

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World

The Evangel

December 2023 Edition



ST. STEPHEN'S
united methodist church



We are all, without exception, beloved children of God

From the Senior Pastor

Jesus is coming, look busy!

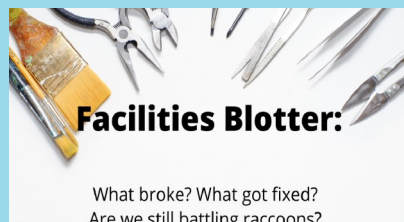
This was a funny bumper sticker my youth minister had hanging in his office when I was in high school, and captures the madness of the advent season very well in plain — and funny — language. It's pretty amazing, no matter how well we plan ahead or how closely we read our calendars, it always seems like this time of year arrives before we know it. I hope that you and your family take full advantage of the opportunities to worship, fellowship, celebrate and give thanks.

As you may already know, Pastor Heather will be leaving our staff at the end of the year as she and her family move to Prescott, Arizona for a wonderful opportunity. I hope you'll join me in wishing her well in her new adventure! Following the traditional service on Dec. 10, we'll have a reception in the Narthex to celebrate her ministry with us these last couple years.

I hope you'll take time to read the calendar about all the wonderful things we have going on this year: A Christmas Sing Along Dec. 9, prayer and reflection time each Tuesday from 9-1, wonderful worship, parties, children's activities, and so much more!

I also hope that as we come to the end of 2023, you'll be prayerfully reflecting on your financial support of the church. If you're in a position to do so, please consider making a special year-end gift to support our church.

Also, exciting news! Starting the weekend of January 27, we'll be working with consultants from Horizons Stewardship on a capital campaign as well as going through the Unstuck process to focus our mission and ministry on our vision. If you are interested in learning more about what all of this entails, please let me know!



Isaiah 40:31 Better now than never? After originally buying several TV screens in 2019 to display church information on around our campus, we're now going to hang them up! Look for them soon with all kinds of great information.

Acts 27:13 We are beginning the project of replacing the HVAC in our Fellowship Hall! Now we'll only need to wait on the supply chain, custom equipment, weather, contractor availability, and....

From the Pastor of Music and Worship



Hello Beloved St. Stephen's Church Family,

Thank you for being a loving church who truly cares for the entire community, who continues to care for the needy and the homeless, and who leads in justice for all! It has been a wonderful three plus years serving this community with you. Unfortunately, our time together is coming to an end as my family and I are moving to Prescott, Arizona in January. I have accepted a job as a Hospice Chaplain and will start on January 8th. My last Sunday in person will be Christmas Eve Sunday. It has been such a blessing to be here at St. Stephen's! I will miss you all and think of you often and fondly as we move forward. Thank you again for being such a loving church and a blessing to myself and my family.

Blessings to you all,
Rev. Heather Velez

Cover photo: Sunrise over St. Stephen's (taken by Christie Fisher)



The church does not belong to us

Youth and Family News

Messy Christmas —It's the most wonderful Messy Church of the year!

Messy Christmas returns on Tuesday, December 12th from 5:30-7 PM. Our theme will of course be Christmas and there will be loads of fun to be had at our 8 craft stations that will tell the Christmas story in an interactive way.

As it is Christmas, we'll also have a photo booth and a mission project.

Dinner will be included for the whole family as per usual. Free for all. Bring your friends!

Messy Church includes worship designed for young children and dinner for the whole family too—all free. See you there from 5:30-7 PM.

UMYF Christmas Spectacular—Our annual youth Christmas party takes place on Sunday, December 10th from 5-7 PM.

In addition to our usual slate of wacky games, we'll be enjoying a Pastor Nathan-cooked meal, and a white elephant gift exchange, and we'll take our 2023 UMYF Christmas pajama photo.

If you decide to take part in the white elephant gift exchange then the value of said gift should not exceed \$10. We will buy enough gifts for everyone taking part so even if you are unable to provide your own gift, you're still included!

The No-Prep Pageant— Sign up to take part in our Christmas pageant!

There are spots for all ages and roles for all who are interested. We'll provide the stage and the costumes and you... well, you just have to be there!

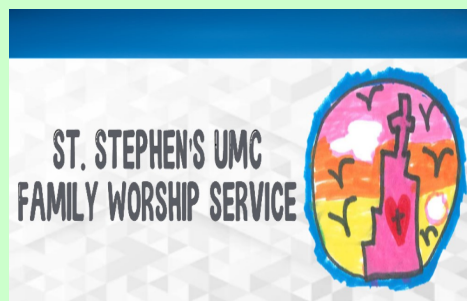
Why is it "no-prep"? Because there are no lines to read. We'll have five different narrators who will describe the Christmas story. At the same time, our other volunteers will act out what is being said.

Sounds simple right? Register at stshtx.org/events

Family Worship—Our regular monthly Family Worship Service and Community Breakfast will take place on Sunday, December 10th.

The community breakfast is free and open to all (even if you can't stay for the service) and includes coffee from our friends at Ship Channel Coffee on Wakefield. The service begins at 9:15 a.m. and features a band playing contemporary music, two craft tables for children, and space in the room for wiggles and movement.

Christmas Eve Family Worship—We will have a special family worship service on Christmas Eve (December 24th) at 10:30 am. We'll be serving a community brunch and holding a more contemporary service. This service will also feature crafts, and the aforementioned No-Prep Pageant.



December 2023 Highlights

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Sunday School— 9:15 am, Education Bldg Traditional Service—10:30 am, Sanctuary Virtual Service—10:30 am, Facebook & YouTube Family Worship Service—Second Sunday of the Month at 9:15 am, Fellowship Hall			For a more detailed calendar or to learn more about our church visit stshtx.org or call the church office. <u>For a list of recurring events, please see the next page.</u> *Register for events at stshtx.org CR=Choir Room FH=Fellowship Hall Sanc=Sanctuary			
					1	2
3 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am- Traditional Worship With Communion	4	5 Line Dancing, Tuesdays 9:30 	6	7	8 Family Fun Game Night 6-9 PM 	9 Red Hats Cookie Bake 9:30 am 4 pm- Christmas Concert 
10 Community Breakfast 8 am Family Worship Service 9:15 am 9:15am Sunday School 10:30am- Traditional Worship	11 10am— The Gathering Place, FH 	12 Messy Christmas 5:30 FH 	13	14 Prayer Shawl Ministry 10 am, Room 112 	15 	16 Sewing Circle 1PM Last Day for 1st Class mail to arrive before Christmas 
17 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am- Traditional Worship 5:00 pm— Young-ish Adult Christmas Party	18	19 Sanctuary open for prayer 9-1 pm 	20 Senior Games 10:00 AM 	21	22	23
24 Christmas Eve 10:30 am— Family Christmas Eve and No Prep Pageant 7 pm— Candelight service	25 Christmas Day 	26	27 January Newsletter Article Deadline 	28 	29	30
31 10:30am- Lessons and Carols Service 	Young-ish Adults Christmas Party December 17, 5-8 PM White Elephant Gift Exchange • limit 20 		PROJECT WARMTH Decorate the Library Christmas Tree with new Hats, Gloves, Scarves, Socks, and more. Give generously to help people in need from now until Christmas Eve. Questions? info@stshtx.org 		UMYF Christmas Spectacular SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10TH 5:00 - 7:00 PM GAMES, DINNER, WHITE ELEPHANT GIFT EXCHANGE, GROUP PHOTO, AND MORE! 	



God is in our neighborhood and not just in our building

Get Involved

Christmas Sing-along— Join us on Saturday, December 9th at 4 pm for a joyous neighborhood Sing-A-Long in our Sanctuary.

Songs will be led by two world class opera singers - Megan Berti and Cassandra Black—who will be accompanied by our very own Dr. Andreea Mut.



Come and enjoy a wonderful Christmas program with family, friends, and neighbors. This event has a suggested donation of \$10.

Questions, please email info@stshtx.org. See you on 9th!

Young-ish Adult Christmas Party— The St. Stephen's Young-ish Adult Christmas Party, featuring the world's greatest White Elephant gift exchange [citation needed], is back!

Join us in the Barrel Room at Great Heights Brewing Company on December 17 from 5-8 p.m. Kids are welcome and make sure to invite your friends! There'll be plenty of free food and soft drinks. Great Heights will serve their favorites too but we can't spend church money on alcohol, so you'll have to buy your own grown-up drinks.

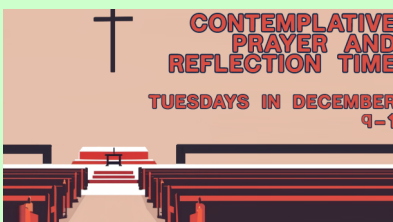
If you want to bring some special Christmas snacks or treats to share, please do!

Registering at stshtx.org/events will be helpful but it is not required to attend. Likewise, the white elephant gift exchange isn't mandatory but taking part is the only way you might go home with 2023's Rev. Nathan Lonsdale Bledsoe face gift - it's a long story.

(Suggested gift value for the White Elephant Gift Exchange: up to \$20)

Contemplative Prayer and Reflection

Time— The sanctuary will be open every Tuesday in December from 9-1 pm for contemplative prayer. The Christmas season can be exciting and wonderful but it can also be stressful and hectic. You are invited to spend some time in a quiet sanctuary to take intentional breaths, reflect on the important things in life, and focus on God in prayer.



What's on at St. Stephen's Summer schedule subject to change

WEEKLY EVENTS

Sunday School—Sun., 9:15 am, Educational Bldg
Traditional Worship—Sun., 10:30 am, Sanctuary & Online
Narcotics Anonymous—Mon. & Wed., noon; Thurs., 7pm; Saturday, 8pm, FH
Boy Scouts Troop 604—Mon., 7pm, FH
Zoom Bible Study—Tues., 3pm
 Email Susan Barcus at sjbarcus@comcast.net for more information.
GriefShare—Tuesdays, 6pm, Room 101
Line Dancing Class—Tues & Fri, 9:30 am, FH
Staff Meeting—Tues., 1pm, Church Office
Sea Scouts Ship 24—Tues., 7:30pm, FH
Senior Games—Wed., 9:30am, Café & 112
Prayer Shawl Ministry—Thurs., 10am, Rm 112

BI-MONTHLY EVENTS

UMYF—United Methodist Youth Fellowship
 1st & 3rd Sundays, 5pm
Great Heights Sermon Conversation & Bible Study, 2nd & 4th Sunday, 5pm
 Great Heights Brewing Co., 938 Wakefield
Girl Scouts Juniors/Cadetettes—Monday (varies), 10am, 201
Girl Scouts Daisies—1st & 3rd Tues., 6pm
Girl Scouts Daisies—2nd & 4th Thurs., 6pm

MONTHLY EVENTS

Community Breakfast—8 am on Second Sundays
Family Worship—Second Sunday of the month
The Gathering Place—second Monday, 10am, FH (a ministry for persons with Alzheimer's or other memory loss & their caregivers)
Red Hats Luncheon—1st or 2nd Saturday, 11:30am, usually at a restaurant
 Next meeting: January

OTHER RECURRING EVENTS

Harris County Parent/Child Visitation—1st, 3rd & 5th Saturday, 8am-2pm, FH (with a few variations during the year)

FH=Fellowship Hall CR=Choir Room
 Sanc=Sanctuary SH=Scout House

For more information, visit stshtx.org.



Worship connects us with God and with each other

Prayer Requests

Greg Albert, Debra Akin, John & Dorothy Artz, Betty Beyer, Peggy Bickel, Tommy Bickel, Joan Booth, Frank & Kathy Chambers, the Collins family, Brayden Corson, Janet Cummins, the Dickson family, Angela Earl, Allen Ebelt, Maurice Ebelt, Mary Gail Ellis, Frieda (Cindy Tindol's sister) and Bob (Cindy's friend), Mary Kay Glenn, Phyllis Greene, Lori Gossett, Megan Eyre, Elsie Haley, Tricia Wright Halley, Shirley Hammonds, Bert & Charm Hensley, and Daniel Hernandez; Lola Hensley, Elizabeth Hickerson, Betsy & Wesley Hill, Dorrie Jackson, Dustin James, Joe (Shirley Moan's brother), Cathy Johnson, Dot Lockhart, Carol Luce, Renita Majors, Marsha Massey, Audrey Mayfield and family, Clint McCray, Ed Mills, Ben Newton, Doris Parr, Brenda Paulk, Nathan's grandparents, Mary Peek, Nancy Piercefield, Eddie Pollard, Gladys Reeve, Jane Roberts, Barbara Smith, Meranda Soto, Michael Stuart, Hazel Swearingen, Preston Taylor, Charles Turner, Paul Wieting, Patricia Williams, Howard & Cindy Wright, Judy Zanelli

Social Justice Prayers: The sin of racism and its effects on all of us.

In the Military: Allen Clutter, Keegan Ferrell

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

In addition to our Family Worship Christmas Eve service, we will also hold a more traditional Christmas Eve service in the sanctuary at 7 pm.

This service will feature popular Christmas hymns, and we'll light the Christ candle on the Advent wreath.

At the end of the service, the congregation will light their own candles and we'll turn off the lights as we sing "Silent Night" and process out of the doors with anticipation of the coming celebration on Christmas morning.



December Communion Offering

Our Communion offering for December will go towards Star of Hope.

Star of Hope is a Christ-centered community supporting Houston's homeless men, women and children. Their work encourages positive life changes through programs in spiritual growth, education, employment, life management and substance abuse recovery.

If you wish to support the ministry work of Star of Hope, you can mark any giving as "Communion" throughout the month of December (excluding Christmas Eve).



Worship Attendance

	In Person	Virtual (Registered)	YouTube Views	Facebook Views
Sunday, November 5	71	7	60	96
Sunday, November 12 (Family Worship)	54	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sunday, November 12 (Traditional Worship)	55	16	46	100
Sunday, November 19	63	10	45	144
Sunday, November 26	69	7	34	108

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In Memory

We extend our prayers and sympathy to the families of the following members and constituents who passed away recently:

- Marie Bolding who passed away on October 31st
- Ernest Brew who passed away on November 14th in Houston, Texas. A celebration of life service was held at St. Stephen's on Monday, November 27th.

Project Warmth

It's time once again to decorate and fill up the Christmas tree in the church library for our annual Project Warmth.

We are collecting new and gently used coats, gloves, hats, scarves, and socks (new only) to be distributed to our neighbors in need for the upcoming winter.

If you are able to donate items, please drop them by the library at any time during Advent or at the church office during business hours.



Welcome New Members

Mary Wenzel—who joined St. Stephen's on Sunday, October 15th via transfer from Chapelwood UMC in Houston. Mary is already heavily involved in connecting with our homebound members.



Nico Turilli—the son of David Turilli and Sandra Pushkin was baptized at St. Stephen's on Sunday, October 22nd.

Janice Gabriel—who joined St. Stephen's as an associate member on Sunday, October 29th (meaning she is maintaining her connection to her membership at a Catholic Church). Janice regularly takes part in the prayer shawl ministry (pictured) at St. Stephen's.



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Christmas Basket Ministries

St. Stephen's is supporting two local elementary schools again this year with two different Christmas gift ministries.

Garden Oaks Elementary—Church members and friends are purchasing gifts and clothing for ten families consisting of twenty-five children. A thank you party for anyone who sponsored at family will be held at Garden Oaks Elementary on Monday, December 11th at 2 pm.

Stevens Elementary— This year we are aiding sixteen families including over forty children. By working closely with the social workers at Stevens, we have been able to identify worthy families and will purchase clothing, gifts, and food.

The Stevens Christmas baskets will be distributed on Saturday, December 9th from 9-12:00 pm.



Lessons and Carols Service

Our last worship service this year will be a Lessons and Carols service on the morning of New Year's Eve.

We'll be singing several Christmas hymn favorites and contemplating scripture lessons in between.

There will be no Sunday School on this day or Great Heights Bible study later in the evening.

Lessons and Carols Service

Dec. 31
10:30 am



SongPlay and Musical theater Camp

Following a successful Fall semester, Julie Osterman's Sing Studio Houston will hold SongPlay and Musical Theater classes for the winter starting in January.

SongPlay begins on January 23rd and classes are held on Tuesdays at 5:30 pm, Wednesdays at 9:15 am, and Thursdays at 9:15 am.

Musical Theater Class begins on January 29th and culminates with a performance of "The Little Mermaid Jr". Classes take place on Mondays at 5:15 pm.



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2023 Evangel Covers in Focus



Red Hat's Cookie Bake

The Ramblin' Reds of St. Stephen's will be baking cookies on Saturday, December 9th beginning at 9 am.

Freshly baked cookies will be delivered to:

- Fire Station 13 in Oak Forest
- Fire Station 31 near Independence Heights
- Fire Station 4 near Greater Inwood
- Fire Station 50 at Highway 290 and Bingle
- Houston police Station North serving Acres Homes



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Johnson School News

Memorial

November Recap from Our JMS Hallways

Since Halloween (and the day after) fell on a school day this year, we added a fun tradition of Pajama Day on November 1 - the students and teachers loved having a quiet day after all that Halloween excitement! The first few November days after Halloween are also when we collect left-over candy for our Treats for Troops program; I am so happy to report that we beat last year's donation (114.6lbs) by dropping off 134.6lbs this year. Our students also participated in an optional speech and language screening with a local Speech Pathologist. By identifying possible delays in articulation or expressive language, we aim to encourage early intervention because a little bit of help can make a world of difference before heading off to Kindergarten.



One of our favorite fall traditions is the Thanksgiving Chapel and Feast. Each child brought a canned good to donate to the food drive for local families and placed them in a bin at the start of our chapel time together. Our JMS families were all invited to join us for lunch afterwards in the Fellowship Hall; each class prepared a menu item and contributed them to the buffet for all JMS students to enjoy. We had enough mashed potatoes to feed all of Oak Forest - the students loved peeling potatoes!

The fall field trip this year was a little closer than what we've done in the past - we headed up to Humble to explore Old MacDonald Farm. Our parent chaperones were a huge help as the kids enjoyed playtime on a giant sand pile, explored in the playground tunnels, fed pigs, bunnies and goats, and experienced a horse ride for the first time for many! However, the highlight of the trip for most kids was getting to ride on an actual big yellow school bus. What a special memory and what confidence-building skills they all worked on by being away from familiar places like school and home - we are so proud of our students.

Registration for the 2024-2025 school year will be underway soon. If you are a church member or a returning family (even if there has been a gap between siblings), you always qualify for early registration between Feb 1-29. As long as we have your registration and deposit in hand, you will be guaranteed a spot for the following school year. All enrollment materials will be on the church website starting January 1, 2024. Questions? Please reach out to Candice Croker, JMS Director - JMS@stsumc.org



Johnson Memorial School
St. Stephen's U.M.C.

Poinsettias

As in years past, we are offering shares for \$15 each to help fund poinsettias for the sanctuary for Christmas, and for the ongoing beautification of the grounds at St. Stephen's. Registration is now open online at stshtx.org/events. When you register, you will be able to include a dedication in memory or in honor of loved ones. Please register no later than Tuesday, December 19th, if you wish to have your names included in the worship bulletins on Christmas Eve.



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JMS November Highlights



Church Office Christmas and New year Hours

The office will be closed on Tuesday, December 26th to allow our staff to spend time with their families over Christmas (and also because Steven is British and it's Boxing Day).

We will return to normal hours on Wednesday, December 27th.

As New Years Day is a Monday and the office is already closed, there will be no further closures at the beginning of 2024.





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The Evangelist

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



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Readings

A new church year is underway and we are into Advent. The countdown to Christmas day is underway. If you just can't wait to read the associated scriptures from our Advent Series—Our Spirit Waits—the references are below:

December 3: Isaiah 64:1-9; Mark 13:24-37

December 10: Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8

December 17: Isaiah 61:1-4; John 1:6-8, 19-28

December 24: 2. Samuel 7:1-11; Luke 1:46b-55;
Luke 1:26-38

Fun Fact

Nine days before Christmas in 1965, the Gemini 6 astronaut crew alarmed officials at NASA when they said they had seen an unidentified flying object go by their craft.

Just as NASA was trying to figure out what was going on, the astronauts began to play jingle bells with a harmonica and sleigh bells they had secretly brought on board.

There has been no official word from either the Gemini 6 crew or NASA if it was actually Santa who flew by. We'll leave that up to you.

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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