

THE INTERPRETER

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



January

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



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

We need two medical cleaning teams for the 2026 calendar year. The available months are February and August.

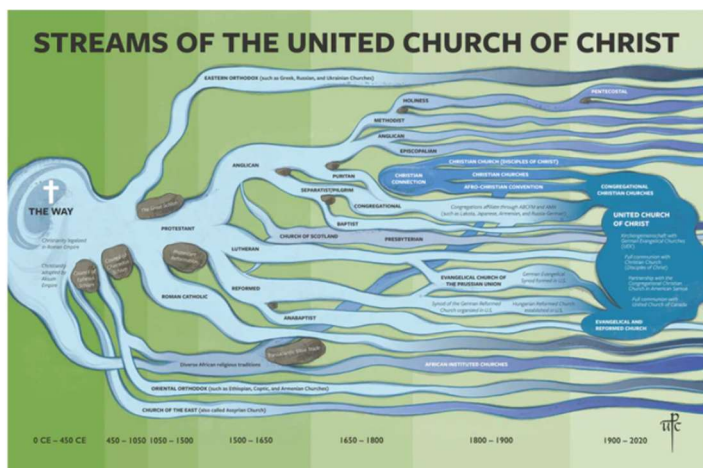
Generally, volunteers come once a week to clean and maintain used equipment. This is a vital community ministry, and we need the congregation's support to keep it operational. Please contact Terra in the Church office if you are able to assist.

UCC HISTORY AND POLITY REFRESHER

If you are interested in becoming a voting member of Saint Stephens, you are invited to attend the Confirmation Class on **January 21**, which will cover UCC history and polity. We will also share dinner together during this time. The class will take place from **5:00 PM to 7:30 PM**.

If you are unable to attend on January 21, there will be a New Members Lunch after church on January 25. New members will be received before the Annual Meeting on February 8.

Current members who would like a refresher on UCC and the organizational structure of our church are also welcome to join. Please sign up if you plan to attend so we can prepare adequately for dinner.



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

Emergency
Pastoral Care Needs
618-558-5014

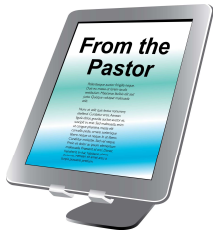
January	p. 1
From the Pastor	p. 2
January Happenings	p. 3
Upcoming Events/Radio	p. 3
Lectionary Readings	p. 3
January Mission	p. 4
2025 Baptisms	p. 4
Tend & Table	p. 5
New Stove in Fellowship	p. 5
Stewardship	p. 6
WISE/Green Team Article	p. 7
Financials	p. 8
Birthdays	p. 9
Memorials	p. 10-11



2026 BUDGET/ELECTION MEETING

February 8 after Worship

Annual meeting packets will be available for pickup in the church office during office hours or at the scrip table on Sunday mornings starting January 18.



As is my custom for January church newsletters, I offer a potpourri of church trivia questions. Because all the answers are available somewhere in St. Stephens, this could also be called a scavenger hunt. Have some fun! Completed entries may be placed in the “Ask the Pastor” bucket, and a winner will be drawn from the bucket at the Feb. 8 Annual Meeting for a valuable prize.

1. What was the title of the church newsletter before it became “The Interpreter”? _____
2. What was the name of the first bald pastor at St. Stephens? _____
3. Name the hymnal in which you can find “Complete Orders of Worship Authorized by the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church.” _____
4. What seminary did notable E&R and UCC theologians Reinhold Niebuhr, H. Richard Niebuhr and Walter Brueggemann attend? _____
5. The Rev. Dr. Augustus Kuether recently died. What was his connection to St. Stephens UCC? _____
6. The Rev. Dr. Fred Trost was the Conference Minister in Wisconsin for many years and accomplished a great deal in his tenure here. Rev. Trost’s mother was a member of a church Pastor Mike served before being called by St. Stephens. Name that church.

7. There is a portrait of Tripp in Pastor Mike’s office. What is the pseudonym of the “painter?”

8. The stained glass window of Jesus in the Garden of Gethesemane is based on a famous painting by what German painter? _____

I hope you have some fun with the trivia in the coming year and...

*“May God grant you always a sunbeam to warm you,
a moonbeam to charm you,
Laughter to cheer you, faithful friends near you.
And whenever you pray, Heaven to hear you.”*

Happy New Year!

Pastor Mike



January 1 – Office Closed
January 2 – The “Vibe” Episcopal Church, 6 PM
January 3 – Sanctuary De-Decorating
January 4 – No Sunday School
January 11 – Messy Church
January 21 – UCC History Class 5 – 7:30 PM
January 24 – Wise Church-Wide Gathering
January 25 – Youth Sunday
January 25 – New Members Class 10:30 AM

Chime Choir – Every Thursday at 6 PM

Confirmation - Every Wed. 5 – 7:30 PM



JANUARY LECTIONARY READINGS

January 4, Second Sunday after Christmas

Jer 31:7-14 Ps 147:12-20
 Eph 1:3-14 John 1:1-9,10-18

January 11, First Sunday after the Epiphany

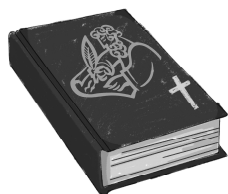
Isa 42:1-9 Ps 29
 Acts 10:34-43 Matt 3:13-17

January 18, Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Isa 49:1-7 Ps 40:1-11
 1 Cor 1:1-9 John 1:29-42

January 25, Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Isa 9:1-4 Ps 27:1,-4-9
 1 Cor 1:10-18 Matt 4:12-23



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

JANUARY RADIO BROADCASTS

January 4 – In memory of parents and grandparents from Dennis & Ione Koehler

January 11 – In memory of our mom, Ruth Buck, for her 90th birthday on December 5 from her family



Open Radio Ministry Dates:
January 18 & 25
February 1, 8, 15, 22



Livestream sponsorships
 are available for all of 2026!
 Sponsoring a month of
 livestreams costs \$200.

Please call the church office to reserve your preferred month.



SPECIAL WORSHIP SERVICE

Our Sunday morning service on **January 25** will be led by our confirmation students. They are putting in a lot of effort to plan a service centered around the theme “Let Your Light Shine.” Join us in supporting these students as they step out of their comfort zones to lead the worship service!



JANUARY MISSION



MAC Home

The Merrill Area Community Homeless Shelter (MAC Home) works every day to ensure that everyone has a safe and comfortable place to sleep. As of November 30, 2025, MAC Home has provided 1,338 safe nights of shelter. In 2025, they served 89 individuals, comprised of 68% men, 21% women, and 11% children. Additionally, 58% of those served accessed services in the warming center, while 42% received assistance in the transitional living area. Since opening in March 2019, MAC Home has provided a total of 10,214 safe nights of shelter to 538 individuals. In addition to monetary donations, they are in need of the following items:

- Laundry Detergent
- Cleaning Products
- Mens Winter Gloves
- Chapstick
- Backpacks
- Hand Warmers
- Copy Paper



We want to make it as easy as possible for you to contribute. To donate the items listed above, there will be a box by the scrip table where you can place your donations. If you prefer to provide monetary donations, please use your January monthly mission giving envelope or choose "MAC Home" from the drop-down menu for online giving. Thank you for your generosity and support!

Baptisms

2025

Name	Baptized
Elizabeth Schwartz	3/23/2025
Kayce Mahn	3/30/2025
Henry Williams	3/30/2025
Dutton Lewandowski	4/20/2025
Bellemey Lewandowski	4/20/2025
Amaya Peterson	5/18/2025
Alyvia Peterson	5/18/2025
Scarlett Leistikow	7/20/2025
Hayden Hommerding	12/21/2025



The Usher's Club would like to thank all of the volunteers who showed up to decorate the church for Christmas. And an extra special thank you to the special helpers who did the prep work early. Your efforts were greatly appreciated. Please keep in mind that we will need help **Saturday, January 3 at 8AM** to undecorate and clean up. God's Blessings to all, and Merry Christmas!



"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

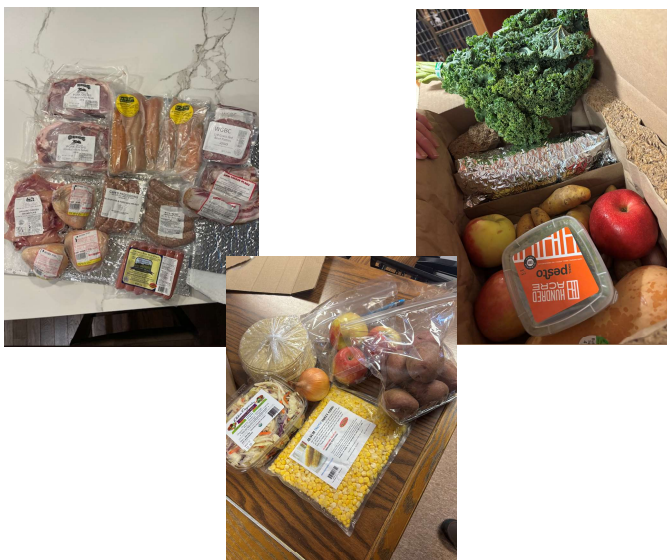
-2 Corinthians 5:17

TEND & TABLE

Saint Stephens is excited to be a part of Tend and Table! This farmer-led subscription service connects Wisconsin farmers with our community, making fresh food more accessible and supporting our local farmers.

Currently, we have about four people participating in Tend and Table, and we hope to see this number grow. Below are some pictures of the items that have been included in the boxes!

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](https://tendandtable.com/pages/saint-stephens-ucc-fundraiser)



NEW STOVE FELLOWSHIP KITCHEN

The stove in the Fellowship Kitchen had burners that went out. Due to its age, the cost of repairing it, including parts and labor, was going to be expensive. Additionally, the burners were unable to get our large pans to a boil.

In December, Pastor Mike visited Hargraves in Merrill to explore options for a new stove. He identified one that was priced at \$799 and inquired about any potential discounts for the church. Scott said, "How about we just make this our Christmas gift to the church?"

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Scott and Kim Voigt for their generous donation of a brand new stove to our Fellowship Kitchen. It has been a fantastic addition for our Mission Trip fundraisers, Dinner @ 5, and other events.

It actually gets the water in our large commercial pots up to a boil. We are so very grateful!

At St. Stephens, we shop local whenever we can. We get better service, friendly delivery, and when you look at the total cost, shopping local is less expensive than the so-called big box stores. Our local merchants support the O'Tannenbaum Tour, the county fair, local sports teams, and so much more. Stop in at Hargraves and tell them St. Stephens sent you!





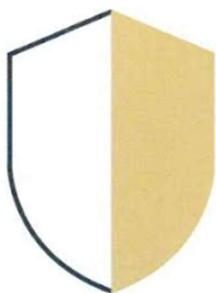
Orders must be placed by previous Friday
Pick-ups
Start Dec 5
Fridays weekly 4p - 6p
903 E 2nd St,
Merrill, WI 54452





<https://tendandtable.com/pages/saint-stephens-ucc-fundraiser>

STEWARDSHIP CORNER



7 tips to outsmart scammers and protect yourself online

By Cameron Brooks

Americans lost \$12.5 billion to fraud in 2024, up 25% from 2023. Today's scammers are constantly testing new tactics to trick consumers, from large-scale investment schemes to "urgent" text messages impersonating your boss. (Don't reply.)

Unfortunately, scam attempts often spike around the holidays. With heightened online shopping activity comes gift card fraud, package delivery scams, fake charity solicitations and worse. Tactics like these are increasingly difficult to spot, so it's important to keep your security measures current.

Here are 7 tips to stay safe online this holiday season and beyond:

1 USE STRONG PASS PHRASES/ PASSWORDS:

Use a password manager app to generate and store your login credentials for online accounts. When it's available, enable multifactor authentication (MFA), a security measure that requires you to verify your identity using two or more methods before accessing an account (for example, providing both your password and a PIN code sent to your mobile phone). MFA adds a layer of protection to reduce the likelihood of an unauthorized person accessing your accounts.

2 SHOP ON SECURE WEBSITES:

Look for "https://" and a padlock icon in your browser

search bar before entering your payment details.

3 TRY A VPN: A virtual private network is a service that enhances your cybersecurity by encrypting your internet traffic and masking your IP address, making it significantly harder for threat actors to intercept your data or track your online activities. It sounds complex, but it only takes a couple clicks to activate.

4 USE CREDIT OVER DEBIT: Credit cards often have stronger fraud protection, allowing you to dispute suspicious charges without losing actual money.

5 BEWARE OF IMPOSTORS: Scammers use urgency and fear, often posing as government, financial or other corporate entities. Never respond to unsolicited texts, calls, emails or direct messages on social media until you're certain they're authentic. Verify information by looking up the information independently from what you were sent.

6 MONITOR YOUR ACCOUNT STATEMENTS: If you're not already in the habit, consider keeping a closer eye on your account statements and report any suspicious activity to your account provider.

7 SHOP BRICK-AND-MORTAR STORES: Why not support local businesses with some in-person holiday shopping? You even could pay in cash. The scammers won't stand a chance!

None of us is immune to fraud, but taking these steps can help safeguard your money and information from criminals. Practice caution online, and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Finally, remember that all Thrivent clients with membership have access to identity monitoring and protection plans through Experian®. Learn more at thrivent.com/IDmonitoring.

→ Cameron Brooks is marketing strategist for Thrivent.

See footnote 5 in "Important information" on page 32.

+ Looking for extra safety tips?

Go to thrivent.com/protectyourself or scan the QR code to help you explore 11 red flags to help identify scams.



WISE TEAM

Leaning into the Winter Doldrums

By Leanne Schnabl

With the shortage of daylight during the winter months, people often talk about and experience the “Winter Doldrums” or the Winter Blues. But does the lack of sunlight and being indoors for most of the day or week automatically bring negative side effects? I do not think so, and I want to share with you some positive effects that I have personally experienced this winter season from staying inside.

I challenge myself to read a book that is outside my usual reading palette. I “Google” the author to learn more about his/her writing career and the influences around their writing. I read books that were the basis of movies or TV shows. You do not have to buy a book—take a trip to a local library to find new material to stir your curiosity. I also pick up one of the devotional resources at church and read a few daily entries each day, often rereading the associated Bible passages and the author’s take on the chosen scripture a few times.

I spend at least a few minutes each day watching the birds and squirrels outside my windows. God’s littlest creatures can be very entertaining. I like watching woodpeckers eat from the seed logs I have hanging in my yard. While I do not like squirrels, I am entertained by their tenacity at trying to get into my bird feeders.

I have coloring books that I use, and I love the fact that I can pick any color I want, depending upon my mood. I can be whimsical and give a child green hair or give a tree purple leaf. Or I simply doodle on scratch paper. I do not create for anyone other than myself, and I never worry about my drawings being “good enough”.

These activities are relaxing for me, and I find that I can mentally process things I might be worried about while I am relaxing. By devoting time to my Winter activities, my worries are not so important, and my anxiety either diminishes or goes away. Being inside with shortened daylight can be a blessing and open the doors to new interests.

WISE EVENT



The WISE team is sponsoring an afternoon to socialize, play games, and do puzzles on **Saturday, January 24 from 2:00-5:00**. All are welcome and should bring their favorite game or a puzzle to share.



GREEN TEAM

This January, you can focus on energy efficiency at home! Enjoy these tips from the University of Michigan.

- Insulation is key to keeping out cold winter air. Think about clear window film to prevent heat from escaping or weather stripping for windows and doors.
- Keep drapes open during the day to let in the warm sunlight and closed at night to keep out drafts.
- Unplug small appliances, chargers, and adaptors to avoid phantom energy.
- Turn down the heat at night or when you leave for long periods of time.
- Bundle up at home before turning up the heat.





POINSETTIA MEMORIALS

In memory of Bruce Robinson from Jon & Gerri Robinson

In memory of Betty & Norbert Krause from Dan & Becky Krause and Mark & Sally Woller

In memory of Bob & June Krueger from Dan & Becky Krause

In memory of loved ones from Randy & Diane Perry

In memory of our grandparents John & Mary Herdt, Marvin & Verna Koehler from Wendel & Debbie Mathis and family, Brian & Terri Haufe and family, and Todd Herdt and Sydney Faris

In memory of our parents Ray & Betty Herdt from Wendel & Debbie Mathis and family, Brian & Terri Haufe and family, and Todd Herdt and Sydney Faris

In memory of Kermit Golisch and Barbara Golisch from Clint & Melanie Golisch and family

In memory of my husband, Kenneth Schubert from Eunice Schubert

In memory of loved ones from Eunice Schubert

In memory of Jerry Plautz from Dave & Sue Pyan and family

In memory of Burnell Pyan from Dave & Sue Pyan and family

In memory of Beatrice Marquardt from Todd & Renea Frederick

In memory of Bob Frederick from Todd & Renea Frederick

In memory of Charles & Jean Southcombe from Mike & Sue Southcombe

In memory of James & Jeannine Sprague from Mike & Sue Southcombe

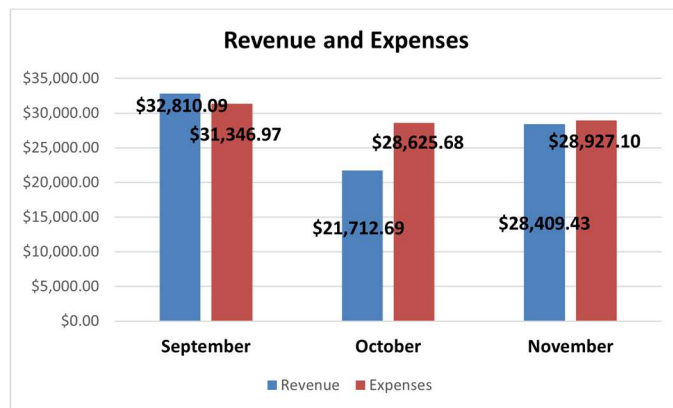
In memory of loved ones from Mike & Sue Kunkel

In memory of Ewald & Marilyn Katke at Christmas from Kevin & Terry Krueger

In memory of Lois & Don Wold from Donna Frisch



CHURCH FINANCIAL REPORT



November Revenue and Expenses

Revenue \$28,409.43

Expenses \$28,927.10

Net Loss: \$517.67

The congregation raised \$3,090 and donated 260 pounds of food to the Merrill Food Pantry. During a time when the Food Pantry was concerned for those they serve, our congregation came together in a remarkable way. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the Merrill Food Pantry.

In addition to the donations made to the Food Pantry, our congregation also purchased gifts for 63 children in our community and donated \$1,000 to the program! The generosity of this congregation is truly inspiring!



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!**JANUARY 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!

Jan 2	Robert Plautz	Jan 13	Madeline Rodemeier	Jan 23	Allen Mussell
Jan 3	Patricia Cottrell	Jan 14	Phyllis Wendland	Jan 23	Abner Gremler
Jan 3	Scott Krause	Jan 15	Beth Heckendorf	Jan 24	Jacob Schnabl
Jan 3	Hailee Lapsenberg	Jan 15	Wayne Krueger	Jan 24	Bellemey Lewandowski
Jan 4	Michael Hommerding	Jan 17	Cindy Melton	Jan 25	Kenyon Golisch
Jan 4	Susan Wendt	Jan 18	Todd Herdt	Jan 25	Rosezanna Pierce
Jan 5	Darcia Hopp	Jan 18	Kristine Bowe	Jan 26	Lisa Krause
Jan 5	Brenda Rowe	Jan 19	Gary Schwartz	Jan 26	Terry Zastrow
Jan 5	Hudson Schult	Jan 19	Tanner Duwe	Jan 27	Mary Walsh
Jan 6	Kraig Hanig	Jan 19	Willamina McGregor	Jan 27	Gorgette Sampo
Jan 9	Nicole Seidler	Jan 21	Janella Rice	Jan 28	Nancy Strand
Jan 10	Harlan Fausch	Jan 21	Angela Hinner	Jan 29	Amy Gehrke
Jan 10	Mike Kunkel	Jan 21	Tamara Stender	Jan 29	Jerry Lyon
Jan 10	Becky Teske	Jan 21	Laurie Bergh	Jan 30	Lydia McIntyre
Jan 11	Toni Peterson	Jan 22	Lynn Dreikosen	Jan 31	George Henrich
Jan 13	Joan Hartson	Jan 22	Jeffrey Kraft	Jan 31	Kayla Golisch
Jan 13	Bailey Iwen	Jan 22	Jean Meyer		

**Saint Stephens UCC**

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

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

Some stock photographs in this issue are courtesy of ChurchArt, Clip Art, Pixabay, and Unsplash. www.pixabay.com
www.unsplash.com www.clipart-library.com www.churchart.com

GIFTS & memorials

Received through December 14

Dedicated to the glory of God and...

Radio Ministry

\$190.00	in memory of parents and grandparents from Dennis & Ione Koehler
\$190.00	in memory of my husband Bob for Christmas, and my father Ted Jaeger for his December 25 birthday, from Kathy Turner
\$100.00	in memory of Millie Burrows from Tom & Mary Maluegge

New Roof Fund

\$1,000.00	in memory of Joy Meyer from David Meyer
\$200.00	in memory of my husband, Norm Ziemke, for Christmas from Alice J Ziemke
\$200.00	in memory of parents, Ed & Lillian Zimmerman and Albert & Emily Ziemke, from Alice J Ziemke
\$100.00	in memory of loved ones and friends from Christmas from Alice J Ziemke

Sanctuary Updates

\$100.00	in memory of our parents, Roy & Phyllis Schlueter and Roger & Darlene Welk, at Christmas from Randy & Vivian Schlueter
\$20.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Jeff and Sue Kraft
\$50.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Bill & Joanne Wengeler
\$100.00	in memory of Millie Burrows from Tom & Mary Maluegge


Food For Kids

\$25.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Dennis & Luann Grefe
\$50.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Bob & Candy Hinner
\$100.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Scott Kasten and Cheryl Kanitz
\$100.00	in memory of Arlo, Scott, and Lisa Berndt Fisher from Eunice Berndt

Memorials

\$50.00	in memory of parents John & Dorothy Bellin for their December birthdays from Gay Stencil
\$40.00	in memory of Fern Reinhardt Langhoff from Ron Vachavake
\$25.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Kevin & Terry Krueger
\$40.00	in memory of parents at Christmas from Dennis & Sharon Woller
\$25.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Dan & Patsy Pick
\$10.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Shirley Ziemke
\$100.00	in memory of my husband, Frank Ziemke, for Christmas from Shirley Ziemke
\$25.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Brenda Rowe
\$200.00	in memory of Elmira, Elmer & Delilah Krause, and Elmer & Minnie Henrichs from Jerry Krause and Family
\$25.00	in loving memory of my parents, Frank & Leone Stefanez, and my son, Steven Cottrell, from Patricia Cottrell
\$25.00	in loving memory of my friend, Darlene Stark Pepke
\$20.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Mike, Paulette, and Joe Heuser
\$100.00	in memory of my sister, Barb Golisch, from Eunice Schubert
\$20.00	in memory of Ruth Buck from Dave & Emily Schwartzman
\$20.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Dave & Emily Schwartzman
\$100.00	in honor of the birth of my first great-grandchild, Darla Marie, from Sharon Detert

\$400.00	in memory of Philip Krause from Carol Krause
\$100.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from the FedEx Family
\$20.00	in memory of Barb Golisch from Linda & Bryan Plautz
\$100.00	in memory of parents, Marvin & Ruthmae Schenzel, and sister, Mary Geiss, from Linda & Bryan Plautz
\$400.00	in memory of parents, Donald & Shirley Anderson, brother, Dale Anderson, and son, Lucas Anderson, from Jeff & Sheila Anderson
\$50.00	in memory of Ewald & Marilyn Katke at Christmas from Kevin & Terry Krueger
\$25.00	in memory of Michael Walsh at Christmas from Kevin & Terry Krueger
\$25.00	in memory of Myron & Carol Jean Marquardt at Christmas from Kevin & Terry Krueger
\$100.00	in memory of our late spouses, Linda Perry and Ken Wallen for Christmas from Randy and Diane Perry
\$100.00	in memory of Lylas & Bernice Berndt from Darryl & Donna Berndt




PUZZLE


FIX YOUR EYES ON JESUS

Remembering Jesus' life, death and resurrection
helps us live with gratitude every day.


Use the picture and number code to fill in the blanks for Hebrews 12:2-3, NIV



1. Jesus	5. cross
2. weary	6. endured
3. endured	7. scorning
4. opposition	8. shame



1. Jesus	5. perfecter
2. lose	6. him
3. pioneer	7. faith
4. sinners	8. hand



1. eyes	5. right
2. us	6. grow
3. joy	7. God
4. heart	8. throne

"... fixing our _____ on _____, the _____ and _____ of _____.

For the _____ set before _____ he _____ the _____, _____ its _____, and sat down at the _____ of the _____ of _____. Consider _____ who _____ such _____ from _____, so that you will not _____ and _____."

Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV

Answers: "...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

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>