



The Quill

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH

Williamsburg, Virginia

January 2026



FAITH IN (POLITICAL) ACTION

In my previous articles, we explored the foundational role of politics in community life, the biblical definitions of justice, *mishpat*, and *tsedaqah*, and the vision of *shalom* as a lived, communal wholeness. We have established that for followers of the Way, seeking justice and peace is not an elective; it is a baptismal vocation.

But how do we move from understanding these concepts to embodying them? How do we exercise our collective and faithful power to ensure that our communities breathe the air of *shalom*?

In the political arena, power is often viewed as the ability to dominate or control. However, as a community of faith, we understand power through the example of Jesus: it is the ability to achieve a purpose through solidarity and service.

Faithful power is collective. While an individual can advocate, the whole body is called to this vocation. When we act together, our power becomes a sign of God's promised future, moving beyond simple legality toward active restoration and the protection of the vulnerable.

Exercising faithful power means recognizing that politics means people. When we align our collective actions with the values of love, dignity, and respect, we create the conditions under which *shalom* can take hold. We live out the values of the Kingdom of God.

As we have done throughout history, from the meetinghouses of the Revolution to the civil rights movement, the church is called to step boldly into the political arena to facilitate the flourishing of all. By exercising our collective power faithfully, we ensure that

justice gives peace its substance, and peace makes space for justice to flourish.

Here are tangible ways we can exercise our collective power to cultivate the "deep peace" Jesus calls us toward:

- **Educate the Body on Local Systems:** To effectively alleviate suffering, we must first understand its cause. Host or attend town hall-style meetings to learn how local policies impact the "quartet of the vulnerable": the widow, orphan, immigrant, and poor.
- **Engage in *Mishpat* Advocacy:** Contact local representatives to advocate for policies that protect the marginalized. Focus on questions that center on the needs of the poor and the oppressed, asking how current decisions impact their daily lives.
- **Practice *Tsedakah* through Community Partnerships:** Build relationships with local organizations that seek radical generosity and active restoration. By aligning our resources with these groups, we strengthen communities and restore the harmed.
- **Facilitate Purely Political Dialogues:** Use the church as a meetinghouse for constructive, non-partisan conversation. Invite community members to discuss challenges like housing or safety through the lens of love, dignity, and respect.
- **Utilize ELCA Resources:** Connect with the **ELCA Advocacy** network and review the **Social Statement on Faith and Civic Life** to find guidance on how our Lutheran identity informs our solidarity with those at the margins.

By taking these steps, we ensure that our faithful power is used to make justice a lived reality rather than just a concept. We do this not as a political party, but as followers of the Way who believe that every person deserves to be treated with the compassion of Christ.

In Christ,
Pastor Jon

CONGREGATION COUNCIL



The December Council Meeting was held on Tuesday, December 9.

The meeting began with a discussion of the survey conducted by the Search Committee as the first step in looking for an additional Pastor, Deacon or other spiritual leader to help in our church. We reviewed what the respondents felt were the strengths, weaknesses and needs as the search begins. There was a discussion of those findings and an acknowledgment that the Council will need to consider the financial aspects of the recruitment process and consider affordability of recruitment of additional pastoral care professionals.

Committees reported on the continued progress with the HVAC System. There is a committee underway to explore a contract for a service to develop an upgraded website. The Finance Committee reported that the pledge campaign conducted by the Stewardship Committee was quite successful with an increased number of pledges and increased amount of money pledged.

The Finance Committee then presented the 2026 budget which was reviewed and approved. In addition, it is an IRS requirement that the Council designate what percentage of the Pastor's compensation is housing allowance and that was also passed.

The Council is planning a retreat on Saturday, January 10.

New Business included the Pastor's Report which highlighted Sharon Powell's session on current immigration challenges in the United States, new members, Holden Evening Prayer for Advent, and a Preschool report. Carpet installation was pending for the Gathering Space area. Collections for 2025 were down

for the year although it was noted that December is traditionally a large collection month due to the holidays and because of IRA contributions at the end of the year. At the same time, with refinancing of the mortgage and other adjustments, expenses are down about ten percent.

Questions may be directed to any Council member.

Bill Dichtel



MEN'S & WOMEN'S BREAKFASTS

- **January 6** – Women are invited to join together for breakfast the first **Tuesday** of this month.
- **January 8** – 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.

JANUARY CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

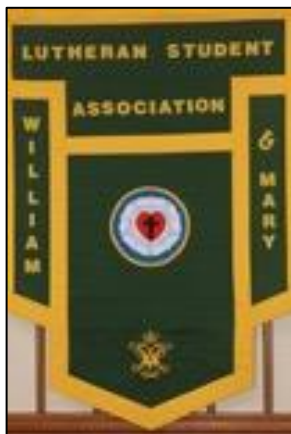
The January Congregational Meeting will be held **following the 11:00 a.m. service on Sunday, January 25**. We will review our mission statement, receive annual reports, and approve a budget. More details forthcoming!

ALL COMMITTEE MEETING:



The Congregation Council is requesting all committees gather for a potluck lunch and meeting **following the 11:00 a.m. service on Sunday, January 18**. Pizza and drinks will be provided (gluten-free option guaranteed); you are welcome to bring a side or dessert (or nothing). We look forward to reviewing the first half of the program year and planning for 2026.

WHAT IS GOING ON AT LSA?



This semester has just concluded as the students have returned home for the holidays. We are blessed with a freshman class of six active members, and a new visitor every week. We continue to provide dinners on Sunday nights, and the students are very appreciative of our hospitality. The dinner resembles an old-fashioned Sunday family dinner as the

group looks forward to checking in with each other. The conversation is lively and the students are getting to know each other and are forming an identity as a group. We also have a weekly Bible Study on Wednesday night with consistent attenders. The Adopt-A-Family has been a wonderful program as all six freshmen have signed up for the extra family connection. The students do frequent the College Room, and the washing machine and dryer get a fair amount of use. The students couldn't pass up an opportunity to venture out together to Busch Gardens for Howl-O-Scream. Eight students braved all the creepy and scary that Busch Gardens could muster.

Our group is on solid re-building ground. We have elected new officers for the 2026 calendar year. They are: Jared Dewey, President; Susanna Carr, Vice President; Lillian Goetz, Treasurer/Secretary; and Sophie Gustafson, Historian. We wish to thank the LSA leaders of 2025: Ellie O'Neill, President; Jared Dewey, Vice-President; Mia Ryan, Treasurer/Secretary and Historian. We are grateful for their participation and leadership in LSA. Our new leaders are already engaged in identifying group activities and are looking forward to a very active second semester.

LSA is blessed to have the support of the people of St. Stephen. Special thanks to the many families that support the Adopt-a-Family and Sunday Dinners. We are grateful for the people of St. Stephen who have welcomed a student into their house and heart. Thank you, Stephanie and Tim Judy, Heidi Flatin, Rosemary Stimson, Diana and J.R. Lyons, Tracy and Bruce Powers, Lori and Tobias Janke, Nancy and Keith Egloff, Mallory Spencer, Beth Grant, Emily and Mike Morgan, Sandy and Gerry Johnson. We also thank the dinner providers: Janke, Powers, Lim/Turner, Morgan, Egloff, Nelson,

Rossiter, Nester, Arnold, and Johnson families for their yummy dinners. LSA is a wonderful outreach to William & Mary and a valuable connection to our community. Thank you all for your support and care for the students.

Gerry Johnson

WINTER BOOK STUDY

Beyond the Bonnet: Little Women Thematic Study



PENGUIN CLASSICS

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Little Women

Join us this January for a unique five-week exploration of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. This study looks beyond the plot to examine the history, morality, and social influences of the March sisters' world, and how those themes still speak to us today. Sessions begin the week of **January 12** with two convenient times: Mondays at 7:00 p.m. or Tuesdays at 2:00 p.m. Participants should be familiar with the story (book or film) beforehand. We will be using the Penguin Classics edition. All perspectives are welcome as we discuss everything from the Civil War to the "Battle of the Sexes." [Click here](#) for more information.



MUSIC NOTES

December Happenings

Karen Ives, Music Director



Our children and their parents present "At the Manger," A Chord Story with Chimes



Ringers Sandy Croushore, Sandy Johnson, Marj Gottschalk-Trone, and Jane deSolms and Ina Berkey on piano accompany the children's anthem "Take This Light"



Caroling at Brookdale with Pastor Jon "directing"



Christmas Caroling at Williamsburg Landing



Marilyn Johnson and Chris PUNCHARD



Ingrid and Ed Brown with their daughter Karen



St. Stephen Ringers (L to R): Terri Larsen, Sandy Croushore, Sandy Johnson, Marj Gottschalk-Trone, Jane deSolms, Kris Eichelberger, George Martin, Jim Larsen, Paul Reier, Corey Knestrick



St. Stephen Ringers (L to R): Sandy Johnson, Kris Eichelberger, Sandy Croushore, Terri Larsen, Marj Gottschalk-Trone, Jane deSolms

STEPHEN MINISTRY AT ST. STEPHEN



Williamsburg Stephen Ministry Class Held at St. Stephen

You probably have already heard that St. Stephen will be hosting the Williamsburg Area Stephen Ministry Course for 2025 beginning on **Tuesday evening, January 6**. Stephen Ministry is a ministry made up of well-trained lay ministers from the congregation. They are trained in thoughtful listening and walking with those in the church who may be going through times of personal crisis or emotional distress. Women minister to women parishioners and men to men. The counseling is supervised but completely confidential. It continues as long as necessary, sometimes with weekly sessions extending for a year or more.

Stephen Ministry was introduced in St. Louis in 1975 by Rev. Dr. Kenneth Haugk, a Missouri Synod Lutheran Pastor and Psychologist. By the time of its 50th anniversary in 2025, 14,000 Protestant and Catholic congregations have developed Stephen Ministries. 2026 is the 32nd anniversary of Stephen Ministry at St. Stephen and a good number of our present parishioners have trained and served in the Stephen Ministry. Currently we have seven women and three men Stephen Ministers on "active duty." I am delighted to report that we have three women from our church participating in the upcoming class!

The Stephen Ministry classes are fairly intensive. They meet every Tuesday night from January 6 until May 26 (with time off for Holy Week). Those classes last two to two- and one-half hours and are lectures, discussions of readings, devotions, play-acting learning and small group discussions. There is also a six-hour Saturday session on May 2 as well.

Uniformly, reviews from those who have taken the course have been very good. Even those who have had patient care or counseling experience before felt that they learned new listening and caring skills that helped them going on in life.

It's NOT TOO LATE! If you would still like to get in on the course call **Bill Dichtel** at (757) 232-5334 or send a text message as soon as possible so we can get you in.

Also, if you are a prior Stephen Minister interested in reactivating, call me as well. We may have a one-hour class for this group if there is enough interest, just to re-group on the main principles of Stephen Ministry and to bring you up to date on where we are now.

Bill Dichtel, Stephen Leader



JANUARY

4	Kenny Spencer	Penelope Sulouff
5	Gayle Spencer	
6	Jim Mayfield	Chris Punchard
7	Judy Joppa	
8	Carole Meyer	Hollie Jones
9	Karen Shoberg	
10	Jeffery Berry	
13	Peter Stauffer	
15	Brad Jefferson	Brandon Jefferson
	Brock Jefferson	Justice Jefferson
16	Julie Jefferson	Jim Nickols
17	Susan Bosworth	Ned Neidlinger
	Mira Powell	
19	Chuck Frey	
20	Susan Neidlinger	
21	Emily Rossiter	
22	Leah Hardenbergh	Julia Mahony
25	Margie Ehrhardt	
26	Tom Witt	
28	Nancy Carter	Tobias Janke
	Ethan Owens	
31	Corey Knestrick	



ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN PRESCHOOL

December has been a joyful month of celebration and learning in the preschool! Our students have been learning about Jesus and the Nativity story, and they joyfully celebrated His birth with cake following their Christmas program. Throughout the month, children made reindeer food, created special gifts for loved ones, and even learned about prepositions—all while having so much fun together.

Please mark your calendars for our next Community Meal on **January 12 from 5:30–7:00 p.m.** We'll be serving a variety of chili, fresh crudité's, and macaroni & cheese. We hope to see you there for a fun evening of fellowship and good food.

Jessica Kimball, Preschool Director





GODPARENTS FOR TANZANIA UPDATE

We have received good news from Kristin Westermann regarding the three students St. Stephen supported at Hai Institute of Technology again this year:

Kristin writes:

I am happy to report that Bernadeta, Suzana, and Charles have graduated with their vocational training certificates this month (November)! The girls now have training in tailoring, and Charles is trained in masonry.



As you can see, these kids have grown a lot over the past two years. (Having three square meals a day at school may have something to do with that!) And they are much more confident, which is lovely to see.

While I don't think life is going to be a breeze for these kids going forward, they now have a skill upon which to build their futures. And they have learned entrepreneurship and life skills that will serve them well.

The two other students you sponsored at Hai Institute, Samwel and Mohammed, are now working as masons. They work with construction crews as day laborers, earning something like 10,000 Tanzanian shillings (about \$4) per day. While that doesn't sound like much to us, it makes a huge difference to them and their families. To put it in perspective, 45% of Tanzanians live on \$2.15 or less per day (which is considered extreme poverty).

I also want to convey greetings and thanks from Mr. Peniel Shali. He is an old friend of G4TZ, a civil engineer, and the founder of Hai Institute of Technology. His dream has always been to help children from poor families acquire skills to help them raise the standard of living for themselves and their families. He is very grateful for your help in sending these young folks out into the world with some training and some hope.

Kristin



STEWARDSHIP ESSENTIALS

On Sunday, January 25, a representative of enCircle, formerly Lutheran Family Services, will report on the organization between services. enCircle offers a variety of services including Minnick Schools, immigration services, advocacy, treatment, foster care, and assistance to people with disabilities in all regions of Virginia. The Tidewater Region office is located in Newport News.

enCircle's mission is to "Empower communities, families, and individuals on their journey to well-being, guided by our belief in the inherent value of all people."

Pastor Jon has recently pointed out the social justice messages in many passages of the Gospel, and enCircle is one organization working toward those ends. There is a category for Lutheran Family Services on the St. Stephen website giving information. For more information or to give directly, see www.encircleall.org.

Susan Williamson



Martin and Margaret Bleck
Tom and Sandy Peterkin

Jack Harris
Tom and Sandy Peterkin



JANUARY 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

1	Jane Gingerich	
11	Sandy Croushore	
12	Barbara Youngk	Emily Morgan
15	Karen Sanderlin	
	Kenny Spencer	
20	Carl Stauffer	
31	Sammi Crittenden	

Others who were baptized in January:
York Doerr

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

PRAYERS



Join your prayers for healing with God's desires for Ingrid Brown, Preston Burton, Kristin Carter, Bob and 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.

Pray for these loved ones of our congregation: Sam Areheart, Randy Altona, Phyllis Andrews, Carl Baker, Charles Baugh, Donald and Carol Baum, Robi Bayard, Jeffrey Berry, Sr., Lila Bradley, June Brantley, Carol Bergh, Mary Bloom, Richard Boger, Doug Bolick, Kay Braman, Bob Britcher, 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, Mabel Mater, Jack Mayfield, 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, Brian Ritter, Lou Schuster, Pamela Sharp, Kelsey Slay, Vasili Soultoukis, 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 Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



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