

OPEN HEARTS • OPEN HANDS • OPEN DOORS

Saint Stephen's

EPISCOPAL CHURCH



50 Years *of* Love



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS
SAINT STEPHEN'S
 EPISCOPAL CHURCH
 Open Hearts • Open Hands • Open Doors

A Moment Between Past and Future

The Rev. John Burruss



It seems quite antiquated to turn to Leviticus, a book often dismissed because of its overarching focus on bizarre and ancient laws and practices, for Biblical wisdom. However, in the 25th chapter, the author of Leviticus introduces the idea of Jubilee, the 50th year in the cycle of life, a special year that is dedicated as holy. In the Jubilee year, debts are canceled, people are forgiven, lives are restored, and everyone is reminded that everything of this earth and all that we possess belong to God. Maybe there's more wisdom in that book than many realize.

It's easy to look back at the history of Saint Stephen's and think of all of the lives that have been touched, the churches planted, and the ministries started. Growing from 40 people meeting on a Sunday evening in an old trailer into one of the most vibrant and innovative congregations in the Episcopal Church, it is a rather remarkable journey. And it is a story that shows how God is always up to something new—and that God is a part of everything that happens and all that we do. Saint Stephen's has always been a place where people are welcomed

and loved and use their gifts to build up the kingdom of God.

What does it mean to celebrate our Jubilee year? Not only do we name the beauty of our history, but we also have an opportunity for renewed focus. If God restores all every 50 years, then Jubilee offers us a moment to see the ways in which God has been shared through this community and live into the next 50. We can let go of the things done and undone, looking with clarity on the hope we have in Christ that has been shaped through the people and stories of this cherished place. I hope this Jubilee edition of our magazine will not only remind you of your role in our community but also compel you to continue its legacy with a renewed spirit.

Faithfully,

The Rev. John Burruss

RECTOR
SAINT STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH



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The Rectors Reflect

A CONVERSATION ON THE SPIRIT, VALUES, AND “GODINCIDENCES” OF SAINT STEPHEN’S



**The Rev. Douglas
“Doug” Carpenter**
Founding Rector 1973-2005



The Rt. Rev. Russell Kendrick
Rector 2007-2015,
now Bishop of the
Episcopal Diocese of the
Central Gulf Coast



The Rev. John Burruss
Rector 2018-Present

These interviews were conducted separately in Birmingham and combined for this article.

John: I am excited to talk with you about the history of Saint Stephen’s. Can you believe that we are celebrating our 50th anniversary?

Doug: I am so pleased. The spirit of this place has always been about reaching out into the neighborhood, and we still do that so well. I started on the week I turned 40, so you know what that means about the reunion.

John: The Monday after, we celebrate your birthday. We need cake at the party!

Doug: My good friend told me that when you are in your 80s, people ask you to do things, and you have to think of all sorts of excuses if you can’t do it. But when you get to be 90, just say, “I’m 90 now,” and they don’t ask you. I’m looking forward to that!

John: I’ve got to know—why the name “Saint Stephen’s”?

Doug: When I was in Brewton, Alabama, I served a Saint Stephen’s there. Then [former bishop of the Diocese of Alabama] George Murray asked me if I’d start a brand new congregation in Huntsville. We called it “Saint Stephen’s.”



After moving home following a stint in Lynchburg, Virginia, [future member] Cassell Stewart and I envisioned a new congregation here. My 10-year-old son Stephen said that “Saint Stephen’s” worked in Huntsville, so that’s what we did.

John: It is a striking name. Stephen is the first martyr, stoned to death outside of the gates of Jerusalem while professing his faith.

Doug: And he was the first of seven deacons, which I also connect with being “low church.” We were pretty low church back then. In fact, other clergy called Saint Stephen’s “Mr. Stephen’s.” I like his ministry as a deacon and how we are a servant community, beginning back in the day with the old coal miners who were in bad shape around here.

John: I love the connection to service and ministry, which is what we are all about.

Doug: The other aspect that was beautiful was the location. We had an idea for where the church should be, and to our surprise, the Diocese already owned the land. They even had an old barrack building that had been used to start Saint Christopher’s in Huntsville. The Advent had brought it here to do youth work and let us use it on Sunday nights.

I had to start out slow. I worked one to two days a week while selling insurance. There was an excitement about it.

John: So you went from selling insurance to selling hope?

Doug: I told people I sold life insurance during the week and fire insurance on Sunday! When I think back, it amazes me that I wouldn’t be here if George Murray hadn’t asked me to go to Huntsville. In those days, I had the idea that if you start a parish, you shouldn’t stay more than six years. If you stayed too long, your personality would influence that parish too much. That was a part of why I was willing to go to Saint Paul’s in Lynchburg.

John: And yet you stayed at Saint Stephen’s for 33 years.

Doug: I changed my mind about that. Every time you move, you lose a lot of time catching up to everything again. When you stay, you don’t lose that time.

John: Is there anything you would have done differently?

Doug: It’s all been kind of miraculous the way it has taken place. The early group at Saint Stephen’s always called things “Godincidences” instead of coincidences because things just seemed to work out.

I did often wonder early on if we should have started a separate congregation for the people of Slab Town who didn’t feel comfortable in our worship, where worship could be done more in their own style. But then I remember that [Slab Town residents] Billy Hodges was

(Above) Saint Stephen’s clergy and parishioners broke ground for the first parish hall in 1978.

“Be Jesus people rather than get too involved with churchy things. Be happy without having all the answers. And I keep coming back to Jesus saying, ‘If you seek your life, you lose it. But if you give your life for the sake of the Gospel, you’ll find it.’ Love your neighbor. Pretty simple.”

—THE REV. DOUG CARPENTER

such a great member and Mildred Smith, too. [Learn more about Slab Town on page 10.]

John: It is amazing how this is a place where things just work out. Has it evolved in any way that surprises you, or does it engage in mission in a way you wouldn’t have when you were rector?

Doug: I never would have thought of having bees. I think that’s great. I think Saint Stephen’s is a little more aggressive than I would have been, and I like that. I like that we have solar panels on the roof. I like the fact that the Parish Hall is as big as it is because I would have never been that expansive, and yet it’s the size where the whole Diocese can use it. Saint Stephen’s has a kind of boldness about it that I really like.

John: Russell, what makes Saint Stephen’s unique?

Russell: What we do is serious, but the people of our church don’t take themselves too seriously. I give Doug credit for that. He instilled it as a value. Saint Stephen’s has continued to hire clergy who have that same ethic. I mean, you make a mistake, and you’re not afraid to laugh.

John: One of my favorite moments was when we put up a Christmas Eve banner at the intersection of Crosshaven and Overton. We had ordered it from Banners on the Cheap, and they sent us the banner printed with the file name “SSE 2019 Christmas - Print Final.pdf.” That was it. No picture of the graphic, just that text. We wrote, “Stuff happens, thankfully Jesus saves!” on it in Sharpie and hung it on the street.

Russell: Did you get any comments?

John: We got a lot of traffic with that one. A reminder that we have a pretty important corner.

Russell: I remember driving up to the funerals the week after June 16 and seeing all of the flowers and ribbons. Sacramental stuff happening on the corner. I also am glad to see Saint John’s being utilized.

John: I think more could be done there, but it doesn’t have to happen today or even tomorrow. I’m trying to remember to pace ourselves. Saint Stephen’s is a creative place, and a lot is always happening. Now I am curious about what you miss.

Russell: I miss the ongoing conversation with people from the pulpit. Now I’m a visitor everywhere I go, so my preaching has changed. Looking back, I have found that many of my sermons referred to something that had happened during the week. When you are with people long enough, when you stand up in front of them, you don’t see faces. You see lives. I miss the lives—and the ordinary interruptions that happen in parish ministry. Like when you are in your office and something happens, and all of a sudden you’re sitting down with a kindergartener. I miss that.

John: One of those moments happened just recently. A newer parishioner stopped by to say hello and introduce herself. We were talking in my office on a Friday, which meant the office staff was thin. It was also right before Halloween, and suddenly the hallway was filled with a few preschool classes dressed in beautiful costumes. She jumped right in and helped hand out candy to our preschoolers. What a way to get involved!

Russell: I tell clergy not to take those moments for granted. There is a lot of beauty in those moments.

One of my most memorable events—and a sign of transformation for Saint Stephen’s—was when we introduced foot washing and the Stripping of the Altar for Maundy Thursday. We started with just a few people. By the time I left, there were so many people coming to wash each other’s feet, and nobody was coming to the clergy. Our liturgy had taken on a life of its own, and it was the people serving and giving of themselves. Transformation. Everywhere I go, I carry Saint Stephen’s with me—literally in my crozier that was a gift from our church, and in my heart.

John: Doug, what do you want our congregation to know?

Doug: Be Jesus people rather than get too involved with churchy things. Be happy without having all the answers. And I keep coming back to Jesus saying, “If you seek your life, you lose it. But if you give your life for the sake of the Gospel, you’ll find it.” Love your neighbor. Pretty simple.

John: Amen. Both of you have taught this community a lot about how to love God and others, and I hope I am living up to the culture that you have nurtured for so long.



(Above) Saint Stephen’s spirit of grace, creativity, and humor shone through in the famous Christmas Eve banner.

PROVERBS 3:5-6 says to
 “Trust in the LORD with all your
 heart, and do not rely on your
 own insight. In all your ways
 acknowledge him, and he will
 make straight your paths.”

FOR A HALF CENTURY, those paths have led countless people straight to a wooded corner in Cahaba Heights. There, in 1960, the Diocese of Alabama purchased six acres for \$13,800, prompted by Bishop Coadjutor George Murray’s belief that the area would one day support an Episcopal parish. The land was called “Middleground,” which was fitting because it sat next to the region’s wealthiest community—Mountain Brook—and one of its poorest, known as Slab Town. In 1968 the Church of the Advent placed a prefabricated building on the property to host youth meetings close to the growing suburbs.

At first, the Rev. Doug Carpenter didn’t know his path was leading toward Middleground. Newly returned to Alabama, he was serving as interim rector at Anniston’s Grace Church in April 1973 when he visited a Birmingham bank to secure a loan. But the banker, Cassell Stewart, leapt at the chance to discuss the need for an Episcopal church in Cahaba Heights. Intrigued and excited, Doug began working with Cassell, and, within a month, they had gathered names of prospective members and won approval from the Diocese to start a congregation in the Middleground trailer. That May, after 40 people had met at Cassell’s home to learn more about the new church, Bishop Furman “Bill” Stough officially designated it as a mission station named “Saint Stephen’s.”

MAY 27

1973

On a stormy Sunday,

40 people attended the first service—held at 8:00 p.m. because the Rev. Doug Carpenter continued to preach in Anniston on Sunday mornings. (The weekly service moved to the morning at the end of that summer.)

The congregation worshiped in the trailer (pictured below) for several years. Early on, the church shared the building with the Advent youth and the Sequoyah School, a private junior high school.



(Left to right) Sam Oliver, Betty Brown Donovan, Bill Blair, SuAnn and Russ Vandavelde, and Gloria Hamrick are pictured in front of the original building in 1973. Other current members from the initial Saint Stephen’s mailing list include Mims Cooper, Amanda LeMay and her son Stephen, Anne Oliver, Bobby and Melanie Parker, and Eleanor Trafton.

15 people confirmed in December 1973

“The only ray of sunshine through the dark clouds of this moment is the warmth I feel at St. Stephen’s. It’s the healthiest growing organism I have experienced. The people are so refreshing. The discussion makes me feel warm.”

—ANONYMOUS NOTE LEFT ON THE ALTAR, DECEMBER 1973

SERVING SLAB TOWN

Looking around Saint Stephen's today, it's difficult to imagine that the surrounding area, from Cahaba Heights to the Overton community, was once an isolated, thickly wooded part of the county that had taken a heavy economic hit from closures of its coal mines decades earlier. The neighborhood directly across from the church was known as Slab Town because the homes had been constructed from bark slabs left over from lumber cutting at a nearby sawmill. The houses had no air conditioning or sewers and relied upon wells for water. Most residents had meager incomes because area jobs and resources were scarce.

Responding to the needs of the people living nearby, physician David Reynolds began a free weekly clinic in the church building soon after Saint Stephen's opened. He was inspired by Annette

Reynolds, his wife at the time, who had initiated a club for girls in Slab Town three years earlier. David, helped by volunteers from the UAB School of Nursing, provided residents with essential medical care, and by 1977 the clinic was busy enough to require a bigger space at the Cahaba Heights elementary school.

Alongside the clinic, the church opened a store, operated by a few Slab Town residents, that sold clothes and other items for a few cents each. Saint Stephen's also provided a food pantry and awarded scholarships so that children from Slab Town could attend Camp McDowell in the summer.

All of these outreach efforts created strong, lasting ties between the new church and its community, bringing "many of our members in close contact with neighbors

they might never have met otherwise," the Rev. Doug Carpenter recalled.



“Why do we remain at the communion rail until all have received? Melanie Parker suggested that very early in our history. She said that since she and [her husband] Bobby require their children to remain at the table until all have finished eating, we certainly should have that courtesy at the Lord’s table.”

—THE REV. DOUG CARPENTER

A Few Firsts

- First outdoor Easter service, 1974
- First parish weekend at Camp McDowell, 1974
- First Vacation Bible School, 1974
- First weddings, 1974: Mary Jean Sanford to Carlton Thomas Stewart, and Marlene Elizabeth Montgomery to Jeffrey Austin West
- First parishioners attend Cursillo, 1976



(Above) Parishioners celebrate Saint Stephen's fifth anniversary in the original sanctuary.

“There used to be stables where Publix is now. I kept my horse, Goldie, there. One Sunday—midsermon, midsentence—Doug Carpenter stopped, squinted his eyes, and said, ‘Berrie! Goldie is in the churchyard!’ She had jumped the fence and come across Overton to worship with us!”

—BERRIE BAMBERG, former parishioner



The Rev. Marianne Bogel, the first woman ordained in Alabama, became associate rector in 1977, making Saint Stephen's the first congregation in the Diocese with a female priest.

(Above) Marianne Bogel, circled on the front row, was one of only four women in her 1976 seminary graduating class.



(Left) Cassell Stewart, pictured with his wife, Caroline, initiated the founding of Saint Stephen's and recruited the Rev. Doug Carpenter.

CAHABA HEIGHTS EMBRACED SAINT STEPHEN'S

as a gathering space. Plays directed by member Eleanor Trafton, including From Rags to Riches and Androcles and the Lion, attracted many local residents.



At the home of Paul and Lou Thibodaux, members stripped paint and refinished the altar table and pulpit, given to Saint Stephen's by Saint Luke's in 1977. Both remain in use today.



1977: Popular local singer and pianist Freada Wallace called the Rev. Doug Carpenter with a tinge of frustration in her voice. "She asked why Episcopalians didn't like 'night people,' who worked late Saturday night and had a hard time getting up for Sunday morning," he remembers. At the time, no Episcopal churches in Birmingham held Sunday evening services. Within weeks, Saint Stephen's launched its evening service, with Freada playing the piano. "You do the preaching, and I'll lead the singing," she had announced to Doug.



DO YOU RECOGNIZE THIS BUILDING?

In 1978, the 355-member congregation completed construction of a new building housing a parish hall, kitchen, classrooms, and offices—following a fundraising campaign that included everything from a thrift shop to talent shows. Can you tell where this building fits into the current Saint Stephen's structure?



1980



EPISCOPAL PLACE, a housing community for the elderly and people with disabilities, opened on Birmingham's Southside. Three years earlier, Saint Stephen's had been the first church to lend support for building the facility.

Saint Stephen's also became one of the "owning parishes" of Saint Martin's in the Pines retirement community.

Because the new building was situated on a slope, only half of the lower floor had been excavated and finished. Parishioner Frank Sezemsky convinced the Rev. Doug Carpenter that the church could complete the job itself. So during Lent in 1980, for one evening each week, several members dug into the hill and pushed dirt-filled wheelbarrows through the classrooms. Their work made room for additional educational and office space.



"Before we came here, we knew there was a God, but now we know his name."

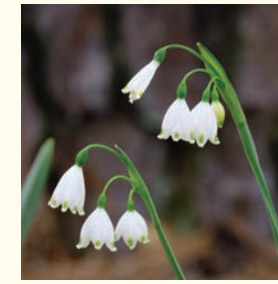
—SAKHON OUK, FORMER PARISHIONER AND CAMBODIAN REFUGEE

In the 1970s, millions of Cambodians were killed in a genocide orchestrated by dictator Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge. Saint Stephen's members Bill and Connie Redd represented the Diocese in a refugee resettlement effort that brought the Ouk family (pictured at right)—who had escaped Cambodia and spent time in a camp in Thailand and in the Philippines—to Birmingham in 1982. The congregation immediately adopted the Ouks—two parents, five children, a son-in-law, and a grandchild born in Alabama—and prepared an apartment, helped them find jobs and medical care, and welcomed them into the life of the church. Eventually, family members chose to become baptized and confirmed at Saint Stephen's. The Ouk family later reunited with relatives after learning they had survived and were living in the United States.



"My favorite memories of Saint Stephen's started forming when I was a young teenager. At an age with so many uncertainties, Saint Stephen's presented a strong sense of acceptance, inclusion, and community, which helped develop my strong connection to the Church and self-confidence to place trust in others. In the early years, we did everything together. We all gathered to paint over graffiti left on the walls. We met regularly for potluck dinners and square dances where there always seemed to be an equal number of adults and teenagers. We joyfully found a way to fit into an adult world in a safe and supportive environment."

—STEVEN THOMPSON, PARISHIONER



Clergy Roll Call

(with dates they arrived at Saint Stephen's)

The **REV. DOUG CARPENTER**
1973

The **REV. MARIANNE BOGEL**
1977

The **REV. TAYLOR WINGO**
1980



500

APPROXIMATE MEMBERSHIP IN 1982

"[Our daughter] Bradley had good friends mention to her about visiting Saint Stephen's. Our friends Janet and Bernie Bell also invited us to visit. Talk about culture shock—we moved our three Mountain Brook children to a trailer in Slab Town. [Our children] Bill and Margaret were young, and we kept them quiet by watching the chickens roaming around the trailer. Doug was so welcoming, and we felt so at home. Thus began our many treasured years at Saint Stephen's."

—ANNE OLIVER, PARISHIONER



1983

KAY STRICKLIN JOINED THE STAFF AS THE FIRST DIRECTOR OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.



The Saint Stephen's Preschool has been an integral and vibrant part of the church since 1986, when it opened under the direction of Kay Hillhouse. Today it provides Mother's Day Out, preschool, and 5K programs for more than 150 children.



Community Center

Saint Stephen's continued to serve as a welcoming meeting spot for local groups including Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts (including a troop led by church members, pictured above), a Jewish Mother's Day Out program, the Mothers' Center, Narcotics Anonymous, exercise classes, and sewing groups. In 1987 Sonrise Health Ministries provided a new free health clinic in the building.



Clergy Roll Call

The **REV. RAY AVERETT**
1983

The **REV. BILL GREELEY**
1987

The **REV. PETER HORN**
1988

The **REV. JOE KNIGHT**
1988

1985

A PRISON FELLOWSHIP, DIRECTED BY DON AND MARY KAYE BEARD, OPENED ITS FIRST OFFICE AT SAINT STEPHEN'S. At Christmas, the annual Angel Tree initiative began as a way to provide presents to the children of prisoners.



INSPIRING SOUNDS: Vera Britton formed the adult choir soon after joining the staff in 1986. One of the group's greatest performances came 10 years later when it sang at Washington National Cathedral.

"Everyone seemed to know the hymn 'Let the Circle Be Unbroken,' and our diverse community was united as it had never been before."

—THE REV. DOUG CARPENTER



The Slab Town families across Crosshaven Drive were a tight-knit part of the Saint Stephen's community, even though none were official members. Many of the children had grown up with the church and had spent much time there or played on its grounds. So it was a tragic shock when 17-year-old Sammy Hodges was shot and killed just a few blocks away in 1985. Saint Stephen's hosted a two-day visitation for the many mourners from his community and school. The funeral service included both Saint Stephen's clergy and the Cahaba Heights Baptist Church minister. Sammy was laid to rest in the Baptist cemetery.

"There was some talk of revenge in the neighborhood, and this is when I saw how respected Billy Hodges [Sammy's father] was," recalled the Rev. Doug Carpenter. "A few words from him, and everything cooled down. Revenge wouldn't bring Sammy back." In the wake of Sammy's death, Billy and his wife, Joyce, became active Saint Stephen's members. The family's legacy continues today through the church's Care of Creation ministries, which tend beehives and a pollinator garden where the Hodges' home once stood.

"ON FEBRUARY 5, 1990, my dear husband, Tom, and I were at Saint Vincent's hospital hoping our little full-term infant son would survive. We sat with him in the NICU as sweet, kind, compassionate doctors and nurses allowed us to bathe, dress, and watch over him. But as happens sometimes, our son Robert Nathaniel passed away surrounded by love. It wasn't long before our priest, Doug Carpenter, arrived to sit at my bedside. He didn't try to make things better with lengthy phrases. He was just present, which I reflect upon as a great gift to me and my family.

"Doug helped us, in our numbness, with the funeral at Saint Stephen's. It was one of those days when the sky couldn't decide whether to deliver a mist or rain. Doug gently talked to us about life, God's love, and grace. We placed Robert in the Memorial Garden, knowing that he was in the loving arms of the Divine. The congregation of Saint Stephen's enveloped us into their prayerful embrace as we walked through that time. We will never forget them.

"We have been blessed with five children, but it was our third child, Robert Nathaniel Schlitt, who changed our focus and allowed us to live more openly in the moment with our other children, and now grandchildren. That one little life was such a gift, and we thank the Saint Stephen's community for helping us celebrate him. Whenever we visit Saint Stephen's, the memories of passing the peace, the music, the sounds of the children, and the compassion of the congregation sweep over me. It is like being hugged by grace. Thank you, Saint Stephen's, for touching our life in a loving way."

—RARA SCHLITT, parishioner



Summer Fun = Camp McDowell

In the 1990s, more than 100 children from Saint Stephen's attended camp each summer. Many other teens and adults from the church have served on the camp's staff over the years.



A SPIRITUAL HOME FOR NEW CLERGY

In Saint Stephen's 50 years, at least eight of its parishioners and lay staff members have been sent to seminary to be formed for ordination as Episcopal deacons and priests.

853
baptized members in 1989

1991

JENNIFER WEBB WAS HIRED AS THE FIRST FULL-TIME YOUTH MINISTER.



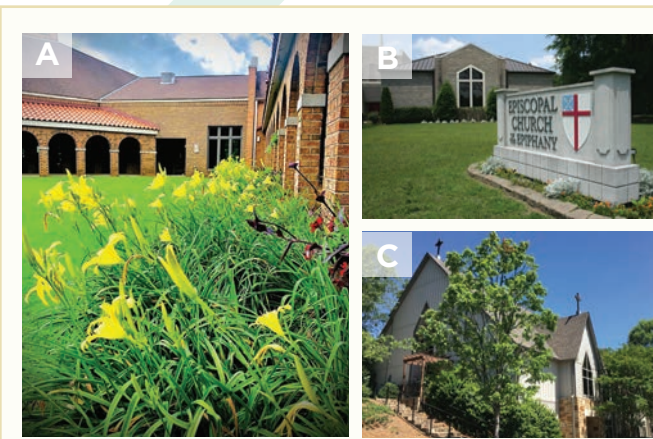
“God’s Treehouse”

Saint Stephen’s opened its current sanctuary in 1987.

Here are five things to notice in the Nave the next time you come to worship.

- 1 The clear windows have become a Saint Stephen’s hallmark. One architect initially advised against them, saying the view would distract from the priests. “Then they will just have to preach really good sermons,” the Rev. Doug Carpenter responded. He added that children called the space “God’s Treehouse.”
- 2 Using a piano instead of an organ highlights the simplicity of the space and continues a worship tradition from the congregation’s earliest days.
- 3 The cross is made from saw-cut cedar timbers, but it looks hand hewn to resemble the cross of the crucifixion. “The Romans used different types of axes to shape timbers, so with a few old axes and tools, I started chipping away at it,” explained parishioner Van Chaplin, who took on the project. “I also beat on the wood with boards, chains, and spikes to create that rough look. The final treatment was to attach the timber to my truck’s hitch and drag it through the church parking lot. My boys helped me pound and drag it. Adding those final touches became a family activity.”
- 4 The needlepoint kneelers at the communion rail depict the parables of Jesus. They were designed by Nancy Baker and sewn by church members and friends.
- 5 According to Doug, the overall design was partially inspired by Camp McDowell’s look and feel. Years later, the Saint Stephen’s sanctuary helped influence the design of Camp McDowell’s Chapel of Saint Francis.

Members were closely involved in the sanctuary’s design and construction. Russ Vandeveld headed the Building Committee, and Bill Horne led fundraising. Architect Katherine Owens created images showing how the building would look. Chip Barganier was a key voice for the congregation during construction.



“But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

—LUKE 8:15

The rapid growth of Saint Stephen’s created unique opportunities to plant the seeds for vibrant new churches and parishes, providing more opportunities for people to join the Body of Christ. In each case, Saint Stephen’s contributed leadership or resources—and some longtime members—to help these new congregations blossom.

- A: SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI, Indian Springs (1980)
- B: CHURCH OF THE EPIPHANY, Leeds (1980)
- C: SAINT THOMAS, Acton Road (1991)



In 1987 Saint Stephen’s took a lead role in growing Holy Innocents Ministries, a community serving children who are homeless or abused, in Chelsea. The Rev. Bill Greeley, one of Saint Stephen’s clergy, became founding director, and many members helped build the school and chapel and volunteered to care for the children on weekends. The congregation also raised money to build the first dormitory. In 1994 Holy Innocents merged with King’s Ranch (now King’s Home).

“We got married at the 5:00 service—much to the surprise of the people attending.”

—CHRIS AND GENE BOLES, parishioners and 1991 newlyweds



1993

- Construction began on the Memorial Garden. Though ashes had been buried on the grounds since 1982, the garden’s creation was inspired by the children of members George and Mary Lindahl, who wanted to honor their late parents.
- The garden’s original wooden cross was created by Bobby Parker using timbers salvaged from a warehouse in downtown Birmingham. In 2021 sculptor Mike Sluder used the old weathered cross to cast a sturdy new version in bronze.
- The current expansion project includes a new columbarium with space for 100 families, a memorial wall that can hold more than 500 names, and a fountain.



(Above, left to right) As Saint Stephen’s grew, many of its beloved annual traditions, including parish events at Camp McDowell, Easter celebrations, Halloween parties, and the Nativity Pageant, began to take shape.

1,099

baptized members in 1993

"In the 1990s I was a member of the ministry that passed the collection plate. After the service one Sunday, Ruth Pitts told me that the zipper on the back of my skirt was unzipped. I reacted in horror when I reached back to feel the gaping hole that exposed my underwear. Ruth just laughed and said, 'You probably doubled the amount of collections today. Keep up the good work!'"

—CAROL HUNT, parishioner



(Above) Clergy broke ground for Saint John's using American Sign Language.

A New Home for a Unique Church

Saint John's Episcopal Church for the Deaf held its first services across the street in 1994. Saint Stephen's helped it relocate from downtown Birmingham by donating land and helping to raise \$500,000 to cover debts from the move. Saint Stephen's member Katherine Owens designed the church, which has special architectural and lighting features to maximize views of services conducted in sign language, and member Chip Barganier was the contractor.

The mission of Saint John's changed in the mid-2010s. While it no longer houses a congregation for the deaf, the building currently hosts community programs including 12-step groups, exercise classes, a Church of God in Christ congregation, and the Collat Jewish Family Services CARES (Caring for Adults through Respite, Enrichment, and Socialization) program, which serves people with memory or movement disorders.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Saint John's is Jefferson County's first Episcopal church, founded in 1850.
- Its members helped establish the Church of the Advent after Birmingham was founded in 1871.
- The Rev. Robert Fletcher, who was deaf himself, initiated Saint John's as a congregation for the deaf in 1935. At one time it was the country's second-largest deaf Episcopal congregation and the only one with its own building.

Tea Time

The Episcopal Church Women (ECW) brought a bit of England to Cahaba Heights in 1998 when they hosted their first Afternoon Tea. Along with beautifully decorated tables and a selection of scones and sandwiches, the annual tradition features a fashion show, a garden shop and gift shop, and a silent auction. Funds raised from the ECW event support the church's various outreach programs.



Music director Whitney Page is Saint Stephen's longest-serving staff member, initially joining as a volunteer in 1994. She has served as accompanist and director for the adult, children's, junior, and children's bell choirs; preschool music teacher, accompanist, and chapel leader; and Nativity Pageant director.

MUSICAL HIGHLIGHT:
"Singing the 'Hallelujah Chorus' on Easter Sunday. The packed church, the glorious flowers, and the sublime voices of the choir give me goosebumps every time. I love the silence that occurs right before the final 'hallelujah' of the piece. The anticipation is palpable, and the joy that comes at the conclusion of the piece is the high point of the year to me."

CHOIR CONNECTION:
"Watching our choir members, both adults and children, grow in their musicianship is rewarding, but even more so because it is accompanied by growth in faith and connection to our parish. I love it when we shift from learning the music to becoming emotionally connected to the anthem."



Led by Youth Minister Lisa Beatty, many of the congregation's younger members embarked upon a series of mission trips in the 2000s.

- HERE'S WHERE THEY WENT AND WHAT THEY DID.**
- Mississippi: helping with Hurricane Katrina reconstruction
 - Kentucky and Tennessee: repairing homes
 - Washington, D.C.: serving in shelters and soup kitchens
 - Piedras Negras, Mexico: building homes



Clergy Roll Call

- The **REV. REBECCA DEBOW** 1995
- The **REV. VIRGINIA MONROE** 1997
- The **REV. LOUIE SKIPPER** 2000
- The **REV. LAWRENCE DEPALMA** 2003



(Left) Members gathered with their furry friends for a Blessing of the Animals in the early 2000s.



"One Sunday morning, my friend Rip Britton was scheduled to help the Eucharist celebrant. He was given the paten full of wafers for distribution. As sometimes happens, I was kneeling at the altar, straddling that 'no man's land' at the rail—between one person's 'stop' and another person's 'start' section. I was accidentally overlooked. No bread of heaven for me that Sunday! When I got home, I decided to give my friend a little ribbing. I wrote him a long email, addressed to 'altar boy,' and complained in a long litany about my denial of holy sacraments despite being in full communion with the faith. I thought it was funny. Not to be outdone, Rip one-upped me. A few hours later, there was a knock on my front door. There stood Rip—in full white-garbed alb, paten in hand. He'd brought the bread of heaven to me in person! Now, years later, I still have a hard time not laughing out loud when Rip serves at the altar rail." —MELINDA RAINEY THOMPSON, parishioner





“During a Blessing of the Animals, Russell realized that I had missed the service that Sunday and asked if I wanted to join a few others for Eucharist in the Nave afterward. I didn’t have anywhere to put my Labrador, Sam, so Russell told me to bring him. Everything went great until Sam jumped on Russell and cleaned off the plate while Russell was handing out the wafers! I imagine that was the first and only time a Labrador received bread during a Eucharist in the Nave!”

—William Wainscott, former parishioner



It’s difficult to imagine Saint Stephen’s without the warm, gracious presence of housekeeper Maria Elena Cruz, who joined the church staff in 2004. She says her hiring was an answer to a prayer: “I was working in a housekeeping company, and every other week we’d clean Saint John’s, and I had to be here [at Saint Stephen’s] to pick up the keys. Always when I was in the parking lot, I would pray, ‘O my God, I would really like to work here.’ A few months later, Jamie Plott [then the parish administrator] asked my friend if she knew someone who could work cleaning the church. And she brought me here, and I thought, ‘Oh wow, this is the church where I had prayed to work.’”

Maria Elena quickly found herself part of a larger family at Saint Stephen’s. “The first Thanksgiving I was here, I didn’t have anything in my house for a good Thanksgiving. The Rev. Doug Carpenter gave me a basket with groceries for dinner to share with my family.” Then, in 2014, “when I had breast cancer, everyone helped me. I needed to go to the hospital twice a day for radiation, and people drove me there—especially Jane Pounds. My heart is full.”

—CURTIS SPRAITZAR, parishioner



“My mom, Evelyn Spraitzar, born in 1920, had no memory of having been baptized, and we could find no paper to prove it. After seeking guidance from the Rev. Russell Kendrick, Mom decided to be baptized and then confirmed at the age of 90—both on Confirmation Day in 2010.

“It was a momentous day for her. I can still see the radiance of her expression as she was baptized and confirmed by Bishop Kee Sloan. Russell was standing to the side as she was being baptized, and like a dad, was so excited and proud of her. Interestingly, when we got home after the service, her baptismal cloth had the shape of a cross on it—presumably an imprint from the anointing oil, but still an important reminder of what the baptism was all about: a loving adoption by God into God’s family.

“Years later, it was humbling to learn how deeply her baptism had affected others who witnessed it. In a talk in 2015, Russell recounted how her baptism was one of several significant moments in which he felt God’s presence as he was trying to discern what decision to make in his life as a priest. And in 2014, during a eulogy at her funeral, our associate rector, the Rev. Jamie McAdams, recalled a conversation with Bishop Sloan on her baptism day. The experience was ‘very extraordinary,’ Bishop Sloan told Jamie. ‘She’s receiving such an extraordinary blessing. But I’m not sure that I did not receive the greater blessing today.’”

—CURTIS SPRAITZAR, parishioner
(Above) Evelyn Spraitzar, the Rt. Rev. Kee Sloan, Curtis Spraitzar



(Clockwise from top) Worship through a child’s eyes; members helped build a Habitat for Humanity house in the 2000s; Easter’s arrival in the Memorial Garden.

The comforting, intimate feel of the 5:00 p.m. Sunday service has a lot to do with Andy Meginniss, who began playing folk music at Saint Stephen’s more than 20 years ago. A guitar and bass player, he is a member of the Alabama Music Hall of Fame with his band Three on a String.

FRESH AIR:

“I dearly love the springtime parking lot services. There’s just something about bringing it outdoors that is joyful and uplifting.”

SWEET SOUNDS:

“I love the freedom that the church gives me. We inject gospel, contemporary, Celtic, folk, and bluegrass as well as traditional Anglican music. You’ll laugh because it’s considered a children’s song, but my favorite one to play is ‘This Little Light of Mine.’ You can’t do it without smiling. It even has hand motions!”

INVITATION TO PLAY:

“The Folk Music Group was put together in 2022 and rehearses every Wednesday evening. We are always open to those who are interested, and you don’t have to play an instrument.”



THE REV. DENSON FRANKLIN SERVED AS INTERIM RECTOR FOLLOWING THE REV. DOUG CARPENTER’S RETIREMENT IN 2005. IN 2007 THE REV. RUSSELL KENDRICK, RECTOR OF SAINT PAUL’S IN NEWNAN, GEORGIA, BECAME SAINT STEPHEN’S SECOND RECTOR.



LOVE KNOWS NO BORDERS

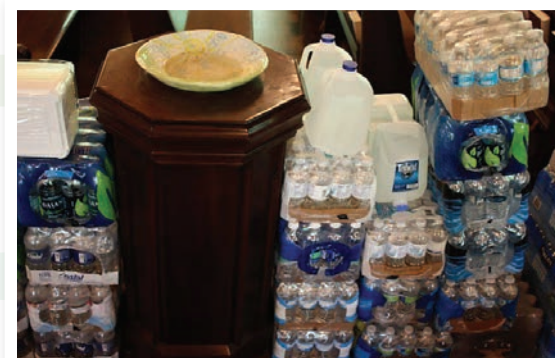
Over the years, Saint Stephen’s members have established relationships and provided support to Episcopal clergy and congregations across the world:

- **Brazil:** Helped the Diocese of Alabama establish a connection with the Diocese of São Paulo.
- **Liberia:** Raised funds for the Rev. Jack Wilson, an Episcopal monk, to provide a water pump for a community in need.
- **Haiti:** Played a key role in strengthening links between the Diocese of Haiti and the Diocese of Alabama, including trips to provide food, health care, and other supplies and resources. Member Ann Piper Carpenter helped create jobs for Haitians affected by the 2010 earthquake by starting a farm and studio for artisans. Saint Stephen’s currently cultivates a partnership with the parish of St. Luc in Thomassique (pictured above).

2008

Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefforts Schiori preached and celebrated the Eucharist at Saint Stephen’s.

“Russell Kendrick corrected my mom, Martha Jo, on her pronunciation of the word ‘naked’ as she read one of the lessons in a service. He explained ‘naked’ versus ‘necked’—one was not good, and the other was acceptable.”
—CONNIE HANCOCK, parishioner



APRIL 27, 2011

A series of devastating tornadoes raked Alabama—including a morning twister that blasted through Cahaba Heights with winds estimated at 120 miles per hour, damaging homes and businesses, flattening trees, and knocking out power. Saint Stephen’s immediately set up a donation center (pictured at left, in the Nave) where people could drop off and pick up essential supplies for the neighborhood. Members also transported much-needed supplies to Tuscaloosa, which had suffered severe damage from another tornado that day, and helped clean up the Cahaba Heights elementary school. Kathryn Dorlon, a parishioner and former staff member, remembered that the church’s outreach helped forge a closer connection with its neighbors and the wider Vestavia community.

“One Wednesday night, we opened the building and hosted a free picnic for Cahaba Heights families, relief workers, and anyone who needed a place of peace,” she said. “One of our members donated and cooked Boston butts for 500 people. Winn-Dixie donated 500 hot dogs as well. James Clayton and Conley Knott played guitar. What a blessing it was to have laughter and music as our background noise instead of chainsaws and generators!”



Clergy Roll Call

- The **REV. DENSON FRANKLIN** 2004
- The **REV. ALISON CARMODY** 2005
- The **REV. JOY PHIPPS** 2006
- The **REV. RUSSELL KENDRICK** 2007
- The **REV. KATY SMITH** 2007
- The **REV. JAMIE MCADAMS** 2008



The Nave's unique baptismal font, which incorporates images of Cahaba lilies, was sculpted in bronze by artist Mike Sluder and installed in 2013. Sluder also created the altar candelabra, Advent wreath pedestal, and Paschal candle pedestal.

2015

A building and renovation campaign culminated in the opening of the current Parish Hall, a new kitchen, and classrooms. During construction, members of the congregation wrote blessings and hopeful messages on the wood and concrete.

"I will never forget holding the marker in hand and writing on the subfloor of the newly constructed Parish Hall. My wish was to have the church's children running and laughing in this room. The moment is poignant for me because my husband and I were navigating fertility challenges, and we so badly wanted to start a family."

—Emily Woloschuk, parishioner

10,500+



Hours of volunteer service completed during the 2018 Pew to 10K campaign, which challenged the congregation to renew its commitment to community outreach by serving as the hands, feet, and heart of Christ.



The Rev. Russell Kendrick, rector since 2007, was elected and ordained as the fourth bishop of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast in 2015. He continues to serve in that role today.



The Rev. Mark Forbes, rector of Saint Patrick's Church in Mooresville, North Carolina, was named the third rector of Saint Stephen's in 2016. Health issues prompted him to resign within a few months.



The Rev. John Burruss, canon for sustainable ministries in the Diocese of West Tennessee, accepted the call to serve as Saint Stephen's fourth rector beginning in 2018.

Holy Ground

Saint Stephen's members have cultivated a special connection with the church's forest setting that has blossomed into several Care of Creation ministries.



(Left to right) **Bee-utiful:** Approximately 200,000 bees live in the apiary the church established to help combat declining bee populations. Tended by a beekeeping team, the bees pollinate flowers around Cahaba Heights and produce a honey harvest that is shared with the congregation. **Nature spirits:** Parishioners, including the gardening experts known as the Soil Sisters, protect the woods on the church grounds by replacing invasive plants with native species. **Wonder walks:** Holy Hikes offer opportunities to commune with God's creation, bringing worship and fellowship to some of Birmingham's most beautiful natural settings. **Love flows:** The first Canoecharist, celebrated last year on the Little Cahaba River, adapted the Holy Hikes concept for the water.

"In my first weeks here in December 2019, I was celebrating at the 5:00 service in the Parish Hall. [My son] Robinson was not yet four—and he was tired, crying, and climbing up my leg as I was trying to preach. Jim Noles tried so hard to distract and engage him—and Robinson would have nothing to do with his kindness. I managed to quickly wrap up the sermon and move on with the service, but I am forever grateful to the patience of dear parishioners who were so encouraging and welcoming."

—THE REV. KATHERINE HARPER



Love Your Neighbor

OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES ARE TRANSFORMING LIVES AND COMMUNITIES THROUGH GIFTS OF TIME, SERVICE, RESOURCES, AND FELLOWSHIP

- Alabama Interfaith Refugee Partnership
- Angel Tree (Greater Birmingham Ministries)
- Avondale Outreach Ministry
- Birmingham AIDS Outreach
- Cahaba River Society

- Community Kitchens of Birmingham
- Disaster Relief and Recovery
- Family Promise
- GraceWorks, Woodlawn (pictured)
- Laundry Love, Woodlawn
- LifeSouth Blood Drives
- Monthly Collections for Outreach

Clergy Roll Call

- The **REV. DONNA GEROLD**
2013
- The **REV. STEPHEN DEGWECK**
2015
- The **REV. RUSTY GOLDSMITH**
2015
- The **REV. RON DELBENE**
2015
- The **REV. MARK FORBES**
2016
- The **REV. CJ VAN SLYKE**
2017
- The **REV. JOHN BURRUSS**
2018
- The **REV. KATIE RENGERS**
2019
- The **REV. KATHERINE HARPER**
2019
- The **REV. DR. REBECCA BRIDGES**
2020



The 5:00 p.m. Sunday service got a makeover in 2021, reemerging as Birmingham's only Celtic Eucharist, which fuses historical worship traditions with reflective music, candlelit silence, and time for contemplation.



TOGETHER IN CHRIST

Saint Stephen's and Fairfield's Christ Episcopal Church launched a parish partnership in 2021, part of an initiative from Bishop Glenda Curry to encourage creative collaborations among congregations. Together with the Rev. Paul Goldman and Christ Church's lay leaders, Saint Stephen's parishioners and clergy are developing opportunities for joint worship, outreach, and fellowship.



NEVER ALONE: Many of the church's ministries focusing on pastoral care, such as the Card Guild, Flower Apostles, and groups dedicated to making prayer shawls and prayer beads, offer comfort to people in need while providing creative outlets for parishioners. Others focus on healing, prayer, and support for the parish's growing families.

POINT OF DISCUSSION

Saint Stephen's has attracted noted scientists, clergy, professors, environmentalists, authors, and other experts who have shared their knowledge and insights—and prompted discussions that enhance both spiritual life and a sense of purpose and community. Here are a few recent visitors:

- The Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, preacher and author
- Bryan Stevenson, Equal Justice Initiative founder
- The Rev. Becca Stevens, Thistle Farms founder and Episcopal priest
- Sean Dietrich (Sean of the South), author and humorist
- The Rev. Dr. Sam Wells, preacher, author, and vicar of Saint Martin-in-the-Fields, London
- John Archibald, Pulitzer Prize-winning op-ed columnist and author



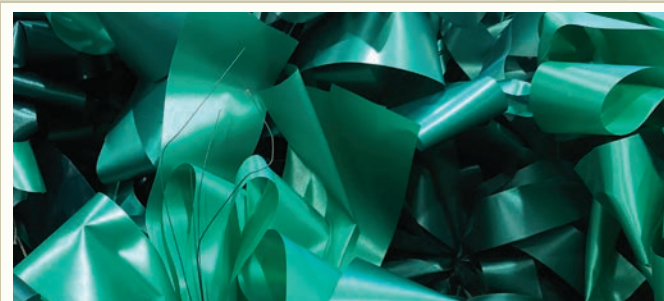
The Most Rev. Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, spoke at Saint Stephen's in May 2022. He plans to return this June.

2020

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic forced Saint Stephen's to get creative with church. Worship services and formation activities—even the Nativity Pageant—went online while members participated from home or occasionally outdoors.



SAINT STEPHEN'S PROGRAMS—in worship, Christian formation, outreach, pastoral care, care of creation, and beyond—are open to everyone. If you spot an opportunity here that interests you, visit ssechurch.org and scroll through the tabs to get in touch, get involved, and help shape the future of Saint Stephen's.



(Above) Green ribbons became a local symbol of support for the grieving church.

Transformation from Tragedy

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

—JOHN 1:5

Members Walter "Bart" Rainey, Sharon Yeager, and Jane Pounds made an impact that will never be forgotten in the wake of the traumatic shooting of June 16, 2022. "The story of Saint Stephen's continues to be a story of hope and love," wrote the Rev. John Burruss. "Three people who profoundly shaped our community continue to teach us how to love, how to serve our church, and how to model compassion and welcome."

Immediately, Saint Stephen's was wrapped in a warm, loving embrace by its neighbors throughout the city, by congregations of different faiths, and by individuals across the country and around the world. Their kind messages, prayers, and support provided much-needed moments of hope, beauty, strength, and light.

"Our hearts are surely broken—but in this suffering, our hearts are also broken open. The healing, saving love of Christ wells up inside each one of us, seeping through the cracks of our brokenness and suffering to refresh this dry land in need of this living water. God is with us as we suffer, grieve, and heal—and we are with one another."

—THE REV. DR. REBECCA BRIDGES, reflecting upon the tragedy on the following day



Bishop Glenda Curry rose above the roof to bless the 104-kilowatt solar energy system installed in 2021. Saint Stephen's became the first Birmingham church to use such a system, which will offset approximately 25 percent of its energy consumption and free up additional funds for ministry and mission activities. (Photo: Wynter Byrd)



This summer, Saint Stephen's welcomes everyone to explore a path of peace—a garden labyrinth honoring the lives lost in June 2022 and those who survived with a beautiful, tranquil place to walk, pray, and reflect.

"Fifty years on and with approximately 1,952 members, Saint Stephen's has retained much of its original character. It is a place that helps people see the light of Christ, to see beauty and joy in a world yearning for Good News."

—THE REV. JOHN BURRUSS

LIFE EVENTS

Sacred moments in the continuing story of Saint Stephen's
OCTOBER 2022-MAY 2023



CONFIRMATIONS

NOVEMBER 6, 2022

Lindsey Alexandra Brock
Carrie Elizabeth Buchanan
Charles Philip Buchanan
Alisha Crossley
Patrick Crossley
Karen Marie Freeman Dayhood
Samuel Dayhood
Anne Hamlin Hall
Robert Hollingsworth
William Steve Holmes
Laura Brooks Kezar
Chrystal Johnson Roesle
John August Roesle
Jennifer Miller Snowden

RECEPTIONS

NOVEMBER 6, 2022

Samuel Joseph Galgano
Leah Karol Hooker
Caroline Elise Kezar
Edwin Paul Kezar
John Paul McGuinness
Teena Minton McGuinness
Patrick Joseph Mulligan
Hannah Leopard Smith
Jake Russell Smith
William Craig Tankersley
Martha Robinson Tankersley

REAFFIRMATIONS OF FAITH

NOVEMBER 6, 2022

Haley Georganne Snowden
Donna Mae Booth
Thomas Christian Hall

BAPTISMS

Grace Bull Harbert
October 29, 2022

Margot Ruth Baxley
November 6, 2022

Alexander Laine Rumbley
November 6, 2022

Alexandra Dacha Thorn
November 6, 2022

Robert Joseph Black IV
November 6, 2022

Charles Lennon Lockert
November 6, 2022

Jackson Knox Thomas
November 13, 2022

Georgia Miller Snowden
November 13, 2022

Adesh Mishra
December 30, 2022

James Montgomery Inge
January 8, 2023

Leighton Lamar Presley
February 5, 2023

John Wiley Cutt
April 8, 2023

MARRIAGES

Sydney Bireley
and Chad Underwood
November 12, 2022

Quinn Catherine Hattaway
and William Monroe Short
November 19, 2022

Taylor Mayberry Carpenter
and Clayton Willis Carden
December 3, 2022

Lindsey Alexandra Brock
and Guy Wesley Baker
April 15, 2023

Mary Celia Beatty and AJ Gallant Jr.
May 6, 2023

MEMBER DEATHS

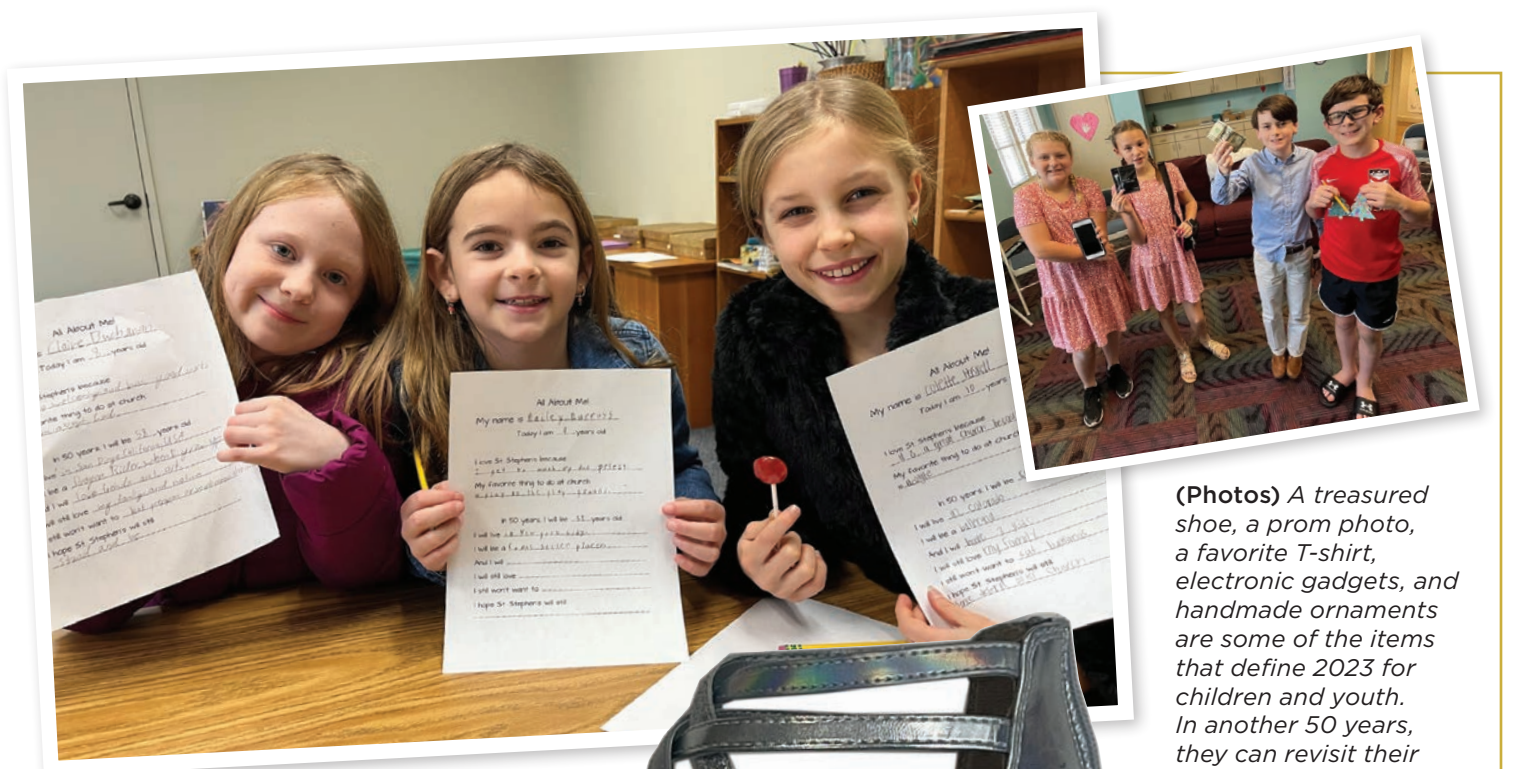
Martha Rambo Dunlap
October 30, 2022

Bobbie Fillingim
December 24, 2022

Carolyn Squires
January 2, 2023

Anne Hobgood
January 16, 2023

Elizabeth "Beth" Jefferson Young
January 18, 2023



(Photos) A treasured shoe, a prom photo, a favorite T-shirt, electronic gadgets, and handmade ornaments are some of the items that define 2023 for children and youth. In another 50 years, they can revisit their predictions (top left) and letters to the future (bottom right).



What would you put in a time capsule?

Saint Stephen's children and youth gathered objects that represent their lives to give future members a glimpse of the anniversary year of 2023. Photos of the kids and youth with their artifacts, along with their written hopes for tomorrow and advice to their grown-up selves, will be preserved in a mini time capsule for the church's 2073 centennial.



(Above) Bishop Glenda Curry and Saint Stephen's clergy celebrate with newly confirmed, received, and reaffirmed members.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS
SAINT STEPHEN'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Open Hearts • Open Hands • Open Doors

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“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body . . . and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-13



(Above) Four generations of Saint Stephen's members gathered for the baptism of Robert Joseph Black IV.