

October 2019

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The Joyful Noise

They need not go away, you give them something to eat. —Matthew 14:16

HEAR

the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper

This year at St. Stephen, each month and season of ministry will have a special focus that invites us to share our attention both as we worship together and in our own prayer lives. We are making our way through the Gifts of Discipleship—those promises of baptism that we use to organize our sending at the end of each worship service.

In October, we'll consider the second of these gifts—“HEAR the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper.” Pray over these questions:

What have you heard about God? Who do you listen to?

How do scripture and the stories of Jesus shape your world?

What do you share with others in your daily life?

What does the Lord's Supper mean to you? How is the Lord's Supper connected to hospitality?

How are the words of scripture and the Lords' Supper connected?

The word of God and the Lord's Supper are great gifts that help us understand who we are as God's chosen people. As you live out your faith in October, consider the questions above and this prayer:

Gracious God—Tune my ears to hear your word in the midst of my busy life, and orient my heart according to your generosity. Amen.

Pastor's Column

By Dan Kuckuck, pastor

Centered



To be a Christian is to put Jesus at the center of everything, and to see Jesus as the organizing principle for our lives.

What's at the center of your life? In the midst of a busy lifestyle, sometimes it can be difficult to identify the part of your experience that gives meaning and purpose to everything else.

For the earliest Christ-followers, that centerpoint was Jesus: God in-the-flesh that lived alongside them and helped them make sense of the chaotic world around them. Their

lives weren't unlike ours. They did their daily work six days a week (with a break for the Sabbath), and their days were filled with fishing, tax collecting, building, farming, teaching, learning, raising children, buying, selling—you name it. In the midst of it all, they made time for their families and gathered with friends. They got grouchy about government and world affairs, and got into arguments with neighbors, too. They made good decisions and bad decisions on a day-to-day basis. If there was much difference, it might only come down to geography, culture, and a lack of social media (lucky them!).

In 2019, we can easily add to the list. Not only are we worried about daily tasks, but we're worried about future and past tasks as well: Did we make the right decision? Will we make the right decision? What if we made the wrong one? We are reacting to past, present, future at once. Before we know it, things are swirling.

The earliest Christians' answer to swirling chaos was to put Christ at the center of it all. When they wondered how everything fit together, and where they should put their focus, the answer came readily: Jesus.

How readily do we put Jesus at the center of our lives, and the way that we see the world?

Too often, we use Jesus in service of other things that aren't central. Instead of following Jesus, we'll be centered in gaining power instead—and use Jesus as a way to get there. Instead of following Jesus, we'll try to center ourselves in being right and use Jesus as way

to show how right we are. We use Jesus as a way to become a “good person” and define being “good” however we want; we use Jesus as a way to make more money, or find happiness, or some other thing. Jesus becomes a means to an end, rather than the source of life.

To be a Christian is to put Jesus at the center of everything, and to see Jesus as the organizing principle for our lives. This is easier said than done, but it is possible. I can't offer 8 easy steps, but I can offer a few reliable practices that start the process of getting centered:

PRAY. You can't be a Christian without prayer. If we try to have a life of faith without a life of prayer, we'll find that our faith is built more on our own opinions and the news cycle. If we don't invite the presence of Christ into our lives, through prayer, we'll never allow Jesus to make his way to the center.

READ THE BIBLE. We believe that scripture is the word of God—a dynamic gift that can be present to the real stuff of life. Jesus is present in scripture, and stories about Jesus' ministry and resurrection can shape our own experience of faith. If we don't know how Christ has been the center for others, we have a tougher time recognizing how Christ is the center for us.

WORSHIP. Shifting the focus of our lives can be difficult, but doing so with others makes a big difference. Gathering with other Christians brings care, encouragement, and support along faith's journey—and holds us accountable as well.

SERVE. Jesus equated loving God and loving the neighbor when he said that what we do for the least of these, we do for him (see Matthew 25). The more we serve others, the more we put Christ at the center—and not something else.

For Christians, Jesus is the center of everything. What's the next step for you?

Pastor Dan

October Highlights



Pet Blessing

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 2 at 6 p.m. Inspired by the ministry of Francis of Assisi, who gave thanks for God's goodness in all creation, we at St. Stephen give thanks for our animal friends of all shapes and sizes! Historically we've had dogs, cats, turtles, hamsters, lizards, horses, and more; bring your best animal friends as we give thanks for life together.



Congregational Meeting

SUNDAY, SEPT 13 after worship. St. Stephen gathers for a congregational meeting to discuss updates to the facility renewal project (see next page) and updates to the congregational constitution. When the congregation gathers to meet, we do the work of the church and make decisions for our lives together. Don't miss this exciting chance to move forward together!



Trunk or Treat

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 23 at 6:15 p.m. Be a part of the fun and decorate your trunk for children of St. Stephen, local congregations, and the neighborhood! As a fun fundraiser for the Urbandale Food Pantry, bring your cash and vote for the best-decorated trunk by putting your cash donations into the pumpkin. If your trunk wins, you get bragging rights—until next year. ☺



Affirmation of Baptism

SUNDAY, OCT. 27 at 10 a.m. Each year on Reformation Sunday, that day where we give thanks for the ministry of Martin Luther and the good news of faith and grace at work in our lives, we also give thanks for young people who affirm their baptismal promises. This year, **Teagan Harris and Luke Mueller** affirm their baptism. We gather as the church to give thanks for what God is doing in their lives!



Bahá'í Festival of Unity

MONDAY, OCT. 28, 7—9 p.m. at Windsor Heights Community Ctr. Pastor Tucker's internship project will explore bridge-building between St. Stephen and interfaith neighbors—learning similarities and differences and practicing love for God and neighbor. The Bahá'í Festival of Unity is a first opportunity to begin the conversation. Contact Pastor Tucker (tucker@ststephenlutheran.org) to let him know you're planning to attend and visit about the intersection between religious faiths, or simply meet him at the venue (6900 School Street, Windsor Heights).

WEEKEND WORSHIP

OCT 5-6 | Pentecost 17
Traditional worship, Sat. 5:30 p.m.
Praise worship, Sunday 10 a.m.

A little faith goes a long way is our Lord's point in the gospel. A mustard seed's-worth has miraculous potential. The patience, tenacity, and endurance required for the life of faith are the blessings received in water and the word (holy baptism), bread and wine (holy communion), the word read and proclaimed in this assembly. Anticipate them. Receive them with thanksgiving.

OCT 12-13 | Pentecost 18
Traditional worship at all services

It's a miracle! Multiple miracles! The waters of holy baptism have healed us. The body and blood of Jesus in holy communion have made us clean. We have died with Christ and been raised with him. For all this we have returned to offer thanks. From this place we are sent on our way rejoicing to share the good news.

OCT 19-20 | Pentecost 19
Traditional worship, Sat. 5:30 p.m.
Praise worship, Sunday 10 a.m.

Pray always. Do not lose heart. This is the encouragement of the Christ of the gospel today. Persistence in our every encounter with the divine will be blessed. Wrestle with the word. Remember your baptism again and again. Come regularly to Christ's table. Persistence in our every encounter with the divine will be blessed.

OCT 26-27 | Reformation
Traditional worship at all services

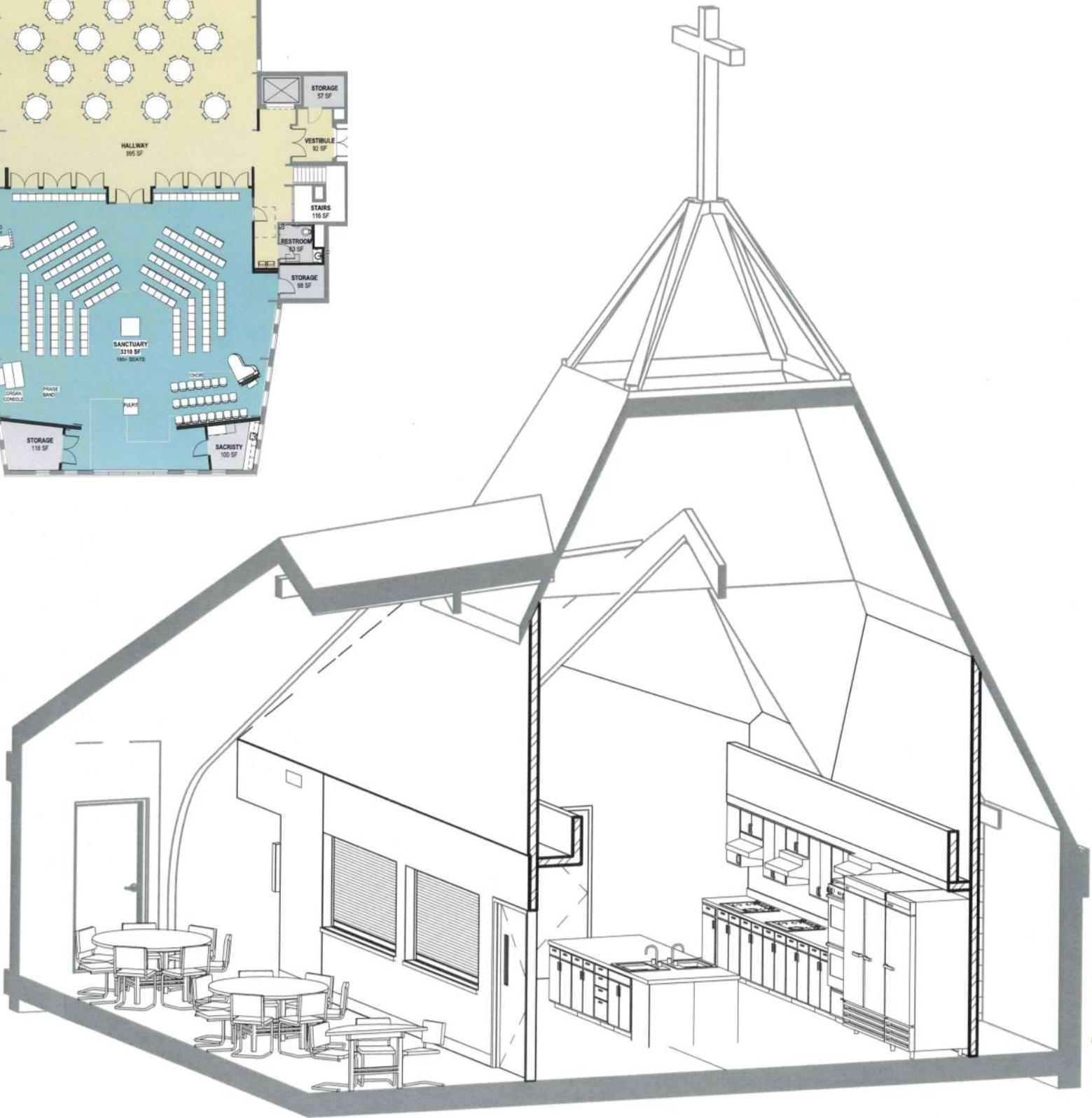
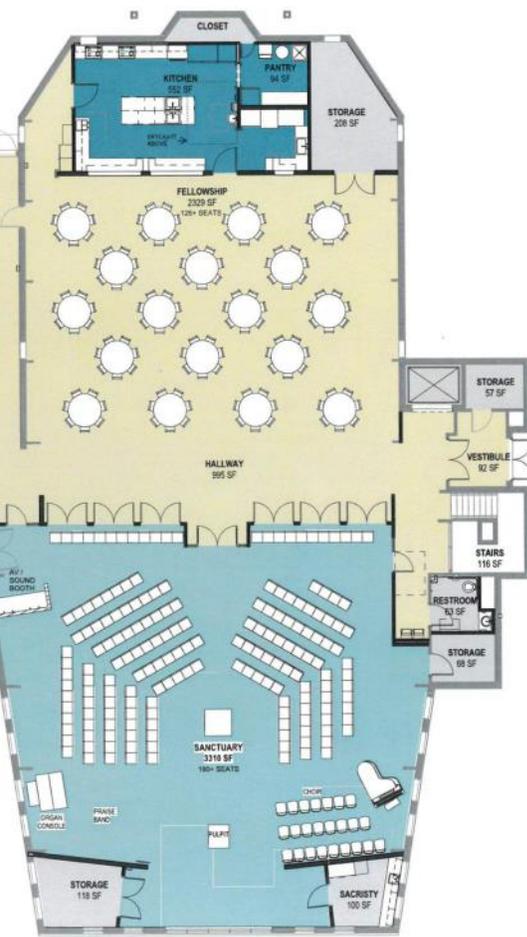
On this day we celebrate the heart of our faith: the gospel of Christ—the good news—that makes us free! We pray that the Holy Spirit would continue to unite the church today in its proclamation and witness to the world. In the waters of baptism we are made one body; we pray for the day that all Christians will also be one at the Lord's table.



Congregational Meeting

Sunday, Oct. 13 after worship

- * Discuss adjustments to the Facility Renewal plan, including relocation of the kitchen from new construction to an interior location (see illustration), and affirm a project start date.
- * Review constitutional adjustments from the churchwide assembly, and one adjustment proposed by the Nominating Committee.
- * Give thanks for all that God is doing through the people of St. Stephen Lutheran Church!





Ongoing Ministries

PEWPICKERS. A gathering for the elders of the church, Pewpickers meet next on **Wednesday, Oct. 2 at 10 a.m.** in the Gathering Area. Bring a friend!

BROWN BAG BOOK GROUP. This group for readers meets each **Wednesday at 11:30 a.m.** Right now, they're reading *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. Their next book is *Dear Church*, by Lenny Duncan. Contact Pastor Dan for more info!

WOMEN'S CONNECTION. This group for women of all ages meets in the Gathering Area on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of the month. If interested, contact Denise Hawks (denise.hawks@gmail.com) or Audrey Jones (movingourcastle@yahoo.com)

LYDIA CIRCLE. This group for women meets on **Wednesday, Oct. 9** at 1 p.m. in the Gathering Area at St. Stephen. Throughout the year, they're reading *John for Everyone: Part 2* by N.T. Wright. Contact Donna Kaus (276-4391) for more information.

MEN IN FAITH. St. Stephen men gather on the first and third Tuesday at 5:30 p.m. for Bible Study. Invite a friend and contact Pastor Tucker for info!

CARE COMPANIONS provide rides to church, deliver communion, and serve as a faithful companions through changes and challenges in life. The next meeting is **Thursday, Oct. 10 at 5 p.m.** Contact Pastor Dan to learn more about this ministry.

PROPERTY WORKDAY! The next property workday is **Saturday, Oct. 19 at 8 a.m.** All are invited to lend your time and expertise! Contact Jerry Strawman (jlstrawman@gmail.com/515-402-3357) to get involved.

SUPPER CLUB! Be a part of this fun evening of socializing with St. Stephen people on **Friday, Nov. 1 at 6:30 p.m.** Bring appetizers and beverages to a group of people who'd love to know

you better. Let the hosts know you're coming: John and Dianne Chadwick (pastorchadwick@hotmail.com) or call Carol Koeplin (515-408-1648).

THEOLOGY PUB. This fellowship engages the intersection of faith and daily life. This year, our conversation follows the monthly congregational focus (see cover). This month, we discuss what it means to "HEAR the word of God and share the Lord's Supper" on **Sunday, Oct. 13 at 7 p.m.** at Granite City (12801 University Ave., Clive).

URBANDALE FOOD PANTRY. A special *thank you* to all those people who made a donation to the food pantry. **In October, facial tissue the suggested personal care item donation.** All donations can be left in the grocery carts outside of the Sanctuary.

LOAVES AND FISHES. St. Stephen people prepare and host this meal for friends and neighbors by either cooking food ahead of time or serving food during the event. Check sign-up sheets at the church; you can be a part of this ministry on **Saturday, Oct. 26.**

FAMILY PROMISE! This quarterly ministry, a partnership among Des Moines area churches, houses families experiencing homelessness for a week at a time. The next opportunity to serve is **Dec. 8-15.** Contact Ron Andersen (278-6582) or Andrea Heerdt (480-7845) to be a part of this ministry.

KAMP: KAREN ACRES MENTORING PROGRAM. Karen Acres Elementary School has opportunities for you to help in a classroom, work with students on reading and/or math, or be a mentor. Consider how you can be a part of students' bright future. Contact Marsha Arens (mlarens57@gmail.com/515-554-6421) to get involved!

From the Intern Pastor

By Tucker O'Leary, intern pastor

Loving neighbors

Loretta Ross writes about “call-out culture” in her article, “I’m a Black Feminist. I Think Call-Out Culture Is Toxic.” If you are unfamiliar with call-out culture, it suggests that we are too quick—and enjoy—calling people out on what we perceive as wrong. Now, someone could be doing something wrong, in which case it is a good thing to correct them. However, many times call-out culture seems to manifest itself in small things that really have no consequence to the larger society.

Ross thinks this has negatively affected our culture and our personal relationships: “Call-outs make people fearful of being targeted. People avoid meaningful conversations when hypervigilant perfectionists point out apparent mistakes.”

This seems to be the most prominent on Facebook and other sites on the internet. People express or share their opinion and twelve others make it their mission to call-out what is wrong with their opinion. Is this what we are called to do as Christians?

We read repeatedly that Jesus commanded us to love our neighbors. Yes, there are times where Jesus called people out, and times in the Old Testament when prophets would tell people to change their ways. However, this was never done to just make someone feel bad or shame a single individual. Rather, these were moments of teaching, of learning, and of offering a new direction. When a prophet called out Israel, it was to guide them back to God. When Jesus called out the Pharisees, it was followed by a parable that educated everyone on how God is a God of love, patience, and compassion.

We as Christians are called to love our neighbors. This also means our neighbor on Facebook, the neighbor with a different opinion, or the neighbor who waves a confederate flag. In her article, Ross writes about how the wives of KKK members asked her to come to their area in the Appalachian Mountains to teach their kids to be more open minded. Her time spent there was filled with the woman who asked her to come, unconsciously saying racial slurs at her. “Instead of reacting,” she writes, “I responded. I couldn’t let my hurt feelings sabotage my agenda.” She stood beside white supremacists and showed compassion, love, and respect that we should give all our neighbors. She then says that over the years of monitoring hate groups she did not see any further outbreaks in that area because of her work.

It can be tempting to immediately respond to a post or a comment that we disagree with. I know because I struggle with it every day. But, when I find myself in those situations, I take a deep breath, I pause, and pray for God’s guidance. Is my response spreading the love of God to all people? We are called to live in a world that is filled with disagreement, but that doesn’t mean we have to have arguments. Instead let’s encourage conversation, let us encourage discussion, let us be like Christ and place love above all else.



We as Christians are called to love our neighbors. This also means our neighbor on Facebook.

Pastor Tucker

Birthdays

- 1 Eric Tiffany, Jim Walker
- 2 Brittany Borup, Dalton Townes,
- 3 Karen Fachman, Marian Hageman, Barbara Knapp, Megan Willem
- 4 Dave Kroeger
- 6 Sharon Jorgenson
- 7 Lucy Thomas
- 8 Mark Heusinkveld, Brian Willem
- 9 Kevin Shay
- 10 Barbara Guthrie
- 12 David Bolender
- 13 Jeffrey Gilbert
- 14 Maria Hsu
- 15 Cliff Harris
- 16 Mary Middleton, Penny Twedt, Betty White
- 17 Hugh Ceaser, Beth Willem
- 18 Jeff Borup, Garrett Kroeger
- 19 Gayle Johnson
- 20 Ben Tomjack,
- 21 Kathy Hoegh
- 22 Karin Hansen, Bob Kirchner, Brent LeBlanc
- 23 Allene Erichsen
- 24 Meghan Walck
- 25 Shannon Groth
- 26 Jennie Beckley
- 27 Bev Lantz, Larry Stole
- 29 Brett Boerner, Vickie Ceaser, Adam Garman
- 30 Kyle Codner, Ardie Strawman, Clayton Weinberger
- 31 Krista Dial, Charlotte Stole

Anniversaries

- 3 Bob and Beth Halverson (55)
- 6 Ed and Millie Kramer (57)
- 12 Doug and Michelle Hanson (28)
Brent and Daphne Monson (17)
- 16 Pete and Jamie Jones (9)
Bob and Nancy Kirchner (43)
- 17 Barb Knapp & Mike Newell (21)
- 20 Jim and Barbara Guthrie (56)
Ronelva and Allen Reiman (40)
- 29 Ken and Sandy Goering (53)
- 30 Steve and Janet Davis (42)



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Welcome to worship!

Wednesdays at 6 p.m.
Saturdays at 5:30 p.m.
Sundays at 10 a.m.

Address service requested



Everyone is invited to join neighborhood Halloween fun!

Wear your costume and collect some treats at one or all of these Urbandale churches:

5:30 p.m. DINNER United Church of Christ
3530 70th St.

6:15 p.m. GAMES St. Stephen Lutheran
3510 72nd St.

6:45 p.m. DESSERT Covenant Christian
2700 72nd St.

We welcome your non-perishable food donations to support the Urbandale Food Pantry. You can also place your cash vote for the best decorated trunk with all proceeds benefiting the food pantry!

For additional information, email tracy@ststephenlutheran.org