



January 2012: Monthly news and
events from St. Stephen United
Methodist Church

The Grapevine

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OUR VISION:

to be the
**Hands
Feet &
Heart**
of Jesus Christ

Introducing the New Monthly Grapevine!

Starting with this issue (covering December 2011 and January 2012), St. Stephen will be publishing *The Grapevine* newsletter on a monthly basis.

We're still working out many of the details, as this is a new concept for St. Stephen. So please be patient as we work out the kinks and get this new way of doing the newsletter running smoothly! And, we welcome your feedback! Let Kelly know (kellykeesling@ststephenumc.net) if you have any concerns or suggestions with the new communications. We appreciate your understanding and encouragement as we try this out. Our hope is that communications will be much more efficient and that this newsletter, as well as our other communications, will be better read.

We are a busy church and events and activities come up quickly sometimes. Therefore, we want you to know that there still is a way to communicate information weekly. Our prayer lists, numbers (attendance and financial), and Sunday school lessons will be included in the weekly Sunday bulletin, our website will be updated at least weekly, and our weekly e-mail will continue to be sent to all those for whom we have an e-mail.

Last, but not least, our senior pastor, Tom Latimer, is kicking off a new weekly blog for biblical and theological and other discussions. This will be online in the next week and is a great way to keep in touch with topics that are important to our church as well as our spiritual lives.



Advent Schedule

families with young children. At 7:30 and 11pm, we'll have Christmas Eve Communion and candle lighting. Nursery is provided for the 4:30 and 7:30 services. Our Christmas Eve offering is designated for Crisis Assistance Ministry and the Pastor's Relief Fund.

Holiday Worship Times

On Sunday, December 25 (Christmas Day) and Sunday, January 1 (New Year's Day), we will have one worship service at 10:30am. There will be no Sunday school on either of those days.

Christmas Eve Worship

4:30, 7:30, 11pm

Join us for Christmas
Eve worship on Saturday,
December 24! The 4:30 pm
service is oriented toward

January Preaching/Teaching Series

Our coordinated Sunday school and worship series last January was so well-received, we're going to do it again in January 2012! This time we invite worshippers and Sunday school classes to consider the 8th chapter of Romans.

For the Sundays January 8, 15, 22 & 29, sermon and worship themes will follow Paul's thought through Romans 8:1-17, 8:18-25, 8:26-30 and 8:31-39. Adult classes are invited to study the same passages those Sundays. Helpful study outlines have been distributed to class leaders. Additional resources on the Apostle Paul, his New Testament letters and the letter to the Romans will be available in our church Resource Center (room 31).

In fact, in Romans 8 Paul brings to conclusion his flow of ideas from chapters 1-7. This section of the letter is the closest thing we have to a systematic statement of theology from Paul. He is writing a general statement of belief in the saving work of Jesus Christ including thoughts on sin, righteousness, salvation and the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross.

New Testament scholarship posits that Paul was writing to Christians in Rome whom he had not yet met in anticipation of a visit, perhaps coming to or from Spain. He speaks of his current work to collect funds to support the "mother church" in Jerusalem and his desire to heal the breach between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

Very much both a Roman citizen and a faithful Jew trained as a Pharisee, Paul straddles both worlds with confidence as he writes to a cosmopolitan church in Rome. Likewise, he brings together his Hebrew world view with that of the predominant Greek culture to give us an understanding of Christ that was revolutionary in his day. That is, no one had ever written about Jesus the way Paul did!

So, we are invited to join Paul in the concluding chapter of his essential thought in his letter to the Romans, chapters 1-8. Watch for Paul's interplay of flesh and Spirit in Romans 8:1-17. Consider his exposition of the effect of Christ upon all creation (and us as first fruits) in Romans 8:18-25. Ponder the power of the Spirit to pray for us and the wondrous knowledge of God in Romans 8:26-28. Find renewal and hope in Paul's assertion that nothing can separate us from the love God in Christ Jesus in Romans 8:31-39.

I look forward to sharing time and study with you in January and the Apostle Paul in Romans 8.

Please read these passages each week prior and join us for some lively discussion and spiritual growth!

— *Peace, Tom*

Announcements

Stewardship

If you have not yet turned in your 2012 commitment, please do so as soon as you can. You can mail it to the church office c/o Angela. Your financial pledge is important as we prepare our budget and plan our ministries for 2012.

Staff Holiday Dates

The church office will be closed on Friday, December 23 and Monday, December 26 for the Christmas holiday and on Friday, December 30 for the New Year holiday. The office reopens on Monday, January 2.

2011 Contributions

As we approach the end of the year, please remember that any contributions you wish to have recorded for 2011 must be received in the church office or postmarked by December 31, 2011. Angela will be in the church office until noon on Thursday, December 29 if you would like to bring your contribution. The office will be closed on Friday, December 30.

Passing of the Keys

Thanks for your service to the many ministry leaders who are rotating out of their leadership roles. If you have a key or a set of keys to the church that were issued for your use, please identify who they are from and turn them back in to Nancy Baum in the main office so that they can be passed on to the incoming leaders (or pass your set on to your incoming counterpart and let Nancy know for our records). If you are still serving in a role where you will need to keep your key, please let the office know that as well.

Announcements

Saints Alive! Luncheon

All senior adults are invited to our monthly covered dish luncheon on Tuesday, January 17 at 11:30am in the Fireside Room. Bring a dish and join us for a delicious meal and some good fellowship. No RSVP is necessary. If you would like to receive a postcard reminder, contact Nancy Baum in the church office.

Wednesday Nights

January 18-March 28

Wednesday night meals and programming for adults resumes on January 18 and goes through March 28. Check the website and watch for an e-mail in early January for more information on classes.

For meal reservations, please make your reservations by noon on Monday each week (beginning the week of January 18). Call the reservation line at 704-364-3260 x3. If you would like a standing reservation for every week, please indicated that when you make your reservation. We start fresh each semester, so **even if you had a standing resedrvation in the fall, you need to make a new reservation for ths spring.** Reservations are not needed for the February 22 (Ash Wednesday) pancake supper.

UMW Soup Lunch

Sunday, January 29

Don't winter weather and a warm bowl of soup go hand in hand? You're in luck! The United Methodist Women are sponsoring a Soup Luncheon on Sunday, January 29 from 11:00 a.m.-1:15 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall. Come enjoy homemade soups, bread, desserts and fellowship! We are gladly accepting donations to benefit Bethlehem Center-Charlotte 2012 Summer Camperships. Come out and enjoy some comfort food and give some comfort to some deserving kids!

Small Group Ministries

20-30 Something Ministry

"Our new "20-30 Somethings" ministry is off to a great start! Lots of interest, excitement, and anticipation of things to come! If you are interested in exploring this new opportunity for fellowship and spiritual growth, contact the church office and ensure we have your contact information and your correct e-mail address. We are currently meeting Sunday mornings at 10:00am in Room 19 (across from Tom Latimer's office) for a time of sharing, planning, and creating our future! All ideas are welcome, so invite your friends who are looking for something new in their lives! IF YOU'RE A 20-30 SOMETHING join us for these next Sunday gatherings.

Saints Alive! Christmas Luncheon

All senior adults are invited to the Saints Alive! monthly fellowship covered dish luncheon on Tuesday, December 20th at 11:30am in the Fireside Room. John Blizzard will entertain us with a program of Christmas music. Bring a dish and join us! No RSVP is necessary. If you would like to receive a postcard reminder each month, contact Nancy Baum in the church office.

Youth Ministries

For information about youth programming, contact Brandon Dirks, Minister with Youth, at brandondirks@ststephenumc.net.

Youth Sweatshirts

If you didn't get your hoodie or sweatpants last year, we still have some left (limited quantities and sizes). E-mail Kelly (kgkeesling@carolina.rr.com) with your order request and she can let you know if we have it.

Next Large Group: Jan. 8

Be looking for our next Large Group on January 8 ... A Rockin' New Year's! Save all your New Year's decorations, hats, blowers, etc ... and come dressed for a New Year's party ... UMYF style. We also welcome the Youth Praise Band from First Baptist Church in Huntersville!

The Grapevine is a monthly publication of St. Stephen United Methodist Church

Editor: Kelly Keesling (KellyKeesling@ststephenumc.net)

Publication deadlines

Grapevine..... 2nd Tuesday at 9am
Bulletin..... Tuesday at 9am
Weekly e-mail Tuesday at 9am

Announcements must be legibly hand written or sent digitally (by e-mail). Maximum 100 words. **No verbal notices.**

For information on joining our church family, or scheduling a baptism or wedding, please call our church office.

Church office..... 704-364-1824
Fax 704-364-0014
Preschool Office..... 704-365-4116
24-hr Reservation Line... 704-364-3260
(press 3 for reservations)
Website.....www.ststephenumc.net

Greenway Park Partnership

It has become one of my favorite outings each week when I get to work with my cute kindergarten boys. I highly recommend it to all, especially retired folks. —Julia Thomas

Thanks to the 23 St. Stephen members who are giving an hour a week to mentor or tutor at Greenway Park Elementary. The kids are benefiting and the teachers are grateful; but, because the need is so great, we need many more volunteers. This is a high poverty school with many single parent households that have little time to devote to any more than the child's basic needs. It's hard to overemphasize the impact an hour a week with a mentor or tutor can have on a child's life. Men take note! Many of these boys have either no male role model or one who models the wrong behavior. Last February I started mentoring an eighth grader who was failing most of his courses. He finished the last quarter with straight A's, and I did nothing more than listen and encourage him at our weekly lunches.

As Julia points out, the rewards go both ways — and they can be for a lifetime. All that is required is the desire to help a

child, the ability to listen, and the willingness to give an hour a week. Please contact Fred Hymes (704/321-9321 or fhymes@wfhasociates.com) to volunteer.

Missions

Room in the Inn

Our ministry with Room in the Inn has begun! Each Friday in December, and Friday and Saturdays in January through March, we host up to 10 homeless guests overnight. Help is needed in many areas, including making meals, setting up and taking down bedding, driving the van, and staying overnight. If you are interested or want more information, see the missions page of our website or contact Brian Barger at 704-841-8936 or bbarger@carolina.rr.com.

Blood Drive

Sunday, January 29

Our first blood drive for 2012 will be Sunday, Jan. 29 from 8am-1pm in the Youth Ministry Center. After a busy holiday season and with winter weather as well, blood supplies are very low in our area. Please plan to join us and be a part of this life saving effort.

All are welcome, especially first time donors! If you are unable to donate blood but are still willing to help, we will need healthy snacks for donors in the cafe. Please contact Kathy Clarke at 704-364-9056. Sign up sheets will be in Sunday school classes and in bulletins beginning January 8. We appreciate and thank you in advance for your participation!
— Donna & Tony Taylor

Stocking Stuffing

A HUGE thank you to everyone who participated in the stocking project that benefited the Salvation Army's Christmas Bureau in helping families in need. St. Stephen collected 1,027 stockings which exceeded our goal! A big thank you goes to the Expressions Class and the Journey Class. They both tied for first place so the stocking award will be shared. Second place goes to the Unity Class. We want to uplift our Boy Scout troop 118 for collecting 347 stockings. We also had extra effort from the Preschool and Cub Scouts who contributed 150 stockings combined. Thanks and Merry Christmas to all.



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