

Vision of St. Stephen

February 2026

Let no debt remain outstanding,
except the continuing debt to love one another,
for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

Romans 13:8

St. Stephen Lutheran Church
7800 Erie St. • Sylvania, OH
(419)885-1551
www.ststephenlutheran.church

Pastor: Rev. Beth Ferne Johnson
sslcpastor@buckeye-express.com

What's in a name?

I've been thinking about our congregation's name, St. Stephen, lately. You may know that Stephen was the first martyr, the first person killed for their faith, in the early church. That all by itself is a good reason to name a church after him.

But Stephen was more than just a martyr. Prior to his death, the church in Jerusalem was having some growing pains. Many widows, both Jewish and non-Jewish, had become Christian and joined the church. Following Jesus' command to love one another, and Jesus's example of feeding the hungry, the church was distributing food to these women. But some conflicts arose because the disciples were too stretched for time to distribute the food. So, they decided to find seven men to feed people. Stephen, "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" is the first one of the seven listed in Acts 6.

Stephen and these 6 other men took up the cause of caring for the widows, providing them their daily bread, providing a sense of dignity and love. Stephen and these others were living out their faith—loving one another as God has first loved them.

Our synod has named 2026 as the "way of love", encouraging us to lean into the example of St. Stephen and countless other people who have shaped us—to grow in our love for each other. And to grow in living out that love towards our neighbors.

So when you next walk into the building and see the painting of St. Stephen in his last minutes, be sure and look around for the work St. Stephen is involved with—the collections of personal care items for people in Salem's neighborhood, the soup collection for Lutheran Social Services, the warm clothing waiting to be shared, the quilt ready to be tied to be sent to people in crisis around the world—these are tangible signs of how we love our neighbors. And we also love our neighbors in less obvious ways—by lifting them up in prayer, by calling and texting when people are going through a rough time, by sending cards and greetings, by bringing meals and offers of help, by asking folks—how are you really doing—in these and in countless other ways, we live into the Way of Love, following Jesus, who shows us what is in God's heart—love for this world and for all of us.

Peace,
Beth Ferne Johnson, pastor

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Spiritual Growth

WEDNESDAY BIBLE STUDY

Interested in the book of Isaiah? Other than the Gospels and Book of Psalms, readings from Isaiah are found more frequently than other biblical books in our Sunday schedule of readings. Why is that? Isaiah speaks of God's yearning for humans to be aligned more closely to God's agenda, how God is mourning the distance that separates us, and how God holds out hope that things will change. All these themes run through the book and we'll look at them together, verse by verse! So, bring yourself, your questions, and a Bible if you have one to our library Wednesdays at 11:00 a.m. as we think about this interesting book together!

"THE CHOSEN" BIBLE STUDY

After some delays due to weather, The Chosen Season 4 is starting on Tuesday, February 3rd!! This opportunity to watch this popular show, which focuses on Jesus's ministry prior to Holy Week, and then have a group discussion continues each Tuesday at 6:30-8:00. Many thanks to Jamile Shibley, who is leading our conversation each week. If you haven't seen previous seasons, you can easily catch up or just start fresh with this season. We meet in the north classroom, so you're invited to enter the building through the fellowship hall door.



CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE

Our annual event celebrates the loving partnership spouses have found together. It provides couples with an opportunity to renew their marriage vows during our worship service. This year, we're opening up the opportunity to renew vows to all of our couples, regardless of how many years you're celebrating. Corsages and a porch delivery of special treats will be shared with those who have celebrated a significant anniversary from Valentine's Day 2025 to now! Please sign up on the bulletin board or call Janell and ask her to add your name to the list in the narthex! Our celebration of marriage will be on Sunday, February 15th.

If you'd like to help assemble and deliver the packages, please sign up on the bulletin board and meet at St. Stephen around 11:30 a.m. on February 14th!

ASH WEDNESDAY

Hearing the words, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return", as a cross of ashes is placed on your forehead is a focus of our Ash Wednesday worship. We'll be gathering together on February 18, at 12 noon and 7:00 p.m. While communion and ashes will be available at both services, the noon service will be spoken, without music. For many, this is one of their favorite worship experiences during the year. If you've never experienced it, please consider coming this year for worship.

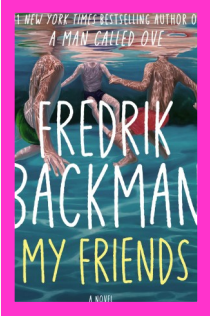
WOMEN'S RETREAT

Although we had begun to plan a women's retreat for February, we're not able to provide that opportunity this winter. However, we'd like to have a one day retreat later in 2026--so keep on the look-out for information to come. If you'd be interested in helping plan a retreat, please speak with Pastor Beth or Beth Madden. Thanks!

Fun & Fellowship

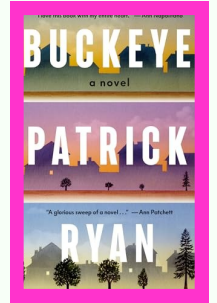
JOY Lunch

Ready for a good lunch and conversation? Join the JOY club on Tuesday, February 17th at The Seafood Restaurant, 5504 West Alexis, Sylvania at noon! Sign up on the bulletin board, or contact Pat Hoehing to add your name to the list!



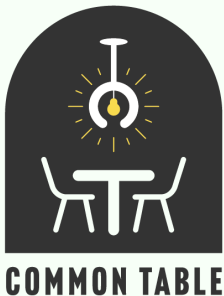
BOOK GROUP

Since the cold weather invaded, cancelling our January gathering, and we still wanted to discuss My Friends by Frederik Backman, we've chosen to have 2 books to focus on for our February meeting. If you've read either My Friends and/or Buckeye by Patrick Ryan, please join in on Thursday, February 26th, at 7:00 p.m.



COFFEE AND CONVERSATION

Looking for an opportunity to connect with others at St. Stephen? You're invited to come to Chick-fil-A on Central/McCord on the 4th Saturday of the month from 9:30-10:30ish for conversation. We've been doing this for years, but as schedules have changed we're moving to a once a month opportunity. You can order food to enjoy, or not, as your mood and stomach might dictate! Our next opportunity will be on February 28th. Look for St. Stephen folks along the back wall, near the bathrooms!



COMMON TABLE

A new intentionally ecumenical and inclusive community is being launched in the Toledo area for young adults aged 18-35! Common Table meets once a month to spend time asking challenging questions of ourselves, our faith, and our world. Whether you're looking for community, curiosity, or just a fun night out—you belong at the table. The next gathering will be February 24th, at 6:00 p.m. at the Reynolds Corner Branch Library (4833 Dorr Street) for a Game Night.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Fun Friday, 7-10, March 6
Sanctuary Cleaning Day: March 28 after Via Di Cristo meeting
Palm Sunday, March 29
Maundy Thursday worship, 7 on April 2
Good Friday, 12 and 7 on April 3
Easter breakfast and worship on April 5
Euchre, 7 on March 20 and April 17

Outreach

Are You Ready For Some...Soup?

Our annual SouperBowl Sunday arrives on February 9th as we feast together on your soup creations! This warm event also raises money and donations of canned soup for the Lutheran Social Services food pantry! So, bring in canned soup and add them to the round table in the narthex! We'll also have a soup pot ready to accept monetary donations during our meal together. If you know what soup you're planning to make and bring, please sign up on the narthex bulletin board!



LSS Cleaning Event

We'll be helping deep clean the food pantry at Lutheran Social Services on Saturday, March 21st from 10 a.m. to 11:30ish. Our presence there has been a great help to the staff at LSS, as they are seeing an increase in our neighbor's requesting assistance from the food pantry. If you'd like to carpool there, please meet in the church parking lot at 9:30 a.m.



Euchre/Puzzle Night

On March 20th, we'll be gathering for euchre at 7:00 p.m. If you're not a euchre player, but love puzzles, we'll have a table devoted to assembling one! If neither of those options appeal to you, bring a board game you love, and we'll try it out. Mark your calendars for another Euchre/puzzle nights on April 17.



Thank You!

Thank you to everyone who has donated warm winter clothing for our drive! During the cold snap, we were able to contribute clothes to the Warming Center at Grace Lutheran. Ruth Moeller also helped to drop off items at King's Closet and Sylvania Area Family Services. A Thrivent Action team also helped to buy new winter clothing in requested sizes for SAFS.



WORKING WITH OLIVET

Pastor Beth is currently working with Olivet, visiting members at home and in the hospital, during their time of transition. For the past several months, she has visited about 2 people per week and has been on call one day a week for any emergencies that need a pastoral response. In exchange for the time, Olivet has been sending a check to St. Stephen that is averaging \$600 a month. Pastor Beth is still keeping Fridays as her day off, but she is working these Olivet visits into her work for St. Stephen.

In Loving Memory



Mike Ball

Mike Ball first came to St. Stephen with his wife Debbie in 2018. They were moving back to Toledo to be closer to family after living for years in Las Vegas. Mike loved music, especially playing the drums and going to concerts. A few months after Debbie's death in 2019, Mike moved to Charter Assisted living and then to The Grove at Oakleaf Village. Mike died on December 30, 2025, and following his wishes, there was no service and no obituary published. Tina Williams, Mike's sister in law, survives him.

Church Finances

ESTATE PLANNING

To ensure St. Stephen's continues to share the good news of Jesus into future generations, please consider including a bequest to St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Sylvania in your estate planning. Thank you for your generosity!

2025 GIVING STATEMENTS

The year end giving statements will be available for pick up in the Narthex starting on February 15! Please review your statement, and if there are any issues don't hesitate to contact Janell in the office! If you need your statement mailed to you, please contact Janell as well.

Administrative News

LEVEL
1

Roads are hazardous,
drive carefully

LEVEL
2

Drive only
if necessary

LEVEL
3

Roads closed to
non-emergency
personnel

WINTER WEATHER

A reminder that if Lucas County happens to be at a Level 3 snow emergency on a Sunday morning, we will not meet for worship. Instead, Pastor Beth will attempt to livestream her sermon on Facebook from home. In case of a Level 1 or 2, we will hold worship and if our tech people can get here, we will livestream as well—but feel free to watch from home! For **non-worship activities**, if Lucas County is at a level 2 or 3, they are cancelled. If a Level 1, use your own personal discretion.

NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

As always our newsletter deadline for anything you want to be added is the 2nd Tuesday in the month. So for **April 2026** Newsletter please have all your **items submitted by February 10.**

NEWS
LETTER

Prayer

Please God, help us to be
patient with each other
and to never give up on
the love we have. Help us
to grow in our
understanding of your
love for us. Amen.

COMMUNITY PRAYERS

Wolf—Stomach Cancer
Laura—Healing & Comfort
Ali—Guidance & Comfort
Peggy—Comfort & Peace
Mark—Comfort & Guidance
Bill—Recovery & Strength
Diane—Healing & Comfort
Libby—Healing & Comfort
Julie R.—Breast Cancer
Ella—Healing & Comfort
Nancy P.—Healing & Comfort
Mandy—Comfort & Peace
Larry W.—Healing & Comfort
Pearson Family—Comfort & Peace
Diana—Healing
Sue—Healing & Comfort
Tim—Peace & Healing
Don—Healing & Comfort
Dan—Healing & Comfort
Lisa—Healing
Brenda—Healing

All Victims of Trauma and War

Fun

ALL IN GOOD FUN

For this Valentine's day
Jesus asks you...



BIBLE QUIZ

1 Corinthians is the _____ letter Paul wrote to the church in Corinth?

(Answer page 9)

- A. First
- B. Second
- C. Third
- D. Fourth

ARE YOU OKAY?

If you find yourself in need of emergency supplies or in need of someone to talk to, please don't hesitate to call the church office and we will assist you however we can or direct you to resources that may be able to help.

Council

2026 Council Members

<i>President</i>	Marilyn Scuralli
<i>Vice President</i>	Tom Dangelo
<i>Secretary</i>	
<i>Treasurer</i>	Kathie Tefft

Ministry Liaisons will be finalized at our February meeting:

Christian Education

Finance

Prayer, Praise, Worship

Property

Staff Support

Stewardship/Evangelism

Technology

Youth & Family Ministry

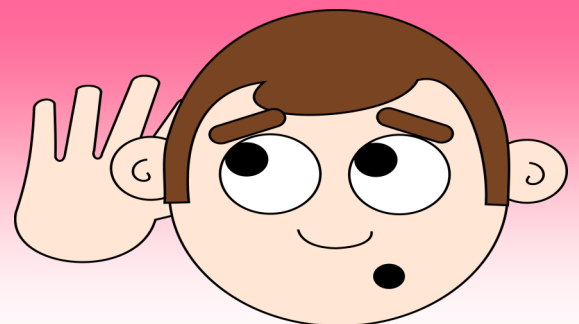
Social Ministry

Thank you to all the members of our council:

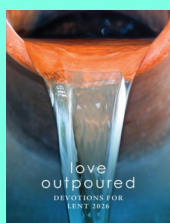
Pastor Beth, Marilyn Scuralli, Tom Schmidt, Beth Madden, Tom Dangelo, Joan Haddox, Kathy Aldrich, and Carol Turvey

HEARING ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Hearing assistance equipment for up to 8 users available for anyone who needs help hearing the service better. Please ask Jeremy Hopkins or anyone who uses the equipment for assistance.



Steve's Bulletin Board



The 2026 Devotionals for Lent will be here in the next two weeks and will be placed in the Narthex for pick up!

BAG RECYCLING

Recycling Bags- Have you noticed a big box in the narthex for recycling bags? Our local Lion's Club is collecting 500 pounds of plastic bags (many types of plastic bags are accepted: grocery and shopping bags, plastic envelopes from on-line shopping etc.). The bags will be made into a Trex bench (recycled plastic "wood") placed at Sylvania Area Family Services and at the Sight Center. Each bench is made up of 500 pounds of plastic bags!

Did We Miss Your Birthday?

Have we missed your birthday or baptism anniversary? If so, we don't have it in the church database! Please let the church office know, via phone or e-mail, so our records will be complete! Thank you for your help!

Bible Quiz Answer

B. Second

February Celebrations

Baptismal Birthdays

2/1 Jim Boldt
2/8 Kathie Tefft
2/8 Lynn Tefft
2/19 Amber Mercer
2/22 Richie Johnson

Birthdays

2/3 Dave Aldrich
2/5 Nancy Pfau
2/6 Mollie McCoy
2/19 John Lock
2/23 Tricia Kunkel
2/25 Joan Paxton
2/28 Jeremy Hopkins

February 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship/Baptism	2 5:30 PM Coun- cil	3 6:30 PM Chosen Study	4 11:00 AM Bible Study	5	6	7
8 Souper Bowl Sunday 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship 11:30 AM Soup Lunch After Worship	9	10 6:30 PM Chosen Study	11 11:00 AM Bible Study	12	13	14 11:30 Cookie Delivery
15 Celebration of Marriage 9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship	16	17 12:00 PM Joy Lunch 6:30 PM Chosen Study	18 11:00 AM Bible Study 12 PM Ash Wednesday 7PM Ash Wednesday	19	20	21
22 9:15 AM Gathering Space 10:30AM In-Sanctuary/Online Worship	23	24 6:30 PM Chosen Study	25 11:00 AM Bible Study 7:00 PM Lenten	26 7:00 Book Group	27	28 9:30 AM Coffee and Conversation