

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World

The Evangel

September and October 2026 Edition



ST. STEPHEN'S
united methodist church



We are all, without exception, beloved children of God

The Continual Soiree (Part 1)

It's strange what TV shows will hook me. I got super into the show Longmire, and it looms large in my mind. However, if you're wondering, "What's a Longmire?", you can perhaps be forgiven. It lasted 63 episodes from 2012 to 2017 across A&E and Netflix. It's about a sheriff named Longmire, who based on the show, seems to be the sheriff of the majority of Wyoming. Also, despite it only having a 63 episode run, I don't think that I finished it either. I guess that I know what I'm doing this evening when I finish writing this.

I bring the show up at because of a thing that one character says every time he answers the telephone. Henry Standing Bear (played by Lou Diamond Philips in what is probably the standout performance of the show) is an extremely grammatically correct, Native American bar owner. He runs the Red Pony - the local hometown dive bar. Picture beer posters, neon advertisements, peanut shells on the floor, etc., Henry carries himself with high dignity, speaks only in complete sentences, and seldom uses contractions. Any time the phone rings in the bar, he initiates the conversation with, "It is another beautiful day at the Red Pony and continual soiree. This is Henry."

I understand that one's theology is not meant to be deeply informed by semi-failed cowboy crime fiction, and yet, here we are. The words "continual soiree" have swirled in my brain, unabated, for close to a decade because it turns out that it's an amazing description of what the church should be. We should be the continual soiree - the never-ending party that presages God's heavenly banquet.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, in Luke 15, the parable's stand in for God, the father, runs to his returning long lost stand in for sinners, his younger son, throws his arms around him, and then orders up a party with all the fixings. The parable is certainly about how God welcomes home the lost sinner, but there's an additional layer to it. While everyone is partying, the older brother gets mad that the father is celebrating the faithless, prodigal younger brother. The parable contains a message for long time church folks. Don't be the stick in the mud older brother. Be the party. Be the continual soiree that creates a place of welcome, joy, and belonging for any lost sinner that finds their way to God.

My friend and colleague, Rev. Andrew Wolfe, the pastor for Congregational Care at Chapelwood UMC here in Houston, is beginning a Master's thesis framing the entire Kingdom of God as a party. We create opportunities for the Kingdom of God to break in, when we throw a good party. Andrew is in good company. John Wesley might not have thought about this as a party. He was perhaps a bit more 18th century British than that, but he sure put a massive focus on the real work of faith happening when we build relationships with others and invite others into relationship. He wouldn't call it the continual soiree. Instead, he wrote in his preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems, "Solitary religion is not to be found here. 'Holy Solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel as Holy Adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love, is the length and depth and height of Christian perfection." The Pentecost arc in Acts 2 establishes the entire concept of the church with the same logic. In Acts 2:1, Luke notes that right before the Holy Spirit descended, everyone was gathered together in one place, and then at the chapter ends, we get this image of the proto-church living together, sharing together, eating together, and growing together. This first golden age of the Church looks a lot like a continual soiree.

A good party doesn't just happen though. It takes meticulous planning, effort, and resources. When I was in Oxford, England, as a college student and traveling weirdo, I ended up in this Bible Study being led by a Professor of New Testament, we examined the opening to Luke 1. "Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us ..." (Luke 1:1 NRSV) We normally glance over this. "Hi, Theophilus, I'm going to write a good Gospel so that you understand." However, this professor explained that the English is too passive. "Have been fulfilled" makes it sound too much like these things just happened. Instead, it's more like, "These were the things that were made to happen" implying active work on God's part and on the part of the people who said yes to God.

It takes work to build the continual soiree.

In the next week or so, you should receive a letter in your mailbox (digital or physical) about how I think that this church can continue our piece of the soiree. I invite you to read it and envision an amazing party.

Vaya con Dios,
Pastor Trey

Cover photo: August and Early September at St. Stephen's



The church does not belong to us

Youth and Family News

October Messy Church — Messy Church's Fall season has got off to a great start with two fun filled events already in the rearview. But there's still so much more to come!

Our October theme is "Light it Up" and we'll have eight craft and activity stations about being a light in the world.

We'll also have dinner for the whole family included, too - all free of charge. Join us October 13th from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. in our Fellowship Hall.

Family Worship Service—Our **October** Family Worship service will happen on Sunday, October 18th and will look a little different than usual. For a start—weather permitting— we'll be outside! We'll start with a community breakfast at 8:30 a.m. and the service itself begins at 9:15 a.m.

What is Family Worship? Well, the service features contemporary music from a live band (the Early Byrds) and two craft stations for children. We also celebrate communion each time too. During the sermon, children have the option of staying in the worship space or going inside for an additional craft and children's lesson on that week's scripture. There's space to move, dance, and wiggle. Kids are encouraged to be themselves in a non-judgmental environment.

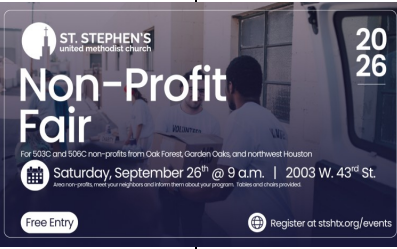
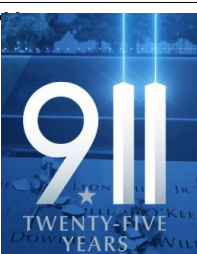
This is a special Family Worship that will also include a blessing of the animals. We've partnered with area non-profit the Animal Justice League to bless pets in the neighborhood and also bring attention to their work. They'll have a few adoptable pets too. The kitchen crew will be baking homemade dog treats and we're planning on having a face painter too to truly make it a family celebration. Bring your pets and worship with us in **October**.

Third Grade Bibles—If you have or know a third grader (or older) who would be interested in receiving a free Bible, then register them now for our Third Grade Bible Presentation on Sunday, September 20th. Bibles will be presented at both our Family Worship Service (Fellowship Hall) beginning at 9:15 a.m. and our Traditional Worship service at 10:30 a.m. (Sanctuary). Recipients only need to attend one of these services. All recipients will receive a Deep Blue Children's CEB Bible. Although this is a third-grade Bible presentation, we believe strongly in providing access to the Word. If the child you have in mind has already completed third grade but did not receive a Bible, go ahead and register and we'll be happy to present them with one.

Youth Group—Our youth group (UMYF) will meet a few times over the next month and a half. First in September, we will meet on Sunday, September 20th from 5-7 p.m. We'll meet twice in October on the 4th and 18th. Our 18th will be a themed youth group with Halloween inspired games. We're also looking for youth volunteers for our Trunk or Treat on October 25th. Read more about that later in this issue.



September 2026 Highlights

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Worship Times Sunday School— 9:15 am, Education Bldg Traditional Service—10:30 am, Sanctuary Virtual Service—10:30 am, Facebook & YouTube Family Worship Service—Third Sunday of the Month at 9:15 am, Fellowship Hall						
This calendar features highlights from our church schedule of events. For a more detailed calendar or to learn more about our church visit ststx.org or call the church office. <u>For a list of recurring events, please see the next page.</u> *Register for events at ststx.org CR=Choir Room FH=Fellowship Hall Sanc=Sanctuary						
		1	2	3 Prayer Shawl Ministry.— Thursdays 10 am. Room 112 	4	5
6 10:30am- Traditional Worship (with Communion) (Sanc)	7 	8 Messy Church 5:30-7 p.m. (FH) 	9 Bible study every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. (Room 101) 	10		12 Houston Woodworkers Association. 9-2:00 p.m. (FH) 
13 8:00am – Wild Church (Houston Arboretum) 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am Traditional Worship (Sanc)	14 The Gathering Place—10 a.m. (FH) 	15 Line Dancing—Tuesdays 9:30 a.m. (FH) 	16 Senior Games—Wednesdays 9:30 a.m. 	17 JMS Blessing of the Lunchboxes 	18	19
20 8:30am - Community Breakfast 9:15am- Family Worship Service (FH) 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am Traditional Worship (Sanc)	21 Houston Philatelic Society Meeting 7 p.m. (FH) 	22 What to know when Hiring an attorney 6 p.m. (FH) 	23	24 JMS Chapel 9:15 a.m. (Sanc) 	25 Parents Night Out 6-9 p.m. (FH) 	26 Non-Profit Fair 9 a.m. (FH) 
27 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am- Traditional Worship (Sanc)	28	29	30			

October 2026 Highlights

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
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				1 Prayer Shawl Ministry.— Thursdays 10 am. Room 112 	2	3 The Table - Women's Bible Study 10 a.m. (FH) 
4 10:30am-Traditional Worship (with Communion) (Sanc)	5	6 JMS Blessing of the Stuffed Animals 	7 Bible study every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. (Room 101) 	8	9	10 Houston Woodworkers Association. 9-2:00 p.m. (FH) 
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18 8:30am - Community Breakfast 9:15am- Family Worship Service (FH) 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am Traditional Worship (Sanc)	19 Houston Philatelic Society Meeting 7 p.m. (FH) 	20 Physical and Mental Wellness Goals 6 p.m. (FH) 	21	22	23 Parents Night Out 6-9 p.m. (FH) 	24 Sewing Circle 10 a.m.—noon 
25 9:15am- Sunday School 10:30am- Traditional Worship (Sanc)	26 Newsletter Article Deadline 	27 Line Dancing—Tuesdays 9:30 a.m. (FH) 	28	29 Internet Day 	30	31 Halloween 



God is in our neighborhood and not just in our building

What's On at St. Stephen's

Trunk or Treat—Our eighth annual Trunk or Treat is back on October 25th from 3-5 p.m. We'll have decorated trunks, a big bounce house, candy, and more!

We're looking for Trunks! Anyone from the community including local businesses can provide a Trunk and meet their neighbors. Visit stshtx.org/events for more information.

Parents' Night Out— Parents Night Out returns on Friday, September 25th at 6 p.m.

Children 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). While at St. Stephen's, your child(ren) will enjoy dinner, snacks, games, crafts, a movie, and more.

Be sure to send your children with something comfortable to lay on.

The cost is \$35 for your first child and \$15 per sibling. Registration can be found at stshtx.org/events.

Community Conversations and Non-Profit Fair—There are a few community events coming up in the next six weeks that you can be a part of:

What to Know when Hiring an Attorney - September 22nd at 6 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

St. Stephen's Non-Profit Fair on Saturday, September 26th at 9 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

Physical and Mental Wellness Goals community conversation on Tuesday, 27th of October.

All events are free to attend. Come and visit and connect to others in our area and learn some useful information too



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
Bible Study—Thurs., 6:30pm
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)
Great Heights Bible Study—2nd and 4th Sundays at 5 p.m. at Great Heights Brewing Co
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—8:30 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 stshtx.org.



Worship connects us with God and with each other

Prayer Requests

(Please update the office if you would like to be added to or no longer need to be on this list)

Debra Akin, John & Dorothy Artz, Betty Beyer, Peggy Bickel, Tommy Bickel, Gloria Collins, 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, Carol Luce, Renita Majors, Marsha Massey, Michelle Maurizi, Audrey Mayfield and family, Clint McCray, Ben Newton, Nancy Piercefield, Gladys Reeve, Debby Roznovsky, 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 and October Communion Offerings

September's communion offering will go towards Stevens Elementary PTCO. 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.



October's communion offering will benefit the Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC). HAWC exists to ultimately put an end to domestic and sexual violence directed towards women and children but in the meantime, they aim their efforts and resources at getting women and children away from violent situations. If you are reading this and are in need of assistance, help IS available. You can visit HAWC or call 713.528.6798 Any offering you mark as communion in October (or any offering left on the Altar rails) will go towards their work.

HAWC

Worship Attendance

	In Person	Virtual (Registered)	YouTube Views	Facebook Views
Sunday, August 2nd	111	6	58	N/A
Sunday, August 9th	91	6	50	N/A
Tuesday, August 11th (Messy Church)	73			
Sunday, August 16th (Family Worship)	81			
Sunday, August 16th (Traditional Worship)	77	4	67	100
Sunday, August 23rd	82	8	64	149
Sunday, August 30th	110	6	62	163
Sunday, September 6th	90	7	85	108
6 Tuesday, September 8th (Messy Church)	69			
Sunday, September 13th (Wild Church)	22			
Sunday, September 13th (Traditional Worship)	81	6	114	102



The stories of scripture transform our own stories

Johnson Memorial School News

Candice Croker, JMS Director

The 59th school year at JMS is officially underway! We kicked things off on Saturday, August 29 with a back-to-school family picnic, where our students discovered their class rosters for the first time and got busy finding their new classmates on the playground. Thanks to color-coded nametags by teacher, there was plenty of “Are you in my class?” excitement!

We braved the summer heat together with a potluck brunch, coffee and waffles from Tom’s Coffee Truck, and a fun Soccer Shots demonstration. It was the perfect way to begin a new year of friendship, fellowship, and a little bit of playground chaos!

At the beginning of September, our 14 JMS teachers spent two days together for training and professional development with a wonderful group of experts. We especially loved welcoming back our favorite, Kate Robertson, who shared practical and encouraging ideas for building pre-reading skills and confidence in our young learners.

The excitement continued the week of September 8 with Parent Orientation and Meet the Teacher Day, when our families officially stepped onto campus to get ready for the year ahead. Then, on Thursday, September 10, we welcomed our 59 preschool students for their very first day of school! JMS parents had the chance to enjoy some fellowship over coffee right after drop-off, and later that day, everyone was invited to stay after school to celebrate this special milestone in their child’s educational journey—with Blue Bell cups and sprinkles, of course!

Thank you for keeping our students, teachers, and staff in your prayers as we begin another wonderful year at JMS. We are so excited for all that this new school year will bring!

Questions about JMS? Please reach out to the Director, Candice Croker at JMS@ststx.org



Women’s Bible Study—The Table

There is something beautiful that happens when we gather at The Table. The next Women’s Bible Study will take place on Saturday, October 3rd at 10 a.m. in our Fellowship Hall.

We come with different stories, different questions, different experiences, and different ways of seeing the world. And somehow, when we make room for one another, we discover that each person’s presence is a gift.

The study includes brunch, table conversations, discussion questions, and will be led by a skilled female instructor.

We’d love to see you at The Table. And bring a friend!



THE TABLE

Women's Bible Study

LET US GATHER FOR
"THE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS: MATERNAL GRIEF & SURRENDER"
FREE FELLOWSHIP MEAL & CHILDCARE

OCTOBER
SATURDAY | 3 | AT 10 AM

ST. STEPHEN'S UMC
2003 W. 43RD ST
FELLOWSHIP HALL



ST. STEPHEN'S

united methodist church

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



Readings

Our next sermon series is currently on the works and whilst we do not have the series name, we do have the scriptures that you can read in advance linked below:

9/20/26 — [Jonah 3:10-4:11](#)

9/27/26 — [Philippians 2:1-13](#)

10/4/26 - [Philippians 3:4b-14](#)

10/11/26— [Exodus 32:1-14](#)

10/18/26— [Matthew 22:15-22](#)

10/25/26—[1 Thessalonians 2:1-8](#)

September and October Fun Facts

The Pumpkin Spice Latte debuted in 2003, but it didn't contain any actual pumpkin until 2015. It took 12 years for the pumpkin to finally make it into the pumpkin drink.

Also, September 16th is 100 days away from Christmas so react to that in whatever way feels appropriate.

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Our Vision



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