

First responders know it. Active-duty military and seasoned veterans know it. Parents of toddlers and teens know it. Jesus' first disciples had to learn it. When it comes to emergencies, or combat, raising children, or following Jesus—this same truth applies. *You need to expect the unexpected.*

The Lenten season is fast approaching. It comes early this year. If you've ever observed Lent before, you've come to expect the same message. *"Deny yourself. Sacrifice something. Give something up."*

The Gospel readings this season certainly hit us with these familiar themes—*denial, sacrifice, etc.* But they come haphazard, out of left field. We begin Lent in Mark's Gospel. Then veer off course with some random, out of sequence readings from John. The Lectionary seems near-bent on shoe-horning these expected themes into Lent—paying no heed to story, chronology, or helping fill in the blanks of Jesus' life. It seems a little forced to me.

I don't find the themes of *self-denial* or *self-sacrifice* particularly helpful for my spiritual growth. Maybe that doesn't surprise you. You've come to expect that kind of sentiment from me.

Too often, the ideals of *self-denial* and *sacrifice* have been used by preachers and the Church teaching us to be content with our station in life. "Just accept it. Don't rock the boat. Don't try to change it. Doesn't matter if it's unhealthy, or no longer works for you." They treat it as a spiritual gift (or a spiritual *necessity*) to be miserable, to suffer, and endure—for that is your lot in life. It is your cross to bear. Deny yourself—and be grateful.

But here's what I've come to believe about following Jesus and the Gospel message. *We need to expect the unexpected.* What people bring to Jesus, what they think they understand, it will all be turned on its head. From Peter declaring what "Jesus is Lord" ought to mean, to the Pharisee wondering what it means to be born again. From those who turned up at the Temple expecting business as usual, to Jesus facing his own death. The Gospel is all about confounding our expectations of what it means to follow Jesus.

Jesus says, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."* (Mark 8:34)

Maybe the denial in this case is casting aside our preconceived notions. Be open to what the Spirit has to teach us this season. Listen. *Expect the unexpected.*

Chris

Secretary Needed

Help! Person needed to take notes at our general committee meeting once a month on the 4th Tuesday. Oct through May we meet on zoom so you would need a computer. From May through Oct we meet in Pierce Hall. Training is available. If you feel you could help us please speak to Chris or Bev or Larry.

Stephentown Federated Church Officers 2024

Members of Presbyterian Session

Larry Eckhardt (2025) Clerk of Session
Heather Eckhardt (2027)
Paul McMillan (2027)
Marge Feathers (2025)
Larry Eckhardt (2025)
Judy Leland (2026)
Helen Wallbank (2026)

Members of Methodist Church Council

Janet Atwater (2027)
Georgi Bebee (2027)
Doug Mayen (2026) Chairperson
Bonnie Bates (2025)
Donna Densing (2026)
Jean Bolen (2025)

Nominating Committee

Malcolm Beal, Presb - Chair
Donna Densing, Meth
Heather Eckhardt, Presb
Mary French, Meth
Kate Beach, Meth

Members of the General Committee

Chris Garrison, Pastor
Vacant, Secretary
Barbara Terpening, Treasurer
Bonnie Bates, Christian Ed (Council)
Larry Eckhardt, (Session)
Bev Westfall (Choir, Worship)

Kate Beach (SonShiners)
Doug Mayen, Co-Facility Chair (Council)
Heather Eckhardt (Session)
Jonathan Koepp (Community Breakfast Group)
Thomas Smith, Co-Facility Chair

Pastor- Parish Committee

Larry Eckhardt, Presb. - Chair
Malcolm Beal- Presb.
Doug Mayen – Meth.
Bev Westfall – Meth.

Community Breakfast Group

Larry Eckhardt, Chair
Kirk Kellogg, Scribe
Paul McMillan, Treasurer

SonShiners

Kate Beach, President
Barbara Terpening, Treasurer
Joanne Hennig, Secretary

Worship/Tech Committee

Joanne Hennig Barb Terpening
Bonnie Bates Laurelyn Mayen
Bev Westfall - Chair Arlene Longo
Janet Atwater

Denominational Treasurers

Presbyterian - Paul McMillan

Methodist – Kate Beach

Financial Gifts

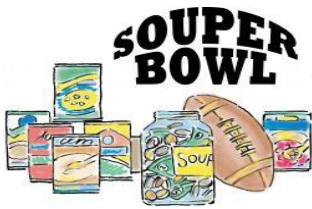
Offering plates are located near the entrances to the Sanctuary.

They are marked “free will,” because we never want anyone to feel an obligation to give. For those who want to give, we offer a variety of other options:

- Online giving: visit our website and click the “Give Now” button. You can give a one-time gift or set up *recurring* giving at a frequency and designation of your choice through Tithe.ly.
- Mail your offering: Stephentown Federated Church
Attn: Treasurer, PO Box 10, Stephentown, NY 12168
- Designated giving: mark on envelope or memo of your check if you wish to give to other than the general fund (examples include: *Manse Building Maintenance Fund, Memorial, heat or utilities, Angel Fund*).
- Thank you: for your gifts—financial & with your time and service.

Denominational Apportionments

It's that time of year. We get to start over for the 2024 year. Our apportionments are due each year. The Presbyterians are leveled at \$46 dollars a person this year while the Methodist are considerable more at \$110 per person. We are very blessed that we have met this requirement from both denominations each year. We thank you for your part in this and would appreciate your help in taking care of the Apportionments for 2024. God Bless



This Photo by Unknown

We celebrate the NFL's Super Bowl with our own “Souper Bowl” on Sunday, February 11th. Bring to our service the groceries and monies you would like to donate to the Stephentown Emergency Food Pantry which we house at our church. If you are giving with a check, please make it payable to Stephentown Emergency Food Pantry.



Choir

Choir continues to meet on Sunday morning for rehearsal following church and Coffee Hour. We will continue this until the first of March. We are preparing music for the Lenten season, Palm Sunday and Easter. All of these are early this year. Easter is actually March 31st. Maybe with any given luck we will have an early spring. If you are interested in singing please come and join us.



Front Pew Band

The band is not meeting in January but will continue in February. We will be sharing our music on the 4th Sunday of each month. If you have an instrument and would like to share your talents, please send a note to Bev at morg104@aol.com. We would love to have more people join us.

The Community Breakfast Group News Spring 2024

We are hosting the Twentieth Annual Turkey Dinner, Saturday, February 24th, 2024. Wow, 20 years!! Mark your calendar, more details below. Watch your mail for a special flyer. Can't wait! Our first breakfast meeting of the New Year was held on January 14th. The meal was postponed one week due to the weather. We had a good crowd with plenty of food for many more. Come and join us. Attending church after breakfast is not required but we'd love to have you for both! Breakfast dates for the remainder of the spring: February 4th, March 3rd, April 7th, May 5th, and last breakfast before summer break – June 2nd. Breakfast starts at 8:00am sharp. If you'd like to be on our e-mail list, please reach out to Paul McMillan, Larry Eckhardt or Ted Bears. Everyone is invited to join us –come one, come all.

Now – for the big news... Turkey dinner!!! Back by popular demand for another great evening of food, fellowship and church community spirit.

It's the Twentieth Annual Church Dinner!!

You are cordially invited to join your church friends and family for fellowship and a delicious **Turkey Meal** with all the trimmings!!! Mashed potatoes, stuffing, gravy, squash, peas and carrots, and our famous **homemade pies!!**

When: Saturday February 24, 2024

Time: Start Serving at 5:00 pm until 7:00 pm

Where: Stephentown Federated Church Hall

Who: You, bring your family and your friends

Goodwill offering only!!

Sponsored by the Community Breakfast Group.

For Information call:

Larry Eckhardt 518-573-2565 or

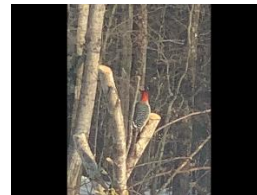
Paul McMillan 518-733-5110 or

Ted Bears 518-728-9326



Would you like to have your meal with someone who can't be with us on Saturday night? Grab a take-out meal for them and yourself and deliver it, so they can enjoy the dinner and your company!

Take-Outs are available starting at 4:15 pm Let us know early so we can have them ready! Call Larry at the number above.



January Devotional by Bonnie Bates

It certainly looks like winter this morning. Just checked the thermostat on the back porch, nine degrees. As we look out our kitchen windows on this crisp January day a pure white carpet of snow covers our yard and limbs on the trees. The evergreen trees stand still, in their branches adorned in white beauty.

We have been spending time in the kitchen, unable to move from the counter tops a few feet away from the windows over the sink and by the rocking chair. The birds wait patiently on the limbs of the magnolia tree, taking turns landing on the wooden ledge Rick put outside the kitchen window. Four or five can land on the round feeder outside the window by the rocker.

They're all here, bright Red Cardinals, female cardinals in brown, Blue Jays, Titmice, Red Bellied Woodpeckers and more.

I know I've shared birds before, yet as we watch them, we are humbled as they wait patiently for their turn for seeds. I pray that as you look out the windows of your homes you will see the hand of God's creation all around you, quietly blessing you with his grace and mercy to all His creatures! Amen

*** this devotional is also found on our website along with music chosen and shared by Bev Westfall. The music "All Things Bright and Beautiful" is the hymn that accompanies this devotion. You will find it on www.stephentownfederatedchurch.org along with our weekly Sunday morning services. Please take a few moments to check us out.



Sunrise Service March 31st Easter Service 9:30 am

On Easter Sunday very early when the sun rises, we will meet at the Garfield Cemetery to celebrate our risen Christ. It will begin at 6:30 a.m. with our Pastor Chris Garrison leading us in the early morning celebration. Come and join us for this special gathering. If by chance it is snowing or raining, the celebration will take place at the Stephentown Federated Church on Garfield Rd. We are hoping however for a beautiful sunny morning!

Our Easter service will share our joy in the risen Christ at 9:30 a.m. There will be special music, flowers, scriptures and food for thought as well as food from Coffee hour. Come and join us for this Easter celebration.

JANUARY/MARCH 2024

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
9:30 am Service 10:30 am Coffee Hour						9:00-11:00 am Food Pantry
March 31 st Sunrise Easter Service 6:30am Garfield Cemetery Continental Breakfast -Church following Easter Service 9:30am		7:00 pm Gen Com 4 th week of month Zoom 7:00 pm Worship Com Mtg 2 nd week of month Zoom				

Each month: 1st Sunday ---Communion – Open to all

2nd Sunday---Hymn Sing at beginning of service

Sunday Worship Services available on our website:
www.stephentownfederatedchurch.org

SonShiners

We are collecting empty cleaned and labels removed pill bottles. Box is on table in Pierce Hall.

Meetings:

February 18th

March 17th @ Ioka Valley Farm (Donations accepted to cover cost, bring your tip)

April 21st

May 19th

Meeting at 8am, bring a dish to share

February 24th Turkey Dinner

CHURCH BIRTHDAYS

If you don't see but want your birthday listed contact Barbara Terpening.



Month	Day	Names
January	14	Malcolm Beal
	17	Mel Feathers
	17	Mary Schnyer
	17	Portia Westfall
	24	Richard Beckwith
	25	Stewart Peace
	25	Marge Feathers
	27	Jean Bolen
	30	Linda Secor
	February	27
March	6	Laurelyn Mayen
	21	Bill Whipple
	23	Barbara Terpening
	24	Arlene Longo



Easter Flower Order Form 2024 It is time to place your orders for Easter Lilies and/or spring bulbs in memory of your loved ones. This year the Easter Lilies are \$15.00 apiece and Spring Bulbs \$10.00 apiece. We are asking that you have your order in by March 3rd. Please send your check and order form to: Stephentown Federated Church, Attn: Treasurer, PO Box 10, Stephentown, NY 12168. The flowers will be placed on the altar in time for our Easter service.

Your name or family name(s)	In memory of:	Specify your choice of Lily \$15 or Spring Bulbs \$10.00 each
Your name or family name(s)	In memory of:	Specify your choice of Lily \$15 or Spring Bulbs \$10.00 each
Your name or family name(s)	In memory of:	Specify your choice of Lily \$15 or Spring Bulbs \$10.00 each
Your name or family name(s)	In memory of:	Specify your choice of Lily \$15 or Spring Bulbs \$10.00 each

Total number of Lilies at \$15.00 apiece _____ and/or
Spring Bulbs ordered at \$10.00 apiece _____

Our total amount enclosed \$ _____