



(ON COVER AND ABOVE) *Hundreds of colorful ribbons, many inscribed with prayers from parishioners, clergy, and community members, served as a symbol of hope and healing in the weeks following June 16.*



Our New Reality

A little before 4:00 a.m., maybe 10 minutes after text messages started flooding in, I made my way to the lobby of our hotel in Athens, Greece. Some communication with our congregation and community was needed. Staśi Bara and I began to record a message. It would be hours later, maybe even days, before we would realize fully just what an impact the tragedy of June 16 would play in the lives of not only our own church community, but also the entire world. Not a day has passed since then that we have not been confronted with our new reality—a reality shaped by the lives of Bart, Sharon, and Jane and what happened on that tragic Thursday evening.

But as tragic and heartbreaking as everything that happened that evening was, the story of Saint Stephen's continues to be a story of hope and love. Three people who profoundly shaped our community over the course of their lives continue to teach us how to love, how to serve our church, and how to model compassion and welcome. As we say on Sunday mornings in our

Eucharistic Prayer, we join with angels and archangels and the company of heaven as we sing! This is being lived out.

This issue of our magazine is dedicated to the transformation of Saint Stephen's through the lives of Sharon, Jane, and Bart and the response of our community to the tragedy of June 16. My hope is that it helps you not only to grow in your faith but also to take comfort in the foundational ethic of Christianity—that love is the most powerful force in the world, and through that love God is always making something new. “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” May we always see the power of God's love when facing our broken world.

The Rev. John Burruss+
RECTOR
SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

“The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

(ABOVE) Many people shared their grief and support for Saint Stephen's through floral tributes and messages of love.



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WALTER RAINEY

Extending the Hand of Fellowship

Melinda Rainey Thompson

Walter "Bart" Rainey's last acts of welcome and kindness were not the exception for him.

They were who he was all the time as a husband, father, grandfather, brother, son, and friend. He was always interested in the lives of others, and he endeavored to make everyone he encountered feel special. Bart was married to Linda Foster Rainey for 61 years. We are grateful that she was spared and that he died in her arms while she murmured words of comfort and love into his ears. We feel a sense of peace that he died in one of his favorite places, Saint Stephen's Episcopal Church, a parish that continues to welcome everyone with love. We are proud that in his last act on earth, he extended the hand of community and fellowship to a stranger, regardless of the outcome. Bart was strong in faith and secure in the love of his family and friends. He will be sorely missed by his wife, children, grandchildren, extended family, and many friends. We hope you will honor his memory by extending your hand to those around you who are in need. We are heartened and uplifted by the response to this tragedy from the bereaved families, our parish friends and families, our clergy, our community, and complete strangers from around the world who have ensured that the legacy of those who died on June 16 will be one of overwhelming grace, unconditional love, steadfast faith, small kindnesses, limitless generosity, and waves of unending compassion that continue to ripple throughout our state, country, and world. Bart Rainey's life, like that of Sharon Yeager and Jane Pounds, is an example of the transformative power and the extraordinary gift of an ordinary life.

Melinda Rainey Thompson is Bart Rainey's daughter. She also is a writer, teacher, and speaker who is leading a creative writing and archival project in response to June 16.



SHARON YEAGER

A Ray of Sunshine

Kathe Patterson

A wonderful descriptor of Sharon would be a "ray of sunshine."

Whenever I think of her now and picture her face, she is always smiling—such a lovely and kind friend whom I feel privileged to have known. Her optimism and happiness always spread to those around her. She certainly was not a stranger to sadness and grief, though. In fact, the first time I met Sharon, we happened to sit by each other at a Saint Stephen's Office Angels luncheon, and we spent a majority of the time talking about her loving husband who had died recently. I also found out that the day just prior to her husband's death, she experienced the loss of her mother whom she cared for and who happened to be living with them at the time of her death. It was obvious she was still hurting from these losses, but at the same time, I could see she was ready to find some joy and purpose return to her life. I believe she found both of those at Saint Stephen's.

I was delighted when Sharon decided to join our Simply Prayer Group. We all instantly bonded, and she brought such a light to our group. Sharon was such a loyal member of Simply Prayer—only missing our gatherings when she was out of town visiting her family. Sharon lived about 30 minutes from the church but would never complain about making the trip to meet and pray for all the people on our prayer list. Prayer was important to Sharon, as were the cards our Simply Prayer Group sent out to others, letting them know that they were being thought about and prayed for by us.

Sharon volunteered in numerous ways at Saint Stephen's. In addition to Simply Prayer, she was a devoted member of the Altar Guild, delivered flowers to church members, and worked as an Office Angel—just to name a few. Many of her actions may have been considered "behind the scenes," but I have no doubt most of us have been touched in some way by her acts of kindness. Saint Stephen's was and will continue to be a better place because of Sharon.

Kathe Patterson is a parishioner at Saint Stephen's.



JANE POUNDS

My Dear Friend

Kaye Adams

In February 2002, a stranger approached me as I paced outside Brookwood's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

She attended Saint Stephen's and heard my grandsons were there with her grandson. Love and compassion radiated from her smile. From that moment my friendship with Jane Pounds began. Recently retired, I was looking to fill my empty days. Over the years, our friendship flourished as I discovered Jane's spiritual heart.

Wanting to share her happiness and joy, I volunteered my help. We sewed items for the Episcopal Church Women tea shoppe. Enjoying warm sunny days working together, we cleaned up the Prayer Garden: pulling weeds, transplanting plants from our gardens, and scavenging for new plants. Cooler months were spent knitting prayer shawls and cross-stitching kneelers and Chrismons.

I had no idea why our paths crossed. But I felt God was working in my life. Being with Jane, who enjoyed the blessings of every day, filled my days. Psalm 92 assures us that "even in old age, we will produce fruit when we follow and have a youthful outlook." Her spirit never aged.

Jane brought joy wherever she went, working quietly to spread God's love. Her acts of selflessness reminded me of an Energizer bunny. The fully charged battery of her heart never seemed to run out of Christlike energy.

Her gift to me was helping God work in my life by sharing her own courageous heart and steadfast faith. Over the years, Jane sent many handwritten notes. A note of comfort when I lost a loved one reminded me to "Place yourself in God's hands. He is able to support us in the darkest times." After she helped me with my son's wedding, I received a note saying, "As we knitted and prayed together for Katie and Shelby, it seems we helped write a beautiful love story."

Jane shared God's love and shined a light as she lived each day. Her light shines even brighter in heaven.

Kaye Adams is a parishioner at Saint Stephen's.

Welcome to the Table

The Rev. John Burruss

"Welcome to the table" has been the ethos of Saint Stephen's for nearly 50 years, and the beautiful prayer from Iona that invites people to the table has been used for more than a decade. Now these words have taken new meaning at Saint Stephen's.

On June 16, Jane Pounds, Sharon Yeager, and Bart Rainey sat at a meal with friends. Three of the pillars of this community, three of the most faithful people I have ever met, who pretty much lived at our church, taught us about Christian hospitality. They took bread and wine and gave thanks for their love for each other as a community. And that evening, they made sure that everyone was welcomed to the table. They modeled unconditional love in a way that lived into the vision of the community that their faith has helped to shape, and as they had faithfully done their entire lives. And it cost them their life.

This is the crux of the Christian faith. Two thousand years ago, Jesus walked this earth in a radical new way. He spent his time caring for people who were hurting. He healed the sick, he saw the dignity and human worth of the outcast and marginalized, and he valued the poor and downtrodden. He invited people into a radical and unconditional love, teaching his friends and followers how to care for each other, how to love each other, how to give of themselves, how to serve each other and the world. He taught us the way of love.

And then Jesus invited his friends to the table, to bless and break bread, to share wine. He invited them to the most intimate of human gatherings, a simple

meal of fellowship and love. He even invited his friend who would ultimately betray him and cost him and the world his life. Jesus loved Judas so deeply it cost him his life.

We are followers of Jesus 2,000 years later because that love was so powerful it gave Jesus and the whole world the way to eternal life. It raised Jesus from the dead. That love of welcome, of compassion, of hope, of unconditional love became the most powerful force in this world, overcoming death and creating the way of life for us all.

Two thousand years later, history repeats itself in the most terrible way. And like 2,000 years ago, it is not the end of the story. Saint Stephen's has lived out the ultimate reminder that compassion and the way of love is the way God's resurrection is made manifest in this world. I don't know if I would honestly have the power and compassion of our Saint Stephen's martyrs, but there is no doubt in my mind that Bart, Sharon, and Jane would invite their Judas again and again to sit down and share a meal, because they knew God's unconditional love, it was their guiding ethic, and they fully embodied it. They knew it is the way to eternal life, and they taught us that all are welcome at the table.

Just as the death and, more important, the love of Jesus Christ transformed the entirety of our human existence, the love of the martyrs of Saint Stephen's has taught us that love and welcome have a cost. Love and welcome are the embodiment of our faith, so much so that they can require the ultimate cost. Yet it is through that love that our community has been utterly transformed, knowing more fully the power of God's love for each of us and what it means to live our faith. Thanks be to God.

This is an excerpt from the June 19 sermon, which you can hear in its entirety at <https://youtu.be/p6EUkC9escU>.



An Unexpected Pilgrimage

Pat Bills

Twenty-one pilgrims from Saint Stephen's landed in Greece on June 15 for a journey of a lifetime, to walk in the footsteps of Paul as he traveled to Ephesus, Corinth, Thessaloniki, Philippi, and Athens.

The next day, June 16, found our group visiting the Acropolis and the ancient city of Corinth where we heard the story of Priscilla and Aquilla, Paul's hosts in Corinth. Our rector John Burruss celebrated the Holy Eucharist with us under the shade trees amid the tumbled monuments and remains of homes and businesses of that ancient city.

At 3:00 a.m. the texts and emails began to hit our phones. Some of us learned a few hours later. But all of us gathered in shock in the hotel lobby as John relayed the tragic news. We couldn't believe it. Jane Pounds, Sharon Yeager, and Bart Rainey. We all knew all of them. Some of the group wanted to go home, and some needed to go home. John asked us to stay and finish the pilgrimage. We journeyed on with heartbreak, sadness, uncertainty, and determination.

Each day we honored our friends with prayers lifted to the heavens in the holy sites. We lit candles in the many churches we visited. We had a very special service of remembrance in Mary's home site near Ephesus. She retreated there with John after the loss of her own dear son. We read the 23rd Psalm, named the names of our own

dear saints, Bart, Jane, and Sharon, and read the names aloud of all those in attendance at the Boomers dinner. We ended with the Lord's Prayer. At Philippi, our beautiful guide Nena sang to us in the amphitheater to illustrate the amazing acoustics—and then Keith Cromwell and Diane Mooney sang "Let It Be." We all joined in the chorus. It was truly a magic moment. The last night, in Thessaloniki, we celebrated our love for each other and our friends with great food. We cried and we laughed.

The trip was transformational. We helped each other up and down the stairs and through the schedule each day, making sure we were all together and not missing anything. We expressed our shock, our disbelief, and our grief. We held on to what we knew for sure about our special place, Saint Stephen's. Paul's message to the Corinthians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Thessalonians was about love and how to cope in a world filled with fear and suspicion. These sermons of love, letters of encouragement, and lessons of Christian life brought us safely home. The 17 remaining pilgrims returned on June 23 to a changed world. We were changed also. We will miss our friends, and we will always remember their service to God.

Pat Bills is minister for stewardship and development at Saint Stephen's.

AS THE PROPHET ISAIAH WROTE (41:10):

“Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.”
I invite you to join me in prayer:
Eternal God of love, we know that you do not
willingly inflict pain upon or grieve your children,
and your dream for all is life abundant.
We come to you now in sorrow and sadness at
the death and violence inflicted on our siblings
of Saint Stephen's Church in Vestavia Hills,
Alabama. Receive the souls of those who have
died. Grant them peace in your arms of love. Be
with those who are injured and suffer, those who
are grieving, and those who are frightened and
dispirited. Help us as a nation to find ways to
bring an end to this scourge of violence, which
hurts your children and our human family. Give us
the strength we need, the courage we must have,
and the faith in you that will see us through.
All this we pray and ask in the name of the prince
of peace—your son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

—The Most Rev. Michael Curry, presiding bishop and primate of the Episcopal Church, offered this prayer on June 17, a month after he had visited Saint Stephen's during a trip to Birmingham. Presiding Bishop Curry plans to return to Saint Stephen's on June 16, 2023.



A COMMUNITY OF

LOVE

Like the rainbow after the Great Flood, the days following June 16 have shone with signs of beauty, hope, strength, and faith. People and businesses across the Birmingham area have donated time, resources, and services to show their support for Saint Stephen's. Messages, prayers, and gifts from around the world (including those pictured throughout this issue) have comforted us. We thank everyone for their warm embrace in this time of need. We will never forget their kindness and generosity.

More than a thousand green bows created by Saint Stephen's parishioners and Norton's Florist fluttered from local homes and businesses to honor Sharon, Jane, Bart, and our congregation.



"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined." —Isaiah 9:2

"The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." —John 1:5

Sisters, brothers, and siblings in Christ at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church; God is with you.

I am Dean Kathie Adams-Shepherd, dean at Christ Church Cathedral, St. Louis, Missouri. I was called to St. Louis after serving for 20 years as rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, Newtown, Connecticut. I was in my 15th year in Newtown when the terrible tragedy of gun violence took 28 lives on the quiet streets of Sandy Hook and at the Sandy Hook School in December 2012. Those taken from their loved ones were our fellow parishioners, neighbors, children, administrators, and teachers. I write to you in the love of Christ with prayer on my heart knowing God is with you.

I am aware by way of conversation with your dear rector that you have received many gifts, expressions of deep care, and offers of support from all over your community, diocese, the Episcopal Church, and perhaps the world. I know well this care and sign of a much-larger community of God's love and light than we ever imagined.

Two large, beautiful posters were sent to us from Episcopal communities we had not known well previously, sharing the quotes above from Isaiah and John. These hung on our walls in the hallway leading from the parish house to the church. A reminder day after day that God was in the darkness with us wrestling forth light little by little—one Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost candle at a time; one heart, one word, one prayer, one sacrament, one hug, one meal, one prayer shawl, one soul at a time.

Our heart to your hearts and our prayers enfolding you in the light and love of Christ always.

In Christ's light and love,
The Very Rev. Kathie Adams-Shepherd+

Christ Church Cathedral | 1210 Locust Street | St. Louis, MO 63103

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” —Revelation 21:4

Sharing Is Healing

Dr. Robert Elsner

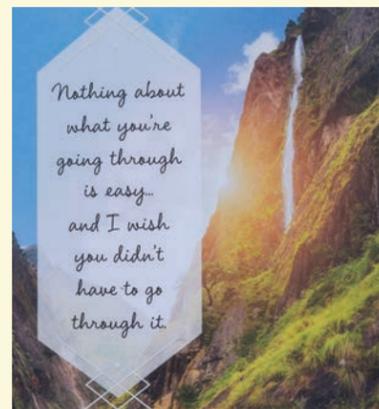
We have shed many tears recently, shared many hugs, asked many questions, and told many beloved stories. But the tears, hugs, questions, and stories define us as children of God. All of these things help us to heal, love, forgive, and stretch out our lives in welcome to others. Sharing with friends or counselors is a form of healing love that glorifies God.

There is an old statement that every tear is a theophany. We tend to think of a theophany as a representation of the presence of God in visual form, such as a burning bush, pillar of cloud or fire, or God walking in front of Moses hidden in the cleft of a rock. But tears are also theophanies. Tears are reminders that we are made in the image of God, and that God’s love surpasses all human understanding. Tears are the presence of God as we are made, showing our

love, our loss, our fear, and our pain. Jesus shed tears at Lazarus’s death, even though he brought Lazarus back.

We cannot bring back those we love, but we can remember that God is with us, that those tears are good. We have a promise of resurrection and a faith that those we have lost are with God and that we will be with them one glorious day. We as a congregation need to embrace the tears, stories, and each other, remembering that God was, is, and will always be with us.

Dr. Robert Elsner is chair of the Samford University Department of Psychology and a parishioner at Saint Stephen’s. In September he led a Sunday Forum about faith, spiritual well-being, and mental health, which you can view at youtube.com/c/SaintStephensBirmingham.



IF YOU ARE GRIEVING:

1. DO NOT GRIEVE ALONE.

You are part of a church community, and it is vital that you stay connected with others during this time. Your support system may include your family, friends, our clergy, bereavement support groups, and/or a licensed mental health professional to help you cope. Do not avoid the Parish Hall, and if you need one of us to hold your hand to go in there, we will do it.

2. TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF.

It can be easy to forget about our own needs after loss, but neglecting yourself will decrease how effectively you deal with your grief. Eat well, get some exercise, and sleep. Be patient with yourself, and allow yourself to feel whatever you feel. Understand what triggers your grief, and prepare for those triggers (e.g., plan to take a day or two off work, let your friends and family know you’ll need extra support, etc.). Self-care can include constructively expressing yourself such as through art, writing, music, etc.

3. IT IS OK TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL GRIEF COUNSELING.

Not everyone needs a counselor or therapist during a grieving period, but it can be extremely helpful for those struggling. If you need a referral, we will arrange that for you. If you feel overwhelmed, call the Crisis Center’s Crisis Line 24/7 at 205-323-7777 or the Amelia Center (for young people and children) at 205-638-7481.

Since June 16, the Saint Stephen’s vestry has made grief and trauma counseling available to everyone within the parish and worked to secure funding so that counseling can continue at no cost.

For questions about counseling or immediate needs, contact the Rev. Katherine Harper: katherine@ssechurch.org.

Make It Beautiful

The Rev. Dr. Sam Wells

While vital to accept that human life is fragile and fallen, and correct to perceive that God’s ways are not our ways, it’s important to see June 16 as not just a story of the mysteries of the Holy Spirit, but as a story of how through those days after the event, through these months of grief and intensity and struggle, perhaps everyone here has been alive like perhaps never before, aware of the fundamentals of the gospel in new ways, in touch with their dependence on God and one another, and grateful for the simplest gifts of creation and existence such that this time has been a renewal as well as a disaster. This must never soften our compassion or lessen our attention to those at the center of this story, the survivors and the families and friends of those murdered. And it must never make us sentimental about the intentions and disturbed actions of the perpetrator.

I lost a parent when I was a very young man. Out of that experience I formulated a motto that has become a guiding star for my life, and I’d be happy to have it written on my tombstone: “If it can’t be happy, make it beautiful.” That sentence sums up my prayer for your community four months on from June 16.

The story of June 16 is never going to be a happy

story. It’s a scar that defaces this church and always will. But one day, maybe in a few years, maybe in a few decades, I hope at least in a few centuries, and I know for certain in God’s good and eternal time, that scar will have been woven, painted, grown, or shaped into something beautiful. The damage will remain—but the hurt will have been joined with the hurt of other communities in a great wave of resistance and understanding and compassion. The hurt will not have completely gone away, but Saint Stephen’s will be known as a place of kindness, goodness, and gentleness.

I have bad news, and I have good news. The bad news you know: This will never become happy. The good news I’ve come to tell you: You can still, in time, with patience, forbearance, and love, make it beautiful. I believe you will. And in doing so, you will come face to face with God.

The Rev. Dr. Sam Wells is vicar of Saint Martin-in-the-Fields and visiting professor of Christian ethics at Kings College, both in London. He also is known internationally as a public theologian and the author of more than 40 books. This reflection is an excerpt from his October lecture, “The Hurt and the Damage: Letting Horror Turn into Wisdom.” View the lecture and discussion that followed in their entirety at youtube.com/c/SaintStephensBirmingham under Special Lectures.



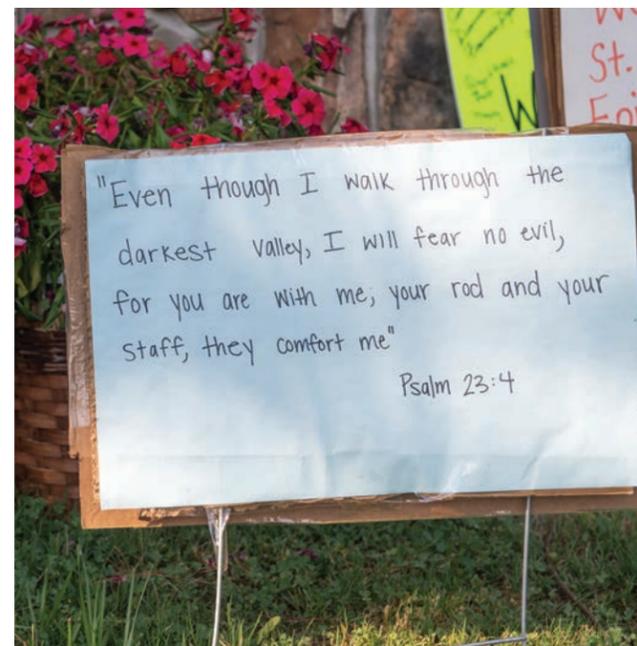


Recovering a Sense of Safety

The Rev. Dr. Danielle Tumminio Hansen

Traumas affect people in many different ways. Not only do traumas take various forms, but different people also respond to the same traumatic event differently. Trauma theorists have spent decades researching the tools that

help individuals recover from traumatic events, including resources from the landscape of faith. I want to give a little glimpse of one resource that is essential to trauma recovery: safety.



Psychiatrist Judith Herman writes in her book *Trauma and Recovery* that there are three steps to healing from trauma: safety, meaning making (also called remembrance and mourning), and reconnection. Safety is the first step to trauma recovery because it's very hard to do anything without it. Without safety, our bodies can also feel stuck in fight-flight-or-freeze mode. You can't make meaning or engage in relationships without feeling safe, and that makes recovery difficult. So in the aftermath of trauma, it's really important to find ways of securing physical, psychological, and spiritual safety. This might include being certain that you have food, clothing, and a safe place to live. It can also include feeling emotionally secure, spiritually grounded, and feeling a sense of security in your home and your neighborhood.

As important as safety is, we often skip over it in trauma recovery and focus on meaning making and reconnection. So it can be helpful to ask what safety looks like and means for you. Where do you feel safest? What brings you comfort and stability? Perhaps safety looks like sharing dinner with a trusted spouse, locking your door at night, playing with a beloved grandchild, or taking a walk through your favorite park. I pray that you each find an outlet to practice safety and to feel God's love and presence in your lives.

The Rev. Dr. Danielle Tumminio Hansen, an Episcopal priest, is assistant professor of practical theology and spiritual care and director of the chaplaincy concentration at Emory University's Candler School of Theology. She visited Saint Stephen's in early October to lead a Sunday Forum on faith resources for trauma recovery. View her presentation at youtube.com/c/SaintStephensBirmingham.

Sealed in God's Love

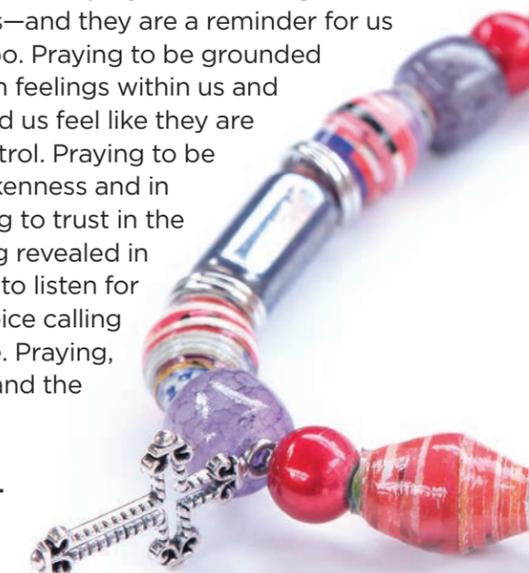
The Rev. Katherine Harper

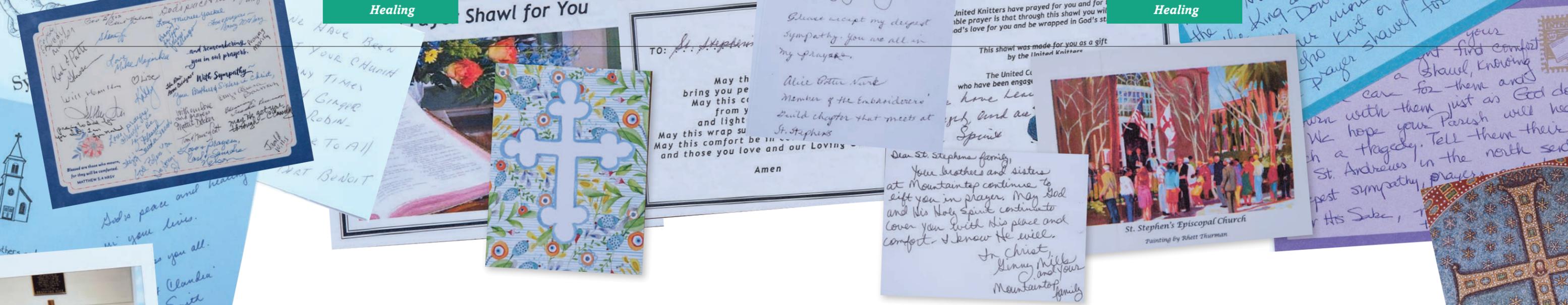
Rolling the cool, smooth orbs lined up on the Anglican prayer beads recenters me. Whether I'm working at my desk or having a pastoral conversation, I feel grateful as I touch those spherical gifts, strung together with cord and sealed in God's love through prayers and blessing.

The Rev. Jean Pierre "JP" Arrossa sent a box of Anglican prayer beads from Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. JP is one of my dearest friends from Seminary of the Southwest. We prayed for one another through those formative times in Austin, Texas, and we continue to lift each other through this space, where we lean upon God to bring reconciliation and peace in the wake of violence and devastating loss. The Anglican prayer beads were made by the hands of Saint Michael's parishioners specifically for the people of Saint Stephen's. JP blessed them during Sunday worship on June 26 as the congregation prayed for all affected by the shooting, and especially for the families of Jane, Bart, and Sharon.

These and other prayer beads and bracelets have been shared with many since June 16. They are tangible reminders of the prayers our siblings in Christ have offered for us—and they are a reminder for us to keep praying, too. Praying to be grounded in God's love, when feelings within us and other things around us feel like they are swirling out of control. Praying to be present in the brokenness and in the healing. Praying to trust in the grace of God being revealed in the world. Praying to listen for the Holy Spirit's voice calling us forward in hope. Praying, in the little things and the big things.

**I will keep praying.
Join me.**





The Post-Traumatic Jesus

The Rev. Dr. David Peters

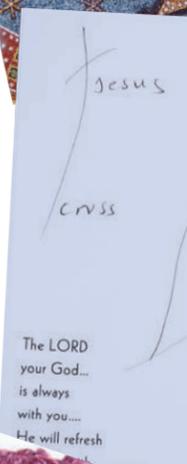
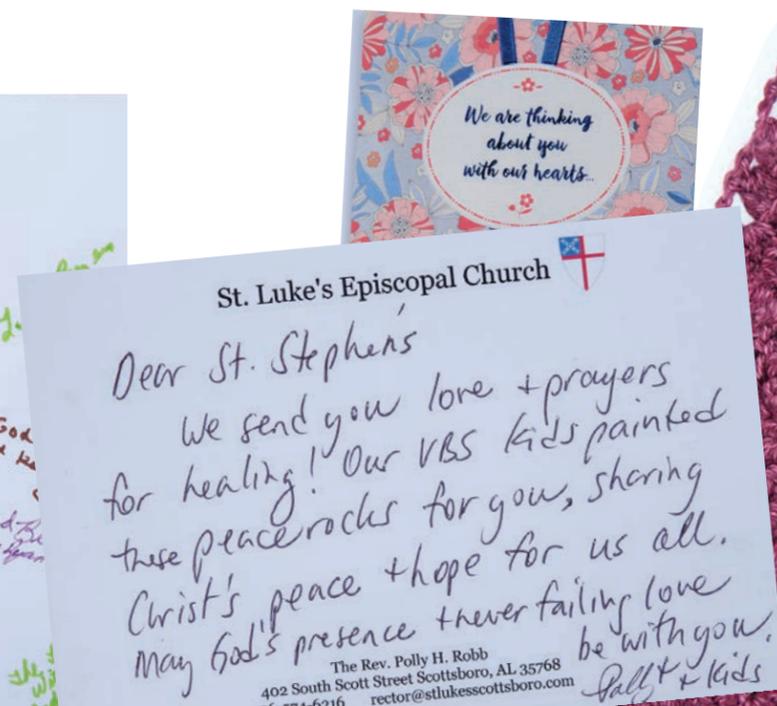
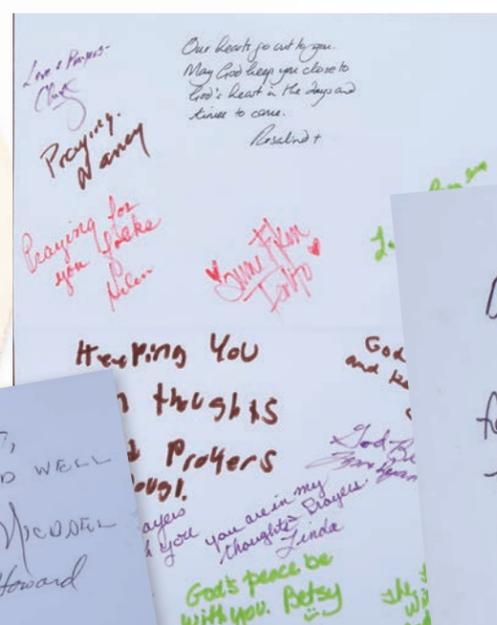
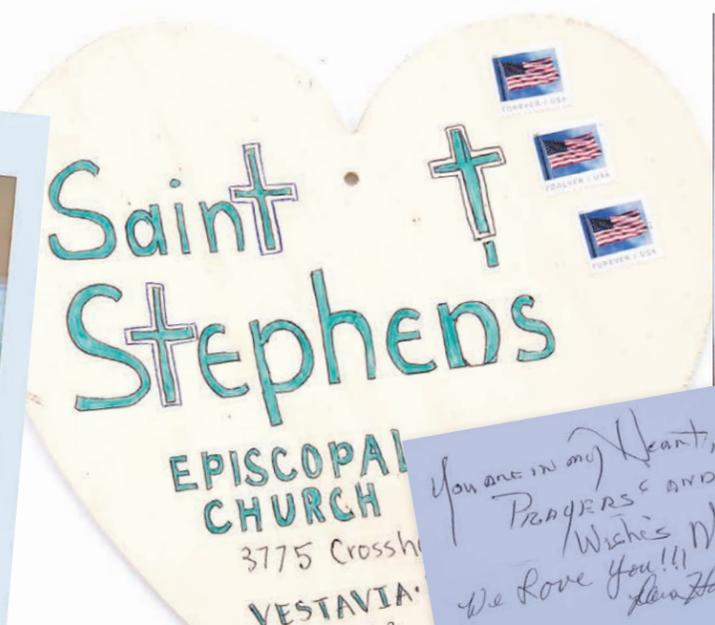
The Post-Traumatic Jesus is the only Jesus Christianity has ever known. From Thomas who wants to touch Jesus' wounds—in Greek, "trauma" means "wounds"—to the Moravians who described their church services as "being in the wound," the wounded, traumatized Jesus has brought healing and hope to traumatized people for all of our Church's history. If the wounded, traumatized Jesus has visible wounds, might he have invisible wounds as well? I believe he does.

When John describes the spear wound in Jesus's side at the crucifixion, he says that blood and water flow out of it. When I read this story through my own post-traumatic lens, mainly from my participation in the Iraq war, I see John's eyewitness account being described as surreal. Traumatic events have a surreal quality about them; it's hard to believe what we are seeing. When we have witnessed a traumatic event, we know that most words are inadequate to convey what we saw and felt. John

sees blood and water as he stands at a distance, watching the torture and death of his friend and teacher.

The story of Jesus is written by post-traumatic people for post-traumatic people like you. It was written by people who were traumatized by the crucifixion and who found solidarity and hope in the outstretched, wounded hands of the one who died for them. They found the surreal quality of the resurrection to be comforting, even as the harsh reality of the world told them it could not be true. These stories were not intended to be read and retold in places of ease and safety, but in the dangerous world of the first-century Roman occupation, a world lit only by fire. Reading the story of Jesus through your post-traumatic lens will introduce you to the post-traumatic Jesus, a Jesus who meets you where you are.

The Rev. Dr. David Peters is vicar of Saint Joan of Arc Episcopal Church in Pflugerville, Texas, and founder of the Episcopal Veterans Fellowship. He visited Saint Stephen's in August to share a sermon and facilitate a workshop with the Boomers that focused on faith and trauma. Watch his sermon at [youtube.com/c/saintstephensbirmingham](https://www.youtube.com/c/saintstephensbirmingham).





Picking Up the Mantle

The Rev. Dr. Rebecca Bridges

After many faithful years as God’s prophet, Elijah knew he would soon need to cross over the Jordan to be taken up to heaven. But Elisha, his apprentice, was not ready to see his mentor cross over. He was not yet prepared to be left behind. So, Elisha said, let me go with you. In a dramatic scene, the prophet Elijah takes off his cloak (called a mantle), rolls it up, and strikes the water with it. The Jordan parts, and together they walk across on dry ground.

Once they reached the other side of the Jordan, Elisha asked this of his mentor: “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” Elisha recognized that he needed to be given some measure of his forebear’s spirit if he were to have any chance of carrying on Elijah’s legacy of faithful service to God.

Like Elisha, we look at the lives and examples of Bart and Sharon and Jane and are amazed at all the ways in which they lived radiating such great love and light and faithfulness to God and neighbor. Like Elisha, we are praying that we may be blessed with a double portion of their spirit; we pray we can honor them by continuing to love others as God has loved us so well through Bart and Sharon and Jane.

Elisha, like us at Saint Stephen’s, is torn between grief and hope. After Elisha watched Elijah be carried up into heaven by those chariots and horses of fire, what could he do next?

First, we know that Elisha took time to grieve—when he could no longer see Elijah, Elisha “grasped his own clothes and tore them into pieces.” But here’s what he does next: “He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water saying, ‘Where is the LORD, the God of Elijah?’”

This is the story behind what it means to “pick up the mantle.” This is the story that shows us what we are to do when we have lost that elder, that mentor, that friend whom we loved and respected and learned from. After we have seen them leave to go be with God, first we must take time to grieve. We cry out, “Father! Father!” and then we acknowledge our grief with outward, tangible signs.

And then, once we have taken time to grieve—and maybe even while we continue to grieve—we begin to pick up their mantle. We pick up Sharon’s mantle, and Jane’s mantle, and Bart’s mantle. Holding their mantles, we ask God to show us: “What is mine to do?” And then, bearing their mantles, we strike the water, we part the water, and we make our way to the other side.

The story of Elijah and Elisha teaches us that we are always dwelling in death and resurrection—but right now we need a double portion to be able to do so. Amen.

This is an excerpt from the June 26 sermon, which you may hear in its entirety at <https://youtu.be/StwieSOH2uU>.



(ABOVE PHOTOS) The Rev. CJ Van Slyke leads the Boomers into the Parish Hall on July 7. Prayers, hymns, and hugs served as a source of strength and healing, and photographs offered reminders of cherished moments in the space.



Reclaiming the Parish Hall: July 7

Lois Chaplin

The thought of getting Boomers back together in the Parish Hall was unsettling. But the fact was that we must do this: Do it for each other. Do it for the friends whom we lost because they would want our fellowship to continue. Do it for the rest of our congregation who would follow on July 10.

So, on Thursday, July 7, as we assembled in the Gathering Space, I drew strength from the love that surrounded us: posters on the walls and handwritten notes of support sent from around the country; stacks of handmade prayer shawls, beads, and other gifts; three weeks of outreach to us from the greater community; and the power of the Holy Spirit supporting all of us, especially our priests, in the emotional exhaustion.

We walked solemnly into the Parish Hall following a trail of incense. We each took a seat in a thoughtfully laid out semicircle facing the altar. We worshipped, prayed, received anointing and the laying on of hands; we hugged, cried, and received healing from each other. The warmth and connectedness felt during that service cocooned us together in God's love. We were the Body of Christ. Made more

vulnerable by our tragedy, we are also stronger as we share in our pain and healing and as we lighten each other's burden.

Forever changed, we gradually made our way from the Parish Hall to a gracious banquet of food and drink that had been laid out in the Chapel by the Saint Stephen's Middlers. It's impossible to verbalize this experience of loving community.

Our entire church is just living it one day at a time together in God's love. A few days later, on July 10, when all were reunited in the Parish Hall, the Rt. Rev. Russell Kendrick's message of "peace be with you" and "peace be with me" was well understood.

Lois Chaplin is an author, editor, gardener, and parishioner at Saint Stephen's.



Reclaiming the Parish Hall: July 10



We walked behind the cross from the sanctuary to the hall for communion, and everyone circled around the walls; the altar was set in the middle of the room. As we prayed that “anything stained or defiled through the craft of Satan or human malice may be purified and cleansed,” we sprinkled baptismal water all around the altar, and also on the children gathered on the floor.

We asked God to make the space a secure haven for those who gather there.

With the power of God, we reclaimed the space for joy, grace, love, and eternal life as we remembered that God has first claimed us. Let us continue to show the world that the love of Jesus is our hope now and forever.

Following the example of Saint Stephen’s and Bart, Sharon, and Jane, may we follow Jesus so that all may see that love wins.

—*The Rt. Rev. Glenda Curry, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, reflected upon the July 10 service to reclaim the Parish Hall. Read her full statement at dioala.org/dfc/newsdetail_2/3210523.*

For many, the world went still one Thursday night in June. In the following weeks, with help from many, we learned that not only does love win, but love also heals. It takes prayer, forgiveness, and love.

I have experienced the most amazing journey through these weeks as our church family wandered and wondered. We have cried together, hugged each other, shared stories, and seen love pour on us from all over the world.

On Sunday, July 10, we processed to our Parish Hall in song to reclaim the beauty of that space, bringing with us the installation of ribbons with prayers and words of healing written on them. We gathered in a circle—a symbol of protection, inclusion, and wholeness—for Eucharist. The service was thoughtfully planned, with

many stations to accommodate all who gathered there.

But it was an unexpected and unplanned serendipity that reclaimed that space for me. A small child wiggled from her mother’s



arms. Wearing a gossamerlike pale blue dress, she began to dance in front of one of the priests.

She had a radiant smile on her face, her blond curls danced around her head, and she gave out soft, happy noise. Noticing her movement, the priest came down to her level, and they met eyes and shared a smile. There was joy in that space—and in this moment it poured in. A small act from a young child and a priest validating the joy of the moment is a symbol of what our Parish Hall was and will be again—a place of joy with love for all who enter. Amen.

Rae Trimmier is an artist and parishioner at Saint Stephen’s.

(TOP) Bishop Glenda Curry, accompanied by the clergy and the congregation, prepares to bless the Parish Hall on July 10. (ABOVE) The Rev. John Burruss shares the Eucharist cup with the Rt. Rev. Russell Kendrick, bishop of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast and former rector of Saint Stephen’s, who preached the July 10 sermon in the Nave.

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

Saint Stephen's continues to be transformed by June 16 and the example of Jane, Bart, and Sharon. They will always inspire us to move forward—step by step, day by day—and recognize the sacred moments in our worship, formation, pastoral care, outreach, care of creation, and our love for God and one another.



May-September

MARRIAGES

Carrie Davis to Bradley Oakes
July 30, 2022

Caroline Houston Page to Patrick Dolon Webber
August 6, 2022



BAPTISMS

Henry Allen Hughes
May 22, 2022

Allen Starke Williams
May 22, 2022

Jonah Marcus Cohen
June 5, 2022

Addison Avery Sellers
June 5, 2022

Margaret Anne Palmer
July 23, 2022

Camden Henry Morrow
August 21, 2022

Lindsey Alexandra Brock
August 21, 2022

Virginia Ware Hassell
September 11, 2022

MEMBER DEATHS

Walter Bartlett Rainey
June 16, 2022

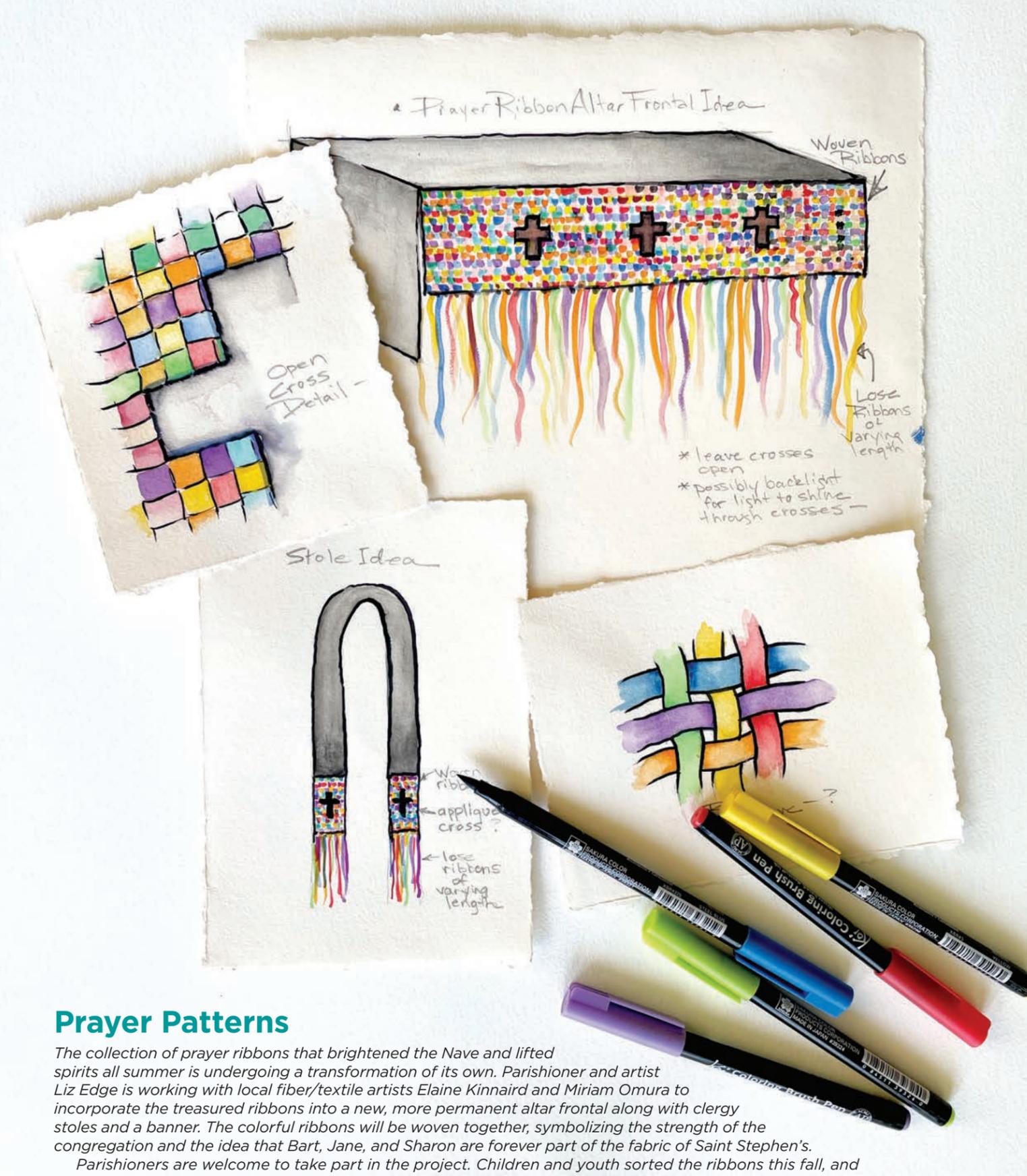
Sarah Sharon McEwen Yeager
June 16, 2022

Elizabeth Jane Easter Pounds
June 17, 2022

Jean Ghareeb
June 22, 2022

Sally Sorrell Dent Chew
June 30, 2022

Jean L. Palmer
July 12, 2022



Prayer Patterns

The collection of prayer ribbons that brightened the Nave and lifted spirits all summer is undergoing a transformation of its own. Parishioner and artist Liz Edge is working with local fiber/textile artists Elaine Kinnaird and Miriam Omura to incorporate the treasured ribbons into a new, more permanent altar frontal along with clergy stoles and a banner. The colorful ribbons will be woven together, symbolizing the strength of the congregation and the idea that Bart, Jane, and Sharon are forever part of the fabric of Saint Stephen's. Parishioners are welcome to take part in the project. Children and youth sorted the ribbons this fall, and everyone will have opportunities to help the artists create the new pieces in 2023. Sketches by Liz Edge

(ABOVE) Margaret Anne Palmer and her family celebrate her baptism with the Rev. John Burruss.



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**“THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE DARKNESS,
AND THE DARKNESS DID NOT OVERCOME IT.”**

JOHN 1:5



(ABOVE) *Candles and prayers to honor friends and loved ones helped Saint Stephen's pilgrims in Greece continue their journey after June 16.*