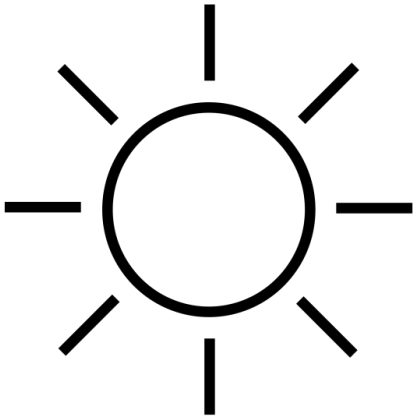


# *St. Stephen's Lutheran Church*



# *Sun*

## *January 2025*

## ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

### Sunday, January 26th

### Immediately after 10 a.m. Worship

**Refreshments will be provided**

We gather together to hear the Long Range Task Force plan for our pastoral leadership for the next 5 years, elect leadership to council, elect 2 voting members for Synod Assembly, and approve a budget for 2025 that reflects our mission. Please plan on attending to support your church as we continue to seek God's will for our ministry together.

**If it is not possible for you to attend in-person, you can attend via Zoom. Watch for an email link the week before the meeting.**



***St. Stephen's Lutheran Church***  
***Evangelical Lutheran Church of America***  
***2500 Soquel Avenue, Santa Cruz, California 95062***  
***Phone—831-476-4700 — Fax—831-476-3918***  
***www..ststephenslutheran.org***  
***email—office@ststephenslutheran.org***  
***Rev. James P. Lapp, Pastor***

Ministers: The Entire Congregation

Church Council: Pres. — Beth Stiles V.P.— Steven Hendrickson  
Secretary - Alyssa Burkhardt  
Treasurer— Mark Linder  
Shelly Barker, Sofia Bartee and Iva Tracey

Director of Music: Gary Roberts

Sunday School: Leslie Lapp

Pre-School Director: Kathy Berens

Custodian: John Hopping

Church Administrator: Leslie Lapp

Office Open: Mon.—Fri. 12:00—5:00 pm

Pastor Jim's Contact Hours — Mon.—Thurs. 9am—5pm at 831-325-9095

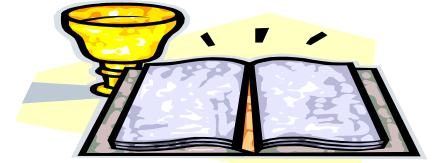
**MISSION STATEMENT**

St. Stephen's is a welcoming, healing community who worship God in Christ, nurture people growing in faith, serve others with acceptance and love, and invite people to share the joy of the Spirit.

**VISION STATEMENT**

To become an energetic, inclusive, multigenerational, multicultural, missional community that offers, hope, joy, worship, service, play, and life as disciples of Jesus Christ

# From Pastor Jim



*It's hard to believe that I have been Pastor here at St. Stephen's for over 28 years now! What a privilege to be able to serve a church for this long and to journey together through so much of our own lives and that of our families and of our church family and the community of Santa Cruz.*

*When I tell people that I have been here 28 years, the story usually always involves the fact that the church helped us purchase the home we still live in, back in 1997—just before the cost of housing skyrocketed due to the Silicon Valley wealth explosion. If that had not been done, our family would have followed so many of the other young families and been forced to move away in order to live affordably.*

*Another big factor in my being here this long was the closing of Light of Life Lutheran Church in Scotts Valley. At the time (2003) many of our younger families had moved away and we had moved to one worship service as our numbers declined. St. Stephen's would have had to face perhaps going to a part-time pastor 20 years ago, but suddenly we were moving to having THREE worship services with a total of 200 people worshipping on Sundays! The energy and leadership and dedication that former Light of Life members brought was amazing.*

*But now, here we are, on the other side of a pandemic that hastened the decline of churches like ours by at least 10 years. So far (thanks largely to a stock market that has been favorable), we have financially weathered the past 5 years, and conclude this year with about the same \$1.4 million in our reserve portfolio.*

*I would like to be able to finish out my full-time vocation here in the next 5 years or so, and retire in August of 2030 (when Leslie and I reach Medicare age).*

*I would like to help lead and spiritually guide St. Stephen's into its latter years as well. I am very encouraged by the vision and capabilities of those leaders on the Long Range Planning Task Force. I am confident that something new, good and hopeful will emerge from our work together to sustain our mission further.*

*At the same time, we must be honest that we are likely not going to be able to grow in number and financial resources in order to continue far into the future. We have been fortunate to be able to continue as long as we have. Many similar churches have already closed or are barely hanging on. We would be ignorant to think that somehow we are an exception.*

*So, I am hopeful that I will be able to continue full-time here for the next 5 years. This will involve a significant use of the \$1.4 million reserve portfolio principal. But at the end, going part-time will also significantly reduce the churches expenses as there will be no more exorbitant health care costs (\$55,000/yr!), no more pension contribution, & there will be salary reduction. A pt-time pastoral ministry could continue for a long while, especially since my housing costs are relatively constant.*

*All things are always in God's hands, and we are God's hands feet as well. I believe this is the best path for our church and our family. On January 28th we will do our best to discern whether this the way God would have us go.*



## Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

I would like to begin by saying Thank You to everyone who has donated to the Musicians Fund. What a wonderful surprise! For your giving, we are truly grateful.

Our Brass this Christmas took off for the snow and family vacationing. My thanks, always to Nathan for playing once again this season of giving.

I am working hard to find, strings and woodwinds for us, before Easter.

They would play for preludes, etc. and liturgy during worship. In Glorious spirit, talents, and gratitude for our Good News Singers. What dedicated, and fine sounding singers they are. More to follow in weekly bulletins.

Yours In Christ & Mission ~ Gary

\* \* \* Special Thanks \* \* \*

To Gary for his commitment & drive to lift up the Holiday in organizing this festive lunch. Your Ham was delish, and the nut-crackers a delight! Taking time to pause, honor the “reason for the season” and enjoy each other was needed and much appreciated!



# **Reconciling In Christ Welcome Statement**

(Approved at January 2020 Congregational Meeting)

**“We welcome all who are seeking God’s love and grace.**

**We welcome all because God welcomes all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status.**

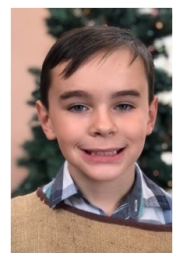
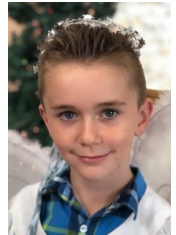
**We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, imprisonment, socio-economic circumstances, or anything that too often divides us.**

**Our unity is in Christ.”**

## **Church Council Highlights**

1. Devotions centered on the Prophecy Song of Zechariah, John the Baptist’s father. It is filled with hope and the promise of God coming to “guide our feet into the way of Peace.” This was comforting to our Council as we continue to struggle with the numerical decline of our congregation.
2. The 2025 Proposed Budget was presented by our Treasurer, Mark Linder, and then discussed. The recommendation of the Long Range Planning Task Force is to maintain a full-time pastor and compensate accordingly for the next 5 years at the minimum Synod Salary Guidelines for only a 1st year pastor (Pastor Jim is a 30 yr long pastor). Pastor Jim is planning to retire after 5 years and possibly then stay on as our part-time pastor. This 5 year Pastoral Compensation proposal will involve using the principal of our \$1.4 million reserve portfolio. Details will be provided with 2025 Proposed Budget on Sunday, January 14th.
3. The Long Range Planning Task Force will present preliminary plans at the Annual Meeting for how we might take steps to address the fact that our congregation is so much smaller now, and what our ministry may look like in the near future. The congregation will be engaged in 4 House Meeting opportunities to provide input and feedback with guiding questions. These will take place in late March.
4. The next Church Council meeting was moved up by one week to January 7th at 6:30p in order to have a final approval of the 2025 Budget. This leaves time for it to be distributed to the congregation on Sunday, January 14th—2 weeks ahead of the Annual Meeting on January 28th.
5. Barbara Rice and Don Smawley agreed to lead the effort to renovate the kitchen. A proposal to the Annual Meeting is sought by Jan. 13th





My heart is warm as I remember our Christmas Pageant and what it means to so many to do this traditional event, yet with a creative spin. Separate we aren't that big, but together, we can bring great joy. Combining church with preschool, Pastor, Administration, Custodian, and Preschool Director to implement. Young families anticipating what they will see their child do on stage for the first time. Warming the hearts of elder friends (Including myself) with their treasured memories of a generation or two before them, and seeing many things remain the same. I marveled at the leadership of our new members who took on the narration carrying this story to all generations. Everyone had a light to share, and it was captured in a snapshot to forever hang on each child's tree. We do not need epic productions to stir up the memories of yesteryear, we got to see them here in our Chapel. Each year is a bit more special just because we took the time to do this, and it mattered to so many! Thank you to all, I especially thank John for joining in, Pastor Jim for accompanying the children, and Leslie for being the vision & making sure the story was told. It doesn't matter what the children do —



*Squiggle, Sing or Moo!* Just being there is the gift that yields smiles. Why fellowship? This is why, priceless, timeless memories, together in Christ.

~ Warmly, Kathy Berens

*You are the light of the world we sing  
I am your child  
Light it up through me!*



What a privilege to get to tell THE STORY with our Mt. Cross leaders. They rolled with the chaos, and brought a charming new energy to this "no rehearsal, stress free" pageant. Ha -ha, you can say that again!

The Spirit showed face at the very beginning when the disappointment of my photographer & little piggy being out sick changed to joy with unexpected kids arriving wanting to participate. Then again as the congregation realized the characters were being plucked from the pews. What's next? Oh the anticipation. Where else do tangled teens get to wrap up their parental Christmas trees? How bout the recognition of Mary & Joseph being "regular", faithful people like you and me? That truth alone causes a pause. My "ah - ha" moment was when our "Super Star" realized the narrators were talking about him! All the friendly beasts know him, and placing him in that role was magical.



May we carry that Spirit & be like the children excitedly moo-ing and singing their hearts out!

~ Faithfully, Miss Leslie  
Aka the Wild Hare

# SOJOURNERS' TOP MOVIES OF 2024

*For the best films of the year for inspiring faith and justice, we picked feature characters — real and fictional — who doubt, who sin, who ask for forgiveness, and who try to carry on and seek justice in a universe full of violence, corruption, and sickness, but also humor, love, and reconciliation.*

One of the best cinematic monologues of 2024 is actually a sermon.

## ***Conclave***

A mystery-thriller about the cardinals of the world gathering to elect the next pope, centers Cardinal Thomas Lawrence, who has been tasked with leading the conclave. As part of his duties, he delivers the opening homily to more than 100 of the most influential Catholic leaders in the world — men with a wide range of views on, for instance, women's ordination, interfaith relations, and LGBTQ+ rights. Understandably, Cardinal Lawrence's colleagues advise him to play it safe. "The trick is to offend no one," Cardinal Joshua Adeyemi tells him. Instead, Cardinal Lawrence decides to preach about something that will offend almost everyone in the room: the virtue of doubt.

"There is one sin which I have come to fear above all others: certainty," he says. "Certainty is the great enemy of unity. Certainty is the deadly enemy of tolerance. Even Christ was not certain at the end. ... Let us pray that God will grant us a pope who doubts, and let him grant us a pope who sins and asks for forgiveness and who carries on."

## ***A Real Pain***

In this dark comedy, two strikingly different American cousins reunite in Poland for a Holocaust remembrance tour, which they hope will help them honor both their recently deceased grandmother and their Jewish heritage. With the backdrop of gas chambers, tombstones, and hotel dining rooms — and the eager, kind company of their tour group of strangers — the cousins search for ways to honor and process grief, both the personal and the inherited kinds.

## ***God & Country***

"*God & Country* serves as a crash-course in how this hyper-conservative, white-dominant minority — one that doesn't represent the values of most Christians or even most evangelicals according to the film's data — came to be such an effectively vocal voting bloc," **writes culture columnist Abby Olcese**. Leaning on interviews with faith leaders like Rev. William J. Barber II, Sister Simone Campbell, Kristin Kobes Du Mez, and Rob Schenck, the documentary aims to interrogate common Christian nationalist arguments and shows viewers what they can do to thwart the movement's ascent.



THANK YOU  
ST. STEPHEN'S FAMILIES !

A photograph of a decorated Christmas tree in a living room. The tree is green and covered in lights, with a nativity scene on top. It is surrounded by gifts, including a large box of 'The Simpsons' and a box of 'The Simpsons' board game. There are also poinsettias and a small table with a red and white striped tablecloth.

Thank you so much for making a difference!

**Next meeting: January 9 at 10:30**

Tina [gateschristina84@gmail.com](mailto:gateschristina84@gmail.com) or Cheryl Curry [cherylcif@cs.com](mailto:cherylcif@cs.com)

~~~~~

**Mondays, January 13 & 27 at 6:00 pm**

9



## Sister Parish News

### **2024 Delegation Highlights** (by Steve Barrett) —

The morning meeting with the local scholarship committee and the university scholarship students was a great way to start our visit to this community where

Santa Cruz al Salvador (SCaS) has been supporting education and community development for 30 years. The university scholarship students shared a little about their studies and the challenges they have faced and mostly overcome. Several students had failed classes in 2023 and had retaken, passed, and were back on track this year. Most of the students were doing well and have adjusted to the difficulty of attending school in the big city of San Salvador which is more than two hours by bus from Guillermo Ungo and some are using the student housing (funded by SCaS and another scholarship group) in San Salvador to study and live at least part-time. All have a difficult time with lack of Wi-Fi or sufficient cell service to keep up with online portions of classes while at home. They are a smart, articulate and resilient group and each one expressed sincere gratitude for the help that their scholarship provides in making it possible to pursue their dreams of higher education.

The scholarship committee then shared several new ideas for 2025 including a school chess club and some new ways to encourage and provide support for the university students. One great idea was developed after a service research project (scholarship students are expected to do a service project benefiting the school or community each year) completed by one of the university students. The project result was a list of most of the university scholarship students who have graduated over the years, their professions and where they were living. The committee plans on using graduates with skills in communications to interview these professionals and create a video to motivate more students to pursue higher education. The scholarship committee surprised us with a delicious cake and sang Happy Birthday in Spanish recognizing SCaS' 30 years of accompaniment and we surprised them with a new Salvadoran Blue T-shirt for each member.

That afternoon the 120 Guillermo Ungo school scholarship students received a gift basket full of household staples and a couple of new bath towels provided by donations by the prayer-children sponsors. We took pictures and exchanged letters with each student. At the same time, we had craft projects led by Corinne Barrett and fluoride application on teeth of the children 12 and under starting in another part of the school.

The highlight of the next day was an amazing graduation ceremony for the 3-year preschool program. I was proud and honored to be asked to represent SCaS at the "table of honor" and it was so fun to pass out diplomas to the adorable kids dressed up in fancy dresses and suits! We received a special plaque of recognition from the school for our support of the education and development of this community. I was happy to have the opportunity to express to the children, parents and dedicated teachers what a joy and honor it is for us to accompany them in the work they do in providing the best education possible for their beautiful children. Maybe it is not so unusual, and I know teachers are all super-heroes, but I was astounded that the teacher of the highest-level students taught 29 6-year olds on her own and it was apparent by all the children wanting hugs and their picture taken with her afterwards how much they loved her and vice-versa. Bless all you teachers!



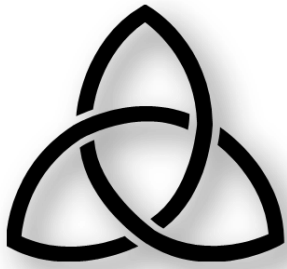
The next day we took a field trip with some of the GU scholarship students and community members to nearby Suchitoto for a boat ride on the lake for some fantastic bird watching, lunch, and a visit with Sister Peggy at the Centro de Arte Para la Paz (where we stayed for four nights) and a chance to explore the museum there. It was a delightful day and a great opportunity to continue our mission of *Building Relationships for Better Lives* with our Guillermo Ungo brothers and sisters.

As a reminder, we will be renewing support for our prayer children in early 2025. Watch this space for more information as it becomes available. We usually receive the new scholarship list from the Guillermo Ungo scholarship committee in February.

On behalf of the Board of Directors for Santa Cruz al Salvador, we thank everyone at St. Stephen's who have contributed toward our programs.

***Your gifts make a difference!***

Peace in Christ, Kent Madsen & Jeanne Boudreau,  
Santa Cruz al Salvador Board of Directors



# Trinity Tuesday

(Pub Theology / Discussion)

**January 7 at 6:30pm**

(First Tuesday of the month)

**Place: Discretion Brewing 41st Ave.**

**1 HOUR**

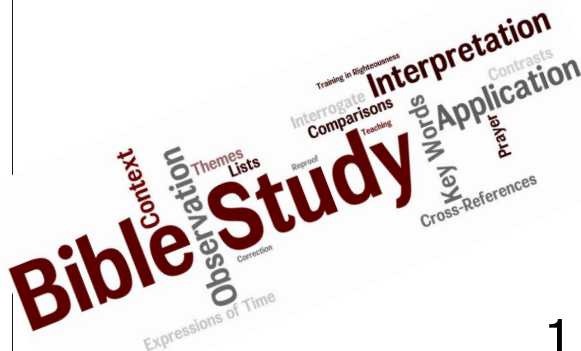
**1 QUESTION**

**1 DRINK (3-in-1)**

Everyone is invited to join us this fellowship gathering. Bring a theological question you would like to discuss or share a “faith” concern in a relaxed space with people who are interested. **Kathy Allen 430-6359 for more info.**

*One definition of theology comes from old time Puritan William Perkins 1558-1602 “Theologie is the science of living blessedly for ever. Blessed life arises from the knowledge of God.” Christians maintain that our best life possible is one that is lived in relationship with the living God. The “blessed life” is based on the “knowledge of God.” It is this knowledge that theology helps to provide. What do you think?*

**\* Come : Share — Ponder — build community \***



**On ZOOM with Pr. Jim**

Check email on Tues. for link

**WEDNESDAYS**

**11a -12noon (no 4th Wed.)**

**& 7:30 – 8:30 pm**



## Thoughts on preparing a draft 2025 budget for the congregation's consideration

As the congregation's treasurer, I am responsible for preparing a draft 2025 budget. The Church Council discusses the draft, considers changes, and approves a proposed budget. The proposed budget must go to the congregation two weeks prior to the annual congregational meeting. The annual meeting is January 26, so the proposed budget must be available to the congregation on January 12. The Church Council will discuss and approve a proposed budget at its January meeting. The Finance committee will review and comment on the draft budget at its January meeting.

I believe the 2025 budget needs to support the long-range planning process. This process considers where we want to be as a congregation five years from now and what actions do we take to get there. The congregation members will discuss options for the future through small group meetings in March.

The draft budget has two key elements to help us move forward in our long-range planning discussions and actions. First, the revenue and expenses are based on what we learned through the 2024 fiscal year experience. Second, the proposed budget invests in our staff as it is important they are here to lead us through this planning and action process over the next five years. To me, it does not make sense to reduce or change our core staff at the same time as we are working together to shape St. Stephen's future. I believe this will mean a strategic use of our investment returns and principal. We do not have the financial underpinnings to proceed with our process unless we use both investment returns and principal from our reserves. Also, just using our reserves to continue as we are without a plan of where we want to go is not wise. The congregation's financial resources and the congregation's long-range plan and action must go hand in hand.

Once the Church Council decides on a proposed budget, I will prepare a cover letter to show how we propose to link the budget to the planning process.

Prayerfully, Mark Linder



## January Special Benevolence Offering



2024 was marked by challenges, but also by incredible progress, collaboration, and resilience. Thanks to you, we touched the lives of over **20,000 neighbors**, offering a safety net of essential services that empowered families, children & seniors across the County.

Here's what we accomplished together:

- **88,111 bags of nutritious food** distributed, ensuring families could put healthy meals on the table.
- **178,815 meals delivered to seniors** in their homes and another **28,206 meals served at dining sites**, combating isolation and hunger.
- **39,500 days of eldercare and childcare**, offering safe, nurturing environments for the most vulnerable.
- **6,554 hours of free crisis assistance and counseling**, helping families stabilize during emergencies.
- Over **\$500,000 in tax credits** returned to local families, providing critical financial relief.

In addition, when devastating storms and floods struck the Pajaro Valley and San Lorenzo Valley in 2023, your support enabled us to provide **over \$2 million in direct disaster relief**. These funds helped families recover, secure housing, and rebuild their lives. We continue to help these families recover thanks to your help.

Through our 10 interconnected programs, we've created opportunities for brighter futures and delivered resources that meet basic needs with dignity.

But there's still work to be done. We remain committed to ensuring that no one in our community has to choose between essentials like food, rent, or healthcare. Thank you for standing with us. Together, we are building a stronger, healthier community.

**December—Lutheran World Relief = \$ 285** (as of Dec. 21)

# Birthdays & Anniversaries

|                   |                     |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1-1 Nathan Lapp   | 1-13 Jennifer Robe  |                     |
| 1-1 Gina Mendoza  | 1-14 Sofia Barte    | 1-23 Diane Hintz    |
| 1-9 Esdras Garden | 1-16 Ellie Russell  | 1-25 Neil Crews     |
| 1-10 Colby Hanson | 1-17 Emily Valencia | 1-26 Iris Colclough |
| 1-11 Mitch Crews  | 1-18 Patty Travers  | 1-26 John Wickham   |
| 1-12 Linda Hix    | 1-21 Chris Turzo    |                     |

## Prayer Concerns

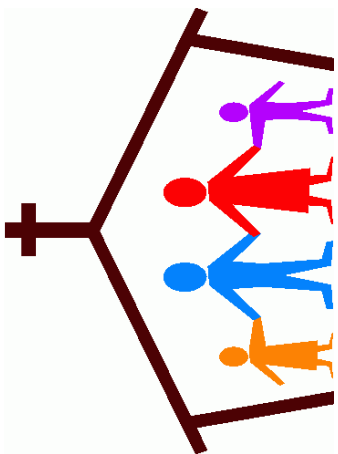


### SHORT TERM:

Chad Fields, Ana Cardenas, John B., Trace Hull, Linda, Scoutmaster Scott, Family of Ryan Fairrington, Connie & Family of Paul Cunningham, Glosier family, Unemployed, George Webber, Michelle & Family, Family of Travis, Boccie, Isaac & Marissa, Chris Powers, Gloria, Jack & Kim Sanford, Lucia, Dennis Lewis, Marta's parents, Adrienne, Gary & Louse Matz, Friends in Tel Aviv, Patrick & Family, Moore family, Brown Family, Nick, James, Beth Mills, Mary D., Tom, Galahad, Susan O., Debbie and son James, Sam, Michael Lee, Nate Barker, Grandpa Dennis, Bob & Shirley Salter, Monica & Family, Lurline Moore, Beth Butler, Jen, Robbin, Maria Mendoza, Ila & Reina, Francisco, Michael, Keith, Noelle, Ensley, Tim Oldfield, Sierra, Julie R., Rosie, Janet, Sue, Middle East Peace, Tom Dawson, Taiyo, Marissa, Isaac, Alvarado family, Dustin, Father Jack Davis, Sandi Csik, Janica Paustian, Elida, Jeannie, Anetta, Jane, Barbara Allen, Sandy, Levi & Alexandria, Gary & Marjie Toops, Paul Paustian, Gaye Cornell, Dorothy, Rachel B., Anne & Chloe Johnston, Nancy, Mateo & Lina, Don, Atlas, Will, Aaron Johnson, Sal, Katarina, Stephanie Jager.

### LONG TERM:

James Sheehan, Biergiel—Colclough family, Carla Brown, Eric Utto-Galarneau, Joel Hurtgamm, Dawit & family (Ethiopia), April McCalmont, Marty Nehring, Miller Mouw, Frank, Joe, Dom, Lisa & Beau, Linda Johnson, Bailey Ingalls, Jan Shadle, Vi Olly, Bobbie Erickson, Mike, Susan Anderson, Richard C., Brouse Family, Janet Baker, Sandy Godvine, Janelle Yung, Karin, Will, Chris, Pearl Runquist, Noah, Esdras, Immigrant families, The Homeless, People of Ukraine, People of Palestine/Israel, Our Nation's leaders, Mt. Cross, St. Stephen's Child Development Ctr, S.S. Senior Housing, Pastor Jim & Our Church Family, men & women of Armed Forces, and the Youth of today.



## ST. STEPHEN'S WORSHIP SERVICE

Ready for your participation each Sunday at 10am.

In-person, Live Streamed on our website, or as a recording.

Go to ***www.stephenslutheran.org***

*(Print the bulletin and Celebrate so you can read, sing and pray with Pastor Jim. Have some bread and wine/grape juice ready for Holy Communion)*

**NEWSLETTER WAS SENT ON  
December 27, 2024**

**POST OFFICE:  
DATED MATERIAL  
PLEASE DO NOT DELAY**

St Stephen's Lutheran Church  
2500 Soquel Avenue  
Santa Cruz, CA 95062

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