Good Riddance, 2014!

As I shared in my sermon on December 28th, I am thankful to have 2014 in my rearview mirror. It was a difficult year for me personally and spiritually. It was so difficult that I came as close as I ever have to throwing in the towel and leaving ministry. Now that 2014 is history, it is time to move into the future of 2015.

2015 promises many exciting things for Ridge Church! This month I will be preaching my annual VISION sermon, but with a twist. The study we just finished on Wednesday evenings inspired me to look at our vision through the eyes of John Wesley. Using Adam Hamilton’s wonderful book REVIVAL as a starting place, I will be preaching on the three main components of our Vision (Offering Hope, Unconditional Love and helping people find Meaning for their lives), but putting it into the context of John Wesley and the revival he ignited in England and America. If you have a chance, you may want to pick up a copy of REVIVAL (in the church library) and experience this powerful book yourself. I pray that John Wesley will help ignite a revival in us, individually and as a church.

This spring we will begin working toward a Capital Campaign. It has been 10 years since our last campaign, and we still have a large debt to pay off on the Fellowship Hall, plus we need to re-roof the original education wing. I am planning to attend a seminar on running a capital campaign this month with a couple of church members. If this is something God is calling you to help with, please let me know. This is a project that pushes all of us out of our comfort zones, but we have seen over the last 10 years all the great opportunities that the Fellowship Hall has offered us— it is time to get it paid off.

Finally, the big challenge of 2014 was filling all the staff positions that were vacant. This was a huge headache and challenge. All the pieces of the puzzle have now been put together, with great people!

Steven Conger—Lead pastor
Sheri LoCascio—Associate pastor, responsible for children’s ministry
Kathy O’Brien—Pastoral care and congregational events
Holly Cummings—Administrative Assistant
Phil Loos—Youth Pastor
Allan Evett—Worship Leader 9:45
Joe Felice—Organist and choir director
Linda Boender—Treasurer
Susan Bryce—Nursery
Diana Kozlowski—Nursery
Dave Miller—Facilities Manager

We are here to help you find your place in ministry. Let us know how we can help to make that happen.

Sharing the adventure with you,

Pastor Steve
**WWE in January**

After a break for the holidays, Wonderful Wednesday Evenings (WWE) will resume on January 7th. Join us for a time of Food, Fellowship and Study (more information below, right) each Wednesday beginning at 6 p.m. Check out our menu for the month of January below. As always, adults $5. and kids $2.50. Sign in on the attendance pads on Sunday mornings to let us know if you’ll be coming. You may also call the office and let us know you will be joining us.

- **January 7:** Pizza
- **January 14:** King Ranch Chicken
- **January 21:** Mostaccoli
- **January 28:** Mexican Night

**BOOK GROUP:**
**The Light Between Oceans**
**Monday, January 5th @ 7 p.m.**

Trying to escape the horrors of his experience in WWI, Tom travels to Australia and takes a job as the lighthouse keeper on Janus Rock, nearly half a day’s journey from the coast. To this isolated island, where the supply boat comes once a season, Tom brings a young, bold, and loving wife, Isabel. Years later, after two miscarriages and one stillbirth, the grieving Isabel hears a baby’s cries on the wind. A boat has washed up onshore carrying a dead man and a living baby. What they choose to do has consequences that will impact the future for two families.

Pick up your copy of this affecting novel at the Munster Public Library and join the discussion on January 5th!

**WWE: The Letters of Paul**

Starting January 7th, Pastor Steve will be leading a class focusing on the Letters of Paul. We will begin with an overview of who Paul was and what his major themes were, then we will jump into one of Paul’s letters and look at it more closely.

If you have always wanted to know more about Paul, or if you have always struggled with Paul, or maybe loved Paul; this will be a great opportunity to learn more about this man who shaped early Christianity.

At this point, there will not be any workbooks, but you might want to do some outside reading. A couple of great resources that are available from the library include: *The First Paul*, by Borg and Crossan, and *Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene*, by Ehrman. A book that is not available at the library but one I also recommend is N.T. Wrights’ *What Paul Really Said*.

Join us for this fun and informative study about Paul. If you cannot make dinner at 6 p.m., the class will start at 6:45 p.m. and end at 8 p.m.
Primetime, Thursday, January 22nd
At Giovanni’s

Because the weather is pretty unpredictable in January, we will be staying close to home. We will meet at Giovanni’s Restaurant on Ridge Road in Munster for lunch at 11:30 a.m. Sign up on the Primetime Bulletin Board.

HAVE YOU MADE YOUR FAITH PROMISE YET?

As of December 22nd, we had received 77 faith promise pledges totaling $275,078. The Leadership Team (Administrative Council) uses these promises to help create an operating budget (salaries, utilities, building maintenance, etc.) for the year. If you have not yet made your faith promise, please do so immediately so we can plan accordingly.

The ministries of Ridge Church are dependent on your generosity. Without your support, we can’t feed the hungry in Hammond, help with food pantry donations, support Children of Abraham (or any number of other mission projects), or provide spiritual nourishment through our youth programs, Sunday School, adult studies and worship.

Thank you for giving generously to the ministries of Ridge Church. Without you, we cannot reach our potential.

YOUTH SUNDAY

Join us for worship on Sunday, February 1st. Members of the youth group will be leading worship at all three services.

SUMMER HIGH SCHOOL MISSION TRIP

Plans are in the works for a 2015 high school mission trip (anyone interested in going back to Slidell, Louisiana?) Please be on the lookout for more details soon!
Coming soon to Ridge Church: STEPHEN MINISTRIES

By the power of God’s Spirit, we are beginning a great ministry that will deepen and expand the person-to-person caregiving capacity of our congregation: Stephen Ministries!

Stephen Ministries is a way for our congregation to train and mobilize members to provide Christ-centered care and support to people experiencing many different kinds of life difficulties, including grief, divorce, cancer, unemployment, a spiritual crisis, infertility, and other challenges. You can see our Stephen Series Certificate of Enrollment posted in both main entryways.

Our next step is to send a team of people to be trained as Stephen Leaders at a one-week Leader’s Training Course, where they will learn how to begin and lead Stephen Ministry here at Ridge Church. Lisa Percak and Kathy O’Brien will be representing Ridge Church for Leadership Training February 1-7 in Anaheim, California. Our newly-trained Stephen Leaders, along with Pastor Sheri [who was trained a few years ago] will return home with the knowledge and skills to train members to serve as lay caregivers—called Stephen Ministers—in our congregation, match those Stephen Ministers with people in need of care, and provide ongoing support to our Stephen Ministry.

Here are some steps you can take as we begin this journey together:

† Give thanks to God for the life-transforming ministry ahead of us.
† Watch a couple of three-minute videos at [www.stephenministries.org/stories](http://www.stephenministries.org/stories) to learn more about the difference this caring ministry makes in people’s lives
† Give thanks to God for whom the Spirit has moved to become our first Stephen Leaders: Lisa Percak and Kathy O’Brien. Pray for them as they attend the Leader’s Training Course in Anaheim California in February. Also for Pastor Sheri who has already attended the training and will be working with Lisa and Kathy to start this ministry here at Ridge Church.
† Pray for the Spirit to raise up men and women of Ridge Church who will become our first Stephen Ministers. Prayerfully consider whether God might be calling you to this ministry.

In the days and weeks to come, you will be hearing much more about Stephen Ministry. If you have any questions about Stephen Ministry, please see Lisa, Kathy or Pastor Sheri.

As we begin this ministry, we believe that God will be at work through it. May St. Paul’s words Ephesians 3:20 capture our excitement, our hopes and our dreams for Stephen Ministry:

“Glory be to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.”
The Children's and Youth's Christmas Pageant was amazing! Thanks to the students and parent volunteers for all their hard work giving the 9:45 service an awesome show on December 14th. Special thanks to Pageant Co-Directors Shelley Cohs and Lauren Holloway and to our Music Director Ginger Moell.

Thank you to all who have been purchasing Scrip Cards and a special thanks to Kathy Giannini, who has been our driving force in this year round fundraising effort! Kathy's organizational skills and sales expertise—coupled with your purchasing power—has earned Ridge Church’s Children’s Ministries almost $500 since I began keeping track in September! Fantastic! Thank you, Ridge Church, for supporting our kids!

To help our readers become familiar with the Christian education opportunities available through our church, each month we will highlight a Bible Study/Christian education group. This month we focus on the Confirmation Class, led by Kathy O’Brien and Phil Loos.

Kathy shares: “Confirm not Conform is the name of our Confirmation class that began back in September and will finish this spring. This year’s class includes: Ashley Bates, Erin Bryce, Tristyn Cohs, Tim Giannini, Andrew Manous, Sam Smolinski, and TJ Zatorski. The curriculum we are using is different from what has been used in the past. Rather than being about ‘doing and believing what you’re told,’ our confirmands are completing a journey of exploration. The classes show, both in content and form, that we believe they are capable of making their own faith choices. Our task is to expose them to ideas, religions, experiences and concepts, and let the Holy Spirit and their own engagement do the rest. Our program focuses more on their questions than our answers, and puts us in the role of companions and guides rather than instructors.

“Each confirmand has chosen a passage of scripture that is at least 10 verses long that is meaningful to them, which they will memorize and share with the congregation as part of their confirmation. They will also be participating in several field trips and action projects in the next few months, which complement their classroom work. As a group they will be selecting a charity or cause with which they will work to make a difference in our community.”

The Confirm not Conform Confirmation class meets each week. Kathy promises more news to follow about this great group of young people in future newsletters.

Thanks to all our teachers and education leaders, who share their gifts and talents to give us opportunities to grow in our faith and closer to God.

Do you have a passion for teaching? We invite you to share your gifts and talents! Feeling a gentle nudge on your spirit? Answer the call! If you would like to be involved in Ridge Church’s education ministry, contact me at: sheri@ridgeumc.org, by phone 838-4770, or cell 718-4039.

In servanthood, pastor sheri
A friend recently shared the following story from *The Tale of Three Trees*, a children’s story about the lofty aspirations of an olive tree, an oak tree, and a pine tree:

“Each of these trees had a great dream to become something special in life. The olive tree dreamed of becoming a finely crafted treasure chest. It wanted to hold gold, silver, and precious jewels. One day a woodsman chose the one olive tree, out of all the trees in the forest, and cut it down. The olive tree was so thrilled. But as the craftsman began working on him, the tree realized they weren’t making him into a beautiful treasure chest; they were making him into a manger to hold food for animals. Heartbroken, his dreams were shattered.

“Similarly, the oak tree dreamed of becoming part of a huge ship that would carry important kings across the oceans. When the woodsman cut down the oak, he was so excited. But as time went on, he realized the craftsmen weren’t making him into a huge ship. They were making him into a tiny fishing boat. He was so discouraged, so disappointed.

“The pine tree lived on top of a high mountain. Its only dream was to always stand tall and remind people of God’s great creation. But in a split second, a bolt of lightning sent it tumbling to the ground, destroying its dreams. The woodsman came, picked it up and carried it off to the scrap pile.

“All three of these trees felt they had lost their value, they were so discouraged, so disappointed. Not one of their dreams had come to pass. But God had other plans for these trees. Many years later, Mary and Joseph couldn’t find any place to give birth to their little baby boy. They finally found a stable, and when Jesus was born they placed Him in a manger made from— you guessed it—the olive tree. The olive tree had wanted to hold precious jewels, but God had better plans, and it now held the greatest treasure of all time, the Son of God.

“A few more years went by, and one day some Roman soldiers were rummaging around in the pile of wood where the discarded pine tree lay. That pine tree just knew they were coming to cut him up for firewood. But much to its surprise, they cut only two small pieces out of it and formed them into a cross. And it was on this pine tree that Jesus was crucified. That tree is still pointing people to God’s love and compassion to this day.”

Of course, this is just a children’s story, but the point it makes is that all three trees thought they had lost their value, that their stories were over, yet they became integral parts of the greatest story ever shared.

While we adults may notice certain inconsistencies in this tale, we can focus on and be reminded of our worth and value. God knows your value and sees your potential! God has a plan for each of us, regardless of whether we can see it now or not. As you consider your New Year’s resolutions, keep God in your plans; you’re in God’s...

Happy New Year! ~pastor sheri
Happy Birthday!

2  Sue Schmit
3  Adam Bogs
5  Jim Hamblin
8  Gentry Jones
    Tom Labus
    Addison Smitka
10  Ray Barron
11  Pat Snyder
12  Gale Osgerby
13  Barbara Absher
    Kevin Morris
    Keith Sorrels
    Larry Temple
14  Kellie Brandner
15  Bradley Goralczyk
    Bev Keil
16  Sherry Seef
    Sharon Stewart
18  Barbara Zafran
21  Carol Osgerby
22  Ken Angotti
    Jennifer Barlow
    Rich Matthews
25  Tony Redman
    Dorothy Webb
26  Brenda Hendry
    Ila Iverson
28  Denise Labus
    Russ Snyder
29  Dave Dobrinich
    Shirley Matthews
    Kim Miskimins
30  Judy Conley
    Michael Phipps
31  Emily Labus
    Laura Stuart

USHERS

8:30
Dick Jones
Tanya Jones
Bev Shideler
Megan Shideler
11:00
Tom Regnier
Tom Schreuder
Scott Sutter
John Wagner

GREETERS

8:30
Tom & Ellie Marinier
1/4
Tom & Ellie Marinier
1/11
Rina Horgan & Brenda Hendry
1/18
Rina Horgan & Carol Lair
1/25

11:00
Lew & LaVern Grasty
1/4
Larry & Phyllis Washington
1/11
Virginia Schreuder &
    Dorothy Seefurth
1/18
Larry & Phyllis Washington
1/25

LITURGISTS

8:30
Rina Horgan
1/4
Sue Molenaar
1/11
John Molenaar
1/18
Wes Lukoshus
1/25

11:00
1/4
1/11
1/18
1/25

HOSPITALITY

8:30 & 11:00
Martha Circle

PASSING

John Ashenbremer
November 30th

Did you know that you can receive your end-of-
year giving statement via email? If you’d like
to try this option, please email
holly@ridgeumc.org, or call the church office
before January 15th.
Do you have news to share? The deadline for The Connection is January 15th.

The Souper Bowl of Caring is Super Bowl Sunday, February 1st. This year, Ridge Youth will be collecting donations after all three services. According to the Souper Bowl of Caring organization, last year nearly 7,600 groups throughout the United States participated to collect food items or donations that totaled more than $8.4 million to help feed the hungry. The need for food is still a growing problem for many families, especially in Northwest Indiana. Watch for more information about how you can help!