

SPRING/SUMMER 2021

Saint Stephen's

EPISCOPAL CHURCH



Imagination + Creation

SIX WAYS
WE CARE FOR THE LAND
AND OUR COMMUNITY *p. 18*

Behind *the* Streams

HOW A VIRTUAL WORSHIP
SERVICE TAKES SHAPE *p. 12*



See what love the Father
has given us, that we should
be called children of God;
and that is what we are.

1 JOHN 3: 1A

Children's Chapel meets under a bright sky on Easter morning. (Photo: Todd Dorlon)



Making Connections on a Long Journey Home

On March 13, 2020, I was sitting in the corner of an empty airline gate, drafting an email to our wardens about having to suspend in-person worship for the first time ever at Saint Stephen's. Half of our group was in Amsterdam, hoping we could make it back to the United States following an incredible, life-changing pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The other half was on other flights, including some routed through Turkey and Egypt. We knew the world was unraveling because of COVID-19, so we all had our fingers crossed that we would arrive home in the next day or so. When I was writing the email, I believed the suspension would last only a few weeks. No one could have imagined that, a year later, we would be having similar conversations and concerns about gathering in person.

And yet it was that Holy Land pilgrimage that became a road map for our life together in the pandemic. It's also why you are holding the first

edition of our new magazine. On our trip home, as our group was split up, we texted each other at each new location and checked in with phone calls and emails. The experience of navigating uncertainty as a remotely connected community knit us together even more closely—more strongly than anything else I had experienced since arriving at Saint Stephen's. This is because our church isn't a building. Rather, Saint Stephen's is this connection that we share and our love for one another.

This is why it is so important for you to hold some of the stories of our community. As you read the words and see the images within these pages, I hope you are inspired. More than anything, I hope that you feel a part of this community and know that these stories are your story, too. We are bound together, and for that I give thanks to God. Enjoy!

John Burruss+
RECTOR | SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

(Photos, left to right) Jerusalem comes into view; Saint Stephen's pilgrims; Burruss speaks to the group.

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Sounding Notes of Hopefulness in Haiti

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Watts

Growing up near Jacmel in southwest Haiti, the Rev. Guilene Fiefie was raised Roman Catholic, attending Mass each week with her mother and siblings. She recalls how, when she was about 8 years old, she aspired to be a nun. Later, when Fiefie was 15 years old, she and her mother visited an Episcopal church. When she saw a woman wearing clericals, she thought it was the bishop's wife, when in fact the woman was a priest. Seeing a woman in this role gave Fiefie a new vision for her life. From then on, she, her mother, and her brother worshipped in the Episcopal church.



After high school, Fiefie moved to the capital of Port-au-Prince to attend university, where she studied for a degree in theological studies. In 2011, she received the support of the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti to attend the Virginia Theological Seminary (VTS), where she was a classmate of the Rev. John Burruss.

Fiefie says her experience with the VTS community

continues to inspire her as a priest: "I have to share the love that I learned from my classmates at VTS—the compassion. I am here to show them that someone

loves them, that someone is thinking about them. I remember when I was at VTS and needed to go shopping. I didn't have a car, it was snowing, and someone drove me to the store to buy my own food—rice and beans, my Haitian food. The same way they had compassion for me [at VTS], I should show that love and compassion with my own people here in Haiti."

Fiefie recalls feeling both culture shock and disappointment when she graduated and returned home in 2013—disappointment because she was not ordained to the transitional diaconate until five years later. When Fiefie was ordained to the priesthood in 2020, she became just the fifth woman ever to be ordained an Episcopal priest in Haiti.

In 2020, Fiefie's bishop sent her to Thomassique to become rector of Saint Luc parish and the head

of its school of 43 students. Today, enrollment at the École Saint Luc has grown to 134 students, ranging from 3-year-old preschoolers up to 12-year-old middle schoolers. With a larger building, Saint Luc could educate as many as 500 students, Fiefie says.

Fiefie believes the school has grown, in part, because she recruited new, more qualified teachers. In fact, recruitment is so important to her that she has provided three of them with a place to live—with her, in the church rectory. Saint Luc now employs 10 teachers and seven other staff who help maintain the building and prepare the food. Another reason for Saint Luc's growth, Fiefie says, is that it is the only school in Thomassique to provide meals to its students.

The school day begins early in the morning and ends at 1:00 p.m. Students learn subjects included in the government-mandated curriculum—math, science, history, French, and Creole—with instruction provided in both French and Creole. As time allows, Fiefie also teaches some basic English. Thomassique's location near the Dominican Republic means that many families hold dual citizenship. Students who learn English will have an advantage if they look for jobs over the border, where tourism is central to the economy.

Fiefie hopes to incorporate music into the curriculum later this year. Music features prominently in Haitian culture—in Carnival, funerals, family gatherings, and community events. Fiefie firmly believes, "If we can teach them music, they could work somewhere else in Haiti in a band." By learning to play an instrument, students gain not just a talent but also a skill to help support themselves.

While Thomassique has public schools, many families want to send their children to church schools like Saint Luc because they trust the church more than the unstable Haitian government. Fiefie observes that many Haitians believe that their government doesn't care about them. Because of this dynamic, "As a church leader, the people are waiting for a lot of things from us," she says.

Reflecting on the possibilities of the budding partnership between Saint Luc's and Saint Stephen's, Fiefie says, "We are very proud of our new relationship. We pray for Saint Stephen's every Sunday in our Mass. Pray for us in Thomassique and for our whole country. We are facing a lot of problems in Haiti. We need prayer. We pray for the United States every Sunday. And we want Saint Stephen's to pray for us." ■

A Tradition of Helping Haiti



THE NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH SAINT LUC IS THE LATEST TO LINK SAINT STEPHEN'S AND THE DIOCESE OF ALABAMA WITH HAITI OVER THE YEARS.

- Vestry member Lisa Beatty remembers many trips to Terrier Rouge, Haiti, where Saint Stephen's brought health care professionals and much-needed food. One day, a woman's bag of rice burst, and she began picking up every precious grain from the ground—quickly helped by Saint Stephen's youth group members. Parishioners also sponsored Haitian schoolchildren for a year.
- The Diocese's companionship with the Diocese of Haiti inspired Ann Piper Carpenter to travel to the country after the devastating 2010 earthquake. There she set up an employment opportunity for artisans, who sewed aprons, purses, pillowcases, and other items to sell in the United States. She also started a farm to raise and sell sisal, a plant used to make rope and fabric. The farm now has 30 full-time employees.
- Deacon CJ Van Slyke and others from the Diocese have partnered with Saint Simeon Episcopal Church and School in Croix-des-Bouquet. Alabama volunteers have helped staff a clinic and provide health care to people with conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, tuberculosis, malaria, and trichinosis.



(Clockwise from left) The Rev. Guilene Fiefie; Saint Luc students enjoy a study break in their classroom and have a hot lunch.



Learning How to Be Together, Apart

CREATIVITY AND FORMATION DURING A PANDEMIC

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Watts

Without a doubt, living in this time of ongoing global pandemic has left an indelible mark on all our lives. Experiencing new ways of being together while being apart has changed the way we think of ourselves, our place in the world, our ways of connecting with one another, and maybe even our ways of connecting with God. Though we did not seek this out, we have ended up participating in a grand experiment in being formed together by these changes and challenges. As we begin to emerge on the other side of this time of pandemic, we are finding that we have emerged as a more creative, more flexible, more empathetic, and more resilient church.

How have we managed to continue being formed together—spurring on one another to love and good deeds—all while wearing masks, keeping a safe distance, and moving many of our interactions online? The people of Saint Stephen’s have adapted to our changed circumstances with double portions of grace and good humor. Looking back on our year of learning together while apart, we see ample evidence of the flexibility, adventurousness, and creativity of our whole community.

TAKING IT HOME

Recognizing that we could not gather at the church for Sunday School or Wednesday Night Live, program staff found creative ways to send activities home. Children’s ministry director Jennifer Jones set up a table in the church foyer where families were encouraged to pick up bags of activities meant to encourage intergenerational learning. For Ascension Day, Jones left a bucket filled with bottles of bubbles

with accompanying prayers, giving families the opportunity to share an object lesson in what it means to ascend. Program staff also collaborated on take-home activity bags so that everyone could still enjoy wreaths, candles, calendars, and paperwhite bulbs during Advent, impose ashes on Ash Wednesday, and access devotional materials during Lent.

GETTING SOME FRESH AIR

Before the pandemic, Saint Stephen’s already organized many outdoor activities. With public health officials touting the greater safety in being together outdoors, going on a Holy Hike suddenly made even more sense, and more people discovered what holy hiking is all about.

In the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2021, Club 56 and Episcopal Youth Community (EYC) small groups moved outdoors, finding new places to gather on the back patio, in the outdoor chapel, and in the grassy area outside Carpenter Hall. This spring, when we began offering worship services in the back parking lot, Children’s Chapel also made its way outside, with the children following the crucifer up the steps to gather on the patio before returning to their families in time for communion. Adults also began gathering outdoors, with the Young Adults Group meeting on the back patio on Wednesday evenings and one of the women’s small groups meeting on Sunday afternoons in the Memorial Garden courtyard.

JUST DRIVING THROUGH

Drive-thru events have been an especially well-received, creative twist on gathering at church over the past year. Wednesday Night Live, which normally



(Clockwise from top left) Viewed through a ring light, the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Watts leads a Sunday Forum online; the Rev. Katherine Harper greets a friend during the drive-thru Blessing of the Pets; youth gather for a socially distanced meet-up in the outdoor chapel.



(Left to right) A youth small group plays a drawing game over Zoom; Bible Buzz translates Sunday School and Children's Choir to an online format; storyteller Betsy Fetner films a Godly Play video for children. (Facing page) Families celebrated Advent with take-home activity kits that included paperwhite bulbs.

“I wonder if this is an opportunity for us to do our engagement with one another differently. Let's prioritize telling our stories to one another . . . and opening that stuff up, bringing it into the light, and then praying about it.” —The Venerable Adam Atkinson

takes place inside the Parish Hall, now happens outside under the porte cochere, where people can drive by from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. to say hello to clergy and staff, pick up dinners and take-home formation activities, and drop off items for our monthly community outreach collections. This winter we collected close to 600 pounds of nonperishable food for Community Kitchens of Birmingham, given mainly through our Wednesday night drive-thru.

Special events also transformed into drive-thru occasions, with people bringing their backpacks to be blessed at the beginning of the school year, or their pets to be blessed on the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. For Halloween, the children's and youth ministry teams organized a drive-thru Trunk or Treat, complete with costumes, games, and piles of candy. Our usual Shrove Tuesday pancake feast became a Mardi Gras-themed drive-thru with king cakes, a brass band, and beads and MoonPies. Even Ash Wednesday had drive-thru options for morning, noon, and night, with ashes imposed while people remained in their cars.

GATHERING ONLINE

In March 2020, one of our first responses to sheltering in place was that we needed to pray together—and

that we should do this every day in ways that had not been our community's common practice. To do this, clergy began offering Morning Prayer and Noonday Prayer services six days a week through Facebook livestreaming. We have found that a community of prayer has formed at Saint Stephen's in ways we never would have imagined. As we gather together online to hear the daily scriptures, say our prayers together, and share in a time of intercession—with specific prayer requests offered in the comments—we have found unexpected solace in our community as we take part in this ancient practice of praying together throughout the week.

To complement these online daily prayer services, Saint Stephen's clergy, along with our summer seminarian intern Susan Oakes, began writing Daily Reflections in response to the lectionary readings. We continue to post these reflections to our website and email them to subscribers' inboxes each morning at 7:45, allowing those who read them to integrate them into their lives as a daily spiritual practice.

CONNECTING TO FUN

As it became clear that our time of keeping our distance would be ongoing, we began moving our weekly formation groups online. Jones and music

director Whitney Page collaborated to create Bible Buzz, a Sunday morning Zoom gathering that blends elements of Sunday School and Children's Choir. Jones also began curating online content for families to share together at home, which she sends out in a weekly e-newsletter. “Children's formation has been offered both live on Zoom in Bible Buzz and as family activities that can be done on their own time,” she says. “Research has shown that faith is best formed when it is consistently part of a family's daily life. I try to use my weekly family newsletter as a place to offer prayers and ideas for families to use at home.”

Club 56, Misfit Mornings, and EYC small groups also found times when they could gather online. Youth ministry director Catherine “CPo” Poellnitz and youth assistant Amelia Warnock began producing short “What's Up Wednesday” videos that youth view on Instagram or through their weekly e-news. Youth small groups explored creative ways of sparking discussion and fun online, including Room Share (with everyone showing off a room in their house) and Scavenger Hunt (with a list of items that participants would try to find around their houses). Even Pictionary and similar games became a new experience when played virtually. Youth Sunday and Palm Sunday became occasions for middle schoolers and high schoolers to get involved in producing online content, such as skits interpreting the Gospel or recreating the Palm Sunday procession complete with a donkey named Winona. “Filming has become a great activity that youth enjoy participating in,” Poellnitz says. “Small groups were a great way to see new people in our ‘What's Up Wednesday’ videos and other digital content.”

BRIDGING THE DISTANCE

Book discussion groups and Bible study groups also migrated online, gathering on Zoom

morning, noon, and night throughout the week. (Eight weekly groups continue to meet online as of the spring of 2021.) These offerings have provided opportunities to include friends and family members who might not otherwise get to take part. For instance, parishioner Carol Myers has found special joy in having her daughter Christy Hayes, who lives in the Atlanta area, join her for the rector's reading group on Tuesdays and women's Bible study on Wednesday mornings.

In the fall of 2020, we brought back our Sunday morning forums—with guest speakers from Saint Stephen's and around Birmingham—livestreaming through YouTube. As we began planning for spring, we realized that the technology could allow us to host speakers from other states and countries as well. Recently, in addition to our local speakers, we have featured presenters live from Florida, Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas, and even London, England. In this way, moving the Sunday Forums online offered us an opportunity to expand our options for learning.

The Venerable Adam Atkinson, our guest presenter from the Diocese of London, reflected on the meaningfulness of gathering in small groups online. Even though we look forward to gathering again in person, we can still take these virtual opportunities to share our lives with one another in meaningful ways. As Atkinson observed, “I wonder if this is an opportunity for us to almost do our engagement with one another differently. Let's prioritize telling our stories to one another—the story of these things that are happening in my life—in order to practice being undefended with one another, being vulnerable in a safe context, and opening that stuff up, bringing it into the light, and then praying about it. It doesn't have to be complicated, but practicing that storytelling, being with one another, and inviting God into that—and then just doing it again and again. Rinse and repeat regularly!” ■





Behind the Streams

HOW A VIRTUAL WORSHIP SERVICE TAKES SHAPE

Charles Buchanan

There's a moment in each livestreamed worship service when the Rev. John Burruss feels closely connected to parishioners—closer than he's ever felt in ministry, he says.

That's a remarkable statement considering that, for about a year, Burruss was tethered to the congregation by the slender digital threads of Facebook and YouTube. But during prayer, when the priest

reads names typed into the online comments, "I feel a beautiful connection to them," he says. "It's like time freezes, and we can pray as long as we need to pray."

Burruss and a team of parishioners—Scott Anderson, Matthew Brooks, Jimmy Gauld, Bill Miller, J.D. Smith, Sheila Snoddy, and Steve Thompson—have worked diligently to translate

the sacredness and beauty of in-person worship to the livestream. Initially, they transmitted services through a webcam and laptop balanced on a table. Videographer Staśi Bara set up the current arrangement, which links wall-mounted cameras at the Nave's back and left side with a NewTek TriCaster media-production system in the expanded control booth.

(Above) Steve Thompson operates the video cameras during the livestreamed Ash Wednesday evening service.

HERE'S THE VIEW FROM THE CONTROL BOOTH DURING A SUNDAY LIVESTREAM

Gauld, Miller, and Thompson begin preparing the livestream. At this service, Gauld is producer while Thompson operates cameras and Miller, wearing headphones, monitors sound.

45
MINUTES
BEFORE
SERVICE

The trio had operated the sound board on Sundays, but Bara quickly taught them to use video-production technology when livestreaming became crucial for worship. The first time the team produced a service on its own "reminded me of my first solo flight as a pilot," Thompson says. Miller appreciates how the tech crew works in tandem, "calmly coaching" one another when technical issues arise.

25
MINUTES
TO GO

The clergy and the tech crew review the order of the service, with Gauld writing notes in a printed bulletin.

"Choreographing multiple camera angles, videos, lighting, and sound based upon who is speaking and their position at the prescribed time is challenging," Thompson says. "Each service is different, which requires detailed planning and coordination." Burruss ends the meeting with a crucial question: "What happens if the computer mouse locks up?" (Answer: CTRL + ALT + DELETE and cancel.)

Gauld and Thompson adjust the cameras using a monitor that displays a series of saved camera angles.

15
MINUTES
TO GO

Gauld zooms in on the pianist so that she is the same size as the singer when they appear together in a split-screen shot. During the service, Gauld will tell Thompson when to switch between cameras and shots. "I always have to think two steps ahead," Gauld says. Miller checks batteries and volume levels for each clergy member's headset microphone.

3
MINUTES
TO GO

Burruss prays for a meaningful worship service. The Nave goes silent, and Gauld taps a button to begin streaming from the TriCaster to a laptop to the Internet. Burruss points to the pianist to begin playing and joins the other clergy in the altar area.

Red lights tell the clergy which camera is live, but they rely on "blind faith" when a prerecorded video—such as a Bible reading or choir performance—plays, says the Rev. Katherine Harper.

*
SERVICE
BEGINS

Because the clergy can't see or hear the videos, they must wait for the tech crew to give a 10-second warning and then point when they can speak. "We're getting more comfortable with the silence," says Burruss, who occasionally zips over to the sound booth if any quick troubleshooting is needed. The clergy also use the pause to read comments that parishioners post online.

23
MINUTES
IN

The sermon begins. Speaking to empty pews was disconcerting at first for Burruss, a storyteller at heart. He has adapted by making eye contact with the few people in the room—the singers, the pianist, and the other priests—who stand in for the larger congregation.

"During the Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols service, we had more singers present than usual," Burruss recalls. "And I realized that, for the first time, I was actually preaching to the choir."

As the postlude video ends, Thompson says, "We're good." He clicks the button that stops the livestream.

1
HOUR
IN

Burruss says livestreaming will continue past COVID. The challenge will be "helping people feel part of the service—honoring their gifts and helping them be part of the liturgy—when the majority of the community is back in the building."

LIFT EVERY VIDEO AND SING

Music director Whitney Page initially turned to the Internet for advice about transitioning live choir performances into virtual anthems. But the top search result wasn't what she expected.



"It was an article explaining why you should *not* attempt this," she recalls, laughing. "I decided not to read it." Instead, she spent days learning to use advanced audio/video-production applications—and figuring out ways to conduct the choir through a screen.

The shift has been monumental for Page and the choir members, who are used to hours of back-and-forth, face-to-face interaction to learn an anthem. These days, Page begins by filming herself conducting

the anthem—layering in an accompaniment track and separate parts for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass recorded by a pianist. Page often chooses music familiar to the choir to make learning easier. Then choir members film themselves singing as they watch Page's video and listen to the music through earbuds.

Angie Parmer, a choir member for eight years, often records her part in her guest room closet—an experience that can frustrate the professionally trained singer and vocal coach. "You don't sound like you're supposed to sound," she explains. "Musicians are taught to fill the room—to sing to the space. A smartphone microphone doesn't pick up the nuance of human voice very well." Singing alone also presents a challenge. "A choir is a community," Parmer says. "You realize how much you need the people around you—and how they give you courage and stamina, taking up the slack when you need to take a breath."

"There's a beautiful image of the church in how the choir functions, in how we rely on each other and lift each other up," Page adds.

Parmer also misses singing

directly to the congregation. "There is an alchemy in music—a give and take," she explains. "When you see those faces, and see that what you're doing matters, you give more."

Once choir members send their individual videos to Page, she synchronizes them in Adobe Premiere Pro, using the audio tracks as a guide. Sometimes she edits the audio—usually in an attempt to mask noisy interruptions such as pets or leaf blowers. She also adds photography to the final video. Page estimates that she spends about an hour's worth of work for each choir member who appears in a virtual anthem. She set a record last Christmas when she, along with Angie's son Nic Parmer and choir member Michael Naro, organized and edited more than 300 videos from adults and children participating in the anthems and the Nativity pageant.

Page appreciates the willingness of the choir members to accept change and learn new things. She says their hard work and talent move her every time she builds an anthem, layer by layer, video by video. "From one voice, it grows," she says. "It's really beautiful." ■



"During the Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols service, we had more singers present than usual," Burruss recalls. "And I realized that, for the first time, I was actually preaching to the choir."

(Above) Stacked furniture helps Angie Parmer record her vocals at home. (Facing page, top) Whitney Page conducts in person and (inset) on videos sent to choir members. (Right) Sheila Snoddy and Thompson set up camera angles.



READY FOR ITS CLOSEUP:

Along with cameras and a bigger control booth, the Nave received other upgrades for livestreaming. New lighting includes controls for adjusting color temperature, or how bright or soft the light appears. Anything that could cause extraneous noise—lights, equipment, and so forth—got muffled. Even the Nave doors shut more slowly now so that they won't shake the camera on the back wall.



(Top left and right) Flower Apostles share arrangements of blossoms from the altar. (Above left) Eucharistic visitors deliver in-home communion. (Above right) A Feed My Sheep team member brings a meal to a parishioner.

Pastoral Care in a Time of Pandemic

The Rev. Katherine Harper

In 2020, the ways that we interacted with one another shifted due to the pandemic, while the needs, losses, and stresses of life continued—and, in many ways, were magnified. Compassionate support and encouragement through the pastoral care teams at Saint Stephen’s became essential for staying connected in a time of isolation. Team members continued delivering Christian community through phone calls, flowers, emails, letters, meals dropped off at the door, and prayers. Here are a few of their stories:

• **In April 2020**, with the organizational support of Saint Stephen’s staff, 54 Community Shepherd groups (small groups designed to promote community connection) formed. In his role as a community shepherd, Ray Brooks was one of the parishioners who reached out to 11 other households in our church family. He says he has been enriched deeply “to have contact with people who need and want connection when we are not able to be in church.” It made his day to simply ask the question, “What can I pray for you?”

When one parishioner moved into a new setting, Brooks, who is a member of the Card Guild, made and sent her a card. Upon receipt, she called him to share her appreciation. As they talked, Brooks asked what she misses about being in church. She said she misses singing—and then sang to him on the phone. His pastoral care contact helped her not to feel so lonely. Brooks says this past year has been eye opening because he never imagined he could make such an impact on others’ lives.

• **Sandra Agricola** learned upsetting news in the past year. She was diagnosed with breast cancer, and she says pastoral care support changed her life: “This

devastatingly lonely diagnosis [during COVID-19] became a manageable nightmare with the care and love from so many friends at Saint Stephen’s.” Parishioners who are cancer survivors often provide encouragement and support—and prayers. And after Agricola’s name was shared with the pastoral care teams during her cancer treatment, the Flower Apostles, volunteers who deliver arrangements made from the Sunday altar flowers, dropped off a vase of fresh greenery and flowers for her. “I never realized how meaningful flowers from the altar can be until I received them,” Agricola says. “Now I look forward to delivering them to others.”

• **Jill Hunt’s world** changed in February 2020 when her husband, Tracy, had a heart attack and nearly died. And a month later, other aspects of the world slowed down, too. What Hunt knew of their busy life was no longer recognizable. As for church involvement, she says that before February of last year, she only participated in little ways. However, the church was there for the Hunt family through Tracy’s health event: A priest visited the hospital, cards arrived from the church, and phone calls coordinated meals and other needs.

When we began training Eucharistic visitors to deliver in-home communion on a wider scale, Hunt wanted to take part. Her own family’s deep need opened her eyes to the ways God was calling and preparing her. “It moved me into action rather than sadness,” she says. “Delivering Eucharist keeps me grounded on the needs of the community and has nurtured my own spiritual needs, too.” Hunt says that because of COVID-19 and its effects on our church community, God is cultivating her purpose in serving. She loves her church and has a new perspective on what caring for people looks like. Eucharistic visits meld “touch and presence of church” and have taught Hunt that “they needed me as much as I needed them.” Serving has changed Hunt, setting her on fire to follow the example of Christian service that her parents instilled in her.

Pastoral care is a great channel for serving—and for being served. I invite you to share your own stories of being moved through the compassionate Christian community of Saint Stephen’s, and as you are able, lend your hands and heart. God will move you in new and beautiful ways. These three parishioners attest to that. We look forward to seeing what comes through your involvement. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION on pastoral care, contact the Rev. Katherine Harper (Katherine@ssechurch.org).

Imagination + Creation

SIX WAYS WE CARE FOR THE LAND AND OUR COMMUNITY

The Rev. John Burruss



After graduating from seminary,

I became priest-in-charge of a small West Tennessee congregation with almost as many acres of land as people on a Sunday morning. I soon learned that, for this church, the land had become a liability. I heard, “We need more people to mow the yard”

and “We have too much property

to keep this up.” The experience reminded me of wisdom shared by acclaimed writer Wendell Berry in an essay titled “Notes: Unspecializing Poetry”: *To preserve our places and to be at home in them, it is necessary to fill them with imagination. To imagine as well as see what is in them.*

Not to fill them with the junk of fantasy and unconsciousness, for that is no more than the industrial economy would do, but to see them first clearly with the eyes, and then to see them with the imagination in their sanctity, as belonging to Creation.

As a congregation, we needed to imagine more faithfully—to see creative potential in the beautiful, sacred gift of stewardship. We began to plant, to collect rainwater, to raise bees, and to build a walking trail with outdoor Stations of the Cross. We began to see more in our lives, and the responsibilities we hold, as a life-affirming, God-given gift.

At Saint Stephen’s, Care of Creation is a church pillar along with Formation, Outreach, and Pastoral Care. Caring for the Earth is an essential way to respond to our baptism and to share God’s love with our neighbors. Together, we can develop a deeper sense of place and home. Here are a few ways we are doing this:

1 PROTECTING OUR FOREST

We love that Saint Stephen’s is tucked into a forest. Until 2019, however, it was hidden in woods choked with invasive plants such as privet, English ivy, and Chinese wisteria. Parishioners have led efforts to eliminate many overgrown, problem plants and replace them with native species. They also repurposed dead trees to line walking trails or serve as homes for insects and birds. The Saint Stephen’s grounds are now a National Wildlife Federation-certified wildlife habitat.

flowers that brighten our yards and our altar—depend upon honey bees for pollination. Unfortunately, a combination of threats is causing alarming declines in bee populations. Two years ago we created a four-hive sanctuary for approximately 200,000 honey bees on the church grounds. Thanks to their busy buzzing around Cahaba Heights—and our resident beekeepers Scott Cochran, Sam Haskell, and Tom Robertshaw—we shared our first honey harvest with the congregation last fall.



3 CONSERVING ENERGY

We have been auditing our energy use to find ways to reduce both consumption and costs. After analyzing a few years’ worth of power, gas, and water bills, accompanied by a deep dive into usage patterns on the campus, we created an energy plan that led to replacing all lighting with low-maintenance, money-saving LED bulbs. The plan also includes a 104-kilowatt solar-energy system that would offset about 30 percent of our energy consumption and make more funds available for ministry and mission.



4

CONNECTING FARMS AND COMMUNITIES

Giving thanks and praise for what sustains us is inherent to what it means to be a Christian. Even eating can become a beautiful and important practice that connects us with God. Last fall we sponsored a pop-up market in partnership with GASP (Greater Birmingham Alliance to Stop Pollution) and Jones Valley Teaching Farm to provide fresh produce, as well as nonperishable food and household supplies, to families living in the 35th Avenue Superfund area, a place decimated by poverty, a legacy of contaminated soil, and ongoing air pollution. Hallie Gibbs, who organized this ministry, noted that such markets make fresh produce affordable and accessible for communities in need. People throughout Cahaba Heights also have enjoyed our partnership with Snow’s Bend Farm, a certified organic farm near Tuscaloosa. Subscribers to the farm’s CSA (community-supported agriculture) program can pick up their share of the harvest at the church during the growing seasons.



5

GETTING TO KNOW NATURE

Experiencing the beauty and wonder of creation by getting outside helps us understand God’s command in Genesis 1:28 to “be responsible for every living thing on this Earth.” Our Holy Hikes invite parishioners to come together to explore the region’s natural treasures, from Red Mountain Park and Oak Mountain State Park to Moss Rock Preserve and Camp McDowell.

6

EXPANDING OUR UNDERSTANDING

We proudly host lectures and forums that invite scholars, practitioners, and clergy to answer questions about the climate crisis, environmental justice, and related topics. In April, our guest speaker was Dr. Anne Hallum, Stetson University professor emeritus of political science and founder of the Alliance for International Reforestation (AIR) Guatemala, whose efforts have been recognized by the United Nations and *CNN Heroes*. Hallum described her own call to care for creation and AIR Guatemala’s work to tackle hunger, rural education, and environmental devastation in 250 communities in that country. She also invited us to consider how we might help. Meanwhile, some of our youngest

community members, children enrolled in our Saint Stephen’s Preschool, have become budding gardeners, learning to grow vegetables through a program developed by Mary Marcoux and Mary White. At harvest time, salad parties give them the chance to enjoy eating the fruits of their labors. ■



DO YOU SEE GOD IN THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD?

Join our Care of Creation ministries at www.ssechurch.org/creationcare.



(Top) The Rev. John Burruss prepares to baptize Joseph Stephen Godwin. **(Above left)** Bishop Kee Sloan confirms Julianne Abenoja. **(Above right and facing page)** The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Watts officiates a distanced, masked, at-home wedding ceremony for Anne Catherine Luckett and Preston Bryant Hairell. (Photos: hannahkatefotographie.com)



Sacred moments in the story of Saint Stephen's

January 2020—April 2021

BAPTISMS

- Ruth Rosalind Smith, January 20, 2020
- Louise Duncan Wignall, January 12, 2020
- John McAdoo Bryant, June 7, 2020
- Catherine Idella Shurtz, August 28, 2020
- Joseph Stephen Godwin, August 30, 2020
- Ainsley Elizabeth Sellers, September 6, 2020
- Dylan Nicholas Hernandez, October 4, 2020
- Eric Joe Sharp, October 25, 2020
- Margaret Ann Black, November 1, 2020
- Elliott Blair NeSmith, November 28, 2020
- Nona Elinor Richardson, December 6, 2020
- Juniper Celia Richardson, December 6, 2020
- Clara Lawrence Worley, December 6, 2020
- Van Boone Worley, December 6, 2020
- Wells Avery Davis, January 31, 2021
- Brooks Christopher Davis, January 31, 2021
- Jessica Wells Davis, January 31, 2021
- Charlotte Elizabeth Lawrence, February 14, 2021
- Banks Oliver Hammond, March 7, 2021
- Evelina Loyer Lawton Macleod, March 7, 2021
- Giuliana Lane Sullivan, April 3, 2021
- Connor Matthew Sullivan, April 3, 2021
- Alexander Beau Sullivan, April 3, 2021

CONFIRMATIONS

- Julianne Alexis Abenoja
- Richard Heath Anderson
- Ann Hollis Burson
- Anabel Alice Camp
- Benjamin Baxley Camp
- Richard Lee Childers
- Jackson Best Cook
- Sutton Elizabeth Dodd
- John Wilson Magruder Dorlon
- Sarah Holladay Dunlap
- Carolyn Elizabeth Dunn

MARRIAGES

- John Alexander Earnhardt
- Elizabeth Reese Fetner
- Madeline Frances Freeman
- Merritt Grace Fulmer
- Randal Paul Girouard
- Alexander Graham Glover
- Joseph Scott Godwin
- Joseph Michael Green
- Jeffery David Grisham
- Elizabeth Pierce Grisham
- Lauren Elaine Jones
- Thomas Miller Knott
- David Clemens Knott
- Haley Elizabeth Lasseter
- Denene Ware Lemke
- Ryan Todd Lunsford
- Anna Elizabeth McDaniel McCormack
- James Jenson Meredith
- Ann Tillery Moak
- James Bernard Murray
- John Gillespie Noles
- Annagrace Margaret Parmer
- Eric Joe Sharp
- Jackson Ryan Short
- Charlotte Dorothy Sims
- Ashleigh Marie Smith
- Adeline Grace Smith
- Debra Deames Spain
- Roger Alan Spain
- Georgia Louise Stock
- Mary Molloy Strickland
- Jason Alwyn Thompson
- Christopher Michael Wadsworth
- William Kelson Webb
- Henry Hudson Wilder

RECEPTIONS

- Lisa Hanlon Schroeder
- Sharon Ottley Host

MARRIAGES

- Shanley Belle Treleven
- to Christopher Smith, February 15, 2020
- Gisela Hildegard Kreglinger
- to Roy Austin Smith III, February 22, 2020
- Lauren Nicole Keiffer
- to Thomas Reid Shearer, September 12, 2020
- Kelly Grace Baker
- to John Murdoch Harbert II, November 7, 2020
- Jane Elise Hood
- to Joel Andrew Thorn, November 22, 2020
- Melinda Faye Williams
- to Michael Steven Bagwell, December 12, 2020
- Anne Catherine Luckett
- to Preston Bryant Hairell, December 31, 2020
- Brittany Densmore
- to Zac Simon, April 24, 2021

MEMBER DEATHS

- Charles Stephen Trimmier, Jr., January 2, 2020
- Sara Putman Johnston, February 15, 2020
- Eugene Michel Holder II, February 20, 2020
- Bobby Ray Hale, February 28, 2020
- Shirley D. Likos, March 14, 2020
- Sarah Ruth Bradford Horn, May 7, 2020
- Vivian Allinder Daniel, July 5, 2020
- Oliver Gordon Robinson, Jr., July 16, 2020
- Catherine Idella Shurtz, August 28, 2020
- Arthur Neal Shirley, January 1, 2021
- Mary Lois Forbes, March 1, 2021
- Anise McCulley Morris, March 2, 2021
- MaryJane Inge Tingle, March 3, 2021
- Claudia Halliday Maxwell, March 16, 2021
- Joy Ogburn Phipps, March 23, 2021

The Gift That Keeps on Giving

As Saint Stephen's continues to grow and mature as a faith community, some gifts can make an impact for years to come. Here are a few ways you can leave a legacy through the Saint Stephen's Charitable Endowment:

- **The Deacon's Fund** was established in 2019 in thanksgiving and gratitude for the ministry of the Rev. Deacon CJ Van Slyke. A full 100 percent of the fund's proceeds support outreach in the community above and beyond Saint Stephen's annual budget.
- **The Saint Stephen's General Endowment** will be allowed to grow until the corpus is large enough to take annual draws. The Endowment Committee and Vestry are aiming for a value of \$1.5 million before beginning distribution. The endowment's purpose is to support in-reach and outreach (50 percent), capital and maintenance projects (25 percent), and special projects determined by the Vestry (25 percent).



Anise Morris

"ANISE ALWAYS HAD A SMILE ON HER FACE AND A JOKE TO SHARE. SHE WENT OUT OF HER WAY TO MAKE NEWCOMERS FEEL WELCOME."

—Music director Whitney Page recalls the pianist and singer who was part of the Saint Stephen's choir for more than 25 years.

- **The Anise Morris Scholarship Fund** will help support one of the church's scholarship singing positions in Morris's honor. A memorial plaque in the choir room will list the names of recipients.
- **The Saint Stephen's Speakers Fund** supports Christian education through lectures and is made possible by a generous gift. In the past, Saint Stephen's has been blessed with visits from Bryan Stevenson, founder and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative; the Rev. Becca Stevens, social entrepreneur and founder of Thistle Farms; countless experts in theology, religion, and sociology; and other gifted practitioners of our faith.



To make a legacy gift or contribute to the Saint Stephen's Charitable Endowment, contact
Ann Day Hunt (ann@ssechurch.org) or the
Rev. John Burruss (john@ssechurch.org).
See additional giving options at ssechurch.org/give-1.

Summertime at Saint Stephen's

Join us for dinner and laid-back fun outside on Wednesday evenings in June and July.

Our Vacation Bible School theme is "Discovery on Adventure Island." From a whimsical lighthouse on an enchanted island, a Lighthouse Keeper and Beacon the Puffin guide explorers on an exciting quest. While children gather, adults will enjoy opportunities for fellowship and learning. We will spread our Vacation Bible School adventures over four Wednesday evenings to extend the fun from the beginning to end of summer. Children can

attend all four sessions or choose the ones that fit their family's summer schedule. In between, we'll gather together for bingo nights and a picnic at the park.

June 9: Vacation Bible School activities for children; conversation and community for adults

June 16: Vacation Bible School activities for children; conversation and community for adults

June 23: Bingo Night

June 30: Picnic at the Park

July 7: No activities due to Independence Day holiday

July 14: Bingo Night

July 21: Vacation Bible School activities for children; conversation and community for adults

July 28: Vacation Bible School activities for children; conversation and community for adults



Save the Dates for Fall and Winter Retreats

Our retreats offer the perfect opportunity to recharge and reconnect with others from Saint Stephen's. These weekends include some organized activities, but nothing is mandatory. You will have plenty of time to rock and chat, hike, nap, and enjoy other relaxing forms of recreation.

All retreats take place at Camp McDowell's Bethany Village.

Parish Retreat
September 3-5
(Labor Day Weekend)
Fun for everyone, ages 0-103

Men's Retreat
November 5-7
Women's Retreat
January 28-30, 2022

“

WHO STANDS FOR SEWANEE IS THE QUESTION. WHO CONSTITUTES THE 'ALL' OF SEWANEE? OUR AIM IS TO EXPAND AND MAKE MORE INCLUSIVE THE DEFINITION OF THAT WORD: ALL.

”

—Woody Register, Ph.D.,
Professor of History and Director of the Roberson Project on Slavery, Race, and Reconciliation at Sewanee, the University of the South.
Watch his presentation, and all our Christian Formation lectures and sermons from 2020-2021, on our YouTube channel:
www.youtube.com/c/SaintStephensBirmingham/playlists.



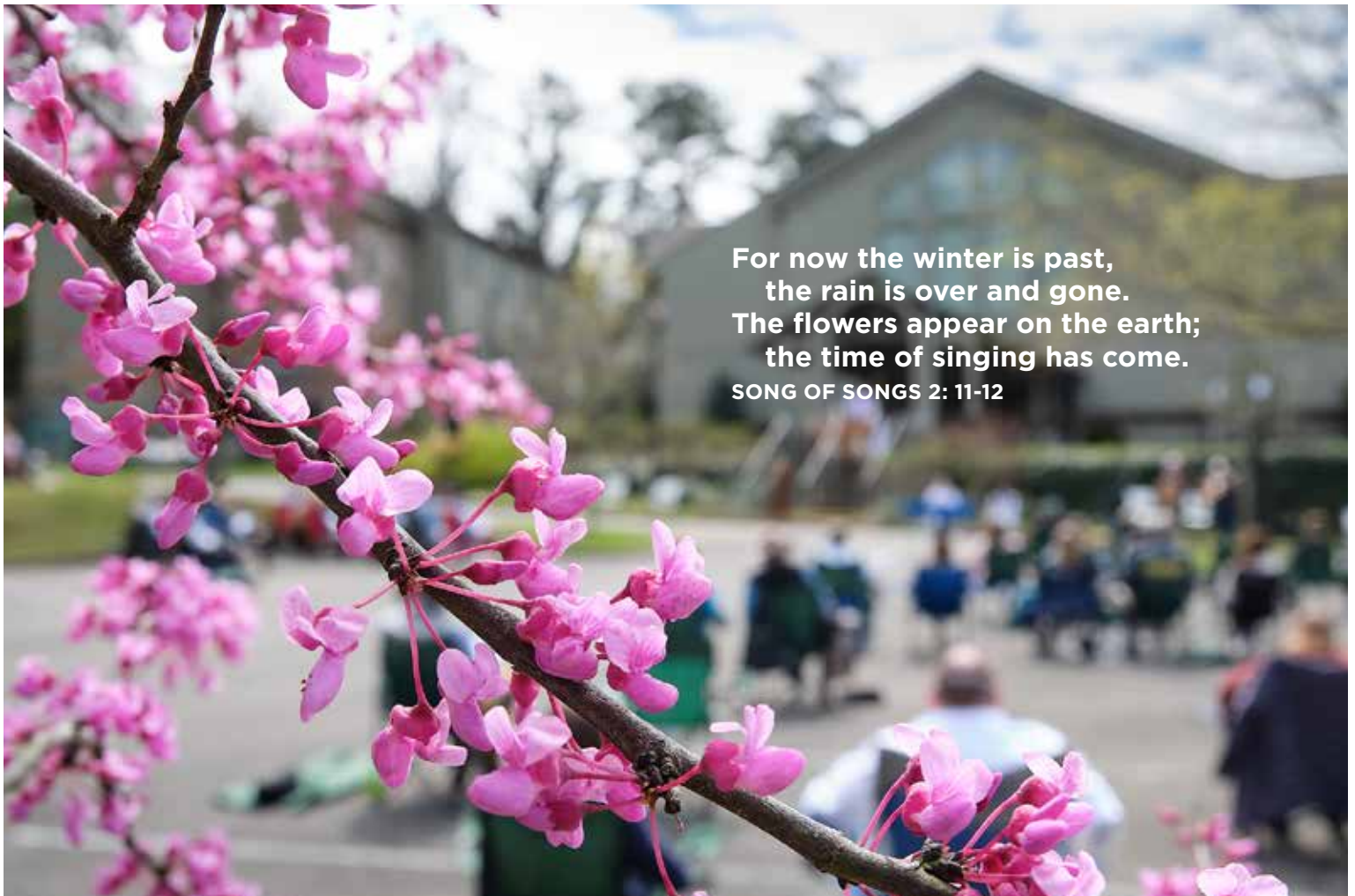
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For now the winter is past,
the rain is over and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth;
the time of singing has come.

SONG OF SONGS 2: 11-12