



Saint Stephen the Martyr PNCC PARISH NEWSLETTER



20 ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH LANE, READING PA 19607 - DECEMBER 2024

Advent and Holiday Season is upon us...

December 1 marks the first Sunday of Advent. While most of us are caught in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, it also signals a busy time in the liturgical calendar.

Advent Sundays are December 1, 8, 15 & 22.

Christmas will be celebrated on Christmas Eve on Tuesday December 24, and Christmas Day, Wednesday, December 25.

St. Stephen's Day, commemorating the patron of our parish, St. Stephen the Martyr, will be Thursday, December 26.

Penitential Devotions are set for Saturday, December 14 at 7 pm, and the YMS of R Semi-annual Egg Sandwich Sale will take place the following Day, Sunday, December 15 after both Masses. The men's group semi-annual sale is a world-famous creation of eggs, ham and cheese on a kaiser roll. It is yummy!

PLANS FOR HOLIDAY FOOD SALE

This year we will try to provide pierogi, kielbasa and halushki for sale for your holiday meal plans.

Hopefully, you have a flyer explaining how the whole plan will work. To be determined is whether the pierogi will be made by members of the parish or if they will be out-sourced from a local Polish market. Pick up a flyer, or read about it in the bulletin, or see Tom Schalata.

Let us not forget the Bishop Hodur Choir. They do an excellent job each Sunday providing us with songs of inspiration during Mass.

With the many special services slated this month, another new voice or two, would be not only welcome, but greatly appreciated. Please consider joining this very important organization in our parish. Choir practices will be announced. Watch the weekly bulletin.



**MESSAGE
FROM FR. SR.
DONALD E.
WUNDERLICH**



**UPCOMING
EVENTS,
PRAYER LIST
& CALENDAR**



The Season of Advent and the Advent Candles!

The history of Advent is complex. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means "coming". The season of Advent began in the 4th century as a time to prepare new Christians for baptism at the Feast of Epiphany in January.

Early Christians prepared for baptism through prayer, fasting, and penance over a 40-day period. This period was sometimes called "Lent of St. Martin" because it began on St. Martin's Day on November 11.

By the 6th century, Roman Christians associated Advent with the coming of Christ, but not his birth in Bethlehem. It wasn't until the Middle Ages that Advent became explicitly linked to Christmas.

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The "Woody Woodpecker Report" & Other News

The Parish Committee held its monthly meeting Sunday, November 24 in the Fellowship Hall. Here are some of the highlights of that meeting:

✓ **Woodpecker Damage:** No new damage has been reported on the church and rectory buildings. Kevin reported two new holes need to be repaired, but at least for the time being there are no new signs. Presently, it is not known whether the paint is doing its job or if the woodpeckers are on hiatus. Stay tuned!

✓ **RECTORY CHIMNEY
REPAIR REQUIRED**

In a related matter, during the painting of the rectory it was evident that the chimney needed repair of stucco, etc. An estimate of \$5,800 was received, but other estimates will be accepted in the spring for consideration.

Cont'd on Page 2

December Calendar Ushers us into the Holiday Season!

Heading in to the holiday season, the parish calendar continues to be very active for members of St. Stephen's.

December's activities include: Advent (Dec. 1, 8, 15 & 22), ANS Meeting (Dec. 1), Penitential Devotions (Dec. 14), YMS of R Egg Sandwich Sale (Dec. 15), Polish Food Sale (*See story on right and inside), Parish Committee Meeting (Dec. 22), Manger Set-up (*Check w/Ned Kotula), Holiday Church Decorating (Dec. 22, 23 - *check with Sally Traczuk), Christmas Eve (Dec. 24), Christmas Mass (Dec. 25), St. Stephen's Day (Dec. 26)

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*New Year's
*Opaltek Dinner
*Annual Meeting

Christmas Food Sale Possible!

There is some interest in making some small batches of pierogies, etc. for parish members **only** this holiday season.

We are testing to see if there is interest in making a small quantity of potato, sauerkraut and cheese pierogies, and possibly some halushki & kielbasa from a Polish butcher shop.

There are sign-up sheets in the vestibule for possible orders and volunteers to make the items to be sold.

This will be one day only, Friday, December 13 or Saturday, Dec. 14. The fillings will already be made.

Quantities will be limited and those who volunteer will receive a discount off the price.

This is short notice, but we will try this out and possibly expand on the idea in the future.

Contact Tom Schalata for more info! *See Calendar p. 4

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FROM THE ST. STEPHENS PHOTO ALBUM...

Here a few photos from recent events at St. Stephen's

1. Edgar Aviles receives First Holy Communion with Fr. Sr. Donald
2. Borah Family celebrates Edgar's First Communion, November 3



3. Prime Bishop Anthony Mikovsky celebrates the Sacrament of Confirmation, November 17

4. Scarlett "Ann" Sadowski confirmed by the Prime Bishop

5. Confirmation, Scarlett Sadowski
6. 100-year-old Edward Czechowski, of St. Stephen's, reflects on a special Veterans Day!



7. Tom Schalata leads Veterans Service Breakfast, Nov. 10

8. Captain Brandon R. Sweeney guest speaker at Veterans Service.
9. Approximately 30-plus attend 2024 Veterans Breakfast.



MESSAGE FROM FR. SR. DONALD E. WUNDERLICH

ADVENT - CONT'D FROM PAGE 1



Advent is often celebrated with themes of hope, peace, love, and joy. Advent wreaths are traditionally made from evergreen leaves, such as pine or fir, and symbolize God's infinite love. The five candles on an Advent wreath each represent a Christian concept and a theme for each week of Advent:

The Prophet's Candle - The first candle, which is usually purple, symbolizes hope and the anticipation of Christ's coming. It pays homage to the prophets, particularly Isaiah, who foretold the birth of Christ.

The Bethlehem Candle - The second candle, which is also usually purple, symbolizes peace and preparation. It commemorates Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

The Shepherd's Candle - The third candle, which is usually pink, symbolizes joy. It marks the midpoint of Advent on the third Sunday of Advent.

The Angel's Candle - The fourth candle, which is usually purple, symbolizes peace. It marks the final week of Advent and serves as a reminder of the angel's message, "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men" (Luke 2:14).

Christ's Candle - The white candle symbolizes light and purity and is lit on Christmas Day. It represents Christ as being the light of the world.

Advent is the season that leads up to Jesus' birth, starting four Sundays before Christmas and ending on Christmas Day. The dates of Advent change slightly each year.

Advent wreaths are circular and are usually made of evergreen leaves, which represent the hope of eternal life brought by Jesus Christ.

God Bless! *Wesołych Świąt i*

Szczęśliwego Nowego Roku ...Fr. Sr. Don



- ✓ ALTAR REPAIR COMMITTEE is still on hold.
- ✓ RECTORY & CHURCH REPAIRS: Kevin Grossman will look into the issue with the leaking trap in the bathroom. On the subject of church maintenance and repairs, the following issues were discussed:
 - ▶ Harold is coming to check on the water heater issues.
 - ▶ Annual maintenance on the heating furnace is set for Dec. 3
 - ▶ Fire Extinguishers have been serviced.
 - ▶ Mike Waltman will be coming in to replace the seal on the floor mixer used in pierogi-making.
- ✓ KNIGHT'S CLOSET PROJECT: Janet Katinowsky informed the

parish committee that during the next couple of weeks a push would be made to appeal for donations for the Knight's Closet Project, which benefits students in need from Reading High School. She noted that the holiday season usually puts a high demand on items collected due to the limited resources of the students, who depend on the project. Some of the needs include personal hygiene products, snacks and nutrition bars, drinks (such as water and Gatorade), Christmas candy, and other useful items. A motion was passed by the Parish Committee to donate \$50 for the purchase of additional items. The Y.M.S. of R. also agreed to donate \$50, as well. Janet requested that project also be promoted in the weekly bulletin to collect donations from members of the parish, also. She stated, "The items will be dropped off at the high school around December 15 or shortly thereafter."

PARISH COMMITTEE MEETING: The next Parish Committee Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 22 at 11 AM in the Fellowship Hall due other activities being held on Dec. 15.



Kevin Grossman: Still recovering from shoulder injury from a fall off the ladder. Please wish him a speedy recovery. 17 W Madison St., 2nd Fl, Mohnton, PA 19540.

Ed Czechowski: A St. Stephen's member and a WW2 Vet recently celebrated 100th Birthday. Send him a card: 1311 Fern Ave. Reading, PA 19607.

*If you know of anyone in the parish that could use a friendly note of cheer or have news we should know about, please let us know. We'll share it with the rest of our St. Stephen's family. Just like any other family would do!

News You Can Use!

Help
Greet
Service

CONT'D FROM PAGE ONE

ANGEL TREE IS BACK AGAIN

"Angel Tree" which features gift donations for local Senior Citizens is back again this year. Arranged by the Berks Co. Office of Aging. Deadline to return wrapped gifts is December 8th. Place your gift in the designated upstairs classroom.

END OF YEAR... ALREADY?

The calendar tells us that 2024 is drawing to a close. A few friendly reminders...

Parish Organizations- start getting your annual reports together for the Annual Parish Meeting, January 2025!

Year-To-Date General Fund Financial Report-

YTD Income: \$107,296.43

YTD Expenses: -\$137,664.75

NET INCOME (\$30,368.32)

Also, while there are no parish dues requirements, please remember to make your final contributions for the year for the benefit of our parish. Your generosity is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

UKRAINIAN RELIEF UPDATE

Finally, a date has been set to deliver much needed items to the Ukrainian Relief Effort. Please make your final donations by Sunday, December 8.

The items will be delivered to the Ukrainian American Relief Organization in Philadelphia on Tuesday, December 10. *The kielbasa for the Holiday Food Sale will be picked up in the city at that time!

An Advent Thought...



**Come and worship!
And invite the Holy Spirit to guide your daily prayer and meditation each day.**

O come, O come, Emmanuel!

Who was St. Stephen the Martyr?

Stephen is first mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as one of the Seven Deacons, who were appointed by the Apostles to distribute food and charitable aid to poorer members of the community in the early church.

According to Orthodox belief, he was the eldest and is therefore called "archdeacon."

The reason for the appointment of the deacons is stated to have been dissatisfaction among Hellenistic Jews that their widows were being slighted in preference to Hebrew ones in the daily distribution of food.

Since the name Stephanos is Koine Greek, it has been assumed that he was one of these Hellenistic Jews.

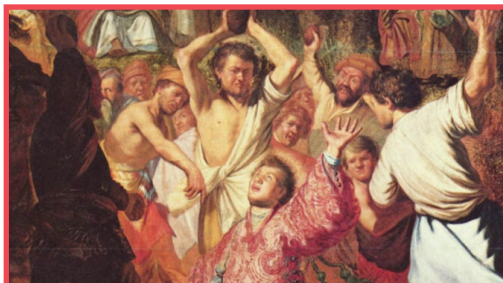
Stephen is stated to have been full of faith and the Holy Spirit and to have performed miracles among the people.

It seems to have been among synagogues of Hellenistic Jews that he performed his teachings and "signs and wonders" since it is said that he aroused the opposition of the Synagogue of the Libertines, and "of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them that were of Cilicia and Asia."

Members of these synagogues had challenged Stephen's teachings, but Stephen had bested them in debate. Furious at this humiliation, they suborned false testimony that Stephen had preached blasphemy against Moses and God. They dragged him to appear before the Sanhedrin, the supreme legal court of Jewish elders, accusing him of preaching against the Second Temple and the Torah. Stephen is said to have been unperturbed, his face looking like "that of an angel."

In a long speech to the Sanhedrin comprising almost the whole of Acts 7, Stephen presents his view of the history of the Israelites. The God of glory, he says, appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia, thus establishing at the beginning of the speech

one of its major themes, that God does not dwell only in one particular building (meaning the Temple). Stephen recounts the stories of the patriarchs in some depth and goes into even more detail in the case of Moses. God



appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and inspired Moses to lead his people out of Egypt.

Nevertheless, the Israelites turned to other gods. This establishes the second main theme of Stephen's speech, Israel's disobedience to God. Stephen faced two accusations: that he had declared that Jesus would destroy the Temple in Jerusalem and that he had changed the customs of Moses.

Stephen denounces his listeners as "stiff-necked" people who, just as their ancestors had done, resist the Holy Spirit. "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of the angels, and have not kept it."

The stoning of Stephen

The account is that the crowd could contain their anger no longer, and were determined to punish Stephen for his actions. However, Stephen looked up and cried, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God." He said that the recently resurrected Jesus was standing by the side of God.

The people from the crowd, who threw the first stones, laid their coats down so as to be able to do this, at the feet of a young man named Saul (later identified as Paul the Apostle).

Stephen prayed that the Lord would receive his spirit and his killers be forgiven, sank to his knees, and "fell asleep."

Saul "was consenting unto his death." In the aftermath of Stephen's death, the remaining disciples except for the apostles fled to distant lands, many to Antioch.

Location of the martyrdom of Stephen

The exact site of Stephen's stoning is not mentioned in Acts; instead there are two different traditions. One, claimed by noted French archaeologists Louis-

Hugues Vincent (1872–1960) and Félix-Marie Abel (1878–1953) to be ancient, places the event at Jerusalem's northern gate, while another one, dated by Vincent and Abel to the Middle Ages and no earlier than the 12th century, locates it at the eastern gate. St. Stephen was the first Christian martyr of the early church.

The association of Stephen with our parish

According the history of our congregation, when the parish was first established, many parishioners from other churches in Reading treated the organizers of this new PNCC house of worship badly. There was name-calling, street fights and even stone-throwing.

Due to this turbulent response from the community, Fr. Cybulski, the first pastor, suggested the name of St. Stephen the Martyr, when the original parish committee sought for an appropriate name for the church.

Fr. Sr. Edward Ratajack, visited the site of the eastern gate, on a trip to the Holy Land, and brought back with him a stone from the place where it is said his martyrdom took place. That stone is on the table beside the St. Stephen statue in the front of the church.

We encourage you to celebrate the feast of St. Stephen, December 26, pause for a moment to reflect on his holy life, and remember the founders of our parish!

Upcoming EVENTS

Meetings

✓ **Y.M.S. OF R.** (Men's Group)

To be announced if necessary

✓ **ANS : LADIES ADORATION SOC.**

Sunday, Dec. 1 after 9:30 Mass

PICNIC COMMITTEE

Nothing Scheduled

PARISH COMMITTEE.

Sun., Dec. 22, 11am in the Hall

✓ **MISSION COMMISSION**

None Scheduled

✓ **BOOK CLUB**

None Scheduled until January

✓ **UKRAINIAN RELIEF**

Donations to be Delivered 12/10

✓ **SUNDAY MASSES**

Sun. Dec. 1, 8, 15, 22, 29

@ 8 & 9:30 am

*Please refer to the weekly bulletin for new announcements, changes in dates, times, etc. Thank you for your cooperation!

Events/Activities

✓ Sunday, Dec. 15 - after each Mass YMS of R Egg Sandwich Sale Breakfast in Fellowship Hall Egg, ham and cheese on a kaiser roll with fixin's: (lettuce, toma to, onion & a drink) \$6.00 each!

LOOKING AHEAD TO NEXT MONTH

● Sunday January 5- Opaltek Dinner & Parish Christmas Party details to be announced.

● Sunday, January 26 @ 11 am -Annual Parish Meeting



PARISH ORGANIZATIONS & CONTACTS

The following parish organizations are always seeking new members to assist with projects and to offer new ideas. These include:

Altar Flowers Donations

Carole Urban

The ANS (Ladies' Adoration Society)

St. Stephen's Book Club & Mission

Commission: *Sally Traczuk*

Bishop Hodur Choir:

Cheryl Heckman

Financial Sec.: *Lynn Dowd*

Knight's Closet Reading HS Program

Sally Traczuk & Janet Katinowsky

Picnic/Fund-Raising

Committee: *Jay Rowe*

School of Christian Living:

Janet Katinowsky

Special Mass Intentions
& Memorial Contributions

Fr. Sr. Donald

Ukrainian Relief

Donations & Newsletter

Tom Schalata

YMS of R (Men's Group):

Fran Golembeski

PARISH INFO & RESOURCES

The Very Rev. Donald E. Wunderlich

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MASS SCHEDULE:

8 AM & 9:30 AM *Unless noted



Prayer List

Please remember all those on our prayer list. Check the Weekly bulletin or the St. Stephen's website for an updated list. Please let Fr. Sr. Donald know if any additions or deletions are needed for the list. Your devotion to prayer is a valuable tool for those in need! Thank you!

December 2024 - Calendar of Events & Special Dates

1 Sunday Masses 8 & 9:30 AM ANS Meeting Library following 9:30 Mass	2 Sunday Donuts Downstairs ARE Back!	3 Tune in each month to THE POLISH AMERICAN CONNECTION with Tom Gajewski on BCTV on First Tuesday of Month - 7:30 pm; First Wed. after First Tues. - 7:30 pm; First Fri. after First Tues. - 1:30 pm; First Mon. after First Tues. - 10:30 am, & Second Tues. - 3:30 pm on Comcast Reading Channel 15, Comcast Southern Berks CH. 965, Service Electric CH. 19 & Streaming on youtube channel!	4	5	6	7
8 Sunday Masses 8 & 9:30 AM Ukrainian Relief Donations Deadline!	9 Holiday Polish Food Sale Sunday, Dec. 15	10 Possible Pierogi Making Date: Dec. 12, 13 or 14	11 Deadline for Food Orders Sunday, Dec. 1-8	12 Flyers & Sign-up in the church vestibule	13 Limited Quantities Check for details in bulletin etc.	14
15 Sunday Masses 8 & 9:30 AM YMS of R Egg Sandwich Sale Fellowship Hall after each Mass	16 Knight's Closet Deadline 12/15	17	18	19	20	21
22 Sunday Masses 8 & 9:30 AM Parish Committee Meeting@ 11:00 AM in Fellowship Hall	23	24 Midnight Mass Christmas Eve Shepherd's Mass 11:45 pm	25 Christmas "Birth of the Christ Child" 9:00 am	26 St. Stephen the Martyr Feast Day Mass 9:00 am	27 *PLEASE CHECK THE WEEKLY SUNDAY BULLETIN OR ANNOUNCE- MENTS FOR ANY CHANGES OR ADDITIONAL DATES FOR EVENTS!	28
29 Sunday Masses 8 & 9:30 AM	30	31 2025 Happy New Year	1	2 SAVE THIS CALENDAR Put it on Your Fridge !!!	3	4