



ST. STEPHEN THIS WEEK

St. Stephen Lutheran Church Newsletter

PASTOR MARY'S STORY

Pastor Mary sat down with a couple of St. Stephen members and let us interview her for St. Stephen's latest collection of bios.

FAITH HISTORY: Pastor Mary has been Lutheran her whole life. She grew up Missouri Synod. That was a positive experience for her, although her dad – who was Methodist – was not allowed to take communion. When the family moved to Dayton in the 1970s, there was an LCA church in their neighborhood. So they joined, and she has been LCA (later ELCA) ever since.

FAMILY: Pastor Mary's father was a scholar who received his MDiv from Yale. Rather than pursue pastoral ministry, however, he devoted his life to teaching religion and philosophy and by working with students during the tumultuous 1950s and '60s. And rather than pursuing a tenure track, he accepted different university offers every four or five years. So asking Pastor Mary to name her hometown is actually a tough question. For example, she attended kindergarten through third grade in Cairo, Egypt. While they were there, she and her mom, dad and younger sister got to travel a lot – to Switzerland, Greece and other countries. She grew up with an appreciation for the amazing variety of people and customs around the world.

INTERESTS: Ask Pastor Mary about the rescue dogs she has known and loved. She hopes to have another dog soon.

EDUCATION: She graduated from Wittenberg University in Ohio in 1978 with a degree in psychology.

FIRST CAREER: Right out of school, she became an intern with United Way of America, first in Des Moines and then in Albuquerque. She loved New Mexico! She stayed there five years with United Way, with lots of skiing, fun and friends. Her best friends were fundamentalist Christians. She loved their upbeat, spontaneous worship – but they were so conservative that they didn't consider her a real Christian, because she couldn't identify the exact moment she was "born again." She was disappointed that she didn't have the words to tell them persuasively about the Lutheran emphasis on God's grace, vs. their idea of solely works righteousness. She was drawn to learn more about Luther's view that we are saved by grace through faith.

SEMINARY: In May 1983, she was on the United Way of Albuquerque's campaign staff, in charge of some major accounts. One day she told her boss that she was thinking, just thinking, of going to seminary that coming fall. And just like that he let her go, because he said he needed someone he could count on 100 percent. Then she went home and told her roommates the same thing. And just like that one of them recruited a new roommate, because she said she needed someone whose rent they could count on 100 percent. She took all of this as a definite sign from God that a door was closing and another was opening. That fall she enrolled in Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Two weeks into seminary, she thought: "I'm home." She greatly enjoyed her third-year internship at a small American congregation in Brussels.

PASTORAL MINISTRY:

1. Pastor Mary's first congregation was St. John's in Des Moines: 3,500 members. It was a great place to learn but exhausting. She was there for seven and a half years. "I made a lot of mistakes, but those were some of the best years of my ministry."
2. Next was St. James in Atlanta. She was head pastor at a congregation struggling with white flight. (It's now closed.)
3. Then came Christ Lutheran in Prattville, Alabama, a small town near Montgomery. It was her first interim. Wonderful, she said.
4. At Ascension Lutheran in Boynton Beach, she was a solo pastor for seven and a half years.
5. For five years she was a hospice chaplain there in Palm Beach County.
6. Next she became an interim at St. Michael in Wellington, also in Palm Beach County.
7. Then, because Pastor Marda was retiring, the bishop called her about St. Stephen. The phone call confirmed a long-running feeling that God was calling her out of South Florida. After prayer, she also felt strongly the sanctity of a pastoral call. She had visited Tallahassee over the years because she had an aunt and cousin here. So even though the call was for an interim position, she packed up everything and brought it up here. Now Tallahassee is home. She and her friend Vicki Miller, who's now worshipping with us, live 11 miles outside of Monticello.

HER VIEW OF THE WORLD: As Pastor Mary's sermons indicate, she is acutely aware of the sin of "otherness": regarding as "other" the outsider, the immigrant, the LGBTQ person, the person of a different faith, etc. "That was ingrained in me growing up: That was just wrong. Accepting, loving, embracing others, to understand what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes – that's what my father taught me." "Othering" comes from people cherry-picking certain scriptural passages, without viewing them in context. She treasures the world's variety of cultures and faiths: "Globally and nationally, we are so blessed to have people who worship in all different ways." The crux of her preaching is understanding that we are by nature broken and sinful. It's only by confessing, repenting and believing that, by God's grace through faith, we're able to get up again and again. "We are people of second chances, and thank God for that!"

CURRENTLY: "I love St. Stephen!" Pastor Mary said. "I'm so proud of what it is and what it's been for 60 years." Especially its dedication to social justice, starting with Pastor Emory Hingst in the 1970s. She has shared with others that she thanks God every day for the opportunity to serve here. "I honestly did not know there was a church that really practiced what Jesus preached as does St. Stephen. I've yearned for this for a long time." What will be next for her? "I haven't got a clue! God has never failed me yet. God never will!"



UPDATE FROM SYNOD VICE PRESIDENT

February 28, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to update you on the process of transitioning out of Bishop Schaefer's term as our bishop. The outpouring of love and concern for Bishop Schaefer and his family is gratifying to see, as are the expressions of support for the Synod Council in this time. Your prayers are felt and appreciated.

As we lean into an uncertain future, I am listening to your voices of hope and fear, confidence and concern. How very "Lutheran"--holding these conflicting voices at the same time! I have not responded to every email, but please know that I am reading them and collecting them for the council's consideration.

As I mentioned in my previous letter, our first focus is on getting an interim bishop. Here's what is happening in that effort:

- This past Saturday, the Executive Committee met with Pr. Walter May, the ELCA Executive for Synodical Relations, and discussed a possible candidate.
- The Executive Committee will function much like a congregational call committee in that it will interview the candidate and make a recommendation to the full synod council, who is responsible for issuing the call.
- Your prayers in these next few days, in particular, are requested.
- Though Bishop Schaefer's last day in the office is March 5, he will be taking some vacation time and will handle administrative matters as needed throughout March.

I also noted that the Synod Council had decided not to hold the election for a new bishop at the June 2017 Assembly, and that there would "most likely" be a Special Assembly later in the year. There are many factors to balance in making this decision, including contractual obligations for the synod, other scheduled conferences such as the Conference on Ministry and the ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering in Atlanta, and the financial impact to our congregations. It is also important that we have a process that helps pastors discern their openness for a call, and allows us all to think about what we as a synod desire in our next bishop. We are diligently pursuing options. No matter what path we ultimately decide, we know that some will prefer something different. I ask for your prayers, your patience, and a healthy dose of grace. We will keep you apprised of our progress.

Though there are still questions about our next bishop that we cannot answer, of this we are confident: God's got this. The Spirit is moving. We take to heart the words from last week's Gospel: "This is my Son. Listen to him." May we, as a faith community called the Florida-Bahamas Synod, live confidently in these days, being open to the Spirit and hearing the voice of Jesus in our lives.

Peace and grace,
Your sister in Christ,

Cheryl Stuart
Synod Vice President

Schedule of Services for Lent/Holy Week

Midweek Lenten Worship Services:

6:15 p.m. – Soup and Salad

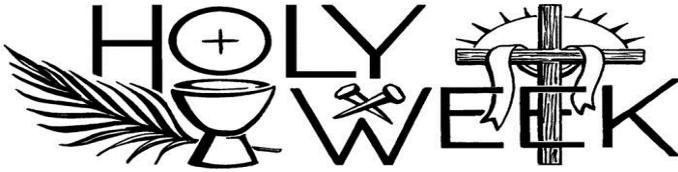
7:00 p.m. - Lenten Series on “The Seven Last Words From the Cross,” Scripture Readings, simple Taize chants:

- **Wednesday, March 8:** The First Word: “Forgiveness”
- **Wednesday, March 15:** The Second & Third Words: “Paradise” and “Behold”
- **Wednesday, March 22:** The Fourth Word: “Forsaken”
- **Wednesday, March 29:** The Fifth & Sixth Words: “Thirst” and “Finished”
- **Wednesday, April 5:** The Seventh Word: “Commit”

Sunday, April 9, 10 a.m.: Passion/Palm Sunday:



- Procession with Palms
- Dramatic Reading of the Passion
- Holy Communion
- Instrumentals
- Darkened sanctuary to symbolize Holy Week’s beginning.



Thursday, April 13: Maundy Thursday: 7 p.m.:

- Holy Communion
- Foot Washing
- Stripping of the Altar
- Darkened sanctuary

Good Friday, April 14: 7 p.m.:

- Adoration of the Cross
- Simple Liturgy
- Instrumentals
- Darkened sanctuary to symbolize Holy Week’s beginning.

There will be no Easter Vigil service but rest assured it will be resurrected next year! The decision was made prayerfully with Pastor Mary, Katharine Gossman, and the Worship Committee.

Easter Sunday, April 16: 9 a.m. - Easter Breakfast and Easter Egg Hunt; 10 a.m.:

- Festival worship
- Holy Communion
- Instrumentals



LENTEN SUPPERS



During Lent this year, on every Wednesday beginning March 8, we’ll have a Lenten soup supper at 6:15 p.m., followed by a service at 7 p.m. We have a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board in the breezeway for those who can bring soup, salad, or bread for the suppers. You can also email or call Lori in the office to let her know.

WHAT A SHOW

Many thanks to everyone who performed in Sunday's St. Stephen talent show, in addition to those who organized the quick lunch beforehand. Two participants have messages for you:

- The lunch organizers apologize for underestimating how many sandwich rings we'd need! Next year we'll know better.
- Dave (Amazing Zing!) Suhrweir wishes he had informed the audience that those knives he was waving around, though they looked real, were actually rubber.

Some of you are thinking: "Knives! Thrills! Gee, I should have been there!" Right you are, sad Lutheran. We'll save you a seat next year.

FINANCIAL MATTERS!

One of the best things that our interim pastor is doing for us is helping us step outside of ourselves and get a different perspective on St. Stephen. Yes, our congregation has creative energy, a heart for social justice, newly rejuvenated buildings and a welcoming spirit known far and wide. But preparing to call a new pastor is much more than assembling a call committee and praying for the Holy Spirit to work its magic.

This article is an expanded version of a brief announcement that appeared in last week's newsletter. The Church Council has decided that before we can even *think* about putting a "PASTOR WANTED" sign in our front yard, we need to take a hard look at how prospective pastors would see us. In other words, we have work to do. For example:

- Our new pastor will expect a complete leadership team. However, at the moment our Church Council is missing a treasurer* and a care-and-hospitality coordinator. Those empty seats symbolize a hole in our ministry.
- Our new pastor will expect a finance committee to assist the treasurer and ensure that members' faithfully given offerings are handled with all the appropriate checks and balances. We have no such committee, though, and we've neglected some regular financial maintenance, such as routine audits.
- Our new pastor and the synod office will look carefully at our financial health. As Ol' Bill Taylor regularly says, ministry takes money. The size of our budget and the amount of our weekly giving helps determine whether we can even afford a full-time pastor. It's not encouraging news, then, that the percentage of St. Stephen members who make financial pledges continues to drop.

The good news is that these are things we can change, with God's help. So what does this all mean for you? If you're already giving all the time, talent and treasure that you can, bless you! But if you're not, Pastor Mary and the Church Council ask you to prayerfully consider the following:

- Will you serve on the Council -- either as treasurer or as care-and-hospitality coordinator?
- Will you serve one year on the finance committee?
- If you haven't already done so, will you make a financial pledge? So far, only 36 "giving units" (individuals or families) have done so -- only about half of the 73 giving units we have at St. Stephen.
- If you have made a pledge (thank you!), will you consider increasing it?
- In other words, will you -- through the grace of God -- join us in making sure that the St. Stephen we know and love is the same St. Stephen that others will see as we proceed down the path to our next pastor?

Thank you and God bless!

**(Beth Alexander has a lot on her plate and has resigned as treasurer. In the short term, she has agreed to continue paying St. Stephen's bills until we find a new treasurer. Thank you for your service, Beth.)*

ADULT STUDY

Please join us in Adult Education each Sunday at 9 am in the Matthew Room. We are working our way through the Small Catechism. Each week is a new adventure, so if you miss a week, you can still learn something new (or be reminded of something you have long forgotten)! All are welcome!



MORE MIDWEEK UPDATES

- Remember: Place any transition questions you have for Pastor Mary in the "A-Ticket, A-Tasket" Transition Basket in the back of the sanctuary.
- OWLs will be meeting on Wednesday, March 15, at 11:30 a.m. at Marie Livingston's (2705 Apalachee Parkway). Please let Jan Harrison know if you plan to attend.



UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS:

Jan Harrison - 03/02

Jennifer LaVia - 03/02

Robin Oliveri - 03/05

THIS WEEK'S CALENDAR

This Sunday:

9 a.m. - Sunday Church School
Adult study

10 a.m. - Worship, First Sunday in Lent

Wednesday, March 8:

6:15 p.m. - Lenten supper

7 p.m. - Lenten Midweek Service, The First Word: "Forgiveness"

7:30 p.m. - Choir rehearsal

COMING UP

March 15, 6:15 p.m.: Lenten Supper

7 pm: Lenten Midweek Service, The Second & Third Words: "Paradise" and "Behold"

March 22, 6:15 p.m.: Lenten Supper

7 p.m.: Lenten Midweek Service, The Fourth Word: "Forsaken"

March 29, 6:15 p.m.: Lenten supper

7 p.m.: Lenten Midweek Service, The Fifth & Sixth Words: "Thirst" and "Finished"

SERVING SUNDAY:

Pastor Mary Nesmith, Presiding and Preaching; **Jennifer Dritt**, Assisting Minister; **Sandy Larson**, Cup Minister; **Jan Harrison**, Visitation; **Tim Larson**, Walkways; **Jan Harrison & Karen Olson**, Greeters; **Rob Schiffer**, Lector; **Eunice Muchuruza & Andrea Notley**, Altar Guild; **Sandy Davis & Janet Barber**, Counters; **Sandy Davis**, Bread; **Anna Amundson**, Announcements.



If you have news or photos to share, please send them to Lori at ststephentallahassee@embarqmail.com.

Don't forget our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ststephentallahassee>.

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