

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.

OCTOBER
2026



We will hold World Communion Sunday on October 11. There will be no Communion on October 4.

Saint Stephens UCC

903 E. 2nd St.

Merrill, WI. 54452

715-536-7322

**Emergency
Pastoral Care Needs
618-558-5014**

New Member Lunch – October 11



**Become
Part of
Our
Church
Family**

Pastor Mike will host a New Member Lunch after coffee fellowship from 10:30 AM–12:30 PM. This is a wonderful opportunity for those interested in joining to learn more about Saint Stephens! We are excited for our church family to grow!

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We will hold a congregational meeting on **October 25** after worship at 10 AM. This meeting will discuss the Roof Loan, provide updates on the Endowment, and outline our upcoming Capital Campaign for building repairs, including updates to the sanctuary.



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

October 7 – Dinner Church
(RSVP requested)

Oct. 14 – No Wednesday Service

Oct. 21 – Contemporary Worship

Oct. 28 – Contemporary Worship



Trunk or Treat will take place on October 31 from 4 PM to 7 PM in the Kuck Lounge. If you are interested in hosting a trunk for this event, please sign up at the kiosk! We aim to have at least 10 to 12 trunks. This is a fun activity that our church provides for the community. We hope to see you there!

From the Pastor

Deuteronomy 22:8



When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.

If you could walk down the streets of Mainz, Germany in 1460 and ask if that new printing press invention from Gutenberg would revolutionize communication, lead to an increase in literacy; contribute to the schism within the Catholic church and later to the growing separations within the Protestant churches; put scribes out of work; help lead to democratic revolutions, the overthrow and routing of empires from colonies; spread scientific knowledge beyond the limits imposed by the church; I am quite certain you would be answered with blank stares or laughter at how silly you must be.

It appears, however, that we are at that point now with Artificial Intelligence.

It will either end life as we know it in 3 years (a 10% chance of that according to some of the designers of AI) or it will revolutionize our daily lives as well as exponentially increase our ability to gather and understand knowledge. Or, maybe, a little of both.

AI will certainly eliminate some, if not many, jobs. We need to consider now how to help the people in those jobs transition to new lines of work.

At one of our recent Wednesday night worship services, we thought about AI, looked at how scripture might help us understand our responsibilities to ourselves and to our society as we expand the use of it.

Note Deuteronomy's warning about building parapets around roofs. The roof of the ancient Israelite home was an extension of the living quarters. Families slept on the roofs on hot summer nights to get the full benefit of cooler air blowing in from the coast. Deuteronomy says, "When you build a new house," not "if," and then warns the homeowner to put up a half wall to keep people from falling off the roof. "Make your roof safe," in other words.

Greater use of AI is coming. We may not need parapets, per se, but we do need to create safety walls around those things we do not want AI to touch.

Bill Gates has suggested that we create "human reserves," areas of our life that we wall off and protect from AI. Like establishing nature preserves, are there simply places in our culture and in our own lives that we do not want technology to overwhelm?

It is incumbent upon us to remember the people whose livelihoods most likely to change need our economic, social and spiritual support during the upheaval and transition. We need to anticipate these changes rather than react to them.

Teachers may use AI as a tool to better teach but let us not replace teachers with robots.

Doctors may use AI to help better understand symptoms and search for many more treatment options but we need them in the room, responding to us in our humanity.

We have had discussions about AI in the church office. It helps us edit the Interpreter to be clearer and more concise. But the words are still ours and the connection with our members is more important than a glitzy layout or fancy graphics.

We need these conversations before problems arise. Let us plan where and how to use AI in ethical and life giving ways that enhance and nurture our intelligence rather than letting our abilities to discern truth, make decisions and respond to information begin to atrophy.

What areas of your personal life do you want to wall off from AI? Reading books instead of scrolling through short stories created and pushed into your media feed by an algorithm?

Creating art just for the sake of art—paint, sculpt, write some poetry, turn a bowl on a lathe, build a bookshelf, bake a cake or create a tasty meal?

Choose 3 people every week and send a handwritten card or note to them?

Use that fancy phone and take some pictures of the changing colors of Autumn?

What are the parts of your life you want to keep from giving over to the algorithm?

Beloved children of God, let us promise each other and ourselves to stay human, with all our faults, rough edges, discomforts, joys, love and hope we can muster.

Pastor Mike

Some links for further exploration: [9 Bible verses on Artificial Intelligence](#) on aiandfaith.org

[The Turbulent AI Era is Here. The Choices We Make Now are Critical](#) in Gates Notes and check out Cameron Trimble's blog: [What Should we never let AI do for us?](#)



October 7 – 2027 Mission Trip Meeting 5 PM
October 7 – Dinner Church 6 PM
October 11 – World Communion Sunday
October 11 – New Members Lunch 10 AM
October 14 – No Wednesday Service
October 21 – Contemporary Service 6 PM
October 24 – Food For Kids Fundraiser
October 25 – Congregational Meeting 10 AM
October 27 – Wise Team Meeting 6 PM
October 28 – Contemporary Service 6 PM
October 31 – Trunk or Treat 4-7 PM

Chime Choir Practice Thursdays @ 6 PM



Handchimes

The Chime Choir is accepting
New Members!!! Contact Darlene
 Johnson if you would like to join!!



OCTOBER LECTIONARY READINGS

October 4, Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Ex 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20	Ps 19
Isa 5:1-7	Ps 80:7-15
Phil 3:4b-14	Matt 21:33-46

October 11, Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Ex 32:1-14	Ps 106:1-6, 19-23
Isa 25:1-9	Ps 23
Phil 4:1-9	Matt 22:1-14

Oct 18, Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Ex 33:12-23	Ps 99
Isa 45:1-7	Ps 96:1-9, (10-13)
1 Thess 1:1-10	Matt 22:15-22

Oct 25, Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Deut 34:1-12	Ps 90:1-6, 13-17
Lev 19:1-2, 15-18	Ps 1
1 Thess 2:1-8	Matt 23:34-46



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

OCTOBER RADIO BROADCASTS

October 4 – In memory of Gay & Sally Oberg's wedding anniversary on October 5, from family.

October 11 – In memory of Laura & Franklin Plautz, from Bob and Jolene Plautz

October 18 – In honor of what would have been our 30th wedding anniversary, from Janet Schaefer.

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



Available Dates: October 25
November 1, 8, 29



Dennis and Sharon Woller are sponsoring the October Livestreams.

October 4: In honor of Dennis & Sharon Woller's 60th wedding anniversary on September 24, 2026.

October 11: In honor of our sons and daughters-in-law, Greg & Chrissy and Chad & Jill.

October 18: In honor of our grandchildren Madi and Ben and Nola and Henry.

October 25: In memory of our parents Martin & Dorothy Woller and Lylas & Bernice Berndt.

This year's livestream sponsorships are now full. Please call the church office to schedule a spot for next year! The cost to sponsor a month of livestreams is \$200.

MONTHLY MISSION

St. Vincent - Emergency Assistance



Twenty-three years ago, a small group gathered with little more than a vision of service to the poor and a strong faith in God. From this meager beginning and virtually no financial resources, the local Conference of St. Vincent de Paul was born.

Over the years, God's blessing on their work has made a significant difference in the lives of many in the Merrill area. This conference continues to grow, and so does the scope of our service to those in our community most in need.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul has 10 caring community members at the helm of this organization. They are: Pete Mueller, President; Tom Mueller, Vice President; Lisa Carlson, Treasurer; Lori McAlister, Secretary; Judy Warren; Russ Mancl; Deb Parks; Jim Rell; Denis McCarthy; and Dick Duginski, Associate Members.

Where does the SVDP Outreach receive its funding? A United Way grant, Salvation Army monies, monetary donations from the community, and profits from its thrift store. SVDP receives no state or federal funding. It is totally funded through our community! Thank you, Merrill!

What we have shared with our neighbors:

October 2025 - August 2026:

- Vehicle Repair \$15,650
- Work to Warm Program \$24,900
- Utilities Assistance \$10,500
- Rental Assistance \$64,300
- Lodging/Homeless \$29,800
- Other/Misc \$27,900

TOTAL \$173,050

We have assisted with 288 requests in the last 11 months. These requests consisted of families/individuals involving a total of 390 adults and 218 children.

How can you help:

****SVDP** is always needing monetary contributions to continue sharing with our needy in our local community and surrounding area.

****The SVDP Thrift Store** is looking for volunteers to help in their store to price, cashier, put things out on the floor along with other miscellaneous jobs. If interested, please call the store manager at 715-539-1131.

****In need of 1 or 2 people** to help pick-up furniture once or twice a week. Usually 1-to-2-hour duration.

Most Important of All:

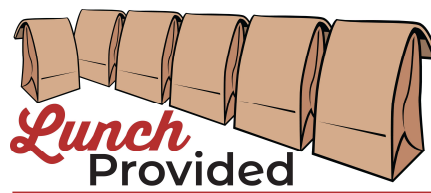
If you know of anyone who needs any type of help or assistance, please call our Outreach Office at **715-539-2666**.

Please use your **"Special Offering Envelope"** and enter the amount you would like to donate to St. Vincent on the monthly mission line. This offering will also be available on the online giving platform at <https://ststephensucc.net/give>, or you can text "SAINTSTEPHENS" to 73256 to give using your mobile device. Thank you for your support and generosity!



Summer Lunch Program

This past summer, we had a very busy Summer Lunch Program. Our Taco Tuesday crew served 2,266 lunch bags this year, with an average of 188 children participating each week. In total, the program provided over 10,000 lunch bags throughout the summer, operating five days a week for twelve weeks. Thank you, Sally Woller, for cooking and organizing this ministry for St. Stephens, and thank you to all the volunteers who helped on Tuesdays!



STEWARDSHIP CORNER

Required Minimum Distributions

Source: Thrivent Financial & Funds

With so many financial demands on your plate, it can be hard to find the extra funds to give to the causes you care about most. And for many people, one core cause is their church. From supporting day-to-day operations to chipping in on ministries, renovations, or outreach programs—it can be rewarding to see the good your dollars can bring. If you own an individual retirement account (IRA), there's a tax-efficient way you can give back: Donating your required minimum distribution (RMD) through a qualified charitable distribution (QCD).

What is a required minimum distribution?

A required minimum distribution, or RMD, is the minimum amount of money you must withdraw from a tax-deferred retirement plan (in this case, an IRA) after you reach a certain age. With your retirement accounts, make sure you understand the required withdrawal amount and the deadline for each year to avoid a 25% IRS penalty.

In the year of your first Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) (the year you turn 73 or 75, if born in 1960 or later), you have until April 1 of the following year to withdraw it. After the first year you reach age 73 or 75, and for every year after, you must take your RMD by December 31.

The IRS has online resources that can help. IRS Publication 590-B covers IRA distributions including the RMD. Visit [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov).

What is a qualified charitable distribution?

A qualified charitable distribution (QCD) is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA to your church. Because your IRA custodian sends these funds directly to your church your contribution is not taxed.

What are the benefits of giving your RMD to your church?

Giving your RMD through a QCD can provide you with a means to give to your church that you may not have otherwise. Doing so also can:

1. Satisfy your RMD. A QCD counts toward your annual RMD if it comes directly out of your IRA. You can give up to the full amount of your RMD (as long as it's under \$105,000), or donate part and withdraw the remainder.
2. Provide tax relief. Because you never directly touch those funds in a QCD, you can reduce or avoid the taxes you'd incur by taking your RMD otherwise. Additionally, QCDs lower your adjusted gross income (AGI) and therefore potentially reduce taxes on Social Security and avoid increased Medicare premiums.
3. Support your church's mission and ministries. Like other charitable contributions, a QCD is a way for you to practice generosity while also furthering your church's operations. Those can include everything from funding volunteer programs and outreach efforts, to purchasing equipment and maintaining the church building.

The process for completing a QCD to support your church is relatively straightforward. Here's what you need to do.

Request a distribution form from the institution that administers your IRA. In the QCD section, fill out your church's info. **Keep in mind, this transaction must be completed by December 31.** The IRA custodian will mail the check directly to your church. At tax time, report the charitable distribution on the line for IRA distributions. If the full amount was given as a QCD, write "0" on the taxable amount line. Enter "QCD" on the line next to it. And there you have it. You've blessed your church with a generous gift—one you can make part of your yearly giving if you so choose.

WISE TEAM



For many years, I have experienced anxiety that sometimes impairs my activities of daily living. I take medication to control my symptoms, but this is something I will likely deal with for the rest of my life.

I am sharing with you some non-pharmaceutical approaches I use in conjunction with medication to help manage my symptoms. I found joy and relief from these activities and it is my hope that maybe you can try these too--if nothing else but to add a little more happiness, peace, and calm to your days and the weeks/months ahead:

- If I am not able to sleep at night, I pray to God to ask his blessings on people I don't even know: for those who are homeless, jobless, or are hungry.
- I go outside and listen to nature: the wind blowing through the trees, the birds singing, and the squirrels chattering--to remind myself that God watches over the smallest of creation, and that he watches over me, too.
- I get up out of my chair during my work day and stretch out my muscles, particularly my leg muscles that get tense or tight from sitting in a chair all day
- If I am worried or upset about a particular situation, I go for a walk and have an out loud conversation with myself, to help me articulate why I am upset. I feel God is listening and having someone else listening to me helps reduce my anxiety.
- In the past, I may have tended to keep my worries and fears to myself, but I have found that advocating for myself at work--sharing my concerns (again, out loud) with someone else at work helps reduce my anxiety and anger.
- Repetitive motion with my hands helps me: I braid paracord, or wind yarn, or cut paper into decorative shapes.
- I doodle and/or color when I am in a stressful meeting at work.

God's Blessings to you this month. ~Leanne

GREEN TEAM



Hello everyone. Below you can find another website reference from the Green Team. It is for the Living Earth Community Conference that is being held on October 17th, sponsored by the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology. This day-long conference will give us more depth on the Earth that we are part of. You can tune into the conference online that day and enjoy it free of charge. They've promised some good music too! Just scroll down to where you see that it has the words "[Just tune in here](https://fore.yale.edu/event/Living-Earth-Community-Conference)" highlighted in blue. And remember the conference is on October 17th..Our team hopes you will find this enjoyable and useful.

<https://fore.yale.edu/event/Living-Earth-Community-Conference>



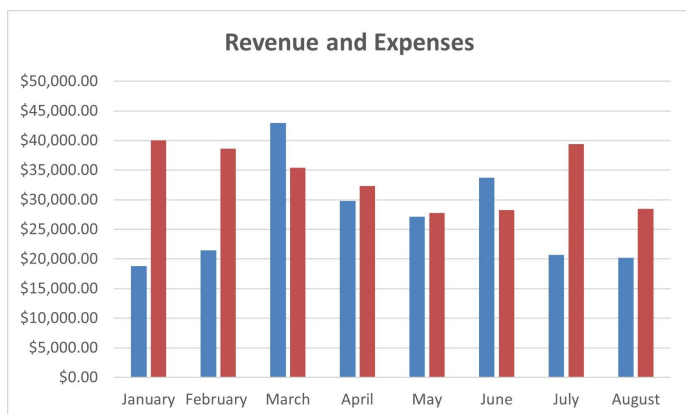
ALL CHURCH MISSION TRIP October 17-23, 2027

Back Bay Mission | Biloxi, Mississippi

We are hosting an organizational meeting on **October 7, 2026 at 5 PM**, for anyone interested in or curious about our next Mission Trip to Back Bay Mission.

After the meeting, stay for Dinner Church located in Fellowship Hall!

CHURCH FINANCIAL REPORT



August Revenue and Expenses

Revenue \$20,221.28

Expenses \$28,472.25

Net Loss: \$8,250.97

The congregation raised **\$3,335** for The Blue Jay Nest and Pantry!

Church COUNCIL

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
Marcus Reinhardt
Todd Frederick

President
Vice President
Treasurer

Jim Bjorklund
Jerry Burnett
Emma Golisch
Cathy Dornbrack

Darryl Frick
Stan Seeger
Candy Hinner
Marge Roggenbuck

Nancy Reinhardt-Porath



Check out **uccci.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!

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR FUNDRAISING BANQUET

OCTOBER 24, 2026
LES & JIM'S | 4:00 PM

\$50/PERSON

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT SAINT STEPHENS UCC, NICOLET BANK, OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO PURCHASE ONLINE (FEES APPLY).

TICKETS INCLUDE DINNER, TWO DRINK TICKETS, AND ENTRY INTO THE DOOR PRIZE DRAWING.

www.foodforkidsmerrill.org

SPONSORED BY



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

OCTOBER 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!



Oct 1	Betty Mahn	Oct 8	Justin Peterson	Oct 14	Pam Iwen
Oct 1	Joel Wendt	Oct 8	Cody Depies	Oct 14	Samantha
Oct 1	Mason Reinhardt	Oct 9	Randy Mahn		Brandenburg
Oct 1	Leanne Schnabl	Oct 9	Emily Schwartzman	Oct 15	Marion Beyer
Oct 1	Gay Mootz	Oct 9	E J Weix	Oct 16	Lynn Badeau
Oct 2	Lynn Seidler	Oct 9	Elliott Frahm	Oct 16	Lexi Slagoski
Oct 2	Lottie Ziemke	Oct 10	Kynlee Badeau	Oct 18	Carol Plautz
Oct 3	Beth Ann Houle	Oct 11	Holly Henrich	Oct 21	Susan Forster
Oct 4	Wesley Boehm	Oct 11	Jerry Krause	Oct 22	Michael Gleason
Oct 4	Kathy Turner	Oct 12	Mari Nelson	Oct 23	Wesley McIntyre
Oct 5	Kathy Keddell	Oct 12	Nicholas Bowe	Oct 24	Barb Anderson
Oct 5	Kayce Mahn	Oct 12	Robert Gremler	Oct 24	Laurie Olson
Oct 5	Parklynn Plautz	Oct 13	Jill Patraw	Oct 25	Aubrie Brandenburg
Oct 7	Ryan Bloch	Oct 13	Jody Meyer	Oct 28	Leo Maluegge
Oct 8	Marge Johnson	Oct 13	Gabriella Schult	Oct 29	Zoey Dreikosen
Oct 8	Carol Krause	Oct 14	Debi Lemon	Oct 29	Jackie Johnson

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

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kimberly@ststephensucc.net
kari@ststephensucc.net

GIFTS & memorials

Received through September 20

Dedicated to the glory of God and...

Radio Ministry

\$190.00	in memory of Gay and Sally Oberg from family
\$190.00	in memory of Gay and Sally Oberg's wedding anniversary on October 5 from family
\$190.00	in celebration of our 65 th wedding anniversary from Patsy & Dan Pick
\$190.00	in memory of Willard Detert for his September 12 birthday from Mary Walsh and Jacob Walsh
\$190.00	in honor of Bruce Schaefer and what would have been our 30 th wedding anniversary from Janet Schaefer
\$190.00	in memory of Laura & Franklin Plautz from Bob & Jolene Plautz
\$190.00	in celebration of our 48 th wedding anniversary from Jon & Gerri Robinson
\$190.00	in memory of Gay Oberg and his November 14 birthday from famiy

Memorial

\$20.00	in memory of Gayle Stevenson from Brenda Rowe
\$60.00	in loving memory of Todd Josiger for his 60 th birthday from Rose Wendorf and family
\$30.00	in memory of Bob Hartson from Dan & Patsy Pick
\$140.00	in memory of my mom and dad, Marvin & Delores Hass, from Kristine Smith
\$25.00	in memory of Bob Hartson from Joe & Marlene Thomaschefskey

Livestream

\$200.00	in honor of Dennis & Sharon Woller's 60 th wedding anniversary on September 24, 2026, in honor of our sons and daughters-in-law, Greg & Chrissy and Chad & Jill, in honor of our grandchildren, Madi and Ben and Nola and Henry, in memory of our parents Martin & Dorothy Woller and Lylas & Bernice Berndt from Dennis and Sharon Woller
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New Roof Fund

\$20.00	in memory of June Berndt for her birthday from Jill Mosser
\$500.00	in memory of Waler Wendland for his Sept 10 birthday from Phyllis Wendland
\$20.00	in memory of Robert Hartson from Dave and Emily Schwartzman

Sanctuary Updates

\$60.00	in memory of Bob Hartson from Bill & Joanne Wengeler
\$25.00	in memory of Bob Hartson from Mike & Glynis Schroeder

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

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&



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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.

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>