

The Messenger

Happenings at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Schenectady, NY
December 2014

Advent



Advent will begin on Sunday, Nov. 28th. It is a time to prepare for Christ's birth as well as for His second coming to judge the world. It is a time of watching and waiting and great expectation. Purple, the color of thoughtfulness and penitence, is the color of the season. The Greek letters, Alpha (the first of the alphabet) and Omega, (the last letter) combine to make the symbol for this season of the year signifying that God is Eternal -- the beginning and the end. Come and worship during Advent in joyful anticipation of the birth of our Lord.

From The Rector

Dear Friends,

This Christmas season finds us in so many different places and conditions. Many I have talked with in passing conversation mention their worry over job security as the Christmas bills begin to arrive. Others are anticipating their holiday trips visiting family and friends. Some struggle with how to make ends meet on a fixed income, while others are beginning college savings plans with the birth of a new child. This season also finds more and more of our church members involved in ministries which try to help people for whom Christmas is bleak.

One of my favorite Christmas carols is "In the Bleak Midwinter" and every year I ponder the question asked: "What can I give him, poor as I am...If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; if I were a Wise Man, I would do my part..." As I look back over the year 2014 I am proud of what our relatively small parish has done for Schenectady and for our own congregation. We are very involved in the many outreach programs of Schenectady Inner City Ministry and our members are involved in most every community agency I know: from tutoring young students to serving meals to the homeless.



In addition, the folks who are attending to the needs of our own church have done their part. Thanks to generous financial giving we are one of the few churches I know who are able to close our books in the black as well as to do such things as fixing roofs and keeping up on general maintenance.

Yes, St. Stephen's struggles with what it means to "do our part" and as community needs and congregational needs increase I suspect so will our struggle. We all stand together in the bleak midwinter, trusting that by grace, we may at best give Him our heart.

James+

A New Icon for the Chapel

On December 7th at the 10:15 Eucharist we will ask God to bless the new Icon of the Resurrection in the parish chapel. After the Eucharist, Mark Bayer, the 'writer' of the icon will give a talk and answer questions about the icon in the parish chapel. Come and learn about the powerful spirituality of the icon.



Christmas Services

CHRISTMAS EVE

Wednesday, December 24th:

9:00 a.m. Morning Prayer

4:00 p.m. Family Eucharist

11:00 p.m. Festive Candlelight Eucharist

CHRISTMAS DAY

Thursday, December 25th:

10:00 a.m. Eucharist

FEAST OF ST. STEPHEN

Friday, December 26th:

9:00 a.m. Morning Prayer

10:00 a.m. Eucharist

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Sunday, December 28th:

9:00 a.m. Morning Prayer

8:00 a.m. Eucharist

10:15 a.m. Eucharist

THE HOLY NAME OF OUR LORD

Thursday, January 1st

10:00 a.m. Eucharist

EPIPHANY SUNDAY

Sunday, January 4th

8:00 a.m. Eucharist

10:15 a.m. Choral Eucharist

Cleaning and Greening of the Church

Help prepare the church for Christmas. On Sunday morning, December 21st, beginning after you get your coffee at 11:30, we will meet in the Church to hang the greens, and generally prepare the church for our celebration of Christ's birth.

Child Care Christmas Eve

The Chapel will be open at the 4:00 p.m. service. Toddlers are invited to share the church service experience with their families, but it can be a long time for some to be still.

Christian Education December 2014

Our classes have been going well! We have (mostly) steady attendance and inquisitive, participatory students. As I sit to write this on Thanksgiving eve, I place my work at St. Stephen's close to the top of the list of the things I am thankful for!

Classroom activity in December will include rehearsals for the pageant and the retelling of the Advent story in which we follow the Holy Family's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. An expectant mother and an anxious father, looking for shelter, hoping that the baby wouldn't choose to be born while they were on the road.

On the fourth Sunday in Advent, December 21, the students will present their take on the Christmas story. The Sunday Friends group will re-enact the story of the shepherds' visit from the perspective of a television announcer's interview. The Godly Play students will present something a little more traditional with the children reenacting the manger scene to a narrated script.

On Christmas Eve, at the 4:00 service, all children whether students in our education program or visiting from afar, are invited to participate in the annual procession to place figures in the crèche.

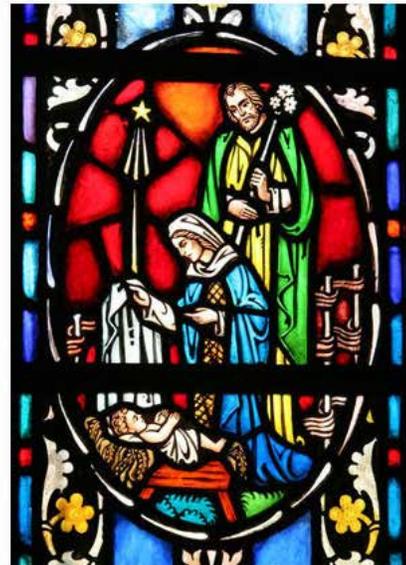
There are no classes on December 28.

On January 4 we will celebrate Epiphany with a pot-luck luncheon after the 10:15 service. A visit from the Magi is rumored to be pending, along with the singing of the carol, We Three Kings.

As I look forward to celebrating Christmas with my family and sending greetings to those whose love has supported me this past year, I am mindful of the essential truth contained in the words of the classic poem by civil rights leader and theologian Dr. Howard Thurman.

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:*

*To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart.*



I wish you a blessed Christmas, may you be surrounded by the peace of God's ever-living grace.

Miranda Rand, Christian Education Director

Home Communion

If you or someone you know is unable to attend church on either a long or short-term basis, please call the parish office if you would like to have communion brought to you.

Every Member Canvass

The Every Member Canvass for 2015 pledges is quickly drawing to a close. If you have not returned your pledge cards to the parish office, please place them in the offering plate during the Eucharist on Sunday, Dec. 7th or please send them to the church office.

So far we have received 48 pledges for \$ 96,450. The parish extends its gratitude to those who have worked so diligently on the canvas, especially to the Finance Committee of the vestry.

Book Club

The St. Stephen's Book Club meets 7 p.m. the second Tuesday of each month in the teen lounge at the church. Here is the list of books for 2014/15. Feel free to just read the ones you're interested in. Everyone is welcome at one or all meetings.

If you'd like to come but don't drive at night, call Tracy Ormsbee at 542-3385.

Of note: Fr. James will join us Jan. 13 for our discussion of *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*, a controversial book that compares the history of the time with what is written in the Bible.

In May we will be joined by Times Union journalist and author Amy Biancolli for a discussion of her new book, "Figuring Sh!t Out: Love, Laughter, Suicide and Survival."

Dec. 9: *The Interestings* by Meg Wolitzer (Fiction)

Jan. 13: *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth* by Reza Aslans (Non-fiction)

Feb. 10: *March* by Geraldine Brooks (Fiction)

March 10: *Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown (Non-fiction)

April 14: *Up From Orchard Street* by Eleanor Widmer (Fiction)

May 12: *Figuring Sh!t Out* by Amy Biancolli (Non-fiction)

June 9: *Electric City* by Elizabeth Rosner (Fiction)

Sept. 8: *Citizens of London* by Lynn Olson (Non-fiction)

Oct. 13: *The Nazi Officer's Wife* (Non-fiction)

Christmas Cards!

On Sunday, December 14, we will prepare Christmas cards for the inmates at the Schenectady County Correctional Facility to send out. We usually provide four cards for each male and eight for each female inmate, with spares as needed. The total number is between 1000 and 1200 cards, which means postage cost is approximately \$500. Please plan to meet after church (either service) in Begley Hall, to help stamp and bundle the cards. If you wish to contribute postage stamps, please bring them to church BEFORE December 14 and put them in the offering plate, knowing that "inasmuch as you did it for the least of these, you did it for Me."

On behalf of the men and women in the jail, I thank you very much. Have a blessed Christmas. Deacon Pat

The Christmas Crèche

The Christmas crèche-also known as a Nativity or manger scene-is more than a decoration. For many, displaying a Christmas crèche is a way to focus on the real meaning of the holiday. The traditional crèche figures are drawn from the accounts of Jesus' birth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. There are many ways and variations to display a Christmas crèche. Feel free to adapt these basic steps.



First Sunday in Advent:

Set the basic scene. Traditionally, most people begin with the stable, or something which resembles the rough Bethlehem setting of the Nativity. Put shepherds in the fields. Place the figures representing shepherds, their flocks of sheep and their sheepdog near the stable but not yet surrounding the manger. Use a green cloth to represent the fields, or unroll sheets of absorbent cotton to represent snowdrifts-not meteorologically accurate, but traditional.

Second Sunday in Advent:

Add the figures of Mary and Joseph and the ox and donkey who share their shelter. Display the manger, filled with a bit of straw (from the bags of straw) if you like, topped with a star ornament or Christmas light, but don't place the Baby yet.

Third Sunday in Advent:

Launch the Magi on their journey. At a distance from the stable, set the figures representing the Magi-also known as the Wise Men or the Three Kings-along with their camels and retinue of servants.

Christmas Eve:

Add the Bambino. On Christmas Eve, place the figure representing the Christ Child in the manger. Top the stable with an angel figure. Bring the shepherds and their animals in around the Holy Family. Display and enjoy your Christmas crèche through January 6. On Christmas Eve, begin moving the Magi figures closer to the stable, advancing them a little each day for the twelve days of Christmas.

Epiphany:

By January 6, the traditional Feast of the Epiphany, the Three Kings should be gathered by the manger to offer their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Tips & Warnings

You don't need to limit yourself to traditional figures. The crèche custom in many countries has grown to include all kinds of people who might have been present in Bethlehem on that first Christmas Eve. In some Nativity scenes, the Christ Child and the manger are one inseparable piece. If you have one of these figures, keep the whole piece out of sight until Christmas Eve.

Creche (continued)

Explore the crèche tradition in the folk art of many cultures. Francis of Assisi, an Italian saint, invented the crèche tradition in the 13th century, and Italians are still masters of what they call the presepio. Latin American Nativity scenes are fashioned from clay and sometimes set inside carved gourds. In recent decades, Native Americans of the US Southwest have made a specialty of building crèche figures from traditional pottery. Remember, keep Christmas crèche figures, especially fragile heirlooms, out of the reach of pets and unsupervised young children.



The Advent Wreath

Pre-Christian peoples who lived far north and who suffered the archetypal loss of life and light with the disappearance of the sun had a way of wooing back life and hope.

'Primitives' do not separate the natural phenomena from their religious or mystical yearning, so nature and mystery remained combined. As the days grew shorter and colder and the sun threatened to abandon the earth, these ancient people suffered the sort of guilt and separation anxiety which we also know.

Their solution was to bring all ordinary action and daily routine to a halt. They gave in to the nature of winter, came away from their carts and fields and put away their tools. They removed the wheels from their carts and wagons, festooned them with greens and lights and brought them indoors to hang in their halls.

They brought the wheels indoors as a sign of a different time, a time to stop and turn inward. They engaged the feelings of cold and fear and loss. Slowly....slowly....they wooed the sun god back. And light followed darkness. Morning came earlier. The festivals announced the return of hope after primal darkness.

Christians have developed a tradition of the Advent wreath to help us take time out from our busy Christmas preparations and to open our hearts to Jesus.

The circular form of the wreath, like God's love, is never-ending. The greenery that covers it reminds us of everlasting life and hope because evergreen trees are green even in the midst of winter.

The candles are symbols of the light God brings us. Three of them are purple, the royal color for the new King. The fourth candle is pink and is lit on the Third Sunday of Advent when we celebrate with special joy. Some people light a white candle, the Christ candle, in the center of the wreath on Christmas day.

Wreaths and candles are for sale at the Church Shop.



The Shop

Christmas at the Shop----The shop is featuring all the aspects of this Holy season. We have candles, angels, unusual tree decorations , Christmas cards, stocking stuffers, Christmas jewelry, Advent candles and calendars. We have a children's section which includes bracelets, a Child's Bible of the Nativity story, and have you ever seen a Nativity set made from erasers? Fun for kids and we have them. If you have someone on you list that needs a perfect gift, How about an Ikon? we have a large variety of them and all nicely priced. The Shop has many calendars which includes the Episcocats and Episcopups, so funny, chuckle thru the new year with them. Stop by and say hello to Louise and Marilyn and we wish you many Blessings of this Holy season and as always thanks for your support. Marilyn Humphrey and Louise Peake



Blessing Prayer for Lighting a Candle on the Advent Wreath

*Lord God,
You who sent into the world Your Beloved Son
as a light that shines in the darkness,
invest this wreath, our Advent symbol,
with the power of Your energy and light.
With each of these candles that is lighted,
may we rekindle within ourselves the desire
to prepare a way for the birth of Christ.
With each new candle that is lighted,
may the flame of Christ's coming
grow brighter and brighter
so that this Christmas may see
a fresh and ever-green coming of the Lord of Light
into each of our hearts
and into our whole world.*

(candle is lighted)

*We pray, then, that the richness of God's blessing
rest upon this Advent wreath,
upon our home and upon each of us
as we light this candle
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen*

SAINT NICOLAUS

(Saturday, Dec. 6)

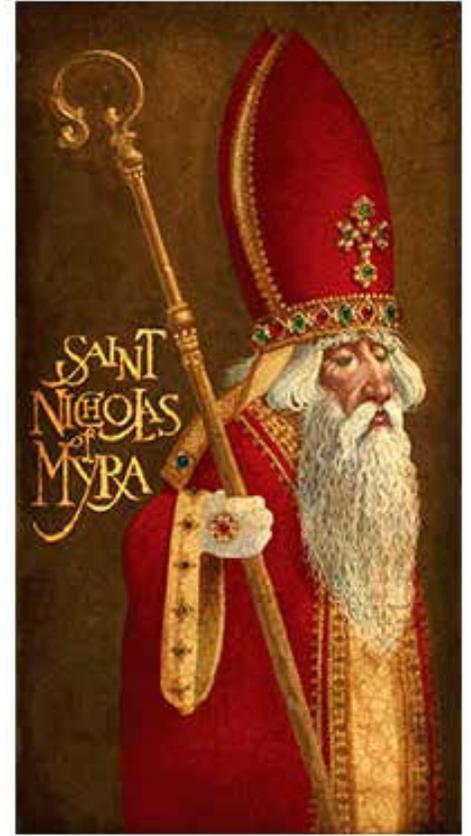
*O you who love festivals,
Come gather and sing the praises
of the fair beauty of bishops,
The glory of the fathers,
The fountain of wonders and great protector of the faithful.*

*Let us all say: Rejoice, O guardian of the people of Myra,
Their head and honored counselor,
The pillar of the church which cannot be shaken.*

*Rejoice, O light full of brightness
That makes the ends of the world shine with wonders.*

*Rejoice, O divine delight of the afflicted,
The fervent advocate of those who suffer from injustice.*

*And now, O all blessed Nicolaus,
Never cease praying to Christ our God
For those who honor the festival of your memory
With faith and with love.
....Orthodox liturgy*



WEDNESDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY: Bible 101

An Introduction to the Old and New Testaments

December 3 - Getting Acquainted

It's the all-time best-seller since the beginning of printing. It has produced passionate controversy for centuries. What is the book that is like none other in the history of the world? Where did it come from? What does it consist of? Does it still speak to us today?

December 10 - The Old Testament

An ancient book? Yes, but far more! It's a kind of love letter and a still-living legacy that shaped the identity of a unique people. What about the Dead Sea Scrolls? The accurate preservation of the contents over millennia underscores the marvel of these writings.

December 17 - The New Testament

It's a book that centers on Jesus. But how do we know we have the actual words of Jesus? How were the books of the New Testament gathered and selected? What's it all about? How does the New Testament build upon but differ from the Old Testament?

Classes are held on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 in the Conference room. If you would like to attend these classes please email Fr. James james.ross.mcd@gmail.com.

SUNDAY MORNING ADULT EDUCATION:

A History of Eastern Orthodox Christianity

December 7 - will explore the founding of the church and continues with the spread of Christianity to the "nations" by the Apostles. This is the period of persecutions and martyrdom and the subsequent legalization of the church during the birth of Byzantium.

December 14 - covers the spread of the Gospel to the Slavic people, the development of the Monastic movement, the Great Schism between East and West, and the last hours of Constantinople

December 21 - will explore the captivity of orthodoxy under Islam (after the fall of Byzantium) and communism (in Eastern Europe). Massive immigration allowed Orthodoxy to flourish in the New World, but presented new challenges for the future. The leaders of World Orthodoxy provide an insight to the essence of their church today.

TUESDAY MORNING SEMINAR:

Philosophy and Religion in the West

December 2 The Development of Christian Platonism

December 9 Jewish Rationalism and Mysticism—Maimonides and Kabbalah

December 16 Classical Theism—Proofs and Attributes of God

Classes are held on Tuesday mornings from 10:30 to noon in the Conference room. It is not too late to begin attending the seminar. If you would like to attend these classes please email Fr. James james.ross.mcd@gmail.com so that he can send you supporting materials.

SICM News

The Food for the Pantry dinner drew a large crowd who all enjoyed an excellent meal and the chance to buy raffle tickets for a vast array of items. The money raised will help the pantry to continue purchasing cases of much needed food. Did you know that the pantry can purchase a case of boxes of cereal for the same amount of money each of us would spend to buy one box? Your check made out to SICM – Food Pantry in the memo line is always appreciated.

Amy, Eunice and Marti

Check out the SICM website at <http://www.sicm.us/>

The December Calendar

This is the draft calendar for December. For latest updates, watch the Sunday bulletin, listen for announcements on Sunday, watch for the weekly e-mail letter, or check the web page calendar.

| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|---|
| | 1 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 7:30 Parish Council | 2 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:30 <u>Seminar</u> | 3 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:30 <u>DOK</u> 7:30 <u>Bible Study</u> 7:30 NO Handbell Choir Rehearsal | 4 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:00 Communion & Healing 7:30 Choir | 5 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer | 6 9:00 Morning Prayer |
| 7 Advent 2 7:30 Morning prayer 8:00 Communion 9:00 <u>Nursery Care</u> 9:00 <u>Adult Ed</u> and Kid's Class 10:15 Communion & Kid's class; <u>Icon</u> | 8 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 7:30 Vestry | 9 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:30 <u>Seminar</u> | 10 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 7:30 <u>Bible Study</u> 7:30 Handbell Choir | 11 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:00 Communion & Healing 7:30 Choir | 12 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer | 13 9:00 Morning Prayer |
| 14 Advent 3 7:30 Morning prayer 8:00 Communion 9:00 <u>Nursery Care</u> 9:00 <u>Adult Ed</u> and Kid's Class Cards for the Jail 10:15 Communion & Kid's class Stewardship Ingathering | 15 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer | 16 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:30 <u>Seminar</u> | 17 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 7:30 <u>Bible Study</u> 7:30 Handbell Choir | 18 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:00 Communion & Healing 7:30 Choir | 19 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer | 20 9:00 Morning Prayer |
| 21 Advent 4 7:30 Morning prayer 8:00 Communion 9:00 <u>Nursery Care</u> 9:00 <u>Adult Ed</u> and Kid's Class 10:15 Communion & Kid's Christmas Performance Ladies' Luncheon | 22 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 7:30 Worship Committee | 23 9:00 Morning Prayer | 24 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 4:00 <u>Christmas Eve Service</u> 10:45 Midnight service | 25 Christmas 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:00 Communion & Healing | 26 St. Stephen 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 10:00 Communion | 27 9:00 Morning Prayer <u>Youth Dinner ?</u> |
| 28 7:30 Morning prayer 8:00 Communion 9:00 <u>Nursery Care</u> 9:00 Education Hour 10:15 Communion & Kid's class Interfaith Thanksgiving | 29 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer | 30 9:00 Morning Prayer | 31 8:30 Osteo Exercise 9:00 Morning Prayer 7:30 Bible Study 7:30 Handbell Choir | | | |

A Christmas Song Puzzle

Here is a Christmas song puzzle that was passed along to me a few years ago. Since you have been hearing all of the music since before Halloween, you ought to ace this. Caution, there is one for which I don't have an answer. I'll put an * by that one. Maybe you can clue me in. I will put the answers on the table in the back of the church for the Christmas Eve Eucharists. Fr. James

1. HY A M L C
2. T F N T A D S
3. G R Y M G L N Y D
4. I C U A M C
5. S N H N A I C A I B
6. O T F D O C M T L G T M
7. D T H W B O H F L L L L L L L L L
8. Y B W O Y B N C
9. J T T W T L H C
10. Y K D A D A P A V C A C A D A B
11. I S M K S C U T M L N
12. C S B S D I H S
13. H T H A S G T T N K
14. G G R O B A R
15. O H N T S A B S
16. A I W F C I M T F T
17. D T T S I A O H O S
18. W T K O O A
19. I D O A W C J L T O I U T K
20. C R O A O F J F N A Y N
21. I B T L A L L C
22. O L T O B H S W S T L
23. S B R A Y L I T L S I G
24. I B H F C
25. W W Y A M C W W Y A M C
26. I H T B O C D
27. F T S W A J H S
28. J O S N L Y E T W
29. G K W L O O T F O S
30. U O T H R P O J G O S C
31. J B J B J B R
32. I H A B C W Y
- *33. W U N W T A G C
34. J H T S B R T T T T
35. C T T M P R P P P

Best Biblical Exam Answers of the Week

In the first book of the bible, Guinnessis, God got tired of creating the world, so he took the Sabbath off.

Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. Noah's wife was called Joan of Ark. Noah built an ark, which the animals come on to in pears.

Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day, but a ball of fire by night.

Samson slayed the Philistines with the axe of the Apostles.

Moses led the Hebrews to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread which is bread without any ingredients.

The Egyptians were all drowned in the dessert. Afterwards, Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the ten amendments.

The first commandment was when Eve told Adam to eat the apple.

The seventh commandment is thou shalt not admit adultery.

Moses died before he ever reached Canada. Then Joshua led the Hebrews in the battle of Geritol.

The greatest miracle in the Bible is when Joshua told his son to stand still and he obeyed him.

David was a Hebrew king skilled at playing the liar. He fought the Finklesteins, a race of people who lived in Biblical times.

Solomon, one of David's sons, had 300 wives and 700 porcupines.

When Mary heard that she was the mother of Jesus, she sang the Magna Carta.

St John the blacksmith dumped water on his head.

One of the opossums was St. Matthew who was also a taximan.

St. Paul cavorted to Christianity. He preached holy acrimony, which is another name for marriage.

Christians have only one spouse. This is called monotony.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Church Staff

The Rev. Dr. James R. McDonald, Rector,

The Rev. Patricia L. Jones, Deacon,

Miranda Rand, Christian Education Director,

Robert Acosta, Director of Music,

Lisa Zebrowski, Nursery Manager,

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Jr. Warden, Erin Cohen

Clerk, Susan Feyrer

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Stan Jakubowski

Class of 2015:

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Bill Frank

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Class of 2016:

Brian Riordon

Travis Reedy

Richey Woodzell

The Church Office

Our office is located at 1229 Baker Avenue.

The telephone number is (518) 346-6241

If we are unable to answer your call, please leave a message.

We will call you back as soon as possible.

The Rector's email is: james.ross.mcd@gmail.com

Our website is <http://www.saintstephenschenelectady.org/>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/SaintStephensSchenectady>

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Please submit articles to our secretary at
StSteph1229@gmail.com by the 25th of the Month before.