THE INTERPRETER

Church Office Hours: Mon-Wed 8-4:30 & Fri 8-3:30 Ministers: The Congregation Minister to the Ministers:

Rev. Michael Southcombe





No matter who you are . . . or where you are on life's journey, YOU are welcome here.





4:00 PM – Service in the Sanctuary

7:00 PM - Service in the Sanctuary (Radio and Livestream)





December 10

Blue Christmas Service is designed for those struggling through grief or other issues during the holiday season. If you are feeling these struggles, please join us on December 10 at 6:00 PM for a special service.



Emergency Pastoral Care Needs 618-558-5014

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Council Elections & Updates (See pg. 4 for more information.)



The little girl got off the bus and ran down the sidewalk to tell her mother she had earned a star on the bulletin board for reading 3 whole pages from the storybook in 1st grade that day, in front of the class! The teacher did not have to say, "Speak up," even once!

She found her mother curled up beside her bed, crying, rocking back and forth. "Make it stop, make it stop," she held her hands over her ears. They were in the hotel room they had been in until a room would open at the shelter. The bruises on her mother's face were fading. The memory of that night, that awful night would not fade. It seared the fear

and the sense of worthlessness into the heart of the shell of the woman rocking on the floor. God saw it all and gave the little girl strength and courage to knock on the doors at the hotel, begging for something to give her mother, an energy bar, a bag of chips, anything.

People called her mother names the little girl did not understand, but understood the disdain in their voices. One man said he had seen her take her to the bus stop that day and knew she could work, she could get a job, just for the Christmas season. They wouldn't have to beg, and he closed the door. And Jesus wept.

The man had not seen the hotel owner yelling at one of the housekeepers, slamming the linen cart against the wall. The yelling, the noise frightened her and she ran back to the room and cried and rocked all day and relived that awful night with the bruises and the hospital and the police and her boyfriend yelling he would find her and....and she rocked and cried. She tried to stand up and her legs collapsed under her. The little girl heated a cup of hot water in the microwave the shelter had loaned them, but a bullion cube in it and gave it to her mother for dinner, and told her to, "Shhhhh, shhhhhh, I won't ever hurt you, Mommy."

Across town a little boy in the same class as that little girl came home but the door was locked. He banged on the door, yelling for his mother. The neighbor called for him, "Your parents have gone away for a few days. "The policia would not let them go into the court today," she explained. "You will stay with us until they figure it all out."

His mother sat in a cell, frightened, worried about her son. The men in masks and no badges came and pinned her against the wall and then threw her to the ground. They knocked her lawyer over a chair and dragged him down the hall and told him to be guiet. She saw others being taken on busses, not knowing where they were going. "Why?" she cried. She was trying to give her son a life beyond the violence of her hometown. She had done everything legally. She applied for asylum. She had a lawyer and a court date. They screamed for the judge and the judge looked away, ashamed at what was happening. She was changing diapers and cleaning up after people in a nursing home. Local kids would show up to work and leave halfway through their shifts, never to come back. "I am doing the work no one else wants to do," she thought and wondered where her husband was and what their son was thinking. And Jesus wept.

God saw it all happening and God thought who can I send to these hurting people? I have put my holy words into the commandments to welcome the stranger, to love one another, to love justice.

I know, thought God. I will come to them myself. Not as a warrior. I will let them see the vulnerability they all share if they only open their eyes. I will come as a baby, a child who brings hope in the midst of fear and who answers death with life. I will come in the plaintive crying of an infant, the poverty of a son whose earthly father has died, the wisdom of all the law and all the prophets. I will come knowing of grief and fear and holding love and light in that darkness.

I will put my Spirit into that child and then into all who follow him.

They will hold me in all my weakness and I will hold them in my love.

I will come to them. I will hold them and say, "Shhhhh, shhhhh. I will never leave you. I will hold you. I am right here." Emmanuel, God is with us!

Blessed Advent and Merry Christmas,

DECEMBER HAPPENINGS

**Reminder: The church office will be closed Wednesday through Friday, December 24 - 26 in observance of Christmas! We will reopen Monday morning, December 29, at 8:00 AM.









December 1 thru 5 - Med Ministry Closed **December 6** – Living River Concert 7 PM **December 6 & 7** – O'Tannebaum Tour **December 11** – Spaghetti Fundraiser 5-7 December 14 - Blue Christmas Service 6 PM **December 14** – Annual Meeting (Elections) December 21 - Cookie and Candy Sale December 24 thru 26 – Church Office Closed **December 25** – Christmas Day on WJMT Noon

Christmas Carol Bible Study Sunday mornings through Advent at 10:30 AM

Chime Choir - Every Thursday at 6 PM

Confirmation - Every Wed. 5 - 7:30 PM



DECEMBER LECTIONARY READINGS

December 7, Second Sunday of Advent

Isa 11:1-10 Ps 72:1-7, 18-19

Rom 15:4-13 Matt 3:1-12

December 14, Third Sunday of Advent

Isa 35:1-10 Ps 146:5-10 James 5:7-10 Matt 11:2-11

December 21, Fourth Sunday of Advent

Isa 7:10-16 Ps 80:1-7, 17-19 Rom 1:1-7 Matt 1:18-25

December 24, Christmas Eve

Is 52:7-10 Ps 98

Heb 1:1-4, (5-12) John 1:1-14

December 28, First Sunday after Christmas

Isa 63:7-9 Ps 148

Heb 2:10-18 Matt 22:13-23

+ These are the lectionary readings for Sundays. Not all readings will be used every Sunday. These are provided for your study and devotion.

DECEMBER RADIO BROADCASTS

December 7 – In memory of Alfred Kanitz for what would have been his December 11 birthday from Scott & Cheryl, Pam Hamilton and **Bud Kanitz**

December 14 – In memory of the 49th wedding anniversary of Alfred & Lorna (Berndt) Kanitz from Scott & Cheryl, Pam Hamilton and Bud Kanitz

December 21 – In memory of Art & Naomi, Phil & Jean, and Bruce Schaefer from Janet Schaefer

December 24 – In memory of my husband, Bob, for Christmas and my partner Ted Jaeger for his December 25 birthday from Kathy Turner

December 28 – In memory of Gary Sholund Sr. for his November 26 birthday from Pat Schultz and son, Randy





December's Livestreams are sponsored by Deb & Stan Seeger.

December 7 - In appreciation of both the radio and livestream ministries, especially during the holiday season.

December 14 – In memory of Deb's parents, Harry & Betty Osness at Christmas time.

December 21 – In memory of Stan's parents, Fred & Hildegarde Seeger at Christmas time

December 24 - Merry Christmas from the McIntyre Family!

December 28 – Wishing everyone a Healthy and Happy New Year!

ANNUAL MEETING DECEMBER 14 Elections & Updates



We have three Church Council openings for next year's council and an opening on the Endowment Committee. We are searching for nominees for the church council. lf vou interested in serving on either. please contact Jennifer Porath or Pastor

SAINT STEPHENS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Church Council Nominees

Open for Nominations or Volunteers

Council Members Up for Reelection

Cathy Dornbrack Emma Golisch Stan Seeger **Todd Frederick**

Endowment Committee Nominees

Tyler Drake Robert Gremler





We have 18 Red Poinsettia plants available to be sponsored. Each plant is in a 6-inch pot and will be delivered to the church on December 13. The plants are \$16 each. Sponsor forms will be available at the scrip table or at the church office.

DECEMBER MISSION: The Christmas Fund

"When they saw the star, they were filled with joy." — Matthew 2:10

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

Please use your monthly giving envelope or our online giving platform to make a donation to December's monthly mission in support of the wider church.

Be the Light

Community and Care

From the many letters and stories the Pension Boards has received from those touched by gifts from The Christmas Fund, we share these words:



"It's wonderful to feel cared for. The amount of the help is not as important as the fact that there's a tangible way the collective church wants to strengthen your foundation."

> - The Rev. Joan Smith Retired UCC minister. Christmas Fund giver and receiver

Thanks to your generosity, last year The Christmas Fund provided over \$1.7 million in pension and health benefits, emergency grants, and thank-you checks to retired clergy and their families.

Every gift came from people like you. This year, please give what you can to continue supporting those who have devoted their lives to serving others.





TEND & TABLE

Saint Stephens is thrilled to announce our participation in a new program called Tend and Table! This farmer-led subscription service farmers connects Wisconsin with community to make fresh food more accessible.

In 2024, Wisconsin faced a loss of over \$3.6 million in institutional food contracts, leaving more than 100 local farms without stable markets and limiting families' access to fresh food across the state. In response, Tara Roberts-Turner, the general manager of the Wisconsin Food Hub, developed the Tend and Table program.

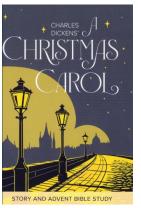
This initiative goes beyond just a subscription box; it represents a statewide effort to reconnect communities with Wisconsin-grown food and to rebuild the markets that farmers rely on.

By purchasing through Tend and Table, you support over 100 local farms. You are not only aiding our farmers but also helping restore an important community resource. Additionally, your purchases will raise funds for our church, which we intend to use for our hunger ministries, including Dinner @ 5, the Summer Lunch Program, and Food For Kids.

To make your first purchase or to learn more, please visit the provided link or scan the QR Code. It's important to complete your purchase through the Saint Stephens link so that we receive credit. Subscription boxes will be available for pickup on Fridays from 4 PM to 6 PM. Click Here for Link



A Christmas Carol - Bible Study



SAINT STEPHENS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Starting November 30 at 10:30 AM, Pastor Mike will host an Advent Bible Study based on Charles Dickens' book, *A Christmas Carol.* This Bible study will take place every Sunday during Advent for a total of four weeks.

The classic tale of Ebenezer Scrooge is a cherished Christmas story about redemption and hope, making it perfect for the Advent season. Join us to explore how this story incorporates prompts thought-provoking Scripture and discussions.

Sign up on the kiosk if you are interested in attending this Advent Bible Study.



2026 Envelopes will be ready for pickup in the Kuck Lounge beginning December 9!



<<<<<<<<

are due to

Terra by

January 5!!

STEWARDSHIP CORNER

Stories on how our ministries impact community members!

The first time a family friend brought a man to our office, he requested a walker for his mother. She had mentioned that she needed one, and he saw the Rollerators and thought they looked "fancy," believing his mother would prefer one of those.

We helped him understand that, typically, someone recovering from a broken hip requires a standard walker for balance and strength. While she could get a Rollerator later if needed, the therapist would want her to use a conventional walker for now, and they would assist in adjusting it properly for her needs.

We learned that he did not read much, and that his mother was opting out of inpatient rehabilitation to take care of him. We informed him about ADRC, and the friend said she would call them to arrange some in-home services and Meals on Wheels for both of them. She also took information about the food pantry, and the man mentioned that a lady at the hospital had talked to them about in-home care.

We provided him with a list of the items we loan out, and two days later, he returned to pick up a shower bench and a toilet riser.

2. One afternoon, a person attending the AA group stopped by Pastor Mike's office to talk. She asked how she could reconnect with her daughter and whether her daughter could ever forgive her for losing custody 20 years ago.

Pastor Mike suggested that the group could provide valuable ideas for healing broken relationships. However, he emphasized the importance of not falling into the trap of believing that reconnecting with her daughter was essential for her sobriety. Instead, he explained that maintaining her sobriety would significantly aid her efforts to reconnect. "Don't make your sobriety your daughter's responsibility," he advised. She cried, and they prayed together. She promised to continue attending AA and other support groups.

About six months later, just before an AA meeting, she visited Pastor Mike's office again. She shared that she had written a note to her daughter, inspired by a suggestion from someone in the group. Her daughter had replied, stating that while she wasn't ready to reconnect just yet, she was praying about it and could see the possibility of it happening soon.

She expressed her gratitude to Pastor Mike for allowing them to meet at St. Stephen's. She mentioned that she wouldn't have come this far in her sobriety without the support of these meetings. As she pulled out some crumpled bills from her pocket, she said, "Please, use this for the church. I'm sorry; it's all I have."

The stories above illustrate how the ministries of Saint Stephens positively impact our community. With the support of our congregation, we can change lives and make Christ's love tangible—just like the support of a walker or the comfort of a healed relationship.

We invite you to prayerfully consider making a special end-of-year gift to your church home, St. Stephens UCC.



CHRISTMAS SCRIP ORDERS



Don't forget to submit your holiday scrip orders to Terra by December 8!!

Submitting your scrip order form helps ensure we have exactly what you need to do your holiday shopping. Or create an account with Raise Right and have 24-hour access to Scrip right at your fingertips. Call the church office for more information!

WISE TEAM

Sleep Anxiety

By Frank Van Alstine

Shakespeare wrote "troubled minds have troubled sleep" and that seems to be true for many of us. Sleep experts recommend getting seven to nine hours of sleep per night. I am lucky if I get seven. I have no trouble falling asleep, but I can't stay asleep. I tend to wake up in the middle of the night and worry about things that wouldn't trouble me much in the daylight.

So, why do people worry so much in the middle of the night? Firstly, at night when things quiet down, the mind has more space to focus on worry. Secondly, we may be experiencing anticipatory anxiety. Worrying about what lies ahead in the morning can cause mental exhaustion. Finally, at night we have increased mental awareness. The silence of the night can make us more aware of a racing heart or shallow breathing, which fuels anxiety.

To learn more about this topic read "Why is Anxiety Worse at Night" by Jamie Ducharme at Time.com.



GREEN TEAM

Holiday Season: Energy and Decorations

- Use LED lights: They consume up to 90% less energy than traditional incandescent bulbs, and many strands stay lit even if one bulb goes out.
- Set a timer: Use a timer for your holiday lights to ensure they aren't left on.
- Choose the right tree: If you get a real tree, recycle it through your city's program after the holidays. For artificial trees, use them for at least 10 years to minimize their impact. A potted tree you can plant is another good option.
- Decorate with natural elements: Make natural wreaths and garlands from items like holly, ivy, and pinecones.

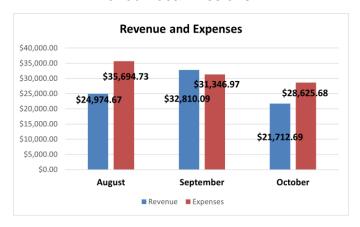
CHURCH FINANCIAL REPORT

SAINT STEPHENS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

October Revenue and Expenses

Revenue \$21,712.69 Expenses \$28,625.68 Net Loss: \$6,912.99

The congregation raised \$1,180 for St. Vincent De Paul. Thank you for your continued support of our local missions!





Gather at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church for a soup lunch at Noon on Wednesdays in December for some conversation and reflection about the world that Jesus was born into, 1st century Palestine, occupied and ruled by Rome. There will be videos from the ELCA's Sumud (suh-mood) ministry that accompanies the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land. We will read scripture and reflect upon the ways that God comes to us, both expected and unexpected.



Dec 10 Riley Magray

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU! **DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS**

We want to acknowledge and celebrate your special birthdays! Send your church friends birthday wishes, whether in person, via email, or by sending one of those wonderful cards you can hold in your hands by mail!

Dec 1	Olivia Pajtash	Dec 11	Melanie Golisch	Dec 21	Jean Hoeft
Dec 1	Kyle Badeau	Dec 12	Mike Krueger	Dec 21	Heidi Ellis
Dec 2	Randy Perry	Dec 13	Megan O'Day	Dec 21	Parker Kohnhorst
Dec 2	Willow Ellis	Dec 13	Caroline Bauman	Dec 23	Carol Garcia
Dec 3	Lawrence Sampo	Dec 14	Sandra Moser	Dec 23	Christopher Salter
Dec 4	Robert Hinner	Dec 15	Linda Hass	Dec 25	Dennis Grefe
Dec 4	Bailey Kohnhorst	Dec 16	Karen Abraham	Dec 25	Jessica Golisch
Dec 4	Cole Stevenson	Dec 16	Walter Prey	Dec 25	Tobias Parks
Dec 5	Liam Oestreich	Dec 16	Vivian Schlueter	Dec 26	William Beaudry
Dec 6	Kelly Davenport	Dec 16	Richard Vandre	Dec 28	Terry Krueger
Dec 6	Mary Schmidt	Dec 16	Kari Weiland	Dec 28	Olivia Grefe
Dec 7	Sue Krueger	Dec 16	Wil Detert	Dec 29	Pam Iwen
Dec 7	Shirley Pfister-Zortman	Dec 17	Rayla Golisch	Dec 30	Thomas Koth
Dec 8	Jerad Schubert	Dec 18	John Bergh	Dec 31	Melissa-Jean Stevenson
Dec 8	Terra Holdridge	Dec 18	Douglas Davis		
Dec 10	Kaylee Bowe	Dec 19	Robert Hartson	× 04) *

Darla Vachavake



Saint Stephens UCC 903 E. 2nd St., Merrill, Wisconsin 54452 715-536-7322 ststephensucc.net

Dec 19

Rev. Mike Southcombe Terra Holdridge Kimberly McCaskill Kari Weiland

Senior Minister Administrative Director Administrative Assistant Christian Ed Director

mike@ststephensucc.net terra@ststephensucc.net kimberly@ststephensucc.net kari@ststephensucc.net

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GIFTS & Memorials

Received through November 16 Dedicated to the glory of God and...

Radio Ministry

\$190.00	in memory of Bob Turner on the 4 th anniversary of his death, November 3,
	from Kathy Turner
\$200.00	in memory of Gary Sholund Sr for his November 2 birthday from Pat Schultz and
	son Randy
\$190.00	in honor of our 50th wedding anniversary on November 15 from Mike & Sue Kunkel
\$190.00	in memory of Art & Naomi, Phil & Jean, and Bruce Schaefer from Janet Schaefter
\$250.00	in memory of our mom Ruth Buck, for her 90th birthday on December 5 from her
	family

Livestream

December's Livestreams are sponsored by Deb & Stan Seeger.

December 7 - In appreciation of both the radio and livestream ministries, especially during the holiday season

December 14 – In memory of Deb's parents, Harry & Betty Osness at Christmas time

December 21 – In memory of Stan's parents, Fred & Hildegarde Seeger at Christmas time

December 24 – Merry Christmas from the McIntyre Family!

December 28 – Wishing everyone a Healthy and Happy New Year!

New Roof Fund

\$25.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Sharon Detert
\$20.00	in memory of Dick Bettin from Dave & Cheryl Buck
\$20.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Jeff & Sue Kraft
\$50.00	in memory of Dick Bettin from Kristine Smith
\$50.00	in memory of Lynn Henrich from Holly Henrich
\$535.00	in memory of Ruth Buck from family and friends

Sanctuary Updates

,	
\$200.00	in memory of Joan Schroeder from family and friends
\$100.00	in memory of Marvin & Verna Koehler on their October wedding anniversary from
	Dick & Kathy Vandre
\$150.00	in memory of Ruth Buck from family and friends

New Christmas Tree

\$300.00	in memory of our father Gary Sholund Sr. from Al and Gary Sholund and
	Gina Mueller

Food For Kids

\$50.00	in memory of lost loved ones from Sharon Detert
\$150.00	in memory of Ruth Buck from family and friends

Memorial offering

\$10.00	in memory of Joan Schroeder from Dennis & Sharon Woller
\$20.00	in memory of Millie Burrows from Dave & Emily Schwartzman
\$20.00	in memory of Dick Bettin from Dave & Emily Schwartzman
\$1000.00	in memory of Richard & Darlene Bettin from family and friends
\$50.00	in memory of Dick Bettin from Cathy Rapp
\$100.00	in memory of Dick Bettin from Nancy & David Meyer
\$50.00	in memory of Gary Mosser from Ronald and Walter Prey
\$25.00	in memory of Millie Burrows from Roger & Julie Wendorf
\$20.00	in memory of Dick Bettin from Mike & Sue Kunkel

\$20.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Mike & Sue Kunkel
\$25.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Patsy and Dan Pick
\$50.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Jerry Krause
\$50.00	in memory of Steven "Beaver" Wendorf from Rose Wendorf
\$50.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Darrel & Melissa Dengel
\$25.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Marion Kysely
\$40.00	in memory of Dick Bettin from Mike & Lee Harbath, Brenda, and Debbie
\$295.00	in memory of Richard Bettin from family and friends
\$25.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Brian & Tammie Sladek
\$50.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Kevin & Terry Krueger
\$5.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Judy & Layne Jensen
\$10.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from James Severt
\$735.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from family and friends
\$20.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Sally Oberg
\$20.00	in memory of Millie Burrows from Patsy & Dan Pick
\$50.00	in memory of Bruce Bauman from Caroline Bauman
\$100.00	in memory of Mildred Burrows from Dave & Nancy Bagley
\$20.00	in memory of Joyce Peterson from Garry & Barbara Schmidt
\$100.00	in memory of Jerry Plautz from Carol Plautz
\$25.00	in memory of Gary Mosser from Carol Plautz
\$25.00	in memory of Mike Mosser from Carol Plautz
\$350.00	in memory of Ruth Buck from family and friends
\$100.00	in memory of my dad Lloyd Buck Sr from Lynn & Tim Seidler
\$100.00	in memory of my brother Lloyd Buck Sr from Lynn & Tim Seidler
\$25.00	in honor of Peyton AnnMarie Cooper on her confirmation day 10/26 from Linda Hass
\$300.00	in loving memory of our Aunt, Fern Langhoff. It brings us comfort to know Fern's memory will continue through the ministry and work of the church
\$100.00	in memory of Elmira Krause on November 15 one year after her passing from Jerry Krause
\$200.00	in memory of Gary and Mike Mosser at Christmas from Jill Mosser
\$25.00	in memory of Walter and Irene Berndt at Christmas from Jill Mosser
\$25.00	in memory of Arlo and Scott Berndt and Lisa Berndt Fischer at Christmas from Jill Mosser
\$25.00	in memory of Jerry Plautz at Christmas from Jill Mosser



End-of-Year Contributions Deadline



All contributions must be delivered to the church by **December 31** to be counted for the 2025 tax year. Please plan for any contributions that are mailed. Contributions received after this date will be attributed to the 2026 giving. Thank you!

ST STEPHENS UCC 903 E 2ND ST MERRILL WI 54452 US POSTAGE PAID NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION PERMIT #10 MERRILL, WI 54452-2576

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Pastoral Care Telephone Number 618-558-5014





facebook.com/ ststephensunitedchurchofchrist/

Worship with us Sunday mornings at 9:00 AM ... Listen on the Radio or Join us for our Livestream on Facebook!

"WE ARE THE CHURCH"

SAINT STEPHENS United Church of Christ

OUR VISION

We are a Christian community called by God's Love to be a force for good in our neighborhood and our world.

OUR PURPOSE

We seek to tell stories of God that challenge our assumptions, to open our doors wide with radical hospitality, and to use our own hands and feet to change the world.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE INTERPRETER

If you don't already receive The Interpreter, please let us know if you are interested in receiving it. We will be happy to send it to you by email or mail, whichever you prefer!

"But wait! There's more!"

Email recipients also receive our weekly updates between the monthly editions. Call Terra in the office (715-536-7322) or sign up and subscribe yourself here:

https://ststephensucc.net/resources/newsletters