THE INTERPRETER

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

Saint Stephens UCC
Where God is still speaking,

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

NOVEMBER 2026

Messy Church is starting back up November 8 from 4 – 6 PM!



Bringing people of all ages together into a relationship with Christ through a fun, engaging evening of activities and fellowship that includes dinner!!

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

Emergency
Pastoral Care Needs
618-558-5014

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On **November 29**, after church around 10:30, join the WISE Team for a couple of hours of fun baking and decorating holiday cookies. You must sign up to attend using the sign-up sheet on the kiosk or by calling the church office - we need to know how many supplies to get.

Wednesday NiGHt services

Join us on Wednesday Nights at 6 PM for Contemporary Worship with Lively Music and Spirited Discussions.

Nov. 4 – Dinner Church
(RSVP requested)
Nov. 11 – Contemporary Service
Nov. 18 – Contemporary Service
Nov. 25 – No Service –
Happy Thanksgiving

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess. 5:16-18)



Every year, Totenfest, the remembrance of those who have died in the last year, and Thanksgiving seem to be on a collision course on the calendar. For many, grief can choke the vine whose fruit is thanksgiving. For others, grief leads to even greater thanksgiving for the life of the person being missed and for the spiritual strength to move through the grief to a new resolve and awareness of life's gifts.

Thanksgiving is a spiritual discipline. It must be intentional because sometimes it is difficult. Through the intentional, daily practice of offering gratitude to God as an act of worship and faith, rather than a reaction to pleasant circumstances, our relationship with God grows ever deeper.

Thanksgiving (the spiritual discipline, not the holiday) has numerous health, mental and psychological benefits. (for more information, click here)

Benefits of a spirit of Thankfulness:

- **Heart Health:** Lowers both systolic and diastolic blood pressure and helps regulate breathing.
- **Better Sleep:** Promotes positive thoughts at bedtime, leading to deeper and longer sleep duration.
- **Stronger Immunity:** Reduces stress hormones, which boosts immune function and lowers inflammation.
- **Healthier Habits:** Encourages better self-care, including more regular exercise, nutritious eating, and routine medical checkups.
- **Stress and Mood:** Releases feel-good brain chemicals like dopamine, helping lower anxiety and depression.
- **Emotional Resilience:** Decreases toxic emotions like envy, frustration, regret, and the desire for revenge.
- **Stronger Relationships:** Fostering fellowship during community and fellowship events builds social support and combats the health risks of social isolation.

Grief can, of course, complicate this thankfulness. We can be angry at the unfairness of death, envious of the time others have with their loved ones—and sometimes contemptuous of the way they may seem to squander that time. Guilt can complicate these feelings as well.

I know a mother whose child died at 6 weeks old. They knew that death was all but certain 2 months before she delivered. As difficult as the grief was, she said she would suffer it and more in trade for just those 6 weeks. She and her husband and their 2 older children created rituals for each holiday to remember their little brother who died so young. They could see his personality developing even with his limited ability to interact with them or his environment. They remembered his strength in such fragility and the peace they saw on his face as he slowly drifted from this life into the next.

As he was drifting to that bend in the river, they did not say the usual things we say bedside when someone we love is dying. The usual did not apply. They simply kept telling him how thankful they were that he was part of their lives for those six weeks; what he had taught them about how much love they have in their hearts; how he made them ready to love others without fear of losing them. I stood in awe and thought no matter how long or brief they might be, love stories all have an end.

And so, for every moment we have with the people we love, for the gift of every second, for all the gifts of creation around us, for the people who challenge us and the people who love us, for quiet moments in nature and loud marching bands blaring across the field, for meandering streams and crashing waterfalls, for the glaring sun of summer and the glint from ice covered snow in winter and for everything in between: Let us give thanks!

Pastor Mike

Upcoming Fall Events

November 4 – Dinner Church 6 PM
November 6 – The Vibe Open Mic 6 PM
November 8 – Messy Church 4 – 6 PM
November 11 – Contemporary Service 6 PM
November 18 – Contemporary Service 6 PM
November 22 – Totenfest
November 26 – Thanksgiving – Office Closed
November 27 – Church Office Closed
November 28 – Hanging of the Greens 8 AM
November 29 – New Member Service
November 29 – Cookie Making 10 AM
December 5 & 6 – O'Tannenbaum
December 6 – Living River Concert 7 PM

Chime Choir Practice Thursdays @ 6 PM

NOVEMBER LECTIONARY READINGS

Nov. 1, Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost
Josh 3:7-17 Ps 107:1-7, 33-37
1 Thess 2:9-13 Matt 23:1-12

Nov. 8, Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
Josh 24:1-3a, 14-25 Ps 78:1-7
1 Thess 4:13-18 Matt 25:1-13

Nov 15, Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
Judg 4:1-7 Ps 123
1 Thess 5:1-11 Matt 25:14-30

Nov 22, Reign of Christ
Ezek 34:11-16, 20-24 Ps 100
Eph 1:15-23 Matt 25:31-46

Nov 29, First Sunday of Advent
Isa 64:1-9 Ps 80:1-7, 17-19
1 Cor 1:3-9 Mark 13:24-37



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

NOVEMBER RADIO BROADCASTS

November 1 – In appreciation of the Dinner @ 5 volunteers, from Todd & Renea Frederick

November 8 – In memory of Gay & Sally Oberg from family

November 15 – In memory of Gay Oberg and his November 14 birthday, from family

November 22 – Blessings for a very happy and grateful Thanksgiving for everyone, from Jon & Gerri Robinson

November 29 – In memory of Grandparents Emil & Caroline Koehler and Fred & Anna Krause, from Dennis & Ione Koehler.

Please help support our radio ministry by sponsoring a Sunday. The cost is $190 per Sunday.

Available Dates: Dec. 13 & 25



Sue Kunkel is sponsoring the November Livestreams.

November 1: In honor of Luke & Tricia Lazare's 19th wedding anniversary

November 8: In honor of William Kunkel who is currently serving in the US Navy and in honor of veterans who have served and are currently serving our country.

November 15: In honor of Mike Kunkel of what would have been our 51st wedding anniversary.

November 22: Giving thanks for our many blessings and remembering Leo & Eleanor Fehlberg, Mike Kunkel and Kay Simon.

November 29: In honor of my grandchildren Amara & Leo Lazare and Lilly Sue Kunkel.



We have three positions available on the church council for the upcoming year! Jody Meyer, Jerry Burnett, and Jim Bjorklund will each have completed two consecutive two-year terms as of the end of this year. Let's take a moment to thank them for their dedicated service to the church and its governance.

We are seeking volunteers to be placed on the ballot, which will be voted on by the congregation **at our December meeting.** Council terms last for two years, and members are eligible to be elected for a second consecutive term, allowing for a total of four consecutive years of service.

If you are interested in serving on the church council, please reach out to Pastor Mike, or any current church council member. Thank you!

Your 2026 Church Council Members

Jody Meyer	**President**
Marcus Reinhardt	**Vice President**
Todd Frederick	**Treasurer**
Jim Bjorklund	Darryl Frick
Jerry Burrnett	Stan Seeger
Emma Golisch	Candy Hinner
Cathy Dornbrack	Marge Roggenbuck
Nancy Reinhardt-Porath	





On ***November 29,*** we will welcome new members to Saint Stephens UCC. Please join us in celebrating with coffee fellowship after worship.

Romans 15:7 —
"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."



Please join us on Sunday, November 22, for our special time of remembrance for those born to heaven this past year.

Ellie Bessey	Charles Reinhardt
Ann Fondow	Joann Sauer
Gary Frisch	Ronald Vachavake
Dean Gille	Carol Weber
Lee Gille	Millie Wagner-Burnett
Barbara Golisch	Kelly Heidemann
Penny Hommerding	Diane Peterson
Joan Johnson	Zakary Plautz
Yvonne Kleimola	Raymond W Woller
Gloria Kottman	Daune Berndt
Mike Kunkel	Phyllis Kretschmer
Cindy Melton	Michael Janssen
Sally Oberg	Kathryn Samuelson





Join us for the Hanging of the Greens as we transform the sanctuary into an evergreen wonderland on **November 28 at 8 AM**. With enough volunteers, we can have the church ready for Advent in no time!

Stan and Deb Seeger would appreciate help on Friday, November 27, to prepare the wreaths. If you can assist, please reach out to them.

STEWARDSHIP CORNER

Members of the Stewardship Committee, Endowment Committee, Property Committee, and a couple of others have joined to work on a Capital Campaign. The Property Committee provided a list of repair items for the Church and Parsonage buildings. We have organized these items into 3 priorities and a wish list.

Priority 1:

- Roof replacement above the Kuck Lounge
- Carpet and vinyl plank flooring in the Sanctuary and Narthex
- Asbestos abatement in the Sanctuary and Narthex flooring
- Underlayment in the Sanctuary and Narthex flooring as needed
- Electrical updates for the sound system
- Elevator upgrades for the starter and doors

Priority 2:

- Vinyl plank flooring in the office hallway and Kuck Lounge
- Pew seat upholstery upgrades in Sanctuary and Balcony
- Replace some pews in poor condition with chairs in Sanctuary
- Tuck-point Sanctuary, Parsonage, and parsonage garage.
- Sidewalk, driveway, and step replacements at parsonage

Priority 3:

- Asphalt replacement at office entrance
- Replace ceiling tiles in Fellowship Hall, Food for Kids room, choir room, and Custodial room
- Replace flooring in Fellowship Hall with vinyl plank flooring
- Replace fluorescent lights with LED fixtures throughout the church building

Wish List:

- Landscaping upgrades
- Memorial garden/patio
- Poster holders for Memorial wall photo displays
- Add camera facing congregation from altar for the Live Stream
- Add monitor in back of sanctuary
- Refurbish the Ascension painting on the altar
- Purchase a new Nativity scene
- New Paraments for altar
- Plexiglass for altar
- 5 mini-split air conditioners throughout the church building
- A quiet room in the back of the Sanctuary, for mothers with little ones

We held a congregational meeting on October 25 to kick off our Sanctuary Update Campaign. Planning for these improvements has been underway for several years. Thanks to Tim's work repairing the plaster throughout the Sanctuary, that project is now complete and no longer on our list of needed updates.

Our priority will be addressing the flooring in the Sanctuary and Narthex, which has become a tripping hazard.

We are also evaluating several other maintenance and accessibility projects:

- The bushes along the retaining wall by the office parking lot were recently removed because their roots were pushing the blocks out of place. We hope to assess the wall for needed repairs and add a privacy fence for the parsonage.
- We are exploring the possibility of removing the pulpit and adding a ramp to the altar in that corner of the Sanctuary.
- The windows in the conference room behind Kuck Lounge—formerly Kuck's office—need to be replaced.

Please watch and listen for updates about this campaign, and support it in whatever ways you can. Together, we can make our buildings safer, more accessible, and more welcoming for everyone who enters them.

WISE TEAM

Brain Health and Aging

by Frank Van Alstine

As I grow older, I am taking a greater interest in keeping my brain healthy. The information I am sharing this month is from a podcast entitled Speaking of Psychology with some helpful information from Vonetta Dotson, PhD.

What types of activities keep our brains sharp? Dotson says doing something new and engaging that challenges the brain is the best strategy. For example, my daily crossword puzzle is not as beneficial as I assumed it to be. I need to mix it up a bit rather than repeating the same activity over and over. Dotson suggests going to a museum, attending a cultural event, or reading something novel. The key is to challenge your brain to learn something new that requires thinking. Problem-solving or putting things together are examples of this.

And what about commercial brain training games and apps? Are these beneficial? Although these games are not harmful, they are too repetitive to keep your brain sharp. Dotson believes that attending a lecture or learning a new language would be a better way to spend your money.

The Wise Team will be hosting Cookie Decorating after worship on November 29! The Wise Team hopes to see you there!





MONTHLY MISSION

Christmas Spirit

The Lincoln County United Giving Tree Program

Christmas is right around the corner, and we are preparing our hearts and our homes for the birth of Christ. Please also remember we are continuing our longstanding tradition of being a tree host for the Christmas Spirit Lincoln County United Giving Tree Program, which aims to provide a joyful Christmas for area children. Last Christmas, Christmas Spirit served 155 families, which consisted of 399 children from Merrill and Tomahawk!

Children's tags will be available for pickup on the giving tree located in our lobby. Once you have chosen a tag, please sign your name on the log by the tree. Remember, gifts are purchased, but please **do not** wrap them upon return to the church, which is set for **November 30**.

If you are unable to shop for a child, monetary donations can be given using your monthly mission envelopes.



HOLIDAY SHOPPING

As Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and all the other fancy shopping days approach, think about purchasing Scrip cards at church on Sunday Mornings or stopping into the church office during office hours! This is a great way to fundraise for the church while fulfilling your holiday shopping list!

If we don't have the store cards you want in stock or if you have a large order, please fill out a scrip order form! You can also download the Raise Right App and purchase Scrip on the go! Check out the Scrip table on Sundays for more information or call the church office on how to sign up online for Raise Right.



GREEN TEAM

Have you ever wondered what our human brains might have to do with some of the problems we face, including climate change?

Apparently, a lot says the world's leading brain researcher. Check out the video interview below to learn more, and while you're at it you might also be interested in his poetry readings which are also available in a separate Youtube.video (not included here).

The Green team hopes you've had a great fall harvest this year.

https://youtu.be/dogVQDydRGQ?si=cUX80qtR1ESsv8RH

A NEW BOOKCLUB

A New Wednesday Schedule



Our Wednesday evening services have leaned more to discussion groups than song and praise worship. So, let's lean into what people seem to be enjoying.

Starting in December, first Wednesday will still be "Dinner Church," and the third Wednesday will be discussion around a book. For Dec. 16, we will discuss the book, "Better Ways to Read the Bible," written by Rev. Zach Lambert, co-founder of the Post-Evangelical Collective.

Peter Enns, professor at Eastern University, host of The Bible for Normal People podcast, says, *"Lambert offers sage guidance for moving beyond the harmful lenses that obscure and distort the life-affirming words of Scripture.*
"

We'll have more information in the mid-week updates and on the bulletin board. You may purchase it on Amazon or through the church. And you are welcome to check out Pastor's copy before you order it. The discussion will be available on Zoom.

CHURCH FINANCIALS

Because a quorum was not present at the last Church Council meeting, the September financials are still pending approval. Both the September and October financials will be included in the next issue of the Interpreter.

Check out **ucci.org** for all upcoming camps, events, and retreats available at Cedar Valley, Daycholah, and Moon Beach! We have scholarship funds available to our church members who would like to participate



November 1





HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

NOVEMBER 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!



Nov 1	Laurie Burns	Nov 12	Jeffrey Porath	Nov 26	Phillip Mussell
Nov 1	Dawson Heckendorf	Nov 13	Andrew Podeweltz	Nov 26	Kaite Rajek
Nov 3	Corey Dornbrack	Nov 13	Scott Kasten	Nov 27	Bert Hopp
Nov 6	Leah Lange	Nov 14	Luke Lazare	Nov 27	Diana Huston
Nov 6	Josh Kohnhorst	Nov 15	Naomi Berg	Nov 27	Gay Stencil
Nov 6	Willow Boquist	Nov 15	Kathy Case	Nov 27	Tim Anderson
Nov 7	Holly Boehm	Nov 17	Bradley Schnabl	Nov 28	Tammy Duwe
Nov 9	Leroy Frick	Nov 19	Nicholas Lewitzke	Nov 28	Michael Golisch
Nov 9	Garrett Lapsenberg	Nov 20	Cheryl Ament	Nov 28	Jessica Frick
Nov 10	Sue Heckendorf	Nov 20	Gary Roggenbuck	Nov 29	Allison Rodemeier
Nov 10	John Schenzel	Nov 21	Whitley Golisch	Nov 29	Betsy Peterson
Nov 10	Jace Bloch	Nov 22	Brian Rowe		
Nov 10	Andi Christensen	Nov 22	Shari Schubert		
Nov 11	Abigail Burnett	Nov 24	Katrina Depies		
Nov 12	Linda Plautz	Nov 25	Ione Koehler		



Do you have sheets, blankets, or fabric that you are looking to clear out of your house? If so, we have some community quilters that can put them to good use! Please bring them to the church office.



Saint Stephens UCC
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GIFTS & MEMORIALS

Received through October 19

Dedicated to the glory of God and…

Radio Ministry

$190.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Joan Hartson, Rob Hartson and Katrice Babizsz

Memorial

$100.00 in memory of Grandpa Robert Hartson from RT & Maria Hartson and Ellie Hartson & Jacob Krueger
$100.00 in memory of Papa Robert Hartson from Bo, Colter, and Lainey Hartson
$10.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Lynette Bloch
$25.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Michael & Coleen Hamann
$25.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Karen & Fred Bruckert
$25.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Dawn & Russ Hartwig
$20.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Patricia Schwab
$100.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Nona Zortman & Kerry Zortman
$20.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Allen & Virginia Woller
$50.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Butch & Evelyn Chrusniak
$40.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Connie Hochstetler & Shirley Hochstetler
$20.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Ryan & Penny Mootz
$20.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Scott & Kelly Wallace
$20.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Wayne Zimmerman
$25.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Kay Pufahl Storm
$20.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Paulette & Mike Heuser
$20.00 in memory of Eric Seidel from Aunt Barbara and Uncle Kelly
$25.00 in memory of Eric Seidel from Dan & Debi Lemon
$30.00 in memory of Robert Hartson from Brenda Rowe
$75.00 in loving memory of Steven “Beaver” Wendorf for his 75th birthday from Rose Wendorf
$75.00 in loving memory of our mom Joan Johnson for her November 23 birthday from Jonathan Johnson, Todd Johnson, and Heather Kassens.

Livestream

$200.00 In honor of Luke & Tricia Lazare’s 19th Wedding Anniversary; in honor of William Kunkel who is currently serving in the US Navy and in honor of veterans who have served and are currently serving our country; In honor of Mike Kunkel of what would have been our 51st wedding anniversary; Giving thanks for our many blessings and remembering Leo & Eleanor Fehlberg, Mike Kunkel, and Kay Simon; In honor of my grandchildren Amara and Leo Lazare, and Lilly Sue Kunkel; from Sue Kunkel

Sanctuary Updates

$60.00 in memory of Bob Hartson from Bill & Joanne Wengeler
$25.00 in memory of Bob Hartson from Mike & Glynis Schroeder
$20.00 in memory of Bob Hartson from Ray Woller
$20.00 in memory of Eric Seidel from Ray Woller
$20.00 in memory of Clarence Schroeder from Ray Woller
$20.00 in memory of Dean Gille and Lee Gille from Ray Woller

Church Camp Scholarship

$40.00 in memory of Rick Wendland from Charlotte Tyskiewicz
$200.00 in memory of my son Rick Wendland from Phyllis Wendland

Food For Kids

$100.00 in memory of Mary Geiss from Linda & Bryan Plautz

THE INTERPRETER ST STEPHENS UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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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.

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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