



St. Stephen Lutheran Church

## News Summary — August 2022

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### Summer Communication Note

St. Stephen pauses publishing the *News & Notes* newsletter in July and August, but continues to communicate with the regular Friday Email. For those who don't have access to digital electronics, we are publishing a summary of the Friday Email for August. *News & Notes* newsletter resumes in September.

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### Letter from Pastor Andrea (July 8)

Dear St. Stephen community:

I'm pleased to announce that Jane Cunningham joined the St. Stephen staff on Monday, July 11 as our new Communications Manager! Jane will be responsible for online and print communications, including the website, Friday email, and *News & Notes* newsletter. Jane is our first "remote" staff member and is based in North Carolina!



Jane graduated from Brown University and attended classes in the Publication Specialist Program at The George Washington University. She began her career as a copy writer for the Boat Owners Association and then began doing page layout and graphic design projects for a variety of churches, schools and non-profits including Tulane University, the University of New Orleans, the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina and several churches in North Carolina. She enjoys spending time with her four adult children and her cats and dogs, as well as hiking, tennis, and pickleball. In her free time she fosters kittens for the local SPCA.

Many thanks to our Personnel Committee (Dick Koepelin, Noreen Christians and Peg Gilchrist) for their hard work in the recruitment and interview process!

I also want to express my deep appreciation for Robin Saxon as she concludes her service as our primary "communications person." While serving in a volunteer capacity, Robin has been a quasi-member of staff over the last five years, and her gifts have enriched St. Stephen's ministry in countless ways!

Now is also a good time to update you on our online worship ministry.

Since my arrival, the Council and staff have been discussing the best way to carry this important ministry forward. The initial plan had been to hire a Videographer to carry on with producing a pre-recorded service. That format served well when we weren't worshipping in-person. Today, however, it lacks the presence of our re-gathered community, as well as the joy and spontaneity that are hallmarks of worship here. Pre-recording worship also requires a duplication of efforts by staff and volunteers, raising stewardship concerns.

For these and other reasons, we will shift to a "livestream" format for Online Worship later this summer. The first piece of implementing the change will be to tweak our current A/V equipment setup (a project that is now underway). The second is to recruit additional members of our Worship Tech Team. The Livestream Tech will work alongside those running sound/slides to broadcast our service on YouTube and Facebook. If you'd like to get involved, please talk to Larry Peterson or me!

Whether we're communicating online, in print, or via video, our goal is the same: to inform and inspire the ministry of St. Stephen as we share the love of Jesus with others every day!

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## A Letter from Pastor Andrea (July 22)

A belated thank you to everyone who participated in our Online Worship Survey in June! A total of 83 responses were received! The goal of the survey was to understand how members are engaging with Online Worship Ministry as we shift into our post-pandemic normal. I want to share some of what we learned from the survey, and let you know what our next steps will be.



**Frequency:** The largest portion of survey responses (39%) said they worship online occasionally (1-3 times over 90 days). The second largest group worships online very frequently (8+ times over 90 days). This suggests that our Online Worship reaches two distinct audiences (and two sets of needs?).

**Reasons:** Survey participants were invited to check “all that apply” and four responses rose to the top: convenience of worshipping online, personal/household illness, concerns about covid exposure, and being out of town.

**General Comments and Suggestions:** Survey participants expressed appreciation for the continued availability of the online service, especially for those unable to attend in person due to aging or health issues. Members expressed gratitude for the ability to stay connected with their church while traveling, wintering elsewhere, or dealing with schedule conflicts. A few noted their continued concerns about covid-19 exposure. Others were quite clear that their online worship days are behind them.

**Format:** Members appreciate the quality of the video and the on-screen visuals that allow them to see words and music. The variety of music styles is appreciated, though it was noted that some recorded music performances are old, and some were considered too long.

Of the 63 comments made in the survey, 25% of them were requests that we shift to a livestream or a recorded version of the regular Sunday service. The primary reason was a desire to connect with the “regular” feel of worship at St. Stephen. A few others raised the question about whether the pre-recorded format is the easiest or most sustainable approach for staff and volunteers.

**Viewership:** Alongside the survey data, Council reviewed worship stats on YouTube and Facebook. In March 2021 (prior to the return of in-person worship) 80-90 households watched “live” on Sunday mornings. In May 2021 (when in-person worship had returned with masking and other protocols), viewership had dropped by half. A year later (May 2022), when covid protocols had been lifted, live viewership averaged 20 households. It’s important to note that our total reach for online worship is larger than these numbers would indicate, because videos are available to view throughout the week. However, the live numbers are sufficient to see the general trends and are the easiest to compare across platforms.

**What’s Next?** We will soon be shifting to a livestream format for online worship! Once the switch is complete, those worshipping from home will be able to see and hear worship leaders and the congregation, as well as view the slides projected in the sanctuary for liturgy and music. The recording will also be available online for those who tune in later in the week.

This shift will provide several key benefits. First among them is that our online worship guests will be more connected with the joy and energy of our gathered community! Also important is the improved stewardship of staff and volunteer time. The pre-recorded service requires extra (and often redundant) effort; the switch to livestreaming will free up valuable time for other ministry.

Online Worship will continue to be an important ministry for St. Stephen for the future, allowing us to meet a wide range of needs within our congregation and the wider community. Stay tuned!

## WORSHIP UPDATES

### Summer Hymn Sing

St. Stephen's hymn sing prelude is back on the 2nd, 4th, and 5th Sundays of the month! The St. Stephen summer tradition of having a mini-hymn sing during the prelude to worship has returned. Here's a chance to sing a verse or two of your favorite hymns. Come with your list!

### Tech Notes and Hearing Assistance

We've been able to achieve a dramatic improvement in fine tuning Pastor Andrea's microphone. In addition, hearing assistance devices are in operation. The ushers will be able to provide you with one, so be sure to ask.

## NEWS & EVENTS

### Youth Summer Trip

St. Stephen's high school ELES youth group departed Sunday, July 24, on a four-day trip to Minneapolis. The group included eight youth and four adult leaders. They partnered with the Ankeny Holy Trinity Lutheran Church youth for this experience. Students and leaders participated in a variety of service and learning activities.

### Get-to-Know-You Ice Cream Socials in August

Get to know Pastor Andrea and fellow members of St. Stephen at one of our Ice Cream Socials this summer! These small group events are an opportunity to get acquainted, tell stories, and dream together about how God is calling our ministry forward! A variety of days/times are available. Please contact the church office at 515-276- 4682/[office@ststephenlutheran.org](mailto:office@ststephenlutheran.org).

August Ice Cream Social Dates:

- **Wednesday, August 3 at 6 pm**
- **Sunday, August 7 at 5 pm**
- **Wednesday, August 10 at 6 pm**



St. Stephen Lutheran Church Program to Benefit the Urbandale Food Pantry

### Pitch'n In For Pantry Meals and Snacks Collection in August

Through the end of August, the Social Ministry's Pitch'n In for Pantry project is collecting new items to benefit our neighbors through the Urbandale Food Pantry. We're asking your help to bring in the following donations and place them on the designated table in the Gathering Area:

- Prepackaged and microwave meals, such as macaroni and cheese
- Condiments such as ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise and pickles
- Snack items such as crackers; individual servings would be appreciated as well

You can also make a monetary donation. Make checks payable to St. Stephen Lutheran Church with "Food Pantry" in the memo.



### Brown Bag Book Club for August

Wednesday, August 3 at 11:30 a.m. we will be introducing author Richard Rohr's *The Wisdom Pattern*.

The Brown Bag group meets in conference room 103/105 on Wednesdays at 11:30 a.m. For information, email Ron, [and0775@mchsi.com](mailto:and0775@mchsi.com).

**Task Day, Saturday, August 20**

The Property Committee and volunteer team invite all members of the congregation to join in to keep our church looking groomed and inviting. A work day is scheduled on the third Saturday of each month. **Our next work day is Saturday, August 20, starting at 8 a.m. Mark your calendar for Saturday, September 17.**

A few typical tasks include: mowing/trimming, adding mulch, cleaning gutters, cleaning parking lots, moving chairs/furniture, replacing lightbulbs, interior painting, minor plumbing updates and limited snow shoveling. This week we will work on parking lot cleanup and placing mulch. Those who wish to help out on other days and times can do so. Help make St. Stephen the best it can be – please contact Jerry Strawman, 515-402-3357.

**ADDITIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**WORSHIP & HOSPITALITY MINISTRY: How Might You Serve?:** We are rebuilding our rosters for worship leaders, and invite you to consider signing up! Scheduling is flexible, and is arranged several weeks in advance so that we can be sure everything is covered. “On the job” training for all of these positions will be provided. Please contact Larry Peterson ([larry@ststephenlutheran.org](mailto:larry@ststephenlutheran.org)) to volunteer and get answers to any questions. There are currently four ways for members to serve as worship leaders:

- **Ushers** – Pass the offering plates and help direct people during the communion distribution. (A great opportunity for families to serve together!)
- **Communion Servers** – assist the pastor in distributing bread and wine during communion
- **Tech Desk** – run the soundboard, slides, and (coming soon!) livestream during worship
- **Readers** – read scripture and lead our intercessory prayers.

**PRAYER LIST:** You can view St. Stephen’s current prayer list at [tiny.cc/SSLPrayerList](https://tiny.cc/SSLPrayerList) or find it in the Welcome Flyer on Sundays at worship.

**CARE COMPANIONS AVAILABLE:** St. Stephen’s Care Companions provide support to those who are struggling, grieving, lonely, or recovering from illness. Care is provided in a way suited to the individual, and might include calls/visits, cards, or providing a ride. Please contact the church office to refer a friend or family member, request a companion, or if you’d like to be part of the Care Companions ministry: [angie@ststephelutheran.org](mailto:angie@ststephelutheran.org) or 515-276-4628.

**SUPPER CLUB** is on summer break. We will resume in September. Watch for details.

**WOMEN’S CONNECTION** does not meet through the summer, but will resume in September. The next meeting date will be announced in the Friday email.

**BOOKS NEEDED FOR OUR FREE LITTLE LIBRARY:** The Free Little Library needs donations of books for all ages – children, teen, young adults and adults. To donate, place your gently used books in the labeled collection tote inside the west entrance. If you’re not getting out and about these days, email Krista Brittain-Dial at [krista.brittain@gmail.com](mailto:krista.brittain@gmail.com) to arrange a porch pick-up. Thanks in advance for your ongoing faithful support of this ministry.