



The Quill

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH

Williamsburg, Virginia

February 2026



WITNESSING

In the Gospel of John, the concepts of seeing and witnessing appear with remarkable frequency, more than all but three other books of the Bible. This is no accident. John's Gospel is deeply concerned with testimony, with bearing witness to what God is doing in the world. And this witnessing is not just John the Baptist's calling, it is ours as well.

Jesus' first words to his curious disciples were not a theological statement or a command, but an invitation: "Come and see." He invites us to witness what God is accomplishing and to experience it personally. And once we have seen and encountered God's liberating love, remaining silent becomes impossible.

Our baptismal promises call us "to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed." This is not merely a suggestion; it is our baptismal identity. We are set apart for a cause: to participate in God's liberating work and to tell others what we have witnessed.

But what does witnessing actually look like? The good news is that our testimonies don't need to be dramatic, complicated, or perfectly polished. What matters is authenticity. What matters is pointing toward the things that help all of us thrive: freedom, love, compassion, vulnerability, justice. As poet Andrea Gibson reminds us, "Sometimes the most healing thing to do is remind ourselves over and over and over, other people feel this too." Testimony serves this purpose, it breaks isolation, offers hope, and transforms hearts.

Here's the revolutionary truth: our cause is not for individual success but for collective liberation. We're not witnessing so that people will admire our personal

relationship with Jesus. We're witnessing because others need to know that the pit doesn't last forever. That waiting isn't pointless. That God is on the side of the oppressed and working through them for freedom.

When we realize our work is God's work, the burden of the struggle feels lighter. This is not because the struggle ceases, but because we are not alone. The universe and others join in the cause. As the Servant in Isaiah proclaims, "My cause is with the Lord."

So how do we begin? Here are some ways to practice witnessing in our daily lives:

- **Start Small:** Share a story over your next meal with loved ones about where you've seen God at work.
- **Practice in Safe Spaces:** Use faith formation gatherings or small groups to practice the language of witnessing.
- **Look for God's Action:** Pay attention to moments of liberation, healing, or hope in your life and community.
- **Remember It's Collective:** Join with others in prison letter-writing, neighborhood meals, or advocacy work – these become shared testimonies of God's liberating love.

John witnessed. He told people to look at Jesus. Andrew witnessed. He found his brother and said, "We have found the Messiah!" That's how it works: one person encounters God's liberating love, tells someone else, and the movement spreads.

Now it's our turn. How is Jesus coming to you? What need is God working to meet in your life? What pit has God drawn you out of? And having encountered the grace upon grace of the Word of God in your life, who are you going to tell?

Evil and injustice depend on people believing they're alone, that there's no way out, that life can't be different. Your testimony, however simple, however ordinary, might be exactly what someone else needs to hear to believe that liberation is possible.

Let us go forth and become with God who becomes with us, bearing witness to the ends of the earth.

In Christ,
Pastor Jon

CONGREGATION COUNCIL



What's Happening at Congregation Council?

Your Council was busy during the month of January.

Activities started with a Council Retreat on Saturday, January 10, orchestrated by Council President Sandy Croushore. The morning of the retreat was spent in a very enlightening Enneagram session, led by Christina Nelson who is a licensed teacher in the Enneagram method of personality assessment. Knowledge of your own personality type and that of others can be invaluable in the understanding of how you “fit” in the world and how to be more productive in working with others. The session proved very useful even to those who had prior exposure to this model of human personality. After lunch, Council Members broadly discussed other goals such as improving communications within the Church, particularly to those that we see infrequently. It was felt that there should be more effort to reach out to those that we reach remotely but see infrequently, particularly since the Pandemic. We have been discussing the strong desire to upgrade and modernize our website. Most felt that our Council Handbook and other documents desperately need to be made more relevant to activities of the Council and Church than they are now. These were all important but loose discussions, with plans to formalize these thoughts at the council meeting the following Tuesday.

Indeed, the Church Council met on Tuesday, January 13 and got down to business. After devotions and prayers, minutes of the December meeting were approved. We were pleased to hear that the fresh air intake for the HVAC system has been installed and some fine-tuning on thermostat locations is being accomplished. That project

is nearing completion. The Council has a committee that is looking into options for design of a new website for the Church. The Call Committee has completed their survey of the Congregation's desires and that is being welded to the realities of the Church Budget. That assessment is currently ongoing.

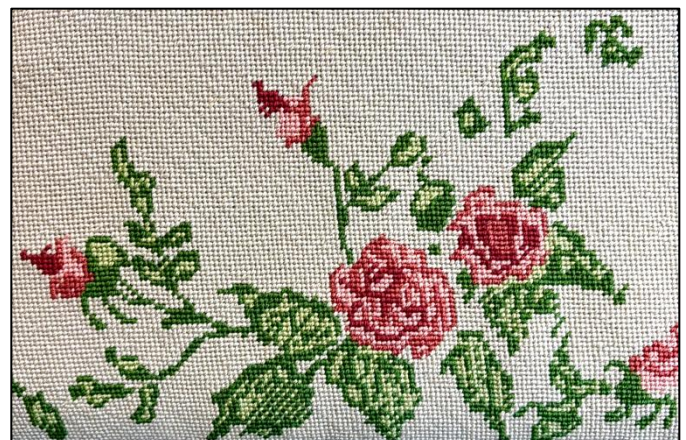
Jane deSolms presented the report of the Budget Committee. The proposed Budget for 2026 was reviewed and passed by Council.

Reports from Council Members serving as liaisons to other committees were heard. The ideas discussed at the Council Retreat were discussed and formalized and it was decided to start calling less-active members, conducting a time and talent survey as part of the stewardship efforts, pressing on with the updated website, and updating handbooks and other staff guides. A few other issues were discussed before the meeting was adjourned.

Feel free to approach any Council Member if you have comments or questions for Council. They have blue name badges on during Church services!

Bill Dichtel

**Giving Statements for 2025
are available for pick-up in
the Gathering Space or at
the Church Office.**





MUSIC NOTES

Kyrie Eleison

Tis the season to sing a Global liturgy. Each Epiphany Season, we change our musical elements of the liturgy to reflect the manifestation of our Savior being the “Lord of all Nations.” With that in mind, we are using songs of various countries: a Haitian *Kyrie*, a Syrian Gospel Acclamation, an Argentinian *Holy, Holy, Holy* and a Finnish *Lamb of God*.

Kyrie Eleison is Greek and means “Lord, have mercy.” In all manner of trials and at times of great joy, our early church from the fourth century and probably earlier have cried out “Lord, have mercy.” As we begin our worship, we use the *Kyrie* to remind us of where our help is to be found. Since our Lutheran beginnings, the *Kyrie* has been sung in many languages with many musical settings, including folk hymns called *Leisen*. You may recall Martin Luther and the 16th century Lutheran church sang both Latin and German versions of the musical portions in our liturgy as well as incorporating *Leisen*. Our Haitian *Kyrie* is a modern day *Leisen*.

Andrew Donaldson, a Canadian church musician who studied French and English language and literature, arranged the Haitian *Kyrie* we are singing:

“I arranged this setting as a prayerful, musical response to the earthquake that devastated Haiti on the afternoon of January 12, 2010. It has been an insight of the ecumenical movement that singing music from a community is a powerful way of praying with them. So, in that tradition I set the “Kyrie eleison” to the Haitian traditional song, variously identified as “Fey-Oh” or “Fé Oh.”

The melody was likely introduced to wider North American audiences via the folk music scene in New York City in the early sixties. Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel recorded it in 1969, and it appears in some editions of the “Bridge Over Troubled Water album (1970). It should be sung with a rhythmic lilt.

*The words in the original Haitian French Creole are a prayer for a sick child expressing hope that the leaves (“fey/fé, from the French “feuilles”) that the local healer will use will save them from “mizé” – misery. To the words of the liturgical Kyrie, I added a plea in French: “Sauvez-moi la vie, O Jesus, je vous prie, Kyrie, Sauvez nous la vie, O Jesus, je vous prie, Kyrie. Save my(our) life, O Jesus, to you I pray.”**

*(Andrew Donaldson, *Assembly Song Companion to All Creation Sings*, Augsburg Fortress, 2023)

Karen Ives, Music Director

STEPHEN MINISTRY AT ST. STEPHEN



Down in the Dumps...

By February, depression can often settle in for many of us for many reasons. The joyous holidays are passed and visitations by out-of-town relatives and friends are over. While our winter weather is not as harsh as some areas, it still seems foreboding and takes the leaves from our trees and the flowers from our gardens. We are often confined inside more than other times of the year.

Moreover, lately we feel more isolated than in past times. We are hesitant to discuss current events or politics with our neighbors for fear of alienation. We feel isolated and disturbed by current events. We feel that we don’t recognize the very country we all grew up in.

All of these things make us question what is going on, who we are, our very sanity. We feel like turtles who need to retract back into our own shells. To isolate in our own homes. Unfortunately, this is a situation where the problems that we do have fester, increase in severity, and can take on a life of their own.

All of us have problems, quandaries, difficulties that we ponder and turn over and that can lead us to distraction and sometimes to despair. Often, the best solution is to have a careful, nonjudgmental, thoughtful listener who can be there as you work through those dilemmas.

For some of us, a parent, spouse, other family member or best friend can do a good job as a listener. Often, those individuals are too close to the situation or “spilling feelings to them” could be hurtful or damaging to the relationship. Going to an outside source would be wiser.

Getting a Stephen Minister would be a very good solution for someone in such a dilemma. Stephen Ministers are lay Christian counselors who are trained confidential listeners who walk with individuals going through challenging or stressful times whether it be depression, anxiety, self-doubt, spiritual challenge or other emotional problems. The process is individualized and completely confidential.

If you feel that you would possibly benefit from having a Stephen Minister, please contact **Pastor Nelson**.

Bill Dichtel, Stephen Leader

Thanks



Thank you for your generous investment in 3e Restoration's work this year. Your generosity makes it possible for us to equip and encourage communities to empower neighbors living through displacement and trauma toward resilience. We are grateful!

Melinda Marriott, Operations Manager



As the year draws to a close, we want to pause and say thank you. Your recent gift of \$700 to Grove Christian Outreach Center came at a time when demand continues to rise for food and necessities across greater Williamsburg.

Because of your support, families were able to walk into The Gathering Place and shop with dignity during one of the most financially stressful seasons of the year. Parents selected groceries knowing they could stretch their budgets further, seniors accessed consistent healthy food options, and neighbors facing unexpected hardship were reminded that they are not alone as they prepare for Christmas morning.

This season also allowed Grove to extend care beyond the grocery shelves. Households received emergency financial support when utilities or medical expenses threatened stability, children received winter coats, and Christmas gifts were picked and chosen by the children themselves, creating moments of joy and normalcy during the holidays.

In the last few months of 2025, generosity strengthened Grove's ability to respond consistently and compassionately to families in need. Because of you, food remains on shelves, essential resources remain available, and children experience the dignity and excitement of selecting their own Christmas gifts.

Thank you for choosing to stand with Grove Christian Outreach Center. We are grateful for your partnership and honored to serve our community alongside you.

Katie Patrick, Executive Director



Thank you for your generous gift of \$1,000 towards our programs that provide nourishing food for our neighbors experiencing

food insecurity. This amount reflects your giving during November 2025. As we reflect on the challenges faced by so many on the Peninsula this year, we are grateful for your support, which helps families secure emergency food assistance, prepare healthy and culturally important meals, and create meaningful memories around the table. Your donation is significant for neighbors working towards a more hopeful future.

Food insecurity can touch anyone unexpectedly – job loss, medical bills, and rising costs of basic necessities all contribute to someone's decision to seek assistance. The food insecurity rate on the Peninsula grew this year from 60,000 to 70,000 individuals. During the recent government shutdown, visits to our partner agencies increased further by 20%. Your support ensures our programs remain strong and ready to help anyone impacted by these challenges. Whether it's a child receiving summer meals prepared by our culinary students, a senior enrolling in our delivery program for monthly supplemental groceries, or a recently furloughed employee visiting a mobile pantry for the first time, your generosity makes their next meal possible.

We appreciate your patience during this busy period. No matter the season, our gratitude for your impactful contributions and care never wavers. Thank you for being an essential, valued part of this community. Together, we are building a healthier, kinder community for everyone.

Robert "Bob" Latvis, President & CEO





ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN PRESCHOOL

This month, we were thrilled to welcome a new student to our preschool! Thanks to the generosity of congregation members who donated to sponsor this little boy's tuition for the remaining five months of the school year, he has been able to join our community. His classmates have given him a very warm welcome, he has adjusted beautifully, and his family is incredibly grateful for your support.

We were also excited to welcome all our friends back from Christmas break. The children have been busy exploring the new January Big Room centers, including an ice rink, a frosty café, a snowman-themed sensory bin, and much more. Our students are continuing to practice handwriting and letter recognition, and they're working hard on mastering letter sounds.

We enjoyed another delicious and successful community meal. It was so nice to see preschool families and congregation members mingling while the kids played together. A huge thank-you to the Sulouff family for bringing and running a super fun sticker booth station. We are also very grateful to **Pastor Jon, Pam, George and Gerri, and Beth** for donating their time and for providing such wonderful chili, crudités, biscuits, and desserts.

We can't wait to share photos from our upcoming Winter Carnival on **February 1 from 2:00-4:00 p.m.**

Jessica Kimball, Preschool Director



St. Stephen Lutheran Preschool is in desperate need of Newspapers. If you have any that you could drop off or bring to church, we will have a collection bin in the gathering space.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY

2	Don Hardenbergh	Gretchen Osborn
5	Quill Agor	
10	Walker Beatty	
13	Cyndy Touhsaent	
14	Harlan Schone	
17	Pat Janot	Marilyn Johnson
18	Glenn Joppa	
19	Beatty Coleman	
21	Bill Dichtel	
22	Keara Mahony	
23	Angie Groom	
25	Nancy Egloff	Max Hinders
	Terri Larsen	
27	David Wills	



STEWARDSHIP ESSENTIALS

The stewardship focus for February is the Lutheran Student Association (LSA). For many college students, campus activities and being away from home may present a disruption of their faith journey. But a meaningful experience with others of faith can make all of the difference.

I know that our daughter formed lifelong friends from her college church experience, brought her future husband to faith and they chose that church for their wedding.

Retired pastor **Gerry Johnson** has accepted the role of LSA advisor and exciting things are happening. Officers for the current school year are: **Jared Dewey**, president; **Susanna Carr**, vice-president; **Sophie Gustafson**, historian and **Lillian Goetz**, secretary/treasurer. The group plans more fellowship time at dinners, Bible study on Wednesdays and one breakfast a month at Aromas. They will conduct the student led service on **April 12**.

They are working on a mission event and an overnight trip (anyone have a beach house available?). And a new event, an LSA Alumni gathering is on the calendar for **October 24**, W&M Homecoming weekend.

Several members of the congregation have taken an active role in helping to support the LSA activities. The congregation has purchased a washer and dryer for use by the students as well as providing dinners and serving as surrogate parents/grandparents for the students.

Susan Williamson



REGISTRATION OPEN FOR 2026 SPRING WOMEN'S RETREAT

St. Stephen's 2026 Spring Women's Retreat will be held the **weekend of March 20-22** in Sandbridge, Va. Registration forms are available in the gathering space; please take one and spread the word! All interested please note the **deadline is Sunday, February 15**, for submission of a completed registration form, with \$50 deposit.

The spring women's retreat features a new format and venue, offering participants a program theme from the book "Gifts from the Sea," by Ann Morrow Lindbergh; a relaxed program schedule with ample time for connection and kinship; and hands-on assembly of period packs for our service project supporting "No. Shame. Period." The venue is a very large house on the beach with a nice gathering space and an elevator.

The retreat program will run from dinnertime on **Friday, March 20**, through dinnertime **Saturday, March 21**. Meals will be together at the house and include Friday dinner, three Saturday meals, and Sunday breakfast.

Participants may choose from several attendance options including day-only attendance, one overnight stay, or two overnights. The registration forms highlight the "not to exceed" cost to participants, corresponding to the attendance option selected. More detailed information and final cost will be communicated soon after the registration deadline, since these will be dependent on the number of registered participants.

After checkout Sunday morning, retreat participants have the opportunity to attend an 11:00 a.m. service at St. Michael's Lutheran Church in Sandbridge, and stop for lunch at a local seafood restaurant before driving home.

Prior and new women's retreat participants are encouraged and welcome! Some scholarships are available. Contact **Sandy Johnson** with scholarship and other retreat questions: 703-203-4315, beach4sandy@gmail.com.

Alison Carney



FEBRUARY BAPTISMAL ANNIVERSARIES

The significance of baptism, Luther teaches in the *Small Catechism*, is “that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Your baptismal anniversary is an opportunity to light a baptismal candle and to give some prayer time to reflecting on your experiences during the past year on your journey in faith!

Pastor Jon Nelson

6	Rosalie Frey	
13	Keith Egloff	Russ Dabel
15	Susan Neidlinger	Karen Shoberg
	Gayle Spencer	
17	Eleanor Bergh	
21	Alex Stauffer	Mitchell Stauffer
	Peter Stauffer	Zhou Hui Stauffer
22	Caitlin Leek	Jaina Leek
24	Keara Mahony	
25	Tom Berkey	

Others who were baptized in February:
Lori Janke

Were you baptized in February but your name isn't on the list above? Let us know!



MEN'S & WOMEN'S BREAKFASTS

- **February 3** – Women are invited to join together for breakfast the first **Tuesday** of this month.
- **February 6** – Men are invited to join together for breakfast the first **Thursday** of this month.

Both gatherings take place at **8:00 a.m.** at the Colonial Pancake House, at the corner of Page Street and Penniman Road, Williamsburg, VA. The get-togethers promote conversation and friendship in a casual setting.

PRAYERS



Join your prayers for healing with God's desires for **Preston Burton, Kristin Carter, Ginny Cummings, Edith Haecker, Sharon Jacobs, Rita Kristiansen, Jim Mayfield, Carole Meyer, Jim Ogborn, Carl and Mitchell Stauffer, and George Vonderheide.**

Pray for those unable to come to worship: **Ailene Bartlett, Ed Brown, Bob and Angie Groom, Pat Janot, Marilyn Johnson, Jeanne Nelson, Darlene Simon, and Kay Wasaff.**

We hold the family and friends of **Joe Beene**, especially **Joyce**, in prayer as they grieve his death.

We hold the family and friends of **Bob Cummings**, especially **Ginny**, in prayer as they grieve his death.

Pray for these loved ones of our congregation: Sam Areheart, Randy Altona, Phyllis Andrews, Carl Baker, Lori Bardey and family, Charles Baugh, Donald and Carol Baum, Robi Bayard, Jeffrey Berry, Sr., Lila Bradley, June Brantley, Carol Bergh, Mary Bloom, Doug Bolick, Kay Braman, Bob Britcher, Amaree Cluff, Judy Drezek, The family of Scott Hadly, Charee Hampton, Sue Hassan and family, Andy Havola, Nick Havola, Kim, Joan and Laurie Heintzelman, Lisa Hill, Doris Hillenbrand, Michelle Holdsworth, Jaxon Ireland, Don Johnson, Connie Kendrick, The Kennedy family, Pat Layton, Marnah Lund, Keara Mahony, Trish Macerelli, Laura Margolin, Barry and Mabel Martin, Ellen Martin, Mabel Mater, Jackie Mazzone, Tom Mifflin, Jimmy Mitchell, Liz Montalvo, Jim Monteith, Bob Myers, Jeanette Osborn, Maricel Paulin, The Peterson family, Janet Popelas, Coral Pumley, Scott Radley, Kurt Recktenwald, Carol Sue Repass, Brian Ritter, Lou Schuster, Pamela Sharp, Kelsey Slay, Vasili Soutoukis, Kenneth and Laura Spencer, Chad Strausbaugh, Al Stern, Monika Stern, Janis Stevenson, George and Jewel Thomas, Karli Wallace Thompson, Jenn Tyson, Matt Weilmuenster, and Elaine Wrich.



Virginia Lutherans

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Virginia Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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www.saintstephenlutheran.net

February 2026

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<i>Treasurer</i>	Brian Agor	757-561-5889
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	email	Finsec@
<i>Congregational Secretary</i>	Jonathan Hallman	757-566-1686

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