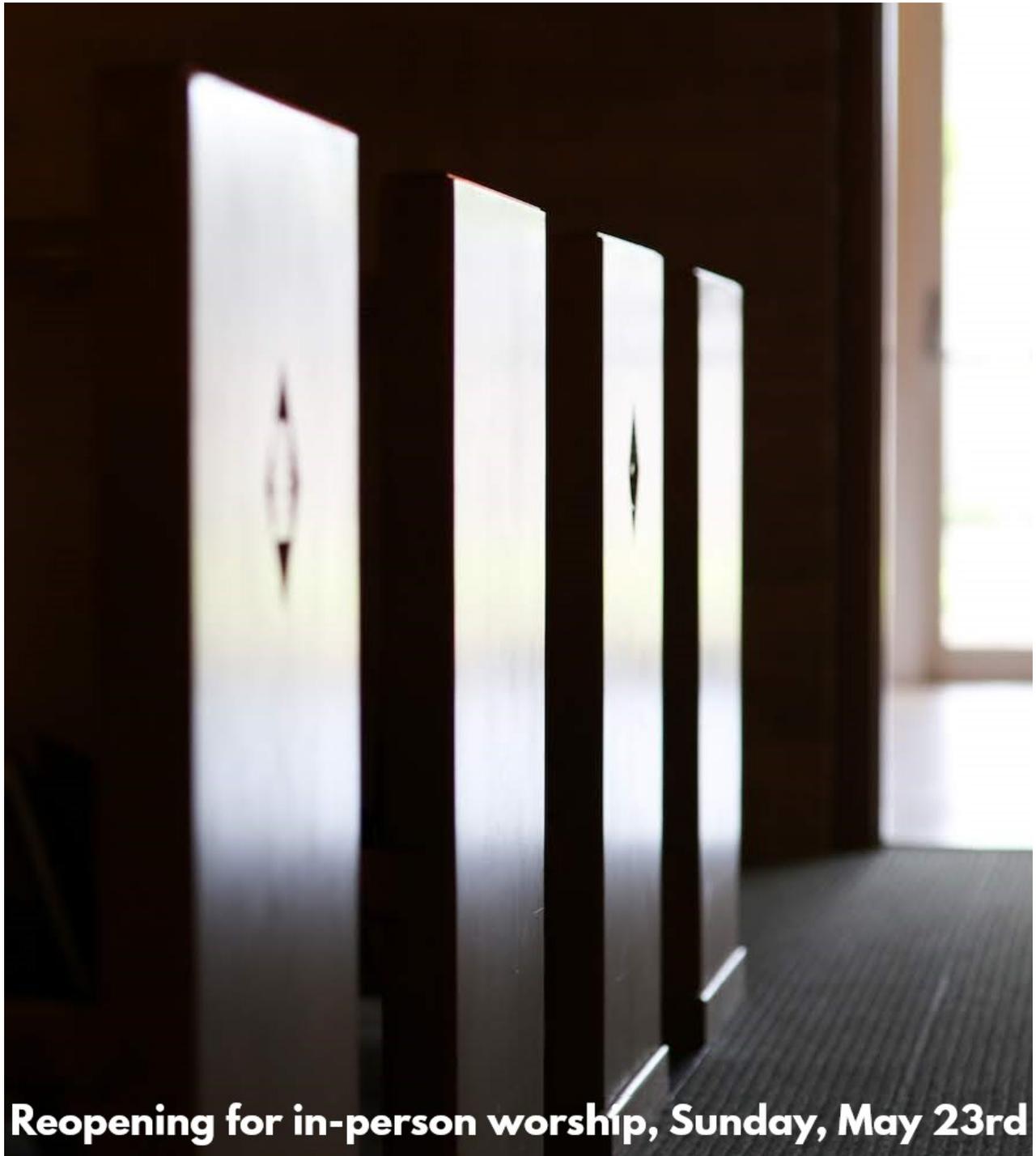


Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World

The Evangel



Reopening for in-person worship, Sunday, May 23rd



ST. STEPHEN'S
united methodist church



We are all, without exception, beloved children of God

Family Ministries Update

Confirmation Class

We are excited to announce that we will be offering a Confirmation class this Fall and registration is open! We are planning to start on September 12th but this far out, these dates are subject to minor changes. To take part in confirmation, a student must be enrolled in the sixth grade or older at the beginning of the 2021/22 school year. A student's family does not have to be members of St. Stephen's, the Methodist church, or any church to register. If you are ready to register, go to stshtx.org/events but if you have any questions about our Confirmation, please reach out to our Family Ministries Director, Steven Fisher, at steven@stshtx.org.



VBS Volunteer Registration

Our VBS sold out this year in just over 12 hours and now the next thing we need are volunteers. Our volunteer registration is available on stshtx.org/events and there are a number of roles and responsibilities to choose from. Our VBS can't happen without you and you are the reason it is so highly thought of. Join the team and let's Discover together on Adventure Island.



Lakeview

The deadline to sign up for summer camp is May 30th. Spots are still open for our trip June 14-18.



COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Coming to St. Stephen's!

Harris County Public Health and Commissioner Cagle, Harris County Precinct 4 will offer the MODERNA vaccine in the fellowship hall at St. Stephen's on Tuesday, May 4 from 8:00 am – 3:00 pm with follow up on Tuesday, June 1 from 8:00 am – 3:00 pm. This vaccine is available for people 18+ and no ID required. You must call [281-350-1029](tel:281-350-1029) to register for an appointment.

Additionally, Methodist Hospital has surplus vaccines at this time. Vaccine appointments for Methodist Hospital can be made online at houstonmethodist.org.



Oak Forest Deed for Change

The work being done by Oak Forest Deed for Change was highlighted on the front page of the Houston Chronicle Sunday, April 18. St. Stephen's members Ashley Cavazos and Jonathan Lowe have been instrumental in this work, and the church has been able to provide support by coordinating with the pro-bono legal team, providing volunteers, and helping in other ways. If you are a Houston Chronicle subscriber, the article can be found here: <http://bit.ly/stschronicle41821>



Cover photo: We're coming back together!
(See the message from the Reopening Task Force on page 5.)

Please submit dates, pictures and information for the June 2021 Evangel by May 24 to info@stsumc.org.

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The church does not belong to us

Johnson Memorial School News

Easter at JMS is always special! We enjoyed a meaningful message from Pastor Nathan at our monthly outdoor chapel time, a scavenger hunt for each class on the playground, learning all the different ways we can decorate eggs, and so much more! Our spring unit includes a student favorite of growing our own caterpillars in the classrooms, seeing their lifecycle before our very own eyes and then watching a beautiful butterfly emerge from their chrysalis. We walked over to TC Jester Park for a picnic and a nature scavenger hunt on Earth Day (Thursday, April 22). Some of the classes were able to release their butterflies in the park.



Tours for prospective JMS families looking to join us for the 2021-2022 school year are well underway after school hours. Families in our community may drop off their completed registration form; spots will be filled on a first-come, first-serve basis. Our registration forms are available on the church website. Questions can be directed to Candice Croker, Director, at JMS@stsumc.org.



God is in our neighborhood and not just in our building

Get Involved

Accounting Team Volunteer Needed

The church accounting team is looking for a volunteer with Quickbooks experience to join into our work. If you have experience with Quickbooks and are interested in serving the church in this way, please email operations@ststxt.org.



A New Directory

We're excited to be working on a new directory for St. Stephen's! If you would like to be included in the directory, please update your information by following the link in the graphic. If you need help, please contact one of the members of our directory team:

- Barbara Lowe—barbara.k.lowe@gmail.com
- Colleen Green—ca51green@comcast.net



Church Clean Up Day

St. Stephen's is preparing to once again host in-person services beginning on Pentecost Sunday, May 23rd. Because our sanctuary has not been used by a congregation in over a year, we want to make sure it is cleaned before our doors reopen.

Sign up at ststxt.org/events/ to join us on Saturday, May 8th! Come for a little while, come for the whole time. Help out a little, help out a lot. There will be a role for you as we take another step towards gathering back together. If you need help signing up, please contact Mary Ellen at 713-686-8241.



St. Stephen's Softball

Softball season is back! Here is the schedule for St. Stephen's softball team:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| April 25: 3 pm | May 23: No game (ODC Tournament) |
| May 2: 5 pm | June 6: 6 pm |
| May 9: No game (Mother's Day) | June 13: 5 pm |
| May 16: 5 pm | |

If you would like to come watch the team play or if you are interested in playing, please contact Bryan McDaniel at bryanmcd79@gmail.com.



The Gathering Place

The Gathering Place ministry for persons with Alzheimer's or dementia has not been able to meet in person at St. Stephen's during the pandemic, but our volunteer, Gwen Hunt, continues to spread love to all the care partners and their care givers. Each week, she sends them a special card with a puzzle or other fun activity. She'll be recognized in May by CarePartners Texas as one of their volunteers of the year! If you would like to read more about it, please follow this link: <https://bit.ly/3evExex>





Worship connects us with God and with each other

A Note from the Reopening Task Force

Worship connects us with God and with each other. This is one of our five core values, and in our recent listening sessions, we talked about it as we started planning for reopening the church. Here's the explicating paragraph for that core value:

In our worship, we offer our love to God and accept God's love for us (Ps. 100). Communal worship is the center of our lives together. When we gather to worship as the body of Christ, we experience the presence of Jesus as we sing, pray, laugh, play, listen and learn (Mt. 18:20). We welcome children as they are to play an active role in worship, experiencing what it means to worship God with others. No one is excluded from Christ's ministry; at St. Stephen's, we welcome anyone who seeks an encounter with the living God. When worship includes all different sorts of people, we reflect God's Kingdom.

We have waited until we felt like we could live into this vision to regather for in-person worship, and we think that, between vaccine numbers and other safety developments, we are there. So we'll be gathering for worship in-person on May 23 — Pentecost — for the first time since March of 2020. As we get closer to that date, we'll be posting a full list of our COVID-19 procedures and policies on the church website. But we want you to be confident of the steps we are taking, so here's a little bit of what to expect when we come back together.

- **St. Stephen's is a singing church.** Congregational singing is a huge part of our worship practice. We heard from many people in the listening sessions that if we aren't singing together, there's not much point in worshipping in-person! Because we want everyone who wants to sing to be able to do so, we're going to be extra stringent about mask wearing and social distancing between households in how we space ourselves throughout the sanctuary.
- **Our online worship has been life-giving to many, and will continue.** We've heard from people who are homebound, people who have to travel because of their jobs or their kids, and people who live far from the church and just can't make it to 43rd street every Sunday about how wonderful online worship has been for them; it's allowed them to stay connected to our church in spite of difficulties. Even once we begin to meet together in-person again, we will include people worshipping online in our services! The other thing that this means is that if you are feeling the least bit under-the-weather, please stay home and join our online worship community. We want to do everything we can to stop the spread of COVID-19, and other illnesses, too!
- **Attendance taking will look different!** At the doors, we'll have volunteers to check peoples' temperature and welcome them to worship. Our usher teams will include people who are using our church software to sign folks into worship, and record where they sit. We're going to subdivide the sanctuary into 5 zones and keep track of which of the zones each person goes to. In the event that someone learns that they have tested positive, we'll send a church-wide email with the Zone they were sitting in, allowing folks to decide if they need to be tested. While we'll share which zone someone was in, the identity of the person who tested positive will remain anonymous, to protect everyone's confidentiality.

Other safety measures will be in place, and this is a work in progress! We want to ensure that we are doing everything we can to make people feel safe, comfortable, and confident when they choose to worship in-person. We'll have sanitizing stations, dismiss people through designated doors, avoid passing offering plates, and generally be safety-conscious.

With everyone's help, we have confidence that we'll reopen smoothly, safely, and in a way that really allows us to connect with God, and with each other, in wonderful ways. See you soon!

The Reopening Task Force

Emily Leffler, Chris Barcus, Brenda Paulk, Jim Varnell, Steven Fisher, Suzi Byrd, Heather Velez, Nathan Lonsdale Bledsoe



The sanctuary will be open for silent prayer during Drive-Thru Communion on Sunday, May 2. Please wear a mask and practice social distancing.



The stories of scripture transform our own stories

Altar Flowers

Our altar flower registration is open and available online at stshtx.org/events/. We'll be meeting together in the sanctuary again soon and there are several dates available if you wish to donate flowers for the altar during worship, in memory or in honor of loved ones.

When you place your order online, you will be able to indicate a color preference, include your dedication and pay by credit card, if you prefer. You may also select the "pay later" option if you prefer to pay by check. The cost is \$55 for the standard arrangement. If you need help ordering, please call the church secretary, Mary Ellen, at 713-686-8241.



In Memory

We are saddened to announce that **Ruth Austin** passed away at her home on March 27, 2021, after an extended illness. Ruth joined St. Stephen's in 1990 along with her brother, Donald Burkett, whom she cared for until his death in 2013. A funeral service will be held for Ruth on Tuesday, May 4, at 1:00 pm at one of the outdoor shelters at Houston National Cemetery, 10410 Veterans Memorial Drive, in Houston, Texas. Masks and social distancing are required for all who attend the service.

A service of death and resurrection to celebrate the life of **Betty Patterson** will be held on Saturday, May 15, at 11 a.m. in the St. Stephen's sanctuary. In person attendance will be permitted using the same guidelines we'll be using when we return to in-person worship on May 23. Social distancing will be enforced, and masks will be required. We'll also be live-streaming the service on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/stshtx. Please continue to pray for Betty's family and friends during this time as we grieve her passing.

Our prayers and sympathy are extended to the family of **Edwin Day** who died on January 3, 2021, from complications related to COVID-19. Ed and his wife, Dovie, who passed away in 2015, joined St. Stephen's in 2005. A private graveside service with full military honors was held for Ed on January 29 at Houston National Cemetery.

Sympathy and prayers are also extended to the family of **Billye Sifford**, who passed away on January 19, 2021, one week after her ninety-first birthday. Billye had been a member of St. Stephen's since 1967. A graveside service was held for her on January 30 at Earthman Resthaven in Houston, Texas.

Prayer Concerns

Karen Alford & family upon the death of her mother, Margery Gray; Dwight Allen, Pat Anderson & family, Sherri Anderson, John & Dorothy Artz, Kathy Ballard, Anita Bishop and daughters, Jeanie & Janya; Hilda Bluett (Steven Fisher's grandmother), Rhonda Boehm, Florence Bowman, Mary Brennan, Arlene Caler, Mark Cass, Delight Clary, Charles Cobler, Chappie & Gloria Collins, Martha Collum, Patricia Creed, Janet Cummins, Charles Davenport, David Derr (in home hospice care) & wife, Mary; Ed & Pam Dickson, Andrew Drapkin, Angela Earl, Allen Ebelt, Kayla Ebelt, Walter & Maurice Ebelt, Megan Eyre, Robert Faltisek, Blaine Fernandez, Christie Fisher, Rod Fisher, Michael Guadagnoli, Kathy Gunter, Charm Hensley and son, Daniel; Lola Hensley, Elizabeth Hickerson, Harlis & Curtis Hicks, Dorrie Jackson, Dwayne Johnson (Pam Steward's son, in hospice care), Dot Lockhart, Penny Loy, Barbara Luikens, Frances Mayberry, Ann McIntire, Henry & Sarah McKinley, Wayne Meyenberg, Rev. Nathan Lonsdale Bledsoe & family upon the death of Nathan's uncle, Ajay; Bill Niederhofer, Mamie Niederhofer, Dian Parker, the family of Betty Patterson, the Patton family, Brenda Paulk, Milton & Noni Ray, Rande Richnow, Rogers & Jane Roberts, Terry & Sandra Russell, Flora Sandt, Barbara Smith, Meranda Soto, Tim & Lee Strouse, Hazel Swearingen, Darrell & Cheree Taylor & family, Preston Taylor, Paul Wieting, Dale Wilson & Donna Ebelt-Wilson, Todd Wilson, David Wright & family, Rick & Johnny Yarbrough, Carol Yip Choy, Judy Zanelli

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

In Hospital



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

**Communion Offering
for May:
Stevens Elementary School**



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

In-person worship resumes May 23 at 11 am. Here are the weekly activities during the remainder of our Stay at Home schedule:

Daily:
Devotional Emails

Sunday mornings:
Sunday School: 9:30 am (Zoom, Facebook)
Worship: 11 am (Youtube, Facebook)
Feast Virtual Potluck: noon (Zoom)

First Sunday of the Month:
Drive Through Communion and Silent Prayer in the Sanctuary: 12:30-2pm

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

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