

News, Notes, and Prayers

from St. Stephen Lutheran Church

February 2024

Who We Are

St. Stephen Lutheran Church is God's people in The Plainfields, Piscataway, and Edison.

Staff

Pastor Frantisek Janak pastor@ststephenspnj.org
Jeanne Elmuccio, office secretary secretary@ststephenspnj.org
James Horan, director of music

Congregational Council

Trevia Benjamin
Bill Cochran (President)
Jim Deane
Randy Gerling
Frank Gianneschi
Effil Hemmings
Donna Hasssey
Patricia Klatt
Bob Merring
Eloise Newton (Secretary)
Rich Newton Jr. (Vice President)
Audrey Oddman

Office

3145 Park Ave., South Plainfield, NJ 07080
908-757-4474

What's Happening

Saturdays, January 27, February 3 and 10
Faith Refresher with Pastor Frantisek

Sundays, February 4, 11, 18, 25
10:30 a.m. + Worship with Holy Communion

Wednesday, February 14
7:30 p.m. + Ash Wednesday Service

Tuesday, February 20
7:30 p.m. Council Meeting

Wednesday, February 21
5:00 p.m. + St. Stephen's Pop-Up Food Pantry



St. Stephen Lutheran Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

3145 Park Avenue
South Plainfield, New Jersey 07080
908-757-4474

Address Correction Requested

Pastor's Letter

Beloved Community,

As we reflect on the past year at St. Stephen, we are filled with gratitude for the many blessings and accomplishments we have experienced together. It has been a busy year, and yet it is hard to believe that it is over!

One of the significant highlights of the year was our involvement in shepherding St. Luke's during their transition after closure. We are delighted to welcome 11 former members of St. Luke's who have joined our congregation. They have actively participated in worship, educational opportunities, and various ministries, enriching our community. We are also grateful for the legacy gift of \$117,412 from the assets of St. Luke's.



In terms of ministerial acts, we celebrated the baptism of 2 children and confirmed Logan James Flannary-Miller and Nicolas Anthony France. We also mourned the passing of 4 beloved members of our congregation - Odessa Lemley, Barbara Cibak, Robert Collins, and Lois Gorman. Special thanks go to the Worship and Music committee, led by Eloise Newton, Pastor Nancy Nardi and Pastor Dámaris Porsch-Ortega, for their dedication and support, especially during my parental leave after the birth of my daughter Lily Kacy Janák.

Our lay leadership has grown stronger in various areas. Linda Nietman, Yuan Yuan Yao, and Effil Hemmings have contributed significantly to the expansion of our visitation ministry, ensuring that communion is brought to the homes and care facilities of our members. Advent activities, including wreath making, were led by lay members of our community, and we had a successful spaghetti dinner evening thanks to the social ministry. We have also been able to increase the number of after-worship coffee fellowships.

Over the summer, we had engaging "pub theology" sessions at KC's Korner and continued our studies through Zoom. I am grateful for the opportunity to present a paper at an international doctoral seminar in Prague. My doctoral studies have progressed well, and I am excited to enter the next phase in the first half of 2024.

In 2023, I attended two First Call Theological Education retreats and look forward to the upcoming retreat in Spring 2024. I also had the privilege of co-leading anti-bias and anti-racism awareness trainings in partnership with the Connecticut Diocese of the Episcopal Church in America and the Metropolitan New York Synod of ELCA, through Kaleidoscope Institute.

As we look ahead, I am excited to offer a "Faith Refresher" educational opportunity on Zoom on Saturdays, Jan. 27, Feb. 3, and Feb. 10. Additionally, we are planning meaningful educational opportunities for Lent, building on the success of previous years. There is so much to anticipate, and we are grateful for your continued generosity in many ways.

May the blessings of the new church year be with you and your family.

Blessings,

The Rev. František Janák

Pastor's 2024 Schedule:

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Sundays

(Emergency pastoral care as needed: please text or call at 331-248-3084)

Schedule a meeting or visit with Pastor František: <https://bit.ly/schedule-with-rev-janak>



COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS

Council President	Bill Cochran	billsee28@verizon.net
Council Vice President	Rich Newton, Jr.	church@newtonjr.com
Council Secretary and Worship & Music	Eloise Newton	enewton2@gmail.com
Organist/Choir Director	Jim Horan	jhoran99@optimum.net
Treasurer	Kathy Gerling	kkgerl@me.com
Financial Secretary	Audrey Oddman	quiarakhj@yahoo.com
Council Discipleship	Pat Klatt	pklatt@hotmail.com
Council Property	Bob Merring	HappyCropper@optonline.net
Council Social Ministry	Trecia Benjamin	benjamintrecia@yahoo.com
Discipleship Committee	Linda Nietman	linbet12@icloud.com
Liaison Committee	Jim Deene	jimdeene5@gmail.com
Mutual Ministry and Evangelism	Frank Gianneschi	frankgianneschi@gmail.com
Property	Bob Newman	bobcath57@gmail.com
Social Ministry	Linda Hansen	lindah129@yahoo.com
Technology Committee	Rich Newton, Jr.	church@newtonjr.com
Technology Back-Up	Randy Gerling	rgerling7@icloud.com

From the Council President

December was a busy month for our church. Our community outreach is normally focused on our monthly Pop-Up Food Pantry, but Christmas gifts were also donated in December to be distributed to families in South Plainfield. If you missed it, fear not, you can make a donation next year. The Church was decorated in anticipation of celebrating Christmas and two services were held to celebrate. A first-ever St. Stephen's coral group visited a number of homes to sing Christmas carols to help share the season's joy. It was likely a busy time for most of you as well. We welcome any suggestions on how St. Stephen can expand and/or improve our community and world outreach.

The Church Council meeting was held one week earlier than usual to avoid the Christmas week rush. A brief summary follows:

President/ Evangelism/ Finance Reports: We followed up with the NJ Synod to on our revised Constitution and Bylaws. Evangelism provided groceries, personal items, and baby diapers to about fifty families who visit our Pop-Up Food Pantry. A gift made to St. Stephen by St. Luke out of proceeds from the sale of their property, together with other church funds, was invested in a six-month CD to earn a better rate of return.

Treasurer's Report: After covering all 2023 expenses, our congregation ended the year with a checking account balance of \$314. Thank you to all who contributed your time, talents and resources to make 2023 another successful year as we expand our outreach.

Financial Secretary's Report: Financial income records matched the deposit records.

Worship and Music's Report: Will be meeting in January to plan Lenten services.

Social Ministry's Report: Organized the toy collection drive. January's meeting will plan their 2024 agenda.

Property's Report: Work on the church grounds and building continued through regular attention. New doors were installed in the parsonage. A Charlie George Landscaping cleaned the yard and removed the leaves.

Liaison's Report: Randy Gerling has stepped down as our Church's Liaison Chairperson after 20 (?) years of holding that position. Jim Deene, a new Council Member effective in January, 2024 has volunteered to accept that position. A letter was sent to Adonai Christian Center, a church who also uses our building, asking for a meeting to address recurring issues. A meeting was held with that church's Pastor. Solutions to those issues and possible penalties for continued recurrence were discussed.

Discipleship's Report: A workflow to ensure that new members would receive donation envelopes was discussed. Thirty-one pledges for 2024 totaling 113,752 were received continue to be received. In January we will talk about New Year's Intentions. People will choose a quality to really pay attention to in the new year in our interactions with family, friends and strangers. Qualities could be patience, compassion, kindness, etc.

Mutual Ministry's Report: The committee discussed 2023 with Pastor Frantisek. Suggestions from the committee and congregation on changes in process were discussed. Pastor Frantisek was open to the discussion and will implement most suggestions where practical. He also shared a concern about a scam that might impact members.

Technology's Report: Website tracking continues to show a positive trend (more persons viewing). Photo views consistently outpace video "views". Research on a new church accounting, record-keeping package continues. Work on tweaking the sound system is also ongoing.

Old Business:

Council is still gathering ideas for improvements that would be purchased through the money donated by St. Luke. Craig, a member of St. Luke was involved in the disposition of the sale proceeds. He reports that donations were already made to institutions such as NJ Synod, Crossroads Ministry, etc. The money was anticipated to purchase non-recurring items that might have been postponed due to cost.

Suggestions have included:

- Window sills around small windows each side of the alter.
- Concreate work on steps
- The Church's flat roof needs to be coated with waterproofing.
- A handicap-accessible bathroom
- New handicap entrance.
- New flooring for education rooms.
- Member/ Friends list is being worked on.

New Business:

- A new member, Barbara White Stevens was approved.
- Devotions prior to Council were suggested - tabled till new Council begins in January.
- Luminaries on Christmas Eve approved.
- Bulletin Board updates discussed.
- Peggy Flannary and Mary Lynn Yurchak were thanked for their time on Council.

Yours in Christ,
The Church Council



From the Treasurer

	General Fund Income	Budget Expenses	Over/Short
January – November 2023	139,735.97	142,307.53	(2,571.56)
December 2023	18,177.53	15,291.74	2,885.79
YTD 2023	157,913.50	157,599.27	314.23





From the Discipleship Committee

As I sit down to write this article, all the Christmas decorations are not yet put away, and many of us are still working on our goals and plans for the New Year. Yet, I realized that the focus of this article needs to be Lent. Lent? Already? It seems that the mad rush of the seasons that Pastor talked about on the 4th Sunday of Advent/Christmas Eve, is continuing headlong into the New Year.

I can just hear God saying to us, “time will not wait. While to me, ‘One day is like a thousand years and 1000 years like one day,’ to *you*, time is precious. You need to use it and enjoy it NOW while it is here. Use it and enjoy it by doing what is most important - growing closer to me and working with your brothers and sisters to do whatever you can to bring my Kingdom of Love to the world.”

Lent is a perfect time for thoughtful, prayerful reflection on just how to go about doing this. Take time to ask yourself, “How can I grow closer to God? What is the part He wants me to play in bringing his love to others?”

If you have picked a “Word of Intention” for yourself for this year, Lent would be a good time for examining how your word relates to these two pillars of Lent: 1) Becoming so enveloped in God’s Love, 2) that you just *have to* share it with others. How this plays out in your life is unique to you, for God honors your individuality. He is, after all, the Source of all your special qualities and talents. So, talk it over with God and see what you come up with. I have found that making a plan without him, no matter how involved and high-minded, doesn’t really work.

The Discipleship Committee will offer some tools to help you, but the work is yours. (And it is work.) We will have devotional materials, and will do Prayer Partners. If you have any questions about either of these, please ask a member of the committee. But remember, these are TOOLS to help you, not ends in themselves. The end, of course, is as the beginning - Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega.



POP-UP PANTRY

Thanks to all who donated this month.

Suggestions to donate for this month are:



- **Tissues**
- **Toilet Paper**
- **Toothpaste**
- **Toothbrush**

We thank everyone for their continued support.

Judy Ziccardi



February

Servant Leaders

Offering Counters:



1st Sunday of the Month - Pat Klatt/Judy Ziccardi

2nd Sunday of the Month - Bob Newman/Randy Gerling

3rd Sunday of the Month - Linda Nietman/Linda Hansen

4th Sunday of the Month - Miriam Skrzypczak/Frank Gianneschi

5th Sunday of the Month - Craig and Jane Busch

	5 th Sunday After Epiphany	 Transfiguration of Our Lord Last Sunday After Epiphany	 Ash Wednesday	1 st Sunday in Lent	2 nd Sunday in Lent
	February 4	February 11	February 14	February 18	February 25
Altar Guild	Mary Flannary and Patty Newton	Bob and Cathy Newman	Mariam Skrzpczak and Pat Benward	Donna Hussey and Audrey Oddman	Judy Ziccardi and Sharon Gianneschi
Ushers	Newman Family	Gerling Family	Swartz Family	Linda Nietman and Linda Hansen	Yao Family
Worship Assistants	Randy Gerling	Linda Nietman	Pat Klatt	Bill Cochrane	Frank Gianneschi

Faith with Pastor František

Refresher

What

You are invited to a faith refresher series to explore and consider your faith.

Jan 27th - Basic Beliefs

History of Lutheranism
Scripture and Lutheranism
Lutheran beliefs

Why

There is always more to explore in our faith. As we head towards Lent, it is an opportunity to pause, question, and reflect. Lenten programming is usually more advanced, so this provides an opportunity to get back to the basics.

Feb 3rd - Sacramental Worship

Lutheran Worship
Sacraments in Lutheranism
Liturgy and hymns

Feb 10th - Lived Faith

Discipleship
Ethics and Values
Community Involvement

Where






On Zoom at this link:

<http://bit.ly/faith-refresh2024>

Saturdays **January 27th,**
February 3rd, and February
10th '24 at 7:00-8:30PM



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SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<h1>February 2024</h1>				Feb 1	2 5:00pm ACC	3 10:00am IESDAC 7:00pm Faith Refresher (via Zoom) Faith Refresher with Pastor Frantisek
4 10:30am Worship with Holy Communion 5:00pm ACC	5	6	7 10:00am ACC recording	8	9 5:00pm ACC	10 10:00am IESDAC 7:00pm Faith Refresher (via Zoom) Faith Refresher with Pastor Frantisek
11 10:30am Worship with Holy Communion 10:30am Newsletter Items Due 5:00pm ACC	12	13	14 10:00am ACC recording 7:30pm Ash Wednesday  Ash Wednesday — Lent Begins	15	16 5:00pm ACC	17 10:00am IESDAC
18 10:30am Worship with Holy Communion 10:30am Newsletter distributed 5:00pm ACC	19	20 7:30pm Congregation Council Meeting 	21 10:00am ACC recording 5:00pm Pop-Up Food Pantry 	22	23 5:00pm ACC	24 10:00am IESDAC
25 10:30am Worship with Holy Communion 11:30am Coffee and Refreshments 5:00pm ACC 	26	27	28 10:00am ACC recording			



Worship & Music Committee Mtg