



The Quill

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH

Williamsburg, Virginia

February 2025



RUTH

If you have not done so recently, I would strongly recommend you read (or re-read) the Book of Ruth. Given some of the messages being loudly amplified about “others” in our world today, this book is an important voice within our canon. While there are different themes in it, the central theme is that of *hesed* which means “loving-loyalty” or “steadfast love” in Hebrew. And the surprising source of that *hesed*.

Before we explore that theme some more though, let me give you a quick summary of the book of Ruth. In the first chapter we hear of the famine in Judah that drove Naomi and her family to move to the land of Moab. This was quite the move as there was no love lost between the nations of Israel and Moab. While there Naomi’s husband dies and her sons each took Moabite wives, one named Orpah and the other named Ruth. Ten years later, both of her sons die, and Naomi decides to return home to the town of Bethlehem.

All three women set out, but Naomi encourages both of her daughters-in-law to return to their homes; Orpah chooses to return to her home, but Ruth does not, telling Naomi, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die - there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” (Ruth 1:20-21)

Already we see the power of *hesed* at work in the love Ruth bears for Naomi; a love that will not allow her to desert Naomi in her time of need. In the second chapter

Naomi and Ruth have returned to Bethlehem and Naomi sends Ruth to the fields of Boaz, one of her kinsmen. Boaz pays special attention to Ruth and provides for her and Naomi. He does this despite the ill-will many Israelites bore for the Moabites (the history between the two nations was a bitter and bloody one).

In the third chapter we see Naomi and Ruth take bold action to orchestrate Ruth’s marriage to Boaz. While Boaz responds favorably to Ruth, there is a hitch; another man has greater claim to Naomi’s lands and Ruth’s hand in marriage. In the fourth chapter Boaz arranges to acquire both Naomi’s land and Ruth’s hand in marriage. And it is from their unusual and surprising marriage that Obed is born, Obed who was the father of Jesse, the father of King David. Follow that genealogy a way (800 years or so) and you will find Ruth mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:5.

Ruth will do whatever it takes to provide for Naomi. She loves her dearly and grafts herself onto Naomi’s family, culture, and religion in a way that was unheard of at the time; actually, it’s still pretty unheard of for someone today to do so much and go that far out of their comfort zone for a loved one. But here we see *hesed* at work, the deep and abiding love that springs out of great commitment and joy. We see in Ruth a reflection of the *hesed* love God has for us; a love that would endure even the cross for our sake, and the sake of the cosmos. May you find in Ruth a powerful example of faithful living and a reflection of God’s great *hesed* love! And may you see how divine action and love can come from the most surprising sources!

In Christ,
Pastor Jon

CONGREGATION COUNCIL



Our January meeting was held on January 14, 2025.

In attendance: Julie Meeks, Jeffery Berry, Nancy Egloff, Paul Reier, J.R. Lyons, Lou Rossiter, Sandy Croushore, Roberta Sulouff, Beth Grant, Terri Larsen, Bill Dichtel, Alison Carney.

- Cox Powell, our HVAC replacement contractor, has received 90% of the equipment required to begin work; they are still waiting for delivery of air processing units.
- Council reviewed a draft agenda for the upcoming January 26, 2025 annual meeting.
- The Theologian in Residence (TIR) committee has plans in place for a TIR in September 2025.
- J.R. Lyons reported that the 2024 budget was 99% met.
- Lou Rossiter shared that several members of a local refugee family are awaiting entry to the United States. St. Stephen has existing funds previously designated for refugee support. We stand ready to help these family members with their needs.

The next Council meeting is scheduled for February 11, 2025.

Alison Carney, Secretary, Congregation Council

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED as we partner



with the Williamsburg United Methodist Church (WUMC) in this year's Community Of Faith Mission (COFM) Homeless

Emergency Shelter the week of February 16 – 23. As a Partner, **St. Stephen has committed to staff and furnish meals for up to 25 Guests of the shelter for February 17 and 18.** For each day, 10 shelter staffing volunteers are required to fill varying shifts from 5:30 p.m. until 8:00 a.m. shifts (see sign-up schedule in the Gathering Space). Additionally, a minimum of two volunteers are needed to serve the dinner meal (5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.) and two volunteers are needed to serve the breakfast meal and distribute bag lunches (5:30 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.). Again, the sign-up schedule is posted in the Gathering Space. Please sign up there or contact Hollie Jones at the church office.



STEWARDSHIP ESSENTIALS

February's stewardship focus will be advocacy. **John Gregoire**, a member of St. Stephen representing the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) will be with us on **February 9**. The principal issues listed on the VICPP website, virginiainterfaithcenter.org, are economic justice, justice reform, health equity and civic engagement.

As people of faith, we cannot ignore those who are victims of injustice in the world. In 1 John 3:17 he says, "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?" Proverbs 31:8 says, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute."

Our world is far from perfect, but I believe our time on earth carries a duty to try to leave the world a better place. Advocacy may take many forms. Being informed and voting is one. Donating to those who work for justice, or to help the oppressed, is another. Letters (or emails) to our elected officials is another. Those who have gone before us have used marches and sit ins and economic boycotts to lobby for justice. Jesus himself called out the Pharisees for their oppression of others. But we are not perfect and need to approach others in charity, humbly acknowledging our own shortcomings.

The recent funeral of President Jimmy Carter, highlighted his post-presidency volunteerism. He used his life to help the oppressed, to address housing needs and health equity, because that's what his faith told him to do.

Susan Williamson

Giving Statements for 2024 are available for pick-up in the Gathering Space.

STEPHEN MINISTRY AT ST. STEPHEN



More on Isolation...

We have talked about loneliness and isolation in this column and I didn't intend to write on it again soon. But then, I was struck by the excellent article entitled "The Anti-Social Century" in the February Atlantic by Derek Thompson which was well written and cited a number of interesting facts and fabulous psychological and sociological studies. He points out that isolation is a worldwide phenomenon and that in addition to the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan have started health initiatives to deal with its effects. He points out studies that the isolation started well before the COVID 19 Pandemic although there is no doubt that that accelerated the phenomenon. He cites studies showing how important television and subsequently smartphones have been to further isolation within our society. He discusses several studies that suggest that adolescents have been isolated by increased screen time from the interaction with peers that is so important in developing sense of self and establishing boundaries that are so important in developing personality. Even as adults, the isolation is shown to have effects on sense of self-worth, and lead to depression and even suicide. Importantly, the societal isolation as a whole is demonstrated by some of the studies to lead to breakdown of the sense of "village" that leads to polarization which has been so evident, particularly in our politics in recent years.

Making a point to get out, talk to others, greet people, strike up conversations and break the isolation routine is the way out of this rut. Interestingly, the article cites a study by Nick Epley, a psychologist at the University of Chicago who asked commuter train passengers, "How would you feel if asked to spend the ride talking with a stranger?" Most predicted quiet solitude would be preferable. He then arranged an experiment with some commuters keeping to themselves and some instructed to talk with a stranger, "the longer the conversation the better!" After the experience, the conversation group was, by far, the happier group!

There are definite rewards to talking to others. In particular, if you have issues that are particularly

bothersome to you that you need a careful, compassionate, confidential listener, the Stephen Ministers of our Church are available to you. Let **Pastor Jon Nelson** or **Bill Dichtel** know if you feel you would like to have one made available to you.

Bill Dichtel, Stephen Leader
(757) 232-5334, bill.dichtel@gmail.com



FEBRUARY

2	Don Hardenbergh	Gretchen Osborn
5	Quill Agor	
10	Walker Beatty	
13	Robert Cummings	Cyndy Touhsaent
14	Harlan Schone	
17	Pat Janot	Marilyn Johnson
18	Glenn Joppa	
19	Coleman Beatty	
21	Bill Dichtel	
22	Keara Mahony	
23	Angie Groom	
25	Nancy Egloff	Max Hinders
	Terri Larsen	
27	David Wills	



MEN'S & WOMEN'S BREAKFASTS

- **February 4** – Women are invited to join together for breakfast the first **Tuesday** of this month.
- **February 7** – Men are invited to join together for breakfast the first **Thursday** of this month.

Both gatherings take place at **8:00 a.m.** at the Colonial Pancake House, at the corner of Page Street and Penniman Road, Williamsburg, VA. The get-togethers promote conversation and friendship in a casual setting.



MUSIC NOTES

February 2 – It's not just Groundhog Day! – And It's on a Sunday, this Year!

Beyond the playful predictions of a groundhog, February 2 holds a profound meaning for Christians, marking the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. In our Gospel reading from Luke we hear Simeon's prophetic words (the *Nunc Dimittis*) express his profound gratitude for witnessing the fulfillment of God's promise:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

These words are the traditional translation of Simeon's Song, the one he sang when he saw the baby Jesus. Simeon has been promised by the Holy Spirit that before he dies, he will see the Messiah. This "sight" of the Messiah, the encounter with the infant Jesus, is the final achievement or accomplishment that Simeon wishes to have before he dies. *Nunc Dimittis* literally means "now let depart." Simeon is ready to die peacefully having fulfilled his life's purpose.

In the medieval Western church, the 40th day after Christmas combines two rituals: the presentation to God of one's firstborn son and the purification of the mother after childbirth. The Presentation of the Lord, occurring 40 days after Christ's birth, echoes other significant 40-day periods throughout scripture:

- Lent, our 40-day period of fasting and spiritual preparation leading up to Easter.
- The 40-day flood that Noah and his family live through.
- The wilderness temptation of Jesus – a 40-day period of testing and spiritual growth for Jesus.

This 40th day ritual is also an important one denoting the end of the Christmas season. Some church traditions call this day "Candlemas," as folks in medieval Europe brought their year's supply of candles to be blessed,

symbolizing the light of Christ overcoming darkness and bringing light into the world. We often refer to Christ as the "Light of the World."

In our Gospel reading this day we also hear about Anna, the 84-year-old prophetess, who provides a powerful counterpoint to Simeon. Anna never left the temple and upon seeing the Lord "*began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*" Her unwavering faith and joyful testimony serve as an inspiration for all believers. Martin Luther says of Anna's being 84-years-old, that since 84 is 12 times seven, Anna's age combines all the meanings of 12 and of seven in the Bible.

St. Stephen celebrates The Presentation of Our Lord with our Orchestral band accompanying our hymnody this day. Our choirs present two different versions of Psalm 84, "How Lovely Is thy Dwelling Place," the Matins Choir presenting one from a Scottish Psalter and the Chancel Choir presenting a rendition from Brahms' *Requiem*. We also will hear Martin Luther's rendition of the *Nunc Dimittis* during communion (8:30 am), as well as an anti-apartheid song from South Africa juxtaposed with a Gregorian chant *Divinum Mysterium* (11:00 am). Come, join the celebration!

Karen Ives, Music Director



GODPARENTS FOR TANZANIA UPDATE

This letter was received from Kristin Westermann, Executive Director, Godparents for Tanzania, Raleigh, NC <http://www.godparents4tz.org/>:

Introducing Gladness Emilian Bayda (born March 9, 2004). She recently began a degree program at the Tanzania Institute of Accountancy in Dar es Salaam (<https://www.tia.ac.tz/>).

Gladness (aka "Gladly") lives with her mother and her older sister, Glory, in Moshi. Sadly, her father Emilian died suddenly in 2014. He was the head accountant for the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, and a relatively young man (in his

40s, I think). His death was a shock to the family, both emotionally and financially.

Gladness's mother Redempta is a teacher at a government primary school in Moshi. Like most government teachers, she desperately wanted to send her daughters to private secondary schools (which tells you a lot about the state of public education in Tanzania). Both Gladness and Glory are bright and excel in math, and they have always wanted to be accountants like their father.

Fortunately, we were able to find sponsors for both girls to attend private secondary schools. Gladness excelled and finished advanced level secondary education with excellent examination results. She was selected to join the Tanzania Institute of Accountancy (TIA) to study for a Bachelor in Public Sector Accounting and Finance. TIA is Tanzania's oldest and most prestigious college of accountancy. And it is a government institution, which sets up Gladness for government employment when she graduates.

This is a three-year program, and Gladness is on track to graduate in late 2027. I think we can cover her costs for \$3000 per year. Thank you very much for your donation of \$3000, which we deposited on October 15. That covers the first year, which is a great help. We are so pleased and proud that Gladness has this opportunity!

Would you please share our gratitude with the Social Ministry Committee and the congregation? Thank you for blessing our kids in Tanzania.

Merry Christmas!

Kristin



Gladness Emilian Bayda

THANK YOU

Olde Towne
Medical & Dental Center

We are so grateful for all of the contributions we received in 2024, including direct financial gifts like yours that help keep Olde Towne as a valuable resource for our community. Our records indicate that St. Stephen contributed a total of \$1,500 between January 1 and December 31, 2024, which we greatly appreciate.

Many thanks!


Grove Christian
Outreach Center

As we head into 2025, we at Grove Christian Outreach Center want to take a moment to express our heartfelt gratitude for your generous support throughout 2024. Your contributions have been instrumental in advancing our mission of fostering relationships through love and grace to improve the overall health of the greater Williamsburg community.

Because of your unwavering generosity, we have been able to not only open The Gathering Place, Williamsburg's first free grocery market, but also provide essential resources such as 10,400 free grocery visits, clothing selections to 391 families and over \$52,000 in financial support to ensure families are safely housed. These efforts have brought hope and transformation to countless individuals, reminding us all of the power of compassion and connection.

Your gifts, totaling \$5,650 have not only helped us meet immediate needs but have also laid the foundation for lasting change. Together, we are building a stronger, healthier, and more united community – one where love and grace are at the heart of every interaction.

As we look ahead to 2025, we are excited to continue this vital work with your partnership. Your support inspires us to dream bigger and serve more effectively, knowing that we have a community of dedicated individuals like you standing with us.

From all of us at the Outreach Center, THANK YOU for believing in our mission and for making a difference. We wish you and your loved ones a prosperous New Year filled with peace, love, and abundant blessings.

Katie Patrick, Executive Director



ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN PRESCHOOL

As we begin this New Year, we want to express our heartfelt thanks for the love and support we have received from the church congregation. We are truly grateful and look forward to a blessed year filled with health, happiness, and growth!

With the winter break, additional snow days, and the long holiday weekend celebrating Martin Luther King Jr., our preschool staff and students focused on getting back into our routines in January. A representative from the Virginia Health Department visited our students to conduct fun, hands-on demonstrations that teach them how germs spread and how to best prevent their spread to stay healthy. Additionally, we are excited to have completed our second round of free Developmental Milestone Screenings through Sentara.

We also look forward to sharing pictures next month from Pajama Day as we learn about and celebrate the letter "P"! **Due to inclement weather, our Annual Winter Carnival has been postponed to Sunday, February 2, from 2:00-4:00 p.m.** We hope you can join us to enjoy the activities, or perhaps contribute baked goods for our cake walk and snack counter, or volunteer with us.

In compliance with recent legislation under 22.1-289.057 of the Code of Virginia, our church and preschool have undergone a Lead Test and submitted all required documentation. We are pleased to report that we are fully compliant with the requirements, and the test results confirm there is no lead present in our water.

Lastly, we are excited to announce that registration for the 2025-2026 school year is now open to the public. We've already filled over 50% of our spots with returning families, and we've been giving tours to new families nearly every day. If you have friends or family interested in joining us, they can arrange a tour and get more information by contacting Jessica Kimball via phone at 757-229-6688 or email at: preschool@saintstephenlutheran.net.

Thank you for your continued support.

Jessica Kimball, Preschool Director





FEBRUARY BAPTISMAL ANNIVERSARIES

The significance of baptism, Luther teaches in the *Small Catechism*, is “that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Your baptismal anniversary is an opportunity to light a baptismal candle and to give some prayer time to reflecting on your experiences during the past year on your journey in faith!

Pastor Jon Nelson

6	Rosalie Frey	
13	Keith Egloff	Russ Dabel
15	Susan Neidlinger	Karen Shoberg
	Gayle Spencer	
17	Eleanor Bergh	
21	Alex Stauffer	Mitchell Stauffer
	Peter Stauffer	Zhou Hui Stauffer
22	Caitlin Leek	Jaina Leek
24	Keara Mahony	
25	Tom Berkey	

Were you baptized in February but your name isn't on the list above? Let us know!

PRAYERS



Join your prayers for healing with God's desires for **Ed Brown, Kristin Carter, Bob and Ginny Cummings, Jack Harris, Sharon Jacobs, Donna Kittelson, Jim Mayfield, Carole Meyer, Helen Nelsen, Paul Reier and George Vonderheide.**

Pray for those unable to come to worship: **Martin Bleck, Ed Brown, Birdie Burton, York Doerr, Bob and Angie Groom, Pat Janot, Marilyn Johnson, Jeanne Nelson, Darlene Simon, and Kay Wasaff.**

Pray for the family and friends of **John Moravetz** as they mourn his death.

Pray for these loved ones of our congregation: Susan, Charles Baugh, Donald and Carol Baum, Sally Blackburn, June Brantley, Linda Bonfiglio, Mary Bloom, Tim Brown, Karin Cavanaugh, Chris Clarke, Amaree Cluff, Joe Conboy, Ruth Ann Coski, Ginny Cummings, Judy Drezek, Becky Drury, Darrin and Rosemary Dunn, Tanya Fritz, David Gade, Joel Gillespie, Greg Gildner, Joan and John Goodhart, Charee Hampton, Mark Harbison, Sue Hassan and family, Andy Havola, Nick Havola, Bradley, Kim, Joan and Laurie Heintzelman, Lisa Hill, Jaxon Ireland, Claudia Jacobik, Brian Johnson, Don Johnson, Connie Kendrick, The Kennedy family, Jenn Kramer, Chantal Lacroix, Judy Leister, Marnah Lund, Trish and Sara and Matthew Macerelli, Keara Mahony, Laura Margolin, Jack Mayfield, Doug MacKenzie, The Keith Meins family, Liz Montalvo, Ed Moninger, Kim Morris, Bob Myers, Jeanette Osborn, Coral Pumley, Kurt Recktenwald, Lou Schuster, Inge Seiter, Pamela Sharp, Kelsey Slay, Chad Strausbaugh, Al Stern, Monika Stern, George and Jewel Thomas, Charley Underdahl, Brenda Webster, Caleb Winig, Elaine Wrich, and Lynda Wright.



FAITHFUL + BOLD + SERVING

Virginia Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



**St. Stephen Lutheran Church
612 Jamestown Road
Williamsburg, VA 23185**

The Quill

www.saintstephenlutheran.net

February 2025

Congregational Officers:

<i>President</i>	J.R. Lyons	757-920-5355
<i>Vice President</i>	Julie Meeks	804-432-5149
<i>Treasurer</i>	Brian Agor	757-561-5889
<i>Financial Secretary</i>	Karen Nester	757-869-2949
	email	Finsec@
<i>Congregational Secretary</i>	Alison Carney	703-819-6607

Church Office: Phone: (757) 229-6688
 email: All email addresses are:
 _____@saintstephenlutheran.net

Church Staff:

<i>Pastor</i>	Jon Nelson	320-295-8861
	email	Pastorjn@
<i>Parish Administrator</i>	Hollie Jones	Office@
<i>Director of Music</i>	Karen Ives	MusicDir@
<i>Preschool Director</i>	Jessica Kimball	Preschool@

Congregation Council:

Jeffery Berry (Youth Member)	804-432-5149
Alison Carney	703-819-6607
Brandon Cave	816-510-9409
Sandy Croushore	757-476-5789
Bill Dichtel	757-232-5334
Nancy Egloff	757-293-8547
Beth Grant	703-447-8685
Terri Larsen	804-815-9489
J.R. Lyons	757-920-5355
Julie Meeks	804-432-5149
Paul Reier	757-566-0092
Lou Rossiter	757-345-6206
Roberta Sulouff	978-854-2085

The Quill is published monthly by
 St. Stephen Lutheran Church
 612 Jamestown Road
 Williamsburg, VA 23185

Article deadline: Fifteenth of the month.

Editor: Reed Nester
 reednester@gmail.com