

Spring/Summer 2022

Saint Stephen's

EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Spiritual Connection

A PARTNERSHIP BLOSSOMS
IN FAIRFIELD *p. 6*





HIGHER EDUCATION

Current Education for Ministry (EfM) students and mentors from Saint Stephen's and Holy Apostles in Hoover gather for a Saturday breakfast and book discussion at the home of the Rev. Dr. José Fernández, EfM mentor at Holy Apostles. If you are curious about EfM, or if you would like to join the new cohort this fall, contact the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bridges at becky@ssechurch.org.

“He focused not on what he wanted to accomplish but on how the process deepened his commitment to the group.”



The Deeper Story

Lessons are learned in almost any project. A magazine is no different. In preparing our third issue, I learned as much as I did with our first. For example, I recently sat down with Wally Evans to interview him for the article about our Memorial Garden and columbarium project (page 20). Wally, who chaired the design team, was eager and willing to be involved due to his own dreams about a garden and, dare I say, forever home. I was excited to understand his motivation and willingness to serve in this way and what he hoped to accomplish with the project. Wally is a gifted leader, so I knew I would learn something about the process as well as his own expectations.

However, the conversation pivoted quickly, shifting from questions about process and design to the team. Every comment was about the group, about the friendships he was building through the process, and how his involvement deepened his sense of church and family.

He focused not on what he wanted to accomplish but on how the process deepened his commitment to the group. He ended by sharing that he had been part of many churches throughout his life, but this was the first time he felt part of a church family.

Our magazine will always focus on ministries and stories—ways of getting involved and plugged into the life of the parish. But I was reminded that we really seek companionship, because in the relationships we build with each other, we come to know our Lord Jesus Christ. I hope you will find in these stories and ministries a launching point toward something much deeper.

John Burruss+
RECTOR
SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

(Above) Wally Evans and John Burruss discuss the teamwork bringing the Memorial Garden project to life.

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Spiritual Connection

A PARTNERSHIP BLOSSOMS WITH FAIRFIELD'S CHRIST CHURCH

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bridges

It began with an email sent in March 2021 about a floor in need of repair at Christ Church in Fairfield. The parish was seeking financial assistance from fellow Episcopal congregations around Greater Birmingham, and one of the people they contacted about contributing was the Rev. John Burruss. But instead of simply sending a check across town, John, sensing a greater opportunity, invited the Fairfield leaders to lunch.

Over a meal at the Pita Stop, John and then-Senior Warden Leslie Passafume got to know Christ

Church's rector, the Rev. Paul Goldman, as well as a few key leaders of his parish, including L.C. Rice, Ruthie Thomas, and Talitha Bailey. Connections formed almost instantly, says Leslie, who shares that her new friend Ruthie "has enriched me just by having a conversation with her."

That May, John and I, along with vestry member Chandler Busby, visited Fairfield to deliver the check for repairing the floor, tour the church, and learn about its history from L.C. and Talitha. We saw the various renovation projects and learned more about



Christ Church's vision for ministries to the Fairfield community, including a laundry ministry. Several weeks later, Chandler invited these new friends to join our Holy Hike to see the Cahaba lilies.

So when Bishop Glenda Curry and the Diocesan staff began to circulate plans for the new Parish Partners program in June 2021, Saint Stephen's and Christ Church's partnership was already under way. Clergy and lay leaders from both congregations agreed to be a pilot partnership, which entailed a commitment to get to know one another and work together on at least one shared project over the next six months. Paul and I participated in the initial Parish Partners meeting organized by the Diocese to hear about Bishop Curry's hopes for the program and join conversations with representatives from other congregations taking part in the initiative.

By August, a working group of lay leaders and clergy were talking, planning, and dreaming about how the two congregations could cross-pollinate and share in ministry in ways beneficial to both parishes.

Saint Stephen's representatives are Connie Hancock, Chandler Busby, Leslie Passafume, Michele Quinn, Conley Knott, and Raymond Griffin, while Christ Church's representatives are Jason Elder, Talitha Bailey, Ruthie Thomas, and L.C. Rice.

"They can help me open my eyes to their experience and show me a way to live in faith and embrace spirituality in ways different than my own community," Michele says. "What's been meaningful, besides doing something helpful, has been listening to the parishioners like Miss Ruthie, Tim, and L.C., and hearing them share their stories of their lives and what church has meant to them, and experiencing how they are such strong people of faith."

Saint Stephen's parishioner Connie Hancock has become a key leader of the partnership, motivated in part by her own family history with Christ Church. Hancock grew up worshipping there with her parents, Saint Stephen's members Lee Hurley and Martha Jo Hurley. Both Connie and Lee were born in Fairfield, and Lee's father was a founder of Christ Church.

(Facing page) Clergy and parishioners gather for worship and a lunch hosted by Christ Church for the Saint Stephen's parish. *(Above, left to right)* Christ Church parishioners Edwina Murry, Ruthie Thomas, and Parthenia Craig helped welcome the Saint Stephen's visitors.

As Connie reflects, her “sentimental, emotional” connection with Christ Church motivates her “to give back to the church that had formed me.” She worships at Christ Church about once a month, along with her family members. “My daughter and I both felt the Holy Spirit there,” Connie says. “Worship at Christ Church fills me in different ways than at Saint Stephen’s. At the end of the day, we share the same prayer book and the same practices. We’re all there for the same thing, and your heart can be filled at either place.”

Over this first year of shared ministry, we have shared workdays at Christ Church, joined together to plant wildflowers on Billy’s Lot at Saint Stephen’s, and worshipped with one another on Sundays. In December, Christ Church participated in our Lessons and Carols service, which included Paul joining our three priests in serving communion. Following the service, Saint Stephen’s hosted a lunch in the Parish Hall to create more time for people to break bread together and share conversations. This past February, Christ Church welcomed people from Saint Stephen’s to worship and enjoy lunch in their newly renovated Parish Hall. After lunch, we went around the room sharing a bit about ourselves and toured the church buildings, including the homes of their laundry

ministry and the Metro West Food Bank. For 2022, the Saint Stephen’s Outreach Committee has allocated funds to pay for additional utility costs to operate these two important ministries in the Fairfield community.

This spring, our congregations organized a Parish Partners team for Gumbo Gala, benefiting Episcopal Place. Co-sponsoring a team provided a fun way to work alongside one another for a cause beyond our own parishes. In addition, David Knott, son of working group member Conley Knott, is working with Paul to complete his Eagle Scout project on the Christ Church grounds.

Now, midway through 2022, we are well past the original six-month pilot period. As this Parish Partnership grows and evolves, we continue to look for opportunities to be with one another by sharing worship, fellowship, and ministry to the Greater Birmingham community to which we all belong. “For me, there’s no more rewarding outreach than getting to know and build relationships with people,” Chandler says. “It’s magnified in the Parish Partnership because we’re all coming together for the same good purpose. No matter what sort of work we set out to do, we’re unified by a higher purpose, despite our differences.”



“
At the end of the day, we share the same prayer book and the same practices. We’re all there for the same thing, and your heart can be filled at either place.
”



(Facing page) Members and clergy from the two congregations mingle in Christ Church’s newly renovated Parish Hall. (Above, clockwise from top left) During the visit, Parthenia Craig; Floyd Bates and L.C. Rice; and the Rev. Paul Goldman, Talitha Bailey, and Connie Hancock enjoy opportunities to build relationships.



Reflecting on Forgiveness, Healing, and Salvation

An Evening with Sam Wells

On a Saturday evening in February, 75 people gathered in the Parish Hall (with many others watching online) to hear the Rev. Dr. Sam Wells, vicar of Saint Martin-in-the-Fields in London. Formerly dean of the chapel and research professor of Christian ethics at Duke Divinity School, Wells holds a Ph.D. from the University of Durham. One of the foremost public theologians of our era and a prolific author with an international audience, Wells writes and speaks about a range of political, pastoral, and theological topics.

Renowned Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann has said, “Sam Wells arguably has the liveliest, most agile, best informed, critically disciplined mind in the entire Christian community. And he has a baptized heart of honesty, compassion, and passion to match his baptized mind.” Likewise, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Justin Welby, has called

Wells “one of the finest priest-theologians of our time,” one who “weaves together deep theology with the practical heart and skill of a pastor.”

On the heels of two presentations and a sermon at the Diocesan Convention at Camp McDowell, Wells visited Saint Stephen’s to lead a reflection on the question of “Does God Heal?” Wells concluded, “What we think we want is healing. What we truly need is forgiveness and eternal life. Sometimes we get healing; sometimes we don’t. The question ‘Does God heal?’ can only be asked alongside the question ‘Does God save?’ And these are the answers: Does God heal me? Sometimes. Does God save me? Always. Always. Always.”

After this reflection, Wells asked those present to spend a few minutes sharing with one another the experiences and feelings that arose as they listened. Wells then opened the floor for an extended question-

and-answer time. The following are excerpts from that conversation, edited for clarity and length.

Piotr Małysz: In your pastoral experience, have you run into people who accept that God has forgiven them, but they cannot forgive themselves?

Sam Wells: I think that’s the majority of people that I know. Gently—and that usually means over a series of conversations rather than one—you’re showing someone what they’re suffering from is a very low-status version of the sin of pride because pride says, “Whatever God may say, I know better.” And if God has forgiven you, what God has rejoined, let no individual doubt or separate, to coin a phrase.

But that’s not the kind of thing you can say to someone in the first conversation with them. Because to say, “I can’t forgive myself” sounds like a kind of repentance. But forgiveness is partly a work of grace and partly an act of will, and different people struggle with the two halves of that. I’m talking about when you’re forgiving somebody else. But it does, in my experience, require both of those. But when you can’t forgive yourself, what I really think is happening is that you can’t let go of your fundamental desire to control the story. The idea that you can ruin the story in such a way that you can’t be forgiven is to suggest that the Holy Spirit is not capable of weaving your knife-slice through the tapestry into an even more beautiful picture—which is believing that your power for ill is greater than the Holy Spirit’s power for good. Well, that’s pride.

So the first step is to hear the depth of what they feel they’ve done. That’s why the sacrament of confession is such a great thing, however it’s exercised. But there are four words in ministry that I find are more powerful than any other words, and they tend to come about 40 minutes after you’ve started meeting with someone. When they’ve poured out the story—“she was my best friend, and her husband and I just always got along, and somehow there was more in it”—and you have the whole story. Then you say, after a pause, the most powerful words in ministry, which are “Was there something else?” Which is to say, you’ve told me the story you tell everybody. Now tell me the real story. That’s what I call the second question.

The first question is always for me, “Where does the story start?” And the second question is “Was there something else?” And sometimes what you find is, when you ask the second question, they’ll tell you a rather different story, but it’s the same story. It’s a bit like a trilogy that tells the same story from different



points of view. They’ll tell you a slightly different version of the same story. Or they’ll take the story back to their childhood where they lost a loved one very young, and they never trusted to love someone, so they couldn’t love just one person; they wanted to hedge their bets, and so they tended to have three people at a time. So they’ll go a little bit further back. What you’re doing with that second story is you’re placing the first story in a wider context, which is a context that doesn’t center the person. To use the language of decentering, which is very common at the moment, you’re decentering them from the story. Then at some stage, you’ve got to get to the point when you say, “So what do you think God really feels about you now?” Of course, you don’t usually ask that question until you think you know the answer. The answer usually is “I think God wants me to come home.” And at that point, once you’ve gotten there, you say, “So what’s stopping you?” Which is my inability to let God be at the center of the story, which is pretty much the definition of sin in the first place. So what presents itself as repentance—which is that I’ve done this terrible thing, and I can’t forgive myself—in fact ends up being almost the definition of sin. But you don’t say that to someone in the first 10 minutes after they walk in the room.

(Facing page and above) London’s St. Martin-in-the-Fields; Sam Wells, its vicar, visited Saint Stephen’s for a special lecture and discussion.

Squire Gwin: I read a meditation saying the worst kind of loneliness is to be uncomfortable with yourself. I believe in forgiveness, and I work on it, but it's like there's something from childhood that keeps saying, "You're not good enough." Can you put that in terms of your Biblical knowledge to help me come to grips with the solution to that?

Sam Wells: That's a beautiful question. The question is about how you come to terms with your own shortcomings and your sense of your own imperfections, deeply laid on you or in you since childhood, and how you learn to live with yourself. You made the interesting comment that the deepest loneliness is not being able to be with yourself. In my talk this morning [at Camp McDowell], I talked about heaven as being four kinds of "being with": being with God, being with yourself, being with one another, and being with the Creation—or with the renewed Creation in the case of heaven. All four count in the sense that the first way to begin with that is to recognize that what's known as the summary of the law—you know, you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your mind and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself—is usually presented as two commandments.

It's actually three: to love God, to love your neighbor, and to love yourself. When it says you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you're being invited to love yourself as the first among the neighbors that you're called to love. Denial of self isn't a form of holiness. It's a form of lack of love. It's as bad as not loving your neighbor. Self-rejection is not the path of holiness. And if you can't love yourself, it's arguable whether you can truly love anybody else.

Now there's no question that people of a certain generation, and perhaps still in some places, have been taught as very young people and as children that love is a zero-sum game—that the less you love yourself, the more love you have to give to others. But that's not what the New Testament teaches us. You know, that's not Christianity. Christianity is the three loves: the love of God, the love of neighbor, and the love of self. The truth is, for many wonderful, holy people, particularly

people a little bit older than me, what healing means and what salvation means and what holiness means in the last chapter or two of their life is actually learning to love themselves, which, in my view, wrongheaded forms of teaching have encouraged them not to do at the formative stage of their lives.

The rest of what I want to say about that is pretty similar to what I said to Piotr about not forgiving yourself, which is to say that in the end, not loving yourself is a paradoxical form of pride because if God loves you, then if you don't love yourself, you're saying that you know better than God, which is what pride is.

After 30 years in ministry, I've got some golden moments, and one of those was in the year 2000. I was pastoring a very small church, and we were doing Godly Play. I was getting out the pieces of the Good Shepherd story—little wooden pieces—and I was kneeling down on the floor. The congregation [was] a mixture of adults and children. I took out the pieces for the still waters and the green pastures and the places of danger and the sheepfold.

Then I picked up two or three of the sheep, which were made out of different kinds of wood. I said, "I wonder if it makes any difference that they're different colors." One of the children said, "It makes no difference. We should treat them all the same."

I thought, "OK, we've had that class at school." But I wasn't happy with that, so I said, "I wonder what makes them all the same." And there was really a long pause. None of the adults knew what to say. This six-year-old girl at the back put her hand up. And she said, "They've all got the same shepherd."

That's right at the top of my great moments in ministry because it's basically saying our worth as human beings comes from the fact that God loves us so much as to become one of us in Christ. God could not possibly have gone any further to communicate love to us than that. And if we're not prepared to receive that, then we're either saying that doesn't count or you've got to do better. I'm not prepared to say that. I think that's all I need—and I hope that's all you need, and that all of us here need. We've all got the same shepherd.

Hear Wells's complete sermon and Q&A on the Saint Stephen's YouTube channel, in the Special Lectures playlist: youtube.com/c/SaintStephensBirmingham/playlists.

“
When it says you shall love your neighbor as yourself, you're being invited to love yourself as the first among the neighbors that you're called to love.
 ”

—REV. DR. SAM WELLS

More Words from Wells

Sam Wells has authored 40+ books, including these titles.

Humbler Faith, Bigger God: Finding a Story to Live By
 (2022, Eerdmans/Canterbury Press)

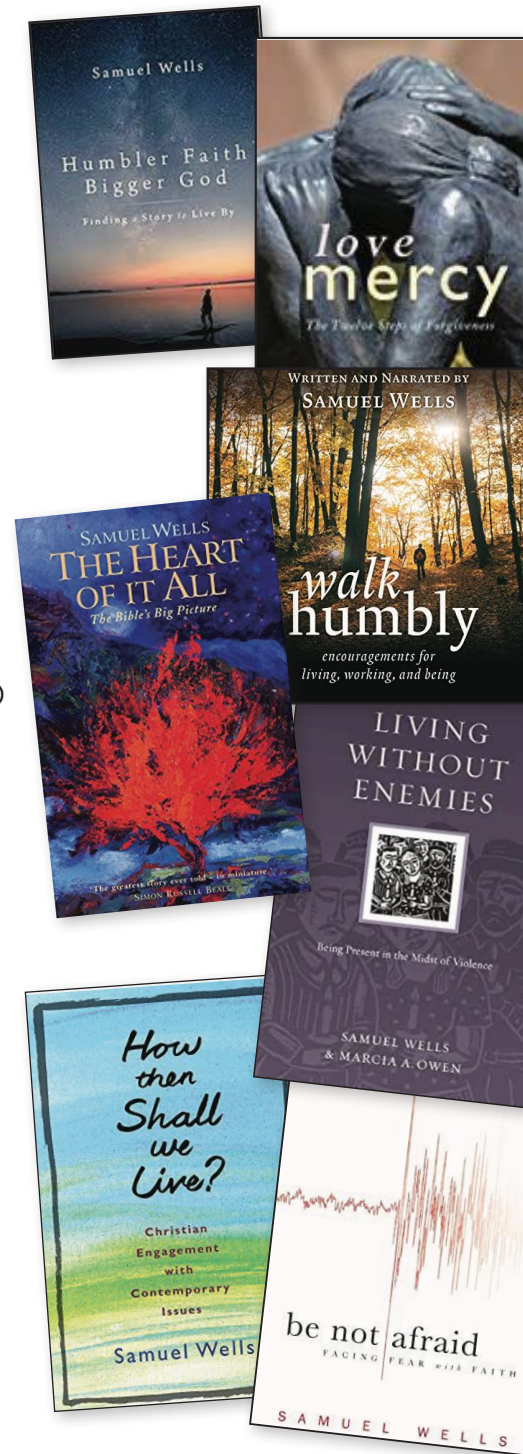
Love Mercy: The Twelve Steps of Forgiveness
 (2020, Canterbury Press Norwich)

In Conversation: Samuel Wells and Stanley Hauerwas
 (2020, Church Publishing)

Walk Humbly: Encouragements for Living, Working, and Being
 (2019, Eerdmans)

Face to Face: Meeting Christ in Friend and Stranger
 (2019, Abingdon)

The Heart of it All: The Bible's Big Picture
 (2019, Canterbury Press Norwich)



Incarnational Mission: Being with the World
 (2018, Eerdmans/Canterbury)

How Then Shall We Live? Christian Engagement with Contemporary Issues
 (2017, Canterbury Norwich)

Incarnational Ministry: Being with the Church
 (2017, Eerdmans/Canterbury)

A Nazareth Manifesto: Being with God
 (2015, Wiley-Blackwell)

Learning to Dream Again: Rediscovering the Heart of God
 (2013, Eerdmans)

Living without Enemies: Being Present in the Midst of Violence,
 with Marcia Owen
 (2011, IVP)

Be Not Afraid: Facing Fear with Faith
 (2011, Brazos)

To join a Being With group (a small group model written by Sam Wells)
 OR BOOK CONVERSATIONS ON SOME OF THESE TITLES,
 CONTACT THE REV. DR. REBECCA BRIDGES AT [BECKY@SSECHURCH.ORG](mailto:becky@ssechurch.org).

Liturgy: The Work of the People

The Rev. Katherine Harper



Ministry is a team sport. That is immediately evident when looking at a worship service. On an average Sunday at Saint Stephen's, 47 volunteers help make services happen, and that number does not even include the support from our choir. Regardless of the roles, visible or behind the scenes, our time gathered in public worship requires others to be present. The term "liturgy" is often understood to mean the words we say and the movements we do in church. We find that the heart of liturgy, in form and function, is the work of the people.

And for whom is this work done? The Rev. Frank Young, a retired priest in our congregation, puts this point upon liturgy: Each person who is participating in this work is doing it for an audience of one—God! "Good liturgy is to present the best of what we have and the most authentic image of who we are to God," Frank explains. Our goal is full participation, in the planning and implementation, so that worship is pleasing to God and nurturing our souls.

LITURGY ROLES

Acolyte
Greeter
Intercessor
Lector
Usher

For the Haynes family, longtime members of the congregation, participating in the liturgy provides an opportunity to serve together. Ashley Haynes, reflecting on her role as a lector, says she feels called to be a reader of the Holy Scriptures. Years ago, she visited a synagogue and watched the Torah scroll be unfurled and read, realizing that these ancient words were meant to be spoken. For Saint Stephen's, she reads the appointed scriptures several times in the week leading up to the Sunday she serves, emphasizing that she reads it aloud as she practices.

Gifford Haynes is one of the acolyte masters. He helps his kids and other youth in this role that he describes as a break from the other work that fills his week. As the convener in the vesting room, he

ensures that acolytes approach their tasks seriously, and he reminds teens that if mistakes happen, worship keeps going. Gifford also looks forward to the fun-filled acolyte training events. (Be on the lookout for a kickoff gathering this summer, complete with acolyte Olympics, community building, and a lunch.)

Emma and Bennett Haynes are teenagers and acolytes. Bennett says acolytes are the train tracks of the service because the crucifer and torch bearers guide the start of worship. Emma highlights that being an acolyte helps her develop as a leader in the church.

Another member, Jim Murray, an intercessor, shares that it is powerful to read the prayers for those in all manners of need, and humbling to say the names of those who are sick and those who have died.

Jim, who is new to the Episcopal church, has learned the important role that the public plays in worship services at Saint Stephen's. Serving in that way connects Jim—and everyone who takes part—to church and to God in a deeper way.

Are you looking to get connected at Saint Stephen's? Consider serving in the work of the people—the liturgy. For details, contact Amy Passey at amy@ssechurch.org.



(Facing page, clockwise from top) Acolytes Ellis Strickland, Marion Haskell, and Clara Haskell escort the clergy and attend the Rev. Katherine Harper as she reads the Gospel; lector Chip Maxwell reads the lessons; children's crucifer Connor Sullivan prepares to enter the Nave with Eucharistic ministers Ray Brooks and Rick Passey. (Above) Greeter Cathy Buhring welcomes the Brocato family.



Forces of Nature

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bridges

They call themselves the “Native Ladies.” For several years, a group of women at Saint Stephen’s—including Chris Boles, Lois Chaplin, Lanier Gartland, Louise Meredith, and C.J. Van Slyke—have devoted their time and efforts to caring for the church’s woodland setting by replacing invasive species with native plants. As spring approached, they took a break to describe their work and their love of the land.

Chris Boles: The first year, 2018, all we did was kill stuff. We cut down huge shrubs and cut down wisteria that was killing trees. We wanted to make a landscape that was self-caring, sustainable on its own. As people saw what we were doing, they started making contributions to help. Planting the daffodils (with bulbs acquired from the Birmingham Botanical

Gardens) was a way to help people see what a little change could do. People also get out there with chainsaws to take care of low branches and small trees that are out of place, or trees that have fallen. We work together as a great collaborative unit.

Lanier Gartland: Every week we try to meet and plant. We always have plants to go into the ground, except in summer when we end up weeding. Our primary reason for adding native plants is to restore the natural habitat for insects and wildlife that have lived here for thousands of years. Non-native invasive plant species crowd out native plants, and most native plant-eating insects are unable to eat alien plants. For example, native trees such as white oaks can support between 400 and 500 different moth and

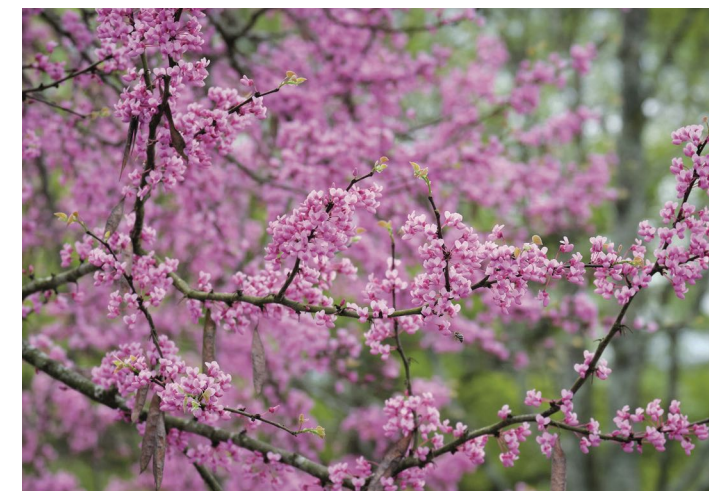
butterfly species. The larvae of these insects are the main food supply for many bird species. A non-native alien tree might not support any local insects. In making the right plant choices, we are able to restore the habitat, and in doing so, we are answering our call to be good stewards of God’s creation.

Lois Chaplin: Van [Chaplin, her husband] and I have been involved in the grounds at Saint Stephen’s since the 1980s. Back then, a forester had recommended we thin it [the wooded area of the property], which was so dense with pines and invasives—privet, wisteria, honeysuckle, Bradford pear, nandina—that we kind of lost the forest. [Now] it’s nice to be able to see the forest floor. Native orchids and native ferns have been coming up that we have never seen before. Because of the nearby condo construction, birds from those woods are making their way to our church property—so we’re providing habitat for those displaced creatures.

Hopefully it can be a learning place for the whole church—where people can walk through and learn about native plants.

During COVID, sharing in this work gave us a way to spend time together. It was a relief to be able to go to the church and be with people. And while there’s a focus on the Native Ladies, there’s also a “Native Man”: Tom Robertshaw, who has done a lot to eradicate privet.

Louise Meredith: Even though we are in the middle of suburbia, we can walk into the woods, and I am reminded of being at Camp McDowell. The woods create a sanctuary—a place of solace and peace. You see old growth, new growth, new plants you have never seen before—just as when we enter a sanctuary and participate in the liturgy, we are reminded of the past (old growth), the present or the future (new growth), and we see people we have never met. Caring for the ground where we formally worship the



(Facing page, left to right) Lois Chaplin, Chris Boles, Louise Meredith, Nancy Brown, Lanier Gartland, Bidly Osbun, and Connie Hancock take a break from working on the church grounds. (Above photos) Springtime at Saint Stephen’s rewards their efforts with a showcase of natural beauty.

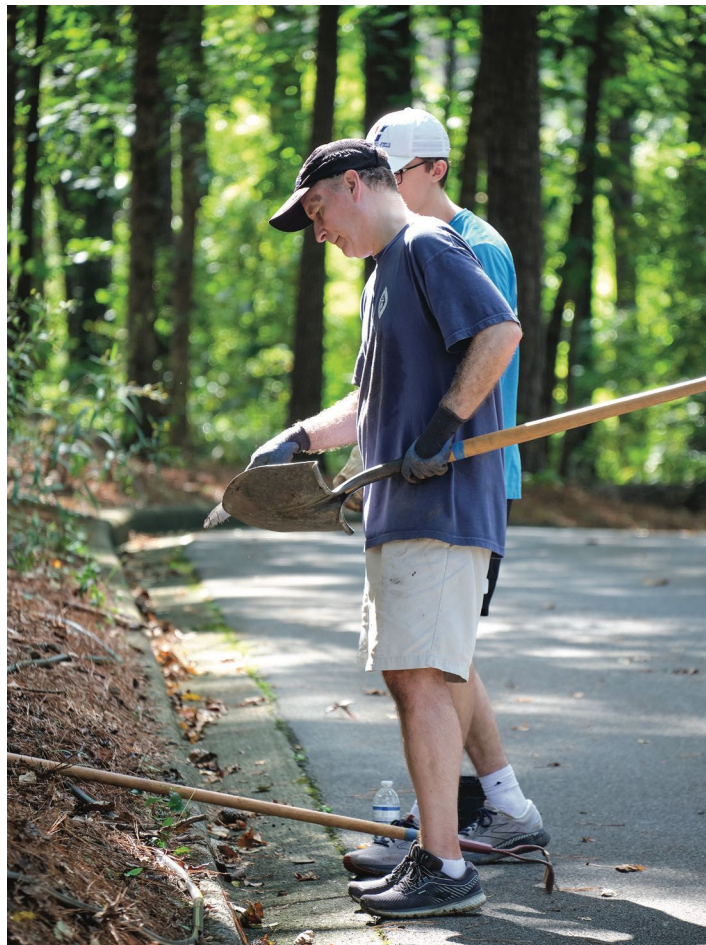


Creator of all life seems appropriate. And the people who come to help share a common goal, and in doing so, create a community and a bond.

C.J. Van Slyke: I've always been interested in reestablishing native plants—and I love the soil and the life that lives under the soil. [The poet] Mary Oliver has touched me and many others with her observation that you look for the life that you can't see on the surface: "Perhaps what I sense when I feel the soil in my hands, is that I am touching all those who came before and perhaps God hers/himself." As a deacon I carry the dust of my shoes to prepare the Way, and as a member of His beloved, we are reminded that we are but dust and to dust we shall return.

The native plant work is a way of strengthening our relationship with each other and with God, helping us to refocus on what is really important, appreciating the things that make where we are so beautiful. And it just brings joy!

Help care for the Saint Stephen's grounds by contacting Chris Boles at cboles1804@aol.com. You also can join the Care of Creation Committee by reaching out to vestry member Chris Williams or the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bridges at becky@ssechurch.org.




LOCAL ROOTS

Ready to make your own yard a native-plant paradise? The Native Ladies recommend a few favorites from among the 100 different species they have planted at Saint Stephen's. (Another tip: Avoid treating your lawn with pesticides and herbicides to help foster a habitat for insects and birds.)

FLOWERS/HERBACEOUS PLANTS
 Aster • Columbine • Coneflower • Pagoda Plant
 Black-Eyed Susan • Phlox (Woodland and Garden)
 Golden Alexander • Bee Balm • Penstemon

SHRUBS
 Native Azaleas • Spicebush • Buttonbush • Leatherwood
 Buckeye (Red and White) • Fringe Tree • Alabama Croton
 Wax Myrtle • Sweetbay Magnolia

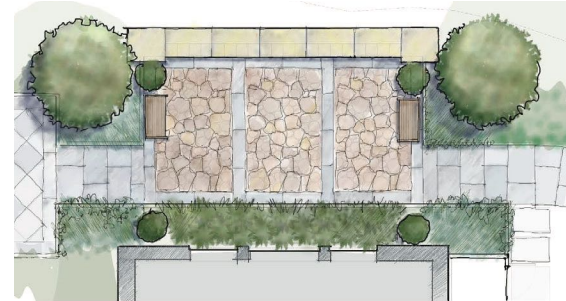
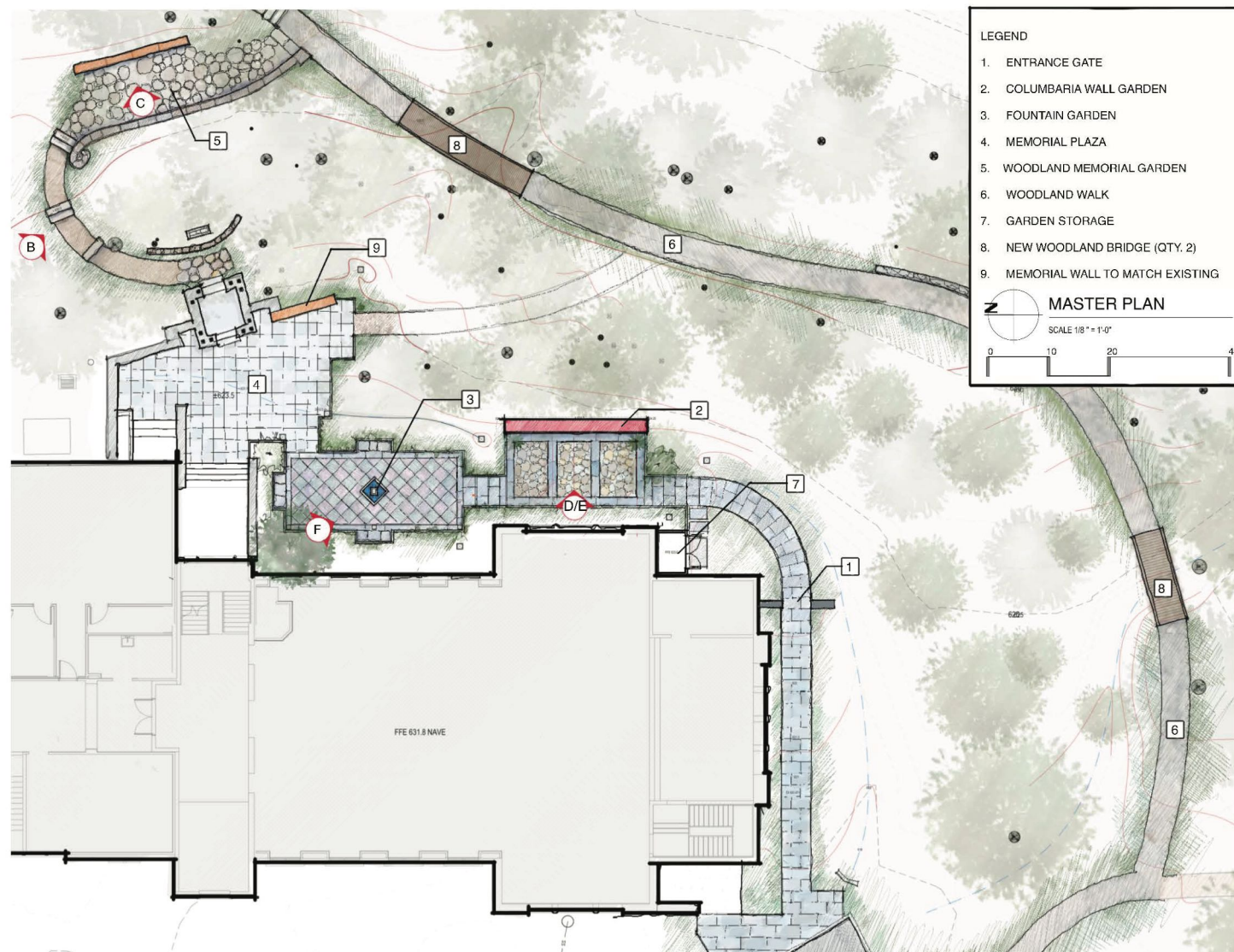
TREES
 Oak • Plum Cherry • Willow • Maple • Elm • Pine • Hickory

(Facing page, clockwise from top left) CJ Van Slyke, Connie Hancock, Jeff and Matthew Kuehr, and Chris Boles and Lois Chaplin tend the woods. (Top) Chris Boles prepares to plant some native babies. (Above) Black-eyed susans brighten the forest floor.

Where Earth Meets Heaven

The Rev. John Burruss

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.” JOHN 14:3



(Photos) Plans and renderings by Golightly Landscape Architecture offer a glimpse of the expanded Memorial Garden, including a new columbarium and water feature nestled among the beauty of the church’s woodland setting.

When Hanna Dewitt (mother of parishioner Ruth Follett) died in October 1982, her children requested that she be buried on the campus of Saint Stephen’s, and the family planted a tree in her honor. The Rev. Doug Carpenter recalls that when Hanna was buried, the family gathered on the grounds for a long time, with Ruth’s children telling stories of their grandmother.

Years later, a playground was to be constructed at the location of her ashes. As Doug writes, “I called (Ruth) to tell her of the situation. Perhaps we could move her mother’s ashes and the tree to a new location. Later that day, she called and told me that the entire family thought it would be absolutely wonderful to have a playground directly over Hanna’s ashes in that place where we had all sat on the ground and told stories about her. When I hung up, I leaned back in my chair, not bothering to fight back the tears.”

Few things in life are as certain as death. In John’s Gospel, Jesus sits down with his friends the evening before his own death to comfort them and to remind them that he is going to prepare a place for them. For Christians, death is not the end, but part of life, and our faith in Christ is the promise that God is always with us. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, we are reminded that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). How we care for our church community through death is a faithful response to God’s promises.

About a decade after Hanna’s death, the current location of the Saint Stephen’s Memorial Garden was chosen, and the memorial wall was constructed in the mid-1990s. Since then, as the congregation has

grown, several people have been interred in the Memorial Garden each year, and the memorial wall has run out of space.

In response, the vestry has embraced the development of an expansive memorial project. In January 2022 it approved a plan for a columbarium with space for 100 families, a memorial wall that can hold more than 500 names, and enhancements for the entire Memorial Garden, including a water feature given to the Glory of God in memory of Gordon Robinson and built by his son.

The work on this project began in 2019 when a committee, headed by Wally Evans, gathered to begin addressing the congregation’s needs. In 2021, after considering several architects, this group commissioned John Wilson of Golightly Landscape Architecture to design the new elements for the Memorial Garden. “John was chosen because of his creative approach to our property and his understanding of the desire to preserve the sacred beauty of our church campus,” Wally Evans says.

Angelika Evans, who also served on the committee, believes John is the most suited to make sure the garden is the place “where earth meets heaven.”

The Memorial Garden provides a way to care for our church community through death—and a place to share stories about friends and family members, as Hanna Dewitt’s relatives did. It’s all about honoring

our loved ones the best way we can, Wally Evans says. The Vestry hopes to break ground this fall.

HOW TO HELP:
Discover how you can bring the new Memorial Garden to life. Contact Pat Bills at pat@ssechurch.org.

Sacred moments in the story of Saint Stephen's

October 2021-April 2022

PRESENTED FOR CONFIRMATION

- Jack Abenoja
- Melinda Bagwell
- Michael Bagwell
- Kathleen E. Bergman
- Ethan Brasher
- Mae Busby
- Lilly Coker
- Wilson Crane
- Kinsley Cummings
- Jane Earnhardt
- Stone Garlich
- Moseley Garrison
- Atticus Girouard
- Maslan Girouard
- Darcy Glasgow
- Preston Hairell
- Kelly Harbert
- Emma Haynes
- Stacey Hinton
- Thompson Jones
- Annette Linton
- Caroline Livingston
- Graham McAdams
- Will McAlexander
- Tiley Perrine
- Abby Puthoff
- Amy Sealy
- Adelaide Smith
- Sheila Snoddy
- Stella Wallace
- Vincent Wilson

PRESENTED FOR RECEPTION

- Steve Ducic
- Joan McAlexander
- Daniel Woloschuk

PRESENTED FOR REAFFIRMATION

- Kristie Bennett
- Barbara Brewster
- Dianne Mooney

MARRIAGES

- Claire Sykes Alexander to Andrew David Fowler, October 5, 2021
- Stacey Renee Lambert to Deborah Louise Hinton, November 13, 2021
- Sarah Goodwin to Will Krieger, April 30, 2022

BAPTISMS

- Jackson James Boykin, October 24, 2021
- Atticus Rhys Girouard, November 7, 2021
- Maslan Nils Girouard, November 7, 2021
- Darcy Power Glasgow, November 7, 2021
- Robert Howard Rutherford IV, December 30, 2021
- Bailey Underwood Campbell, January 9, 2022
- Virginia Drew Nesmith, January 23, 2022
- Katherine Elizabeth Beatty, April 16, 2022
- Peyton Addison Beatty, April 16, 2022
- Isabel Marie Watson, April 16, 2022

MEMBER DEATHS

- Gary Bonds, November 1, 2021
- Hayes Bynum Hammond, November 21, 2021
- Ruth Carpenter Pitts, December 14, 2021
- William Oliver Mooney, February 18, 2022
- Susan Varnon Davis, February 23, 2022
- Camellia Portera Swindle, April 26, 2022



(Photo) Hilary and Todd Campbell celebrate the baptism of Bailey Campbell.



New Youth Leaders Named

Saint Stephen's is pleased to welcome Jackson Massey as the new full-time Minister for Youth Formation. A Montgomery native, Jackson graduated from Birmingham-Southern College with a theatre arts degree before becoming a teacher at the Alabama Waldorf School. He also has been involved in the Diocesan Youth Department and programs at Camp McDowell before joining Saint Stephen's this spring as a youth intern. Jackson has an ability to connect with youth and help them feel welcomed into the group.

Kathy Graham also will join the staff on a part-time basis as Youth Formation Advisor, helping Saint Stephen's build a model youth formation program. Previously, she led children's formation at Saint Stephen's before a 10-year stint coordinating lifelong formation for the Diocese of Alabama.

Look for more information about Jackson and Kathy's exciting plans for youth formation in the next issue.



RESTORATION OF THE GARDEN CROSS

Virginia Hillhouse

The Art Committee hopes that the congregation has been admiring and wondering about the bronze cross in the Memorial Garden. It was created by sculptor Mike Sluder and installed last year.

The original wooden cross was made by member Bobby Parker in the late 1990s from a beam of heart pine that he salvaged from an old warehouse on Morris Avenue. For years it reigned over all our activities in the garden and often was chosen as a background for family pictures.

Mike Sluder has created many works of art for Saint Stephen's. His baptismal font, altar candelabra, Advent wreath pedestal, and Paschal candle pedestal have enhanced our

worship. Mike pointed out that the wooden cross was deteriorating badly and proposed using it as the base for a more permanent bronze cross. He was able to repair many of the badly weathered places before casting the cross in bronze using the lost wax method.

As often happens, good things come together. Anne Oliver asked that any memorials given to Saint Stephen's for her husband, Sam, be used for the restoration of the cross. These gifts and others made it possible for us to preserve the cross.

Saint Stephen's is grateful to Bobby Parker, Anne Oliver, and the Art Committee (Bunny Chew, Liz Edge, Virginia Hillhouse, Conley Knott, Louise Meredith, and Janet Robertshaw) for their design input, and Mike Sluder for this beautiful permanent addition to our garden.



SAINT STEPHEN'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

3775 Crosshaven Drive
Vestavia Hills, AL 35223

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*I pray that, according to the riches
of his glory, he may grant that you
may be strengthened in your inner
being with power through his Spirit
and that Christ may dwell in your
hearts through faith, as you are
being rooted and grounded in love.*

Ephesians 3:16-17

