-47

As we gather for this year's Annual Meeting, we have many reasons to praise God, reflected in the ways our mission guides our life together as a congregation.

"To Love" describes our care for each other. We received new members in January and November, welcoming 6 adults and 2 children, and we regularly meet newcomers at Sunday worship. While we cannot know what impact we've had on each of them, a visitor this fall, passing through Wilmington for work, was moved to tears by the sense of welcome she received. Beyond Sunday mornings, I am excited by new opportunities to care for our children and young families through "Monday School" and other faith formation activities.

"To Invite" directs our focus outward, as we build new relationships in the neighborhood. Last spring we partnered with Westminster Presbyterian to host 14 elementary-aged kids (including 2 from St Stephen's) for our inaugural "Kids in the Pantry" program. The League of Women Voters offered 3 voter registration drives this fall during food pantry hours. They were thrilled with the response they received, and we were able to provide an important service to food pantry clients. An inquiry from a neighbor in an adjacent apartment building led to inviting Sahr Abu, proprietor

of Sunrise Yoga, to offer classes in our Gathering Space during cold weather months when they cannot meet outside.

"To Serve"

encompasses our work in the world around us. The food pantry is our most prominent example of service. Several St Stephen's members are regular volunteers and Kanchalee makes "loaves and fishes" miracles seem commonplace. But did you know we provide chairs every Memorial Day for the City of Wilmington's observance at the Soldiers and Sailors Monument? Sharing space with Abundant Life Faith Center and New Jerusalem are other acts of genuine service, as life-giving to these other congregations as to us.

These are only a few examples of the ways we lived into our mission in 2024. Other examples include representing at DE Pride Day, hosting Pacem Peace Art, and sharing our pulpit with speakers from vulnerable communities. These ministries are all made possible by the collaborative work of our staff, the faithful leadership of our church council, the compassionate generosity of St Stephen's people, and God's grace which continues to bless our congregation.

With hope for what is yet to be,

Pastor Sue



From Our Council President

Many of St. Stephen's activities in 2024 are illustrated in the charts and pictures throughout these pages, so I'd like to highlight just a few items. It was a year of PRIDE, change, grace, joy, and gratitude!

PRIDE

St. Stephen's booth at Delaware's PRIDE festival in Dover provided, once again, a fun way to lean into our Reconciling in Christ designation and show support to our LGBTQAI+ friends and family. Festival attendees had the opportunity to stop by, chat and learn about St. Stephen's. What a wonderful chance for us to welcome, embrace and love God's children. Participating in the PRIDE festival was a personal highlight for me in 2024. Don't miss out on this event in 2025!

Change

Business and personal life changes led our friends at Bootless Stageworks to make the difficult decision to wind down their theater company operations and close after their 2024/2025 season. Bootless will vacate the social hall and other space they lease from us in September 2025 after eleven seasons at St. Stephen's. We thank them for their friendship and their careful stewardship of our property. We wish them every future success.

Grace

We were blessed this year to learn our beloved former member, Ann Ammerman, remembered us in her will, leaving the church a percentage of her home. Prior to the home's sale, we held a special congregational meeting, as required by our Constitution, to permit the sale of the property. Proceeds from the sale are now in the safekeeping of our Endowment Trustees and earnings generated from the proceeds will be available for operating needs.

Joy

There is a joy that only children bring to a worship service. We have been richly blessed this year with the growing presence and exuberant participation of our youngest congregants.

Gratitude

On behalf of St. Stephen's council, I'd like to extend our deep appreciation to our dedicated, hard-working staff: Pastor Sue Loney, Claudio Espejo (Music Director), Kanchalee Reeves (Communications Coordinator/Office Administrator), Bonnie Kincaid (Sexton), and Armand Schmidt (Assistant Sexton). Thank you for your valuable contributions to our community of faith.

Thank you to all committee and non-committee members who helped in ways large and small throughout the year. Thank you to ushers, camera operators, altar guild, finance, endowment, worship, music, concert organizers, fellowship, stewardship, mutual ministry, social ministry, and our intrepid property committee. Your contributions are genuinely appreciated.

It has been a privilege to lead council this year. Our dedicated council members are involved in every aspect of the church, generous with their time and frequently working behind the scenes to support St. Stephen's mission: **To Love, To Invite, To Serve**. Each council member brings unique talents and, together, our varied insights help the church move forward. My sincere thanks to those who served on council during 2024: Ann Dransfield, Rick Feltman, Gary Gooden, Michael Lehm, John Rodammer, Michele Torchia, Ann Warner, and Karen Weber. Special thanks to Claire Morse (non-voting) who graciously served as Secretary for the Council.

Blessings,

Karleen Strayer, Council President



From Our Music Director



St. Stephen's continues to be a great place to work. The congregation and Pastor have been encouraging of my activities throughout the year to pursue different plans: educational (lessons/Association of Lutheran Church Musicians), concert season. As well, I have felt infinitely supported as my wife and I welcomed our daughter.



2024 Concerts at St. Stephen's

February: Joanne Hench, organist, performs

March: Claudio Espejo performs original compositions

April: Hunter van Valkenburg performs Pop/Rock/Classical selections

May: Cab Calloway Concert

October: Peace of Pizza/Claudio performs Chopin Etudes

November: Violin Recital given by Molly Germer

December: Student Recital from Cab Calloway

"Again, thank you so much for your help with all of this and for making your lovely church available to use." *Cheri Astolfi, Dean, The Music School of Delaware, regarding the Holiday Concert we hosted on December 11, 2024*

St. Stephen's Book Club

In 2024, St. Stephen's Book Club read six books, a total of 2,350 pages. The book club meets every other month on the second Thursday. All are welcome.

The Last Days of Ptolemy Grey by Walter Mosley

The Covenant of Water by Abraham Verghese

When Breath Becomes Air by Paul Kalanithi

Sisters Under the Rising Sun by Heather Morris

Digging to America by Anne Tyler

The Memory Keeper's Daughter by Kim Edwards



Baptisms

Ayla Jo Deeney
June 16

Athena Eleanor Sperati
August 11

Tim Duane Gough, Jr
November 17



First Communion

Rowan and Morna Deeney
September 1



Farewell and Godspeed

Jared O'Brien



Deaths

Eleanor Turner
August 12

LCS WALK

St. Stephen's had 16 participants in the 2024 Lutheran Community Services Walktoberfest raising \$1,360 for hunger programs.



PEWS

Four pews were donated to the Wilmington Challenge Program for use in their building trades job training programs. The four pews equaled 32 linear feet.

VOTER DRIVE

St. Stephen's hosted three League of Women Voters voter registration drives at the Food Pantry.



PEACE OF PIZZA

148 people attended Peace of Pizza in October. They ate 272 slices of pizza, 145 ice cream treats, 73 cups of coffee, 112 soda cans and 83 bottles of water.

FOOD PANTRY

Volunteers, including Tom Strayer, Ken Nicholson and Amy Johnson, served 5,173 hours. The pantry received \$42,063 in inkind food donations and \$38,830 in nonfood donations.

PEACE ART

St. Stephen's hosted 14 art pieces as part of the Pacem in Terris Visionary Youth Peace Art Exhibition.