

# Saint Stephen's

FALL/WINTER 2023

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

## THE ROUTE OF FAITH

New Journeys for Youth





**A DIFFERENT KIND OF SANCTUARY:** Participants in the CARES (Caring for Adults through Respite, Enrichment, and Socialization) program enjoy creative movement and art activities at the Chapel of Saint John on the Saint Stephen's campus. CARES, an initiative of Collat Jewish Family Services that helps people with memory or movement disorders, is among several community-oriented wellness programs, including exercise classes and 12-step recovery groups, that have found a home at Saint John's. Over the coming year, Saint Stephen's will invite the congregation and community to assist in developing a vision that further defines Saint John's as a welcoming place to support anyone seeking to deepen their spiritual life and enhance well-being. **(Inset photos, left to right)** Saint Stephen's volunteers Sandy Gellings and SuAnn Vandevelde spend time with CARES participants during an art activity.



## Walking in Love

**I**n the summer of 2008, when I was minister for youth formation at the Church of the Holy Communion in Memphis, I led a group of 10th and 11th graders to the last section of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. A pilgrimage abroad was the capstone opportunity of our program for young people growing in the Christian faith. This group, which had traveled together to many sacred spaces, elected to spend the bulk of the trip walking. Of the many memories from the trip, few are of the destination, the beautiful cathedral in Santiago de Compostela. Instead, the memories are tied to conversations, singing while we walked, the path's twists and turns, and searches for painted arrows on cobblestones to show us the way. I will always remember the random places where we stopped to unpack the scriptures. Pilgrimage reaffirmed an important truth: Faith is a journey, not a destination.

Journey is a theme in this magazine. Our youth team of Taylor McLemore and

Kathy Graham have been working for months to revamp our youth formation program, which includes plans for their very own Camino pilgrimage. The Chapel of Saint John is serving as a space to help people be well and resilient on their journey through respite care, exercise, and recovery ministries. And the metaphor of the labyrinth as the heart of our campus reminds us of our own story—that we are all on a pilgrimage together.

I hope, as you read these pages, that you recognize your own beautiful journey and see yourself in the life of our community.

Faithfully,

**The Rev. John Burruss**

**RECTOR**  
**SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

*“Faith is a journey, not a destination.”*

(Above) John and Anne Burruss returned to Spain to walk the Camino de Santiago together in 2009.



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**The Rev. Ron Delbene** • Priest Associate  
**The Rev. Deacon CJ Van Slyke** • Deacon Emeritus  
**Kristyn Bara** • Minister for Communication  
**Pat Bills** • Minister for Stewardship and Development  
**Zachary Brown** • Parish Administrator  
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**Micah Cummings** • Facilities Manager  
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# The Route of Faith

NEW JOURNEYS FOR YOUTH

By **Kathy Graham**

If you have been around teenagers for more than a few moments, you know that they eagerly question everything as they try to make sense of the world around them. And it seems that those questions intensify when they consider their faith: Do I belong? Do I know God's story? What is my own story, and how does it connect with God? How can I learn more, serve others, and share God's love?

Youth formation helps young people to consider and answer these questions that are the building blocks of faith. It occupies a pivotal middle ground in their journey through their lives and their relationship

with God, expanding upon the foundations established in children's ministry and at home, and at the same time preparing the way for adult formation.

Saint Stephen's has a long history of valuing and providing youth formation programming. Even during the COVID pandemic, church leaders and youth applied a creative approach to their virtual meetings and activities. (Do you remember the Palm Sunday donkey video—and the Youth Sunday skit—that the youth created remotely using their smartphones?) Since then, Taylor McLemore, our minister for youth formation, and I have spent time reworking and updating our opportunities for youth in grades 7-12.

We realize that Christian formation means more than passing along facts, opinions, and beliefs. Instead, the importance of youth formation lies in the space that it creates for relationships and community, which is something that has gained greater emphasis in the wake of the pandemic. By providing times and places to listen, engage, learn, play, worship, question, seek, explore, share, and serve together, we can help young people live into discipleship now—and encourage them to continue following Jesus as they step into adulthood.

*(Photos) Saint Stephen's youth find friendship and fellowship every time they meet for learning, worship, service, and fun.*

**Small Groups: Core of the Youth Community**

Small groups help young people connect with one another and strengthen the bonds of friendship. On Sunday mornings and evenings, two EYC (Episcopal Youth Community) groups—one for students in grades 7-9 and another for students in grades 10-12, meet for lessons, games, fellowship, and food. Wednesday night groups cover grades 7-9 and grades 10-11, while a separate group designed especially for 12th graders helps to prepare them for life beyond high school.

Youth enjoy special events and trips together throughout the school year. They also celebrate key growing-up moments, including entering the youth programs in 7th grade, getting driver's licenses, confirmation, and graduation. Summer brings more fun, fellowship, and opportunities to serve others and participate in events alongside youth from throughout the Diocese. In addition, we invite youth to take part in different Saint Stephen's ministries in worship, outreach, pastoral care, and care of creation.

**Confirmation: A Spiritual Mentorship**

The opportunity for confirmation is a milestone for many youth, and our expanded confirmation program now begins each January and lasts until October, with the service of confirmation in early November. In addition to attending special classes, confirmands are paired with members of the congregation who mentor them throughout the year—walking alongside the students as they consider their faith.

**Mission Trip and Pilgrimage:  
Exploring Ways to Serve and Learn**

In 2024 and 2025, the spiritual journey will take the form of physical journeys designed to nurture one another's faith formation and practice and to provide opportunities to share the Gospel. The summer 2024 mission trip will involve learning, teaching, and serving others. Then, in the summer of 2025, we will take a pilgrimage to walk the storied Camino de Santiago in Spain, learning, listening, and seeking spiritual guidance along the way. Look for more information about these trips soon—along with details about a fundraising dinner prepared and hosted by the youth that is scheduled for next March.



*(Photos) In 2022-2023, the youth enjoyed retreats and trips, helped with the Easter egg hunt and other church events, and served in Diocese ministries including Sawyerville summer programs for kids in Hale County.*



Get more details about Saint Stephen's youth groups, activities, and events—such as the end-of-summer Six Flags trip pictured here—at [ssechurch.org/youth](https://ssechurch.org/youth). Or volunteer to help with youth programs by contacting Taylor McLemore at [taylor@ssechurch.org](mailto:taylor@ssechurch.org).

# A Path with a Purpose

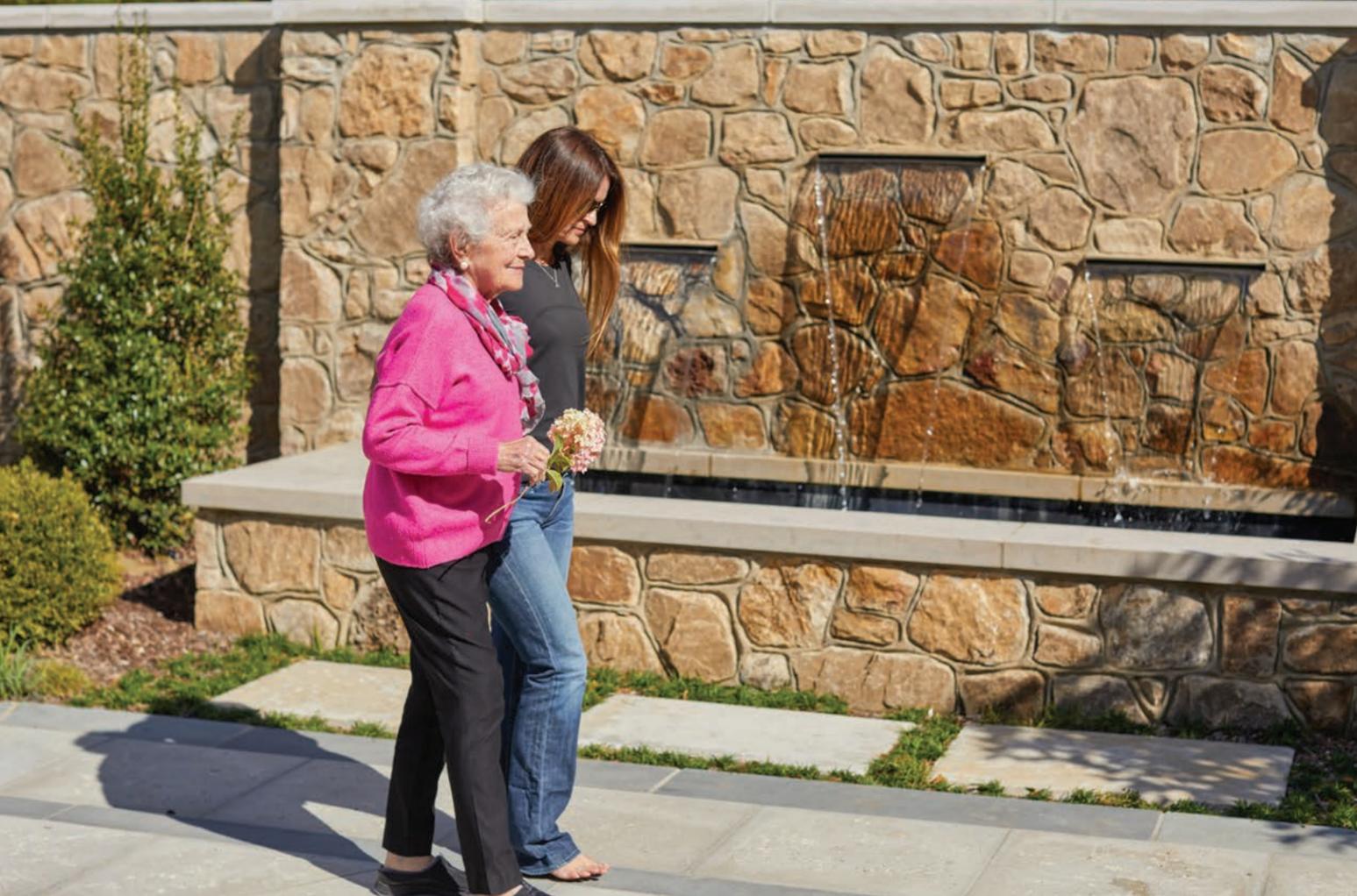
## A CENTURIES-OLD TRADITION FINDS MODERN MEANING

By Katherine Owens

Most of us try to balance the dark moments in life with increased love, beauty, and faith. The Labyrinth Memorial Garden at Saint Stephen's is our way of rebalancing after the violence and loss that occurred on June 16, 2022. It allows us to have the last word by cherishing our loved ones who died and those who survived, by giving back to a supportive larger community, and by increasing our faith.

(Above) The labyrinth's smooth path, flowing water, and greenery help calm the senses and quiet the mind. (Left) A plaque and the three fountains memorialize June 16.





*Unlike mazes, which have multiple misleading paths, labyrinths feature a single path leading to the center and back out again. The rhythmic, compelling geometry represents a discipline and desire to live into a more mindful, more spiritual present.*



### Step by Step

#### HOW TO USE THE LABYRINTH

There are many ways to move through the labyrinth. Think of it as a personal journey where you can experience “healing, contemplation, sorrow, love, and joy,” says Anne Markham Bailey, a committee member and labyrinth facilitator who guides people through the ancient awareness practice. She shares a few insights adapted from Veriditas, the labyrinth-focused organization that trained her:

#### 1. AT THE THRESHOLD:

Take a moment to remember and reflect. Focus on a prayer, an intention, or a question about something challenging you. You can also give thanks.

#### 2. ENTERING THE LABYRINTH:

You can walk alone or with others. Use the path as a way to quiet your mind, release your burdens, and open your heart. Move at your own pace, and take your time. If you meet someone along the way, it’s OK to move ahead of them or to let them pass you.

#### 3. AT THE CENTER:

This is a place to pause, reflect, listen, and receive. Stay for as long as you like.

#### 4. MAKING YOUR WAY BACK:

The return journey is a time to consider your experience and how it can help you reclaim, restore, or renew an aspect of your life. Each walk is unique, and you may feel different things on different days.

**So why a labyrinth?** Labyrinths date back 4,000 years and have been built all over the world in various forms. For Christians in the Middle Ages, labyrinths often served as substitutes for pilgrimages: a sacred place for prayer, meditation, reconciliation, and healing. Unlike mazes, which have multiple misleading paths, labyrinths feature a single path leading to the center and back out again. The rhythmic, compelling geometry represents a discipline and desire to live into a more mindful, more spiritual present. The path to the center is for reflection, the time in the center is for

receiving, and the return journey is for renewal. Many people find that moving through the turns helps them relax and focus their thoughts—an example of what scientists call “embodied cognition,” the concept that the body influences our state of mind.

The development of the Saint Stephen’s labyrinth began with a committee. Two members had previously designed labyrinths and

#### LABYRINTH COMMITTEE

Anne Markham Bailey  
Chris Boles  
The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bridges  
Leslie Carlisle\*  
Rob Elsner  
Conley Knott  
Katherine Owens  
Annette Reynolds  
Casey Ruiz  
Emily Woloschuk

\*Fundraising Subcommittee

had walked many different ones. One member is a founder of the Labyrinth Society, a global organization that supports labyrinth creation and use. Four members are trained labyrinth facilitators, and

five had never walked a labyrinth. However, at our first meeting, everyone agreed that the Saint Stephen’s labyrinth should be a memorial, a place for healing, and a spiritual place, as well as a way to give back to the community and an opportunity for transformation.

Committee members considered multiple sites around the campus but felt strongly that the labyrinth must be outside and available to the community whose support had been so impactful after June 16. Ultimately, we decided to repurpose the centrally located concrete plaza that had been built in the 1970s. The space’s size, location, and accessibility from the back parking lot were ideal.

Together, we envisioned a walled garden space, bordered on three sides by existing structures. To visually separate the labyrinth

from the playground, we designed a stone wall featuring three sheet fountains in remembrance of Jane Pounds, Bart Rainey, and Sharon Yeager. The design of the labyrinth itself is a contemporary take on a five-circuit medieval pattern, using a path that is wider than usual with smooth contrasting borders to make it wheelchair accessible. New trees, landscaping, and a porch with seating surround the labyrinth, and a bronze plaque on a sandstone boulder commemorates June 16.

Both the public and parishioners are welcome to use the labyrinth at any time. We also hope to develop programs including monthly guided walks, signups for group use, and other activities. The labyrinth

is registered on the World-Wide Labyrinth Locator website.

For Saint Stephen’s members, the labyrinth serves as a memorial, a remembrance, and a spiritual healing place. For some in the community, it has become a place of pilgrimage. For others, it is simply a tranquil garden labyrinth. We hope that by welcoming and inviting everyone to this special space, we may continue to foster the love and sense of community that were present following June 16. As a group that has lived through the horror of mass gun violence, we have a unique opportunity to disavow hate, to bravely live into our faith, and to regain balance. Our labyrinth memorial garden is the physical manifestation of this opportunity.

**The Labyrinth Memorial Garden is a public space that has been created by the body of Christ through the love and generosity of our community.**

We invite you to participate as we raise the \$70,000 needed to finish funding the project. Make a special gift at [ssecchurch.org/labyrinth](https://ssecchurch.org/labyrinth), add a check to the weekly collection with “Labyrinth” on the memo line, or email [pat@ssecchurch.org](mailto:pat@ssecchurch.org) for additional giving options.

**(Above)** Parishioner Kitty Robinson and Karin Fecteau walk through the labyrinth together. **(Above right)** Everyone in the community is welcome to use the labyrinth as a space for respite and reflection.

Anne Oliver is a member of the Flower Guild, which creates the natural masterpieces that adorn the altar every Sunday. On Mondays she and a few other volunteers repurpose some of those flowers for the small arrangements, adding other blossoms as needed for freshness and color. "I have been arranging altar flowers for sick and shut-in members for many years," Anne says. "As I arrange the flowers, I silently pray for each person who is to receive them and hope each vase will bring some joy, no matter their circumstances."



# Pray it with Flowers

Special bouquets deliver beauty, comfort, and a reminder of God's love

By Charles Buchanan

If prayers could take physical form, they might look something like the sweet, petite floral arrangements that appear on the Saint Stephen's lobby table every Monday morning. These are the work of the Flower Guild and Flower Apostles, volunteer teams who lovingly create and personally deliver each arrangement to someone on the weekly prayer list—often a parishioner who is sick, grieving, or struggling in some way, or a family who is welcoming a new baby. "We take these little blooms and multiply their blessings in many different ways," says Pat Bills, who serves as Saint Stephen's minister for stewardship and development and leads the Flower Apostles pastoral care ministry.



Recipients “appreciate the beauty and the symbolism of having altar flowers delivered to them,” Pat says. “It brings the presence of our worship home.” While she has arranged and delivered bouquets, Pat also recalls moments when the Flower Apostles have delivered bouquets to her. “It makes you feel truly loved and embraced by the incredible Saint Stephen’s community,” she says.

The Flower Apostles share their time and love by delivering the arrangements. Fiona Watts enjoys the opportunity to brighten someone’s day—and perhaps forge bonds with a parishioner. “Generally I just leave the flowers on the doorstep, but sometimes I get to meet a new member and chat or catch up with someone I haven’t seen in a while,” she says.



Envelopes attached to the bouquets include a Flower Apostle’s name, with the recipient’s name and address discreetly tucked inside. Pat typically requests volunteers a few days in advance and then organizes deliveries geographically so that Flower Apostles don’t have to travel far and can easily fit deliveries into their plans.



Each vase contains “a whole new beautiful work of art,” Pat says. “Each one tells someone that we remember them and pray for them.”

**WE WELCOME VOLUNTEERS TO HELP ARRANGE OR DELIVER FLOWERS AND TO PARTICIPATE IN OTHER MEANINGFUL PASTORAL CARE MINISTRIES. TO GET CONNECTED, REACH OUT TO GRETCHEN LERNER, MINISTER OF WELCOME AND EVANGELISM, AT [GRETCHEN@SSECHURCH.ORG](mailto:gretchen@ssechurch.org).**





# Simple Gifts

By Charles Buchanan

**Y**ou never know what you'll discover when you peek into the Saint Stephen's Outreach Alcove. Packs of socks. School supplies. Canned goods. Clothes. A bunch of pop tabs. In November, look for jars of peanut butter.

It's quite the collection of ordinary, everyday items. But each of these small, simple gifts provided by a Saint Stephen's parishioner shares God's love and impacts the life of a person in need. And sometimes that impact is immeasurable. Diane Hightower, Saint Stephen's parish life

coordinator, recalls delivering donated blankets to a local charitable agency last winter. The agency "told me those blankets would keep someone from freezing on the streets that night," she says.

Each month, the Saint Stephen's Outreach Committee spotlights a different need faced by neighbors in our community and invites parishioners to help meet it. In August, members donated clothing that went to the Alabama Interfaith Refugee Partnership, which resettles families fleeing war, civil unrest, oppression, and famine who often arrive with nothing. July was dedicated to collecting essential school supplies for charities serving local children. November's peanut butter haul will help a variety of people in tough situations because "it's the perfect food," says Diane, who coordinates the monthly collections and the volunteers delivering items to agencies. "Peanut butter is portable, needs no refrigeration or heating, and doesn't require utensils to eat it. Plus it's packed with protein, and both kids and adults like it."

In addition to the monthly collections, the Outreach Committee accepts items including canned goods and new and gently used clothing at any time of the year. (See sidebar for more suggestions.)

Sharing simple gifts is a fun, easy way for anyone to take part in outreach, which has been a core pillar of Saint Stephen's for 50 years, says Cindy McCain, chair of the Outreach Committee. "The beauty of the monthly collections ministry is the ability to reach outside the walls of our church and provide for our Birmingham community," she explains. By serving others and spreading blessings, "we are impacting the needs of our local brothers and sisters in Christ and demonstrating the hands and feet of Jesus."

"The agencies are so thankful, so grateful" to receive the donations, Diane notes. And the neighbors who ultimately receive the gifts feel the love, too. "They know there are people who care for them."

## FIVE SURPRISING THINGS YOU CAN DONATE

**POP TABS:** They go to Birmingham's Ronald McDonald House, which uses the money from recycling them to support families whose children are receiving care at local hospitals.

**TO-GO CUTLERY:** Don't throw away the plastic utensils from your food orders. Many shelters and other agencies can use them.

**HOTEL TOILETRIES:** The same thing goes for the free shampoos, shower gels, and other toiletries you bring home from vacation.

**HOUSEHOLD ITEMS:** Plenty of agencies can use sheet sets, cooking utensils, serving pieces—just about anything you set aside in a cleanout—to help transition people into apartments.

**EYEGASSES:** Old glasses go to the Lions Club, which refurbishes them for people overseas who otherwise would have no access to corrective lenses.



### DONATION DETAILS

- Look for each month's needed items in the weekly e-news.
- Drop off items in the Outreach Alcove, located midway along the church's main hallway.
- Consider ordering items via the Amazon wishlist (linked in the e-news) for delivery to Saint Stephen's.

**SAINT STEPHEN'S NEEDS YOUR HELP TO DELIVER DONATIONS TO AGENCIES AROUND THE BIRMINGHAM AREA. CONTACT DIANE HIGHTOWER AT [DIANE@SSECHURCH.ORG](mailto:DIANE@SSECHURCH.ORG) TO VOLUNTEER.**

# Sacred moments in the story of Saint Stephen's

May 2023 — October 2023

**BAPTISMS**

Rosalie Mae Furnas  
May 28, 2023

Henry Abbott Furnas  
May 28, 2023

Beckett Cael Ransom  
May 28, 2023

Finley Eleanor West  
June 18, 2023

George Finley Skipper  
June 18, 2023

Liam Harrison Knight  
August 27, 2023

Camille Crosby Dorgan  
September 17, 2023

Gwendolyn Gray Dorgan  
September 17, 2023

John Hart Godwin  
September 17, 2023

Charlotte Stetson Whatley  
September 17, 2023

**MARRIAGES**

Adrienne Elizabeth Hill and  
Andrew Franklin Thompson  
June 3, 2023

Kathryn Anne Oakes and  
Jessamy Grayson Moore  
June 10, 2023

Katherine Lanning Speyer  
and Thomas Deaton Owens  
September 16, 2023

Kendall Reed and  
Nicolas Baker  
October 7, 2023

Katie Jean Henry and  
John Breckenridge  
October 21, 2023

**MEMBER DEATHS**

Nancy Oliver Carper  
June 7, 2023

John Lanehart  
August 5, 2023

Jack Stevens Breckenridge Jr.  
October 10, 2023



(Clockwise from top) Deaton Owens and Katherine Speyer; Kathryn Oakes and Jessamy Moore; the Rev. John Burruss prepares to baptize Rosalie and Henry Furnas; big sister Grace Furnas celebrates with her siblings.

## CALLED TO SERVE

WELCOME THE NEWEST ADDITIONS TO THE SAINT STEPHEN'S STAFF



**GRETCHEN LERNER**

Minister of Welcome and Evangelism

Gretchen has a long history with the Episcopal Church. She grew up at Saint Luke's in Mountain Brook and worshiped at All Saints in Homewood for much of her adult life, serving on the vestry and on church staff as the nursery director. Gretchen's diverse background includes helping to start a medical sales company and running the Mountain Brook Club's tennis pro shop. She also worked as a third-party administrator of benefits and retirement plans for a firm managing other companies' benefit programs. Each of these experiences adds to the skill set required for her new role at Saint Stephen's.

"Saint Stephen's is a welcoming place where all are encouraged to get connected to ministry opportunities," says the Rev. Katherine Harper, associate rector for pastoral care and liturgy. "Gretchen's vibrant energy and dedication to helping new and existing parishioners feel the care and compassion of God is beautiful. I am grateful for her presence on our staff and in our congregation."



**THE REV. MARY BEA SULLIVAN**

Director of Spirituality and Wellness

Mary Bea joined the Saint Stephen's staff as a priest associate this summer, and in September she was called to the reimagined role of director of spirituality and wellness. A member of the clergy team, Mary Bea will bring her creative skills to the table as she takes responsibility for two exciting areas: the continued development of our contemplative Sunday 5:00 p.m. Celtic service, and leading us in dreaming and implementing a plan to infuse wellness and spirituality into the larger community through programs at the Chapel of Saint John on our campus.

Mary Bea has been leading women's groups for more than two decades and is a sought-after author and retreat leader around the country. After graduating from Virginia Theological Seminary, she served as priest-in-charge at Holy Spirit in Alabaster and as senior associate rector at Saint Luke's in Mountain Brook. She also has been interim rector at All Saints, Homewood, and Grace Church, Woodlawn. "Mary Bea's entrepreneurial spirit, grounded in a deep faith with an ability to listen, discern, and collaborate, makes her the perfect fit to help Saint Stephen's fully live into our long-term vision," says the Rev. John Burruss.



**EMMA WOOLHOUSE**

Nursery Director

As Saint Stephen's welcomes more young children and infants into the life of our community, Emma and her work are critical to the well-being of our congregation. She leads the hiring and training of new nursery workers and makes sure our nursery is adequately staffed. Emma, who works closely with Jennifer Jones, minister for children's formation, also helps with Club 56. "The nursery is a vital part of Saint Stephen's, and Emma is working hard to make it a welcoming place for our youngest members and their families," Jennifer says.

Originally from Tupelo, Mississippi, Emma studied elementary education at Mississippi College and holds a M.Ed. in English. She currently teaches English at Heritage Christian Academy, is a coach for the school's cross-country team, and is excited to get more involved in the life of Saint Stephen's, which she has attended for about a year.



**SAINT STEPHEN'S**  
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**WHERE DO YOU SEE GOD?** “I see God in the village that surrounded the children of our church as they prepared to return to school. The book-bag blessings and private prayers reminded me of a hymn lyric: ‘Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.’” —Andrew Cotten, parishioner and teacher

