

**Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World**

# **The Evangel**

**September 2025 Edition**



**ST. STEPHEN'S**  
united methodist church



# We are all, without exception, beloved children of God

## Here's to the Next 75

Disneyland, in Anaheim California, opened its magical gates for the first time on July 17th, 1955 – making it, essentially, five years younger than St. Stephen's. In the intervening 70 years, Disney parks blossomed into a cultural juggernaut stretching to both coasts and around the world and generating \$9.27 billion in profit in 2024 alone. As many of the names from the main streets and store shelves of 1950s America have either faded from existence or to mere shadows of their former selves, Disney keeps adding parks, hotels, and even higher tech rides and experiences.



At some point, it clicked for me that Disney style theme parks and the local church are very similar endeavors. At their core, Disney parks aren't rides. Instead, they connect people, in an experiential way, to powerful cultural narratives. That's the "theming" in theme parks. Disney never has the rides with the highest speeds, the tightest turns, or the most g forces. They focus on immersing you in their stories, and people find deep emotional resonance in them.

I once attended a Disney worship service or fireworks show. You pick what to call it. It involved fireworks, music, voice over, movie clips, laser projection on the castle, actors, dancers, and flying objects. As it was in Magic Kingdom, the show focused on the animated side of Disney and had some super generic message about being yourself, following your dreams, and being kind or something. Untold thousands of people stopped everything to stand in the Florida heat and stare towards a castle. At the end, people literally wept and embraced from the sheer power of it all.

Yes, we seek to communicate the Word of God and lead people in an encounter with the Living God. Our values are not generic. They're divine truth. These far eclipse in value Disney's mice, rats, ducks that don't wear pants, honey obsessed bears, flying children, pirates, short miners, whatever is happening in "It's a Small World," and an ever expanding coterie of royal and royal adjacent young ladies. However, we too seek to connect people, in an experiential way, to stories with power, and despite the divine spark within our stories, Disney parks have done far better in growing their relevance over the past 70 years.

So, in the winter of 2023, I led a group of aspiring young-ish clergy to Orlando. We met and learned from theme park executives from Disney, Universal, and Sea World. The meeting felt like a fantasy camp for me, and so, I asked them directly, "How do you stay so relevant in our every changing culture?" They gave a surprisingly helpful answer. Their thinking doesn't involve solely chasing the newest and the hottest, but their constant relevance does involve the parks evolving over time. Theme Park planning is all about three categories of experiences.

**Things that are evergreen, that have been so embedded in culture that they never fade.**

Think Mickey, Minnie, princesses, castles, and, unfortunately for all involved, It's a Small World.

**Things that are newer and are becoming evergreen.**

Think Marvel characters, Star Wars, Frozen, and Toy Story.

**Things that are new, super relevant in the moment, but might not stick around**

Think anything that, a few years later, makes you say, "Oh, right, I kind of remember that. That did come out."

They want to have something that covers all of those bases, so that, when you come into the park, you interact with the evergreen things, the newer things that are joining the cultural canon, and the hyper new stuff of the moment. However, they only invest deeply in something that they believe will become evergreen or at least have a staying power measured in decades. Modern theme park attractions cost hundreds of millions of dollars, so they don't get built on a whim. Also, they're willing to recognize something that is no longer as evergreen as they were for previous generations and move on. For instance, they recently closed Tom Sawyer island at Disney World because that's not a character that young people have an awareness of in the 21st century.

For me, this frames our work as we consider our next 75 years. We have some things that are evergreen, that sit at the core of who we are. Our doctrine and beliefs certainly belong here but so do things like Sunday morning worship, Sunday School, JMS, VBS, small groups, and acts of services. We've added some newer things that are becoming a major part of who are. Our efforts in Family Ministries, Messy Church, and Family Worship fit this category. We need to have the insight, awareness, and flexibility to have offerings that meet a particular cultural moment, but we don't bet the farm chasing every trend. We need the judicious courage to occasionally say goodbye to things, when they no longer hold the power that they once did. In the next 75 years, we will need to continually evolve, but some things are truly sacred and never going anywhere. Vaya con Dios, Pastor Trey.

Cover photo: Sunset over St. Stephen's by Christie Fisher



# The church does not belong to us

## Youth and Family News

**Messy Church** — Our first Messy Church of the fall was so much fun and it was wonderful to see so many of our Messy Church community return (as well as some new faces).

We're now in month two of our fall season and our theme will be "God's Surprising Choices". Who are some of the people in the Bible who through God, did things no one expected them to do? We'll learn the answers to that question through 8 craft and activity stations.

Join us for a night of crafting, and fun, and we'll throw in dinner for the whole family too. What's not to like? See you Tuesday, September 16th at 5:30 p.m. and then in October we will be back to our usual second Tuesday of the month slot (as we won't be competing against Oak Forest Elementary's Open House!).



**Family Worship Service**—Family Worship's new formats and additions were warmly received in August and so we will continue the experiments into September. Our new stage built by three generations of Thomas Comstocks will be back and during our sermon, the children will have the choice to go and do a third craft in our Sunday school room and hear a child tailored version of the sermon. Join us for community breakfast at 8:45 a.m. and Family Worship at 9:15 a.m. on Sunday, September 21st.



**Third Grade Bibles**—Third Grade (and older) Bible Presentation.

Sign up the third grader in your life to receive a free Bible during one of our two worship services on Sunday, September 21st.

Do you know a child who may be interested who has already completed third grade? Sign them up too. We believe in accessibility for the Word and would be happy to provide a Bible to them too.

Register now at [stshtx.org/events](https://stshtx.org/events).



**Parent's Night Out**—Our next Parents Night Out takes place on September 26th at 6 p.m. Children aged 3-10 years old can be left at St. Stephen's under the care of experienced and licensed childcare professionals (and employees of our very own Johnson Memorial School).

The cost is \$30 for your first child and \$10 per sibling. Registration is open now and can be found at [stshtx.org/events](https://stshtx.org/events).



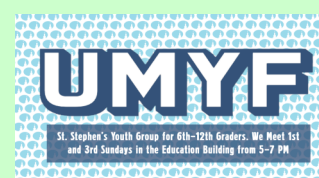
**Sunday School Classes**—Children's Sunday school now has two classes. Due to an increase in young families with children at St. Stephen's, we felt the need to split our children's Sunday school class to an older and younger group for the first time since early 2020. Both classes take place each Sunday at 9:15 a.m. to 10:15 a.m. and are split K-2nd, and 3rd-5th. We also offer a Youth Sunday school class for 6th-12th graders upstairs at the same time in our youth room.



**UMYF**—Our youth group will meet twice in September. Students 6th-12th grade are invited to join us on Sunday, September 7th and Sunday September 21st.

At youth group we play group games, take part in a short devotional study, and eat dinner together—all free of charge. You don't have to be a member of St. Stephen's or any church for that matter to take part.

As a side note, we are exploring changing the time that youth group takes place. If you have a strong opinion on this, please email Steven Fisher at [steven@stshtx.org](mailto:steven@stshtx.org)





# September 2025 Highlights

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p><b>Worship Times</b></p> <p>Sunday School— 9:15 am, Education Bldg            Traditional Service—10:30 am, Sanctuary            Virtual Service—10:30 am, Facebook &amp; YouTube            Family Worship Service—Third Sunday of the Month at 9:15 am, Fellowship Hall</p> <p>This calendar features highlights from our church schedule of events. For a more detailed calendar or to learn more about our church visit <a href="http://stshtx.org">stshtx.org</a> or call the church office.</p> <p><u>For a list of recurring events, please see the next page.</u>            *Register for events at <a href="http://stshtx.org">stshtx.org</a></p> <p>CR=Choir Room FH=Fellowship Hall Sanc=Sanctuary</p>						
	<p><b>1 Labor Day</b></p> 	<p><b>2</b> Line Dancing. Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m.</p> 	<p><b>3</b> Senior Games. Wednesdays at 10 a.m.</p> 	<p><b>4</b> First Day of Class for JMS 25/26 school year</p> 	<p><b>5</b></p>	<p><b>6</b> Chroma Chamber Brass 4PM Sanc</p> 
<p><b>7</b> 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am- Traditional Worship (with Communion) (Sanc)</p>	<p><b>8</b> The Gathering Place—10a.m. FH</p> 	<p><b>9</b></p>	<p><b>10</b></p>	<p><b>11</b> 9/11 24th Anniversary</p> 	<p><b>12</b></p>	<p><b>13</b> Houston Woodworkers Association. 9-2:00 p.m. (FH)</p> 
<p><b>14</b> 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am- Traditional Worship (Sanc)</p>	<p><b>15</b></p>	<p><b>16</b> Messy Church 5:30-7:00 p.m. (FH)</p> 	<p><b>17</b></p>	<p><b>18</b> Prayer Shawl group. Thursdays at 10</p> 	<p><b>19</b> Talk Like a Pirate Day (matey)</p> 	<p><b>20</b></p>
<p><b>21</b> 8:30am - Community Breakfast 9:15am- Family Worship Service (FH) 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am Traditional Worship (Sanc)</p>	<p><b>22</b> Houston Philatelic Society Meeting (FH) 7p.m.</p> 	<p><b>23</b></p>	<p><b>24</b> Newsletter Article Deadline</p> 	<p><b>25</b></p>	<p><b>26</b> Parents Night Out. 6p.m. (FH)</p> 	<p><b>27</b> Meet and Greet Plant Swap. 10 a.m. FH</p> 
<p><b>28</b> 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am- Traditional Worship (Sanc)</p>	<p><b>29</b></p>	<p><b>30</b></p>				



ALL NEIGHBORS ARE INVITED  
TO  
ST. STEPHEN'S UMC  
75<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY WEEKEND CELEBRATION



Saturday, October 4, 2025  
2 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Community Festival  
Games, Crafts, Bouncy House with  
Live Music & Dancing too



Sunday, October 5, 2025  
10:30 a.m. - 75<sup>th</sup> Celebration Worship  
12 Noon - Luncheon



2003 W43rd Street  
For More Information, email  
[info@stshtx.org](mailto:info@stshtx.org) or call  
713-686-8241





# God is in our neighborhood and not just in our building

## What's on at St. Stephen's

**Meet and Greet Plant Swap**—Gardeners and plant enthusiasts from all experience levels are invited to join us on Saturday, September 27th from 10 a.m to noon for a plant swap.

Bring seeds, or plants and find a community to share knowledge with and find a new plant to take home with you.



**Concerts at St. Stephen's** — St. Stephen's is hosting two exciting concerts in September. Chroma Chamber Brass will perform on Saturday, September 6th from 4-6 PM and the Monarch Chamber Players will be here on Saturday, September 13th at 5 p.m. Both concerts are free and open to all.



**Great Heights Bible Study**—Our Bible Study at Great Heights Brewing Co. will happen twice in the month of September. We'll meet from 5-7 p.m. on the 14th and 28th.

Anyone can attend regardless of where you are in your faith journey.

**75th Anniversary**— St. Stephen's turned 75 in May (don't look a day over 60 folks) but we're holding our long awaited celebration this October 4th and 5th. We kick off the weekend of celebration at 2 p.m. on Saturday, October 4th with a community carnival. We will be joined by many of our community partners as we celebrate our neighborhood of Oak Forest and the residents who have called it, and St. Stephen's home over the last 75 years. We'll have carnival games, musical performances, snow cones, corn dogs, bounce houses and more. There's no cost to attend, just your presence is more than enough.

Then on Sunday, October 5th, we will have our 75th celebration in worship. We will reminisce about the work we've done in this neighborhood and more importantly, dream about what's next.

The service will be followed by a celebration luncheon in our Fellowship Hall. We're looking forward to welcoming back some familiar faces and connecting as one big church family.

If you have not been to St. Stephen's for a while, come back and be part of the celebration.

Let's share some memories.



## What's on at St. Stephen's

### 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](mailto:sjbarcus@comcast.net) for the latest information.

**Line Dancing Class**—Tues & Fri, 9:30 am, FH

**Staff Meeting**—Wed., 1:30 pm, 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 (unless stated otherwise)

**Girl Scouts Juniors/Cadettes**—Monday (varies), 10am, 201

**Girl Scouts Daisies**—1st & 3rd Tues., 6pm

**Girl Scouts Daisies**—2nd & 4th Thurs., 6pm

### MONTHLY EVENTS

**Community Breakfast**—8:30 am on Third Sundays

**Family Worship**—Third Sunday of the month at 9:15 am

**The Gathering Place**—second Monday, 10am, FH (a ministry for persons with Alzheimer's or other memory loss & their caregivers)

### OTHER RECURRING EVENTS

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

**Houston Woodworkers Association**—2nd Saturdays 8 am—4 pm

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

For more information, visit [stststx.org](http://stststx.org).



# Worship connects us with God and with each other

## Prayer Requests (Please update the office if you no longer need to be on this list)

Greg Albert, Debra Akin, John & Dorothy Artz, Betty Beyer, Peggy Bickel, Tommy Bickel, Gloria Collins, Brayden Corson, Janet Cummins, the Dickson family, 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, Tripp Hensley, Elizabeth Hickerson, Betsy & Wesley Hill, Dustin James, Joe (Shirley Moan's brother), Cathy Johnson, Dot Lockhart, Carol Luce, Renita Majors, Marsha Massey, Michelle Maurizi, Audrey Mayfield and family, Clint McCray, Ben Newton, Nancy Piercefield, Gladys Reeve, Jane Roberts, Kim S., Barbara Smith, Meranda Soto, Michael Stuart, Preston Taylor, Charles Turner, Paul Wieting, Patricia Williams, Howard & Cindy Wright, Judy Zanelli

**In the Military:** Keegan Ferrell

## September Communion Offering

September's communion offering will go towards Stevens Elementary PTCO. St. Stephen's has had a decades long relationship with Stevens Elementary which is located only six blocks south from our building.

Your communion offering this month will go towards supporting their Parent Teacher Community Organization. The PTCO is responsible for providing supplies for students in need, assisting teachers with needed items, creating spirit days, fundraisers, volunteering and so much more.

Any offering you mark as communion in September (or any offering left on the Altar rails) will go towards their work.



## Memorial Area Ministries (MAM) Activities coming up in September/October

MAM's team has been assisting the 106 families affected by the fire at the 3 Corners Apartment complex in August. This has increased their need for volunteers, especially at the Blalock store. They will have another Shred day on 10/25, and again are requesting a \$10 donation for whatever volume you bring. MAM next online prayer breakfasts will be 9/24 and 10/29 from 9 to 10 AM. For more information, check out the MAM webpage at [MAMHouston.org](http://MAMHouston.org) or contact Jamie Etherton.



## Worship Attendance

	In Person	Virtual (Registered)	YouTube Views	Facebook Views
Sunday, August 3rd	103	8	27	56
Sunday, August 10th	109	8	41	86
Tuesday, August 12th (Messy Church)	59			
Sunday, August 17th (Family Worship)	56			
6 Sunday, August 17th (Traditional Worship)	80	8	26	21
Sunday, August 24th	104	7	32	67
Sunday, August 31st	105	9	23	58





# The stories of scripture transform our own stories

## Johnson Memorial School News—November Update

Candice Croker—JMS Director

### JMS Updates

Welcome to our 58th school year at Johnson Memorial School! As we embark on this journey with our JMS families, we are filled with joy and anticipation for the opportunities and experiences that lie ahead. We are delighted to welcome our 30 returning students and want to extend a warm welcome to the 27 new families joining our JMS community for the first time. Our JMS community holds a special place in my heart as my own family has been a part of this preschool since 2008. We are so excited that these families are trusting us with their precious child(ren) for this critical partnership in their educational journey. Our team has worked hard this summer to prepare for the year ahead and look forward to witnessing the academic, social and emotional growth in our students.

JMS parents have been invited to participate in various welcome activities over the course of our first week:

Parent Orientation on Sept 2

Meet the Teacher on Sept 3

First day of school on Sept 4 with coffee for parent fellowship immediately after drop-off and snow cones immediately after school

Our 14 JMS staff members spent two days together recently for professional development (and some fun!) discussing topics such as Neurodiversity and Inclusion, effective ways to grow a student's language skills, how to build and maintain a positive school culture, and ways to improve a child's fine motor skills from the perspective of an Occupational Therapist. The speakers' expertise was incredibly helpful and inspiring; so much of what they recommended has been done at JMS for many years by these incredible teachers!

Be on the look-out over Labor Day weekend for work on our new playground shade structure - we worked hard on fundraising for this much-needed addition to our school and can't wait for you to see it.

Questions about JMS? Please reach out to the Director, Candice Croker at [JMS@ststx.org](mailto:JMS@ststx.org)







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united methodist church

**The Evangel**

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(713) 686-8241  
[stshtx.org](http://stshtx.org)



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## Readings

For those of you who like to get a head start on the scriptures in our current sermon series “Lived Out”, here they are (and two lectionary readings)

If you’re reading the digital Evangel you can click on the scriptures to be taken to a page where you can read them.

**9/7/25 - With All You’ve Got**  
[Luke 14:25-33](#)

**9/14/25 - With Both Kinds of Conviction**  
[1 Timothy 1:12-17](#)

**9/21/25 - For a World in Need**  
[Jeremiah 8:18-9:1](#)

**9/28/25—**  
[Luke 16:19-31](#)

**10/5/25—**  
[Luke 17:5-10](#)

## Fun Fact

“September” by Earth, Wind & Fire is one of the most streamed songs every September 21st. Yes, people do remember the 21st night of September.

## What’s Inside

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## Our Vision



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