

**St. Stephen's Lutheran Church  
Council Meeting December 15, 2021  
7:15 PM – through Zoom**

**Attendees (Absent):**

Pastor John Snider, Pastor Tim Thompson, Merrill Zieman, Jackie Hanson, Jolene Sather  
Debbie Pirkel, Joy Stenhaug, Sara Ruff, Beth Hostager, Diane Meyers, Eric Donahue, Jessica  
Donahue, Kim Richter, John Anderson, Mary Jo, Tracy Westman, Mark Rogosheske,  
Vicki Jackson, Christine Davis, Hannah Ruikka

**AGENDA**

- Opening Prayer
- Minutes approval 11/17/2021 – minutes approved
- Updates from Executive Committee
  - Gift Policy – final draft emailed. Request approval from Council to bring to final approval to the Congregational meeting in January 2022.
    - Motion by Mark R, Jackie 2<sup>nd</sup>, discussion, approved

**Committee Reports/Updates:** If possible please e-mail prior to meeting (Reply All)

- Pastor Reports:
- Safety – Merrill
  - Everyone wearing masks and going well.
  - Only concern is funerals, food being served & guests un-masked.
  - Volunteers will assist Christmas service to encourage masks, seating & contact cards.
- Vision Action Team (VAT) – see Pastor Tim update page
- Property Management – no report
- Christian Education –
  - Christmas Caroling went great tonight
- Youth and Family
  - Overnight event went great! Had fun during snowstorm with outside activities.
- Finance – see page
- Stewardship – see page
- Missions: 39 coats to both Moreland & Garlough schools, bunch of hat/mittens and an additional \$1,000 check to each school.
- Worship and Music
- Fellowship – Sara
  - More are joining on Sunday's after service fellowship
- Inviting
- Nominating
- Annual Reports are due early January
  - Annual meeting 30JAN22

**Other business or announcements**

In celebration of Christmas please stay together on zoom as long as you wish for fellowship!

**Next Church Meeting**----Wednesday, January 19 at 7:15.

**Pastor John Report**  
**December 15, 2021**

Two comments about being a **culture of generosity**.

**FIRST:** This is who communities of faith are. If pushed we'd be glass half full people but that doesn't quite do it. We are people that look beyond how much is in the glass to whose glass it is and whose stuff is in the glass. Our faith recognizes it all as God's. What does God want done with it? Where does God want it poured out and shared? These are the questions that concern us.

A culture of generosity has a primary focus not on numbers but on faith. Looking primarily at numbers leads us to scarcity and fear. Is there ever enough if it's only ours? Looking to our faith allows us experience the truth of being partners with God.

**The Gift Policy** we have been working on is helping us grow our culture of generosity by leading us with a couple of simply principles: 1. Undesignated gifts are tithed, 10% to ministries beyond the doors of St. Stephen's (the recipients are recommended by the Gift Committee and approved by the congregation council) and 2. 10% to our Foundation.

The tithe beyond our doors recognizes that our ministries include partners. We can't do it all! We are sharing the contents of the cup with others also doing the Lord's work. We give this tithe as encouragement, service to others and as part of our ministries.

The tithe to the Foundation may seem like an insurance policy for St. Stephen's but we are also in the process of studying how to move our Foundation to be a more active of source of ministry.

We are called to be faithful stewards of the 80% of the gift that remains as well. The guidance for its use will be informed by our long range goals, the council and congregation, and most importantly prayer. This area is where the boldness of our faith moving into ministry occurs.

**SECOND:** A culture of generosity has many expressions including being generous with people whose opinions are different than ours. We are called to love all people. Jesus even included people who strike us and are our apparent enemies. In the current climate in our country we are called to be generous to all people, even those whose opinions and politics are different than ours. We are not called to love only those we agree with. We know how challenging this is, pride, defensiveness, fear all come looming to the service. Yet, our faith in God calls us to a place well beyond all of that! A culture of generosity is a culture that practices love.

So, is our glass half full or half empty? The glass and all of its content are God's. It is our duty and joy to participate with God in sharing it. That's what communities of faith do.

Bless you in your leadership of our culture of generosity!

Pastor John

## Council Update from Pastor Tim – December 14, 2021

Sabbath Explorers. I will be offering a four-session class for “Sabbath Explorers” beginning in January. The extreme stress we are all under these days (pandemic, politics, church life in flux) makes it more important than ever for us to learn how to practice rhythms of rest that are truly life-giving, so that – as the angel said to Elijah – the journey won’t be too much for us. (1 Kings 19:7.) This is important, not only for ourselves and our families but also so that we have something life-giving to offer other people who are also distressed but lack a faith community to help. Please consider joining me from 10 to 10:30 am on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Saturdays of January and February. [You can register here](https://bit.ly/SSLC-SabExp): Bit.ly/SSLC-SabExp. Who do you know who’s worn out these days? Might you consider inviting them to check this little class out with you?

Christian Nationalism – I continue my own explorations, learning about Christian Nationalism and how to respond to it. I held an open forum on December 5<sup>th</sup> to share what I’ve been learning so far and provide resources. This was well attended and enthusiastically received, with two households attending via Zoom. The two-page handout with resources that I provided is appended to this report. I am currently working (slowly) through a podcast on CN with some friends and will probably lead a group for St. Stephens based on that down the line. There is a follow-up podcast on how to respond that I look forward to exploring. As with racism and other social issues, attending to CN will be a long-term focus. At the same time, it’s linkage to politics and governance issues makes it feel more pressing as we continue with our regular election cycles.

Vision to Action. We continue to work on assembling specific action items in each of the four Ministry Result Areas (see below). Areas 1 and 2 are progressing. For areas 3 and 4 we are considering how best to identify action items and who to enlist in developing and reviewing them.

1. Connect to our neighborhood through service.
2. Build and deepen relationships with each other at St. Stephen’s.
3. Enhance our vibrant worship experiences.
4. Make improvements to the facilities.

For areas 1 and 2 we are convening focus groups (open to all in the congregation) to evaluate specific action items we have drawn from congregational input and team brainstorming. The focus group for #1 met on Saturday and had an energizing conversation among the eight people attending. The focus group for #2 is this **Thursday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, at 4:30 pm in the Lounge**. The topic will be ways to build and deepen relationships and I encourage you to be a part of this conversation if you are available!

The Gospel of Luke. The featured Gospel for the coming liturgical year is Luke, so Pastor John and I will be offering a two-week introduction to that book during Open Forum on January 9 and 16. We will be drawing on an excellent illustrated video overview of Luke for these sessions and I encourage you to take a look at it here: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/luke/>

Pastor Tim

# Investigating Christian Nationalism

## Resources

**BJC (Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty).** <https://bjconline.org/> Baptist organization working ecumenically to protect religious freedom and oppose special treatment for one religion over another.

**Christians Against Christian Nationalism.**

<https://www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/> Is a campaign organized by the BJC in July 2019 to give voice to the wide variety of Christians who reject CN.

- Podcast series: The Dangers of Christian Nationalism  
<https://www.christiansagainstchristiannationalism.org/podcasts>
- Podcast Discussion Guide: <http://bit.ly/CACN-PDG>
- Responding to Christian Nationalism Curriculum <http://bit.ly/CACN-RCNC>
- How Racism Undergirds Christian Nationalism. Webinar: <http://bit.ly/BJC-Webinar>  
Discussion Guide: <http://bit.ly/CACN-RacismDG>

**Postcards from Babylon** <https://www.postcardsdoc.com/> Documentary by author & pastor Brian Zahnd exploring CN in America.

**Book: “Taking America Back for God”** A sociological study of CN in America.  
<http://bit.ly/TABfG> (This site includes chapter summaries.)

- Book review of “Taking America...” in the Journal of Lutheran Ethics: <http://bit.ly/TABfGReview>
- Time Magazine Article by the Authors: <http://bit.ly/TABfG-Time>

**Article: “What Is Christian Nationalism?”** An explainer on how the belief differs from other forms of nationalism, patriotism, and Christianity.” Christianity Today. <http://bit.ly/WhatIsCN-CT>

## **Education Committee Report 12/15/21**

1. Christmas caroling at Salem on Wednesday at 6pm.
2. The costumes and props for the "No Stress, No Fuss, Christmas Program" have been found and packed into their bags. We are excited to try out this new, simple Christmas program at the 3:30 Christmas Eve service.
3. We are still looking for donations of fleece for blanket tying in January. Information will be in the bulletin after Christmas.

It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness.

Submitted by Christine Davis

## **Youth and Family Committee Meeting Minutes on 12-9-2021**

- Hannah and John Anderson spent our committee meeting time gathering supplies for the upcoming Lock-In on 12-10-21.
- The Lock-In at SSLC, was a great success despite our first winter storm. 11 students attended with 8 out of the 11 students staying overnight. Many thanks go out to both Hannah and Garrett who chaperoned this memorable event. Some activities that took place were: a bonfire, snowball flinging, sledding, reverse hide-n-seek, pizza making on an electric griddle and movie watching. Jessica Donahue and John Anderson made breakfast on the morning of the 11th for the participants.
- The next committee meeting is scheduled for 1-13-22 at 6:30 at SSLC.

Submitted by John Anderson

## Finance Committee report

The Finance committee met on Thursday, December 9th.

Attached is a summary of the financials for the month of November as well as November YTD.

On a year-to-date basis, total income is below budget by \$15,029 while expenses are below budget by \$37,777.

We have a year-to-date deficit (expense exceeds income) of 27,308 however, this deficit is roughly \$22,749 less than the budgeted year-to-date deficit of \$50,057 because expenses are down more than income.

The income shortfall relative to budget is driven by general contributions while the favorable expenses relative to budget are driven by Property & Maintenance, Salaries, and Computer Hardware & Repair.

Please let us know if you have questions.

Sincerely,  
Beth and Diane

	November			November YTD 2021		
	BUDGET	ACTUAL	Change	BUDGET	ACTUAL	Change
General Envelope	35,100	37,945	2,845	354,900	336,026	(18,874)
Total Contributions	35,850	38,346	2,496	381,900	359,558	(22,342)
Total Other Income	5,429	3,950	(1,479)	47,651	54,965	7,313
Total Income	41,279	42,296	1,017	429,551	414,523	(15,029)
Total Expenses	43,967	46,922	(2,956)	479,609	441,831	(37,778)
Income Less Expense	(2,688)	(4,627)	(1,939)	(50,057)	(27,308)	22,749

## **Stewardship Committee**

Growing Connections is at full speed. Happily, reached our financial goal of increased giving and our generous match gift, but still striving to have more intentions turned in for better balance going forward. Overall, intentions are low compared to last year.

Statements did go out last week. Hoping for a good response for end of year giving.

Thanks!

Stewardship team

Submitted by Kim Richter

## **Missions Committee report**

The missions committee did not meet in Dec. but has nonetheless been busy.

The remainder of the land sale tithe is being dispersed as follows:

\$3000 to Camp Wapogasset

\$3036.97 to St Paul Area Synod for their Planting Hope campaign

\$1000 to Garlough Environmental Magnet School

\$1000 to Moreland Arts and Health Sciences Magnet School

The two checks to the two schools were delivered in person to the respective finance officers at the schools.

We are still collecting warm winter gear for students at Garlough and Moreland. So far more than 30 coats plus some mittens and hats have been delivered. We would welcome more.

Diane has faithfully delivered the food shelf donations from church to Neighbor's each week.

Respectfully submitted,  
Vicki Jackson

## **Worship Committee**

From the Worship Team, I want to give a shout out to all of the volunteers who have agreed to do the readings and ushering during this very busy time of year. We are truly blessed.

Especially, thank you to Lori Ritt, who so beautifully decorated the Sanctuary!

Mary Jo Martinek

Isaiah 43:1

*"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine."*

## **Inviting Committee**

The Inviting Committee, with the generous help from John Anderson, Pastor John, Pastor Tim, Tracy Westman and our snow removal expert Luis, raised the Manger last Saturday at noon. It went very smoothly with all the expert assistance.

Thank you everyone! Well Done!

The figures will go out very soon. I will call for help.

Eric & Jessica will you install the lights again this year? Let me know please.

Peace,

Mark Rogo

for the Inviting Committee