

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World

The Evangel



ST. STEPHEN'S
united methodist church



We are all, without exception, beloved children of God

From the Senior Pastor

Last week I was helping check people out who bought produce boxes to support Furlough Kitchen. It's a job I've really come to enjoy, I get to see people through the car window and thank them for their support of Furlough Kitchen as I check them off of the list. Some people are new faces from the neighborhood and some have been a part of St. Stephen's for a long time. One of the folks who came through to pick up a box was Julie Cortez, Ruth Stone's daughter. Many of you know Ruth, and know that awhile back she moved into an independent living facility. Her family has been cleaning out her house to get it ready to sell, and Julie brought the jar in the photo on this page with her when she picked up her produce box. It's from a drive to support missions at St. Stephen's Methodist Church in February 1964.



Looking at this jar of 79¢ while we were doing a fundraiser got me thinking about all the different ways people have supported ministry at St. Stephen's over the years: through meals, and auctions, and fundraisers of all sorts. Through one-time donations because of work bonuses or gifts from others, from legacy gifts made in wills and estates, through gifts of real estate or other valuable items.

Through it all, the bulk of the financial support for the meaningful ministry we do has been the tithes and offerings of members, and I'm writing to ask you to continue to remember the church through your generosity. We are doing incredible and meaningful ministry during the pandemic; reaching out to church members and recent guests through our phone call ministry, providing families with a hot meal through the Furlough Kitchen, running vacation bible school through smartphones and computer screens, and bringing music into peoples' homes through Houston's Virtual Choir.

While Furlough Kitchen has been financially self sustaining — with over half of the donations coming from people beyond the St. Stephen's community — our giving overall is, understandably, a little bit down. I'm writing to ask you to prayerfully consider making a gift today to support all that God is doing through St. Stephen's, and all that God will do through our church in the weeks and months and years to come. Even though we cannot gather, we can still be the church, and we can show our neighbors the love of God we've been showing them for the last 70 years. Will you consider making a gift today to help us do this work for the next 70 years?

Paz, Nathan

Ministries and Resources During COVID-19

In case you missed the article in the July newsletter about the ways we continue to make disciples during the Coronavirus pandemic, we have a new page on our website that has information on ways to connect, as well as links to media stories about St. Stephen's COVID-19 ministries. Visit ststx.org/coronavirus to find instructions on how to connect for worship and Bible studies, resources for children and families, how to support COVID-19 ministries and more!

St. Stephen's Calling Ministry

One of our newest ministries is a calling ministry in which volunteers are reaching out to folks who are actively connected to St. Stephen's to see how they and their families are doing during the difficult months since the beginning of the pandemic. Volunteers have shared how they have been blessed through these conversations, some with people they knew, as well as new people they hadn't met. Some spoke with persons who began participating for the first time in virtual worship and events after the pandemic began. Even those who shared that they were doing well were appreciative of the fact that someone cared about them. Both volunteers and the persons they called reported that they were looking forward to a safer time in the future when they might be able to meet in person.

We would like to thank all of the wonderful people who volunteered for the calling ministry: **Ellie Larato, Karen Alford, Martha Hall, Ron and Kathy Bruns, Sharon Graham, Lang Eng, Donna Ebelt-Wilson, Dan Barcus, Mary Brennan, Lola Hensley, Shirley Moan, Betty Patterson, Cindy Tindol, Dorothy Lockhart, Annie Brew, Diane Johnson and Mary Peek.** Many thanks to **Emily Leffler and Pam Steward**, as well, who helped coordinate this ministry.

The cover photo collage features a "behind the scenes" look at some of our awesome VBS volunteers preparing for our first ever virtual VBS. Read more about it on page 3.

THE EVANGEL Vol. 25 Issue 8, August 1, 2020 (USPS 019-947) is published monthly free of charge to subscribers by St. Stephen's United Methodist Church, 2003 West 43rd St., Houston, TX 77018-3009. Periodicals postage paid at Houston, TX. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to St. Stephen's United Methodist Church, 2003 West 43rd St., Houston, TX 77018-3009.

Please submit dates, pictures and information for the September 2020 Evangel by August 24 to info@stsumc.org.



The church does not belong to us

From the Director of Family Ministries

Virtual VBS

For the first time ever, St. Stephen's hosted a virtual VBS the week of July 27th. Over 100 kits were picked up from the church and a huge VBS hub was created on the St. Stephen's website. This year, the children at VBS became Knights of North Castle and got to take part in many of the familiar VBS staples (like crafts, music, story, science, and even the Bible Village) from home. Each day we hosted a live morning assembly on Facebook Live and our Knights could participate in daily live classes on ZOOM. It's certainly not the way we were planning to hold VBS, but it's a reminder that God's reach has no limit. I'd like to thank all of the participant families for taking the chance on an online VBS, and our small band of volunteers who helped make it happen: **Jeny, Flinn, and Molly Burrell; Shirley Moan and Jessie Durkot; Emily, Brody, and Caroline Leffler; Susan, and Chris Barcus; Candice, Landon, Caroline, and Leyton Croker; Christie Fisher; Jonathan, Olivia, and Violet Lowe; Rev. Nathan, and Rev. Suzi**

Messy Church at Home

August has five Sundays which means the last Sunday, August 30th, will be a Messy Church Sunday! A registration will soon be available online where you can register for a packet for your children to take part. Our theme is yet to be decided but we'll be bringing all of the fun of Messy Church home to you.

Ever wonder what Messy Church at St. Stephen's is all about? You can find out by watching this short video:
<https://vimeo.com/377109212>

Blessing of the Backpacks

Even though the immediate status for the return to school is unknown and differs between districts, we are still going to be holding a Blessing of the Backpacks during our online service on August 30th. Whether your backpack goes with you on campus or stays in your closet, we feel it is still important to pray over all of our children, teachers, administrators, and support staff before the approaching school year. In the week leading up to the Blessing of the Backpacks, we'll make Backpack tags available to collect from the church. You'll be able to sign up for a backpack tag online soon.

Steven Fisher



Thank You From the Blood Center



The Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center expresses sincere gratitude for St. Stephen's very successful blood drive held on July 26. As an extra safety precaution for donors and staff, the drive was held in a mobile unit. The Gulf Coast Regional Blood Center is trying to rebuild its blood supply for Central Houston. Our goal, set by the Blood Center before the drive, was 15-20 successful blood donations. We surpassed our goal with 21 successful donors and 26 total products collected, which can save up to 63 lives! A few days before our drive, the center had only a one-day supply, so blood donations made at St. Stephen's drive were extremely important and appreciated. Thanks again to all who donated to help save lives!



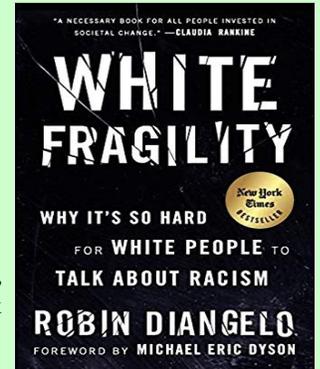
God is in our neighborhood and not just in our building

Get Involved

Book Study: White Fragility by Dr. Robin Diangelo

We'll be starting a hard-copy study on the book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* in the latter part of August. Actual dates and times will be determined by participant availability. This book became immensely popular very quickly and has been recommended by our Bishop, Scott Jones, as well as the bishops in Missouri and Louisiana as helpful reading as we learn what we can do to help rid the world of the sins of racism. Registration for the study is now open at <https://bit.ly/stsbookstudy>

We'll have a couple of different options for people to participate in this reading group. When you register, please indicate that you'd like to buy a copy of the book from the church or that you'll be buying the book elsewhere. If you have any questions or issues registering, feel free to contact Nathan at (nathan@stshtx.org).



Financial Gifts

God is doing great things in and through St. Stephens, and we continue to seek new ways of being the church. The COVID situation has made many of our normal ways of making financial offerings unfeasible. If you are able to make a one-time gift or set up a recurring gift, it will be put to good use. To set up online giving, visit stshtx.org and click on "give." Our giving provider, Planning Center, uses Stripe to process all financial transactions, and Stripe maintains the highest standards of privacy and security with financial info. If you do not do online giving, you are welcome to mail checks to the church; even though the offices are closed we are still monitoring the mail. Thank you for continuing to support what God is doing through our church!



**August Communion Offering:
Stevens Elementary School**

Support Furlough Kitchen Houston

COVID-19 has been hard on all of us. Many people have lost their jobs as a result of the effects the virus has had on the economy. In April, St. Stephen's began a new ministry partnership providing free meals each Tuesday and Thursday to 100+ people who have been laid off or furloughed from their jobs due to the Coronavirus. Since then, the Furlough Kitchen ministry has seen a steady increase in demand. If you would like to help this ministry continue to feed hungry people in our area who have lost their jobs, you can make a donation by visiting <https://furloughkitchenhouston.org/>

Order Farm Boxes

Another option to support the ongoing work of Furlough Kitchen Houston AND provide your family with fresh, local produce, is to buy a box of produce! The produce will vary week to week, but comes to us from The Common Market, a partner we are so excited to work with! Check out their website <https://www.thecommonmarket.org/> for more information about who they are and why they're such a great partner for Furlough Kitchen. Produce boxes are available every 2 weeks. Order on a Friday for contact-free pick up the following Tuesday outside the fellowship hall in St. Stephen's Educational Building parking lot. To place an order for a Farm Box, please visit <https://stsumc.churchcenter.com/registrations>

Update: Thanks in part to everyone buying these produce boxes, we have served over 3,000 meals to folks in need here in the community! In addition to supporting the work we're doing through Furlough Kitchen, these produce box sales have been a lifeblood to local farmers. Our friends at The Common Market tell us that this food box program is helping keep farmers afloat in the midst of some incredibly uncertain times.





Worship connects us with God and with each other

From the Pastor of Music and Worship

Writing letters, then and now....

I do not know why, because I usually am not a collector, but for some reason I have kept every letter I have ever gotten and that is a lot of letters by now. When I recently came upon some boxes containing old letters, I began to read through them, right there, sitting on a box in the garage. Letters in German from my mom, letters in English from friends, and memories and images started swirling in my head.

I do not know if you are aware of this, but the art of writing letters has pretty much disappeared in the digital age. I find that rather regrettable because writing a letter is a wonderful process to digest and discern one's own journey. (Much like writing a newsletter article...)

We begin with a greeting and perhaps a few questions about the addressee's life and family but usually we quickly move on to describe what is happening in our own lives. And as we write we process through our experience and somewhat relive it. Maybe our letter is a reaction to someone else's action. When we sit down and write out our argument, it often releases the stress of the confrontation and we can find words of reconciliation and kindness that might not have been part of our response when we began to write.

I remember hearing the advice of a counselor to write a letter to a person who upset us and never sending it. In German we have a proverb that says, "paper is patient" and it is true, isn't it? It is not the same as typing something up on a computer and being able to delete it instantly. The process of writing can be wonderfully therapeutic.

When I was reading Paul's letter to the church in Galatia which is, by the way, what we as a church are studying for the next 6 weeks, I could read Paul's frustration, love, passion, impatience, brilliant mind, anger, empathy, and so much more. It was like watching him, watching the Galatians getting confused by a group of missionaries. I could literally feel him getting anxious over them (the Galatians) following these new missionaries versus what he had taught them. It was like watching someone seeing his life's work falling apart. If I, who is clearly a couple of millennia removed, can sense his anxiousness, how much more must have the Galatians felt it? I would bet though, that the writing of the letter was much more effective than if he had gone there and chewed them out in person. In his letter he had to anticipate each of their replies and make an effective argument that would not leave any room for doubt.

Paul's letters are fascinating to me. Much like Paul, I have always been a rule follower and I desire a certain order in my life. I tend to get anxious when chaos erupts. If Paul lived today, I wonder how he would fare on social media. Would he be the one writing long posts and then engaging in never-ending arguments? Or, would he say, "Maybe I should write a letter". Imagine if we would write actual letters to all those people on whose social media posts we comment every day. My guess is that our interactions with our fellow humans would be more truthful, kinder, and much more effective. We could give it a try, what do we have to lose?

Gottes Segen,
Pastor Suzi

Current Worship Series

We'll round out the summer with our current series, "Shalom", and have our first Messy Sunday on August 30!

When we wrote this plan, it looked like we'd be in the middle of Olympic season during this series. Well, 2020 had other plans, but it's still a great time to dig into Galatians and celebrate the breadth of God's love and vision for humankind. We'll continue looking at Paul's vision for a diverse and welcoming church from the book of Galatians as we celebrate the incredible things God is able to accomplish through us!





The stories of scripture transform our own stories



Be a Reader in Worship

Each Sunday while we are worshipping away from the sanctuary, we will have two roles available to be filled by our congregation: Liturgy and Affirmation of Faith Reader, and Scripture Reader. There are a few requirements for those who wish to participate. You will need to have a device (phone, video camera, etc.) that lets you film video and audio. You'll also need to be knowledgeable on how to upload a file. Depending on the video length, you might be able to email, but more likely, you will have to share your video through online storage (Google Drive for example). We ask that videos be filmed in landscape (sideways) orientation as this will display better for our worship.

If you are interested in being a liturgist or reader for Sunday worship services, please contact Steven Fisher at steven@stshx.org. We'll email you the script that you'll be using. Don't worry about trying to learn it by heart. Write it down, print the words out, whatever is most comfortable for you.

Member Milestones

Happy 50th Anniversary!



Congratulations to **Mike and Martha Hall** who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on August 8, 2020! Our prayers are sent their way for many more happy years together!

Address Update

Jean Parks moved to a different unit at The Village of the Heights. Her new address is: 1407 Studewood St, Apt 119, Houston, TX 77008

In Memory

We extend our prayers and sympathy to the family of **Frances Bohlae**, who passed away July 3, 2020. Frances joined St. Stephen's in 1989 and was an active member until recently when her health began to decline. Her family is planning a celebration of her life at a later, safer date.

Prayer Concerns

Anita Bishop, Rhonda Boehm, the family of Frances Bohlae, Sandy Bonnin, Isaac Booth, Florence Bowman, Tom Burton, Arlene Caler, Nathan Cartwright, Jan Chambers (Shelley Holcombe's mother), Jess Chambers, Delight Clary, Chappie & Gloria Collins, Janet Cummins, Andrew Drapkin, Allen Ebelt, Kayla Ebelt, Walter Ebelt, Sarah Eloff, Kathleen Heath, Dorothy & Rick Hedges, Dorrie Jackson, Rhonda Linder, Penny Loy, Frances Mayberry, Henry & Sarah McKinley, Wayne Meyenberg, Dian Parker, Brenda Paulk, Liz Powers & family, Milton & Noni Ray, Rogers & Jane Roberts, Terry & Sandra Russell, Barbara Smith, the Soto family, Preston Taylor, Jan Weeks, Patricia Williams, Todd Wilson, Carol Yip Choy, the Zanelli family, Shara Zatopek

Social Justice Prayers: The sin of racism and its effects on all of us; Members of the CITGO6: Tomeu Vadell, Gustavo Cardenas, Jorge Toledo, Alirio Zambrano, Jose Luis Zambrano, Jose Angel Pereira; and all who are imprisoned or persecuted unjustly

In the Military

Allen Clutter, Keanna Piercefield

In Hospital

Paul Wieting—Encompass Rehab

Jason Holcombe—Methodist Willowbrook



ST. STEPHEN'S
united methodist church

The Evangelist

2003 W. 43rd St.
Houston, TX 77018
(713) 686-8241
stshtx.org



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

PERIODICAL
PAID
HOUSTON, TX

Fun Fact

Even a pandemic can't stop the fun of VBS! St. Stephen's hosted its first ever virtual VBS the week of July 27th.

What's Inside

- Page 2: A Message From the Senior Pastor, COVID-19 Ministries Update
- Page 3: Family Ministries Update
- Page 4: Get Involved
- Page 5: A Message From the Pastor of Music and Worship, Current Worship Series
- Page 6: Member Milestones, Prayer Concerns

Our Vision

-  We are all, without exception, beloved children of God
-  The church does not belong to us
-  God is in our neighborhood and not just in our building
-  Worship connects us with God and with each other
-  The stories of scripture transform our own stories

Stay at Home Schedule

Here are the weekly activities during our Stay at Home schedule:

- Daily: Devotional Emails
- Sunday mornings: Sunday School: 9:30 am (Zoom, Facebook)
- Worship: 11 a.m. Youtube, Facebook
- Feast Virtual Potluck: noon, Zoom

Tuesdays at noon and Thursdays at 7 pm: Houston's Virtual Choir Rehearsal (Anybody may join via phone, smartphone, tablet or computer. Contact Pastor Suzi at suzi@stsumc.org for information.)

Tuesdays and Thursdays: Furlough Kitchen Meal Pick-Up, 4:30-6 pm (Education Bldg Parking Lot)

Wednesdays: Pastor's Bible Study: noon, Zoom (Resumes August 12)

For information on how to connect with Zoom, where to find us on Facebook or YouTube, or to sign up for our email list, visit stshtx.org/coronavirus

