



**SAINT  
STEPHEN'S**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Grounded by Tradition + Striving for Justice + Growing in Faith  
A safe and sacred space for all in the community.

# 2024 ANNUAL MEETING

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Our Vision

To be Christ for each other and  
for the world.

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January 28, 2024

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**2024 ANNUAL MEETING**  
**ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF SANTA CLARITA**  
January 28, 2024 - Agenda

1. Opening Prayer
2. Appointment of Clerk
3. Meeting Called to Order / Welcome
4. 2023 Annual Meeting Minutes approval
5. Rector's Address
6. Voting
  - a. 2024 Vestry slate.
  - b. Nominations for Diocesan Convention.
  - c. The Common Cup
7. Treasurer's Report
8. 2024 Budget
9. Q & A
10. Closing Prayer and adjournment to lunch.

# St. Stephen's Annual Meeting Minutes

January 29, 2023

Vestry Members Attending: Reverend Christopher Montella, Sheri Flay, Steve Plote, Kathleen Jensen, Julie Johnson, Shannon Brintnall, Jason O'Leary, Jennifer Aston, Jay Clark, John Fortman, Claudia Alexopoulos, Tish Yanker, Bob McGregor.

1. Opening Prayer:

- Reverend Christopher opened the meeting with a prayer at 10:26 am.

2. Appointment of Clerk:

- Marianne Zinkewicz was appointed to take the minutes as the Vestry Clerk.

3. Meeting Called to Order / Welcome:

- A motion was made by Ken Higginbotham to accept the requested change to the agenda and was seconded by Caroline Morgan. The motion carried unanimously.

4. 2022 Annual Meeting Minutes Approval:

- A motion was made by Colleen Gibbons to accept the 2022 Annual Meeting Minutes and was seconded by Marv Aardahl. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Election Procedures:

- A motion was made by Bill Brintnall and seconded by Tessa Lucero to accept the appointment of the Inspectors of Election and to vote by acclamation for the slate of candidates being elected to the vestry and delegates to convention. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Elections:

- Nominees for delegates to Diocesan Convention

1. Kathleen Jensen (Vestry member)

2. Michael Branda

3. Ken Higginbotham

4. Sheri Flay (Vestry alternate)

5. Peggy Stabile (alternate 1)

6. Richard Holdredge (alternate 2)

- A motion was made by Nick Vestuto to accept the slate of nominees for delegates to Diocesan Convention and was seconded by Miriam Aardahl. The motion carried unanimously.

- Nominees for Vestry:
  1. Dave Melton
  2. James Mackey
  3. William Hendley
  4. Leslie Smith
    - A motion was made by Tom Jensen to accept the slate of nominees for delegates to Diocesan Convention and was seconded by Richard Holdredge. The motion carried unanimously.
- Resolution Regarding Sunday Service Schedule.
  - Christopher Montella moved, and Ken Higginbotham seconded to accept the resolution read at the annual meeting amending the regular Sunday service schedule to 7:45am and 10:30am to allow for regular 9:00am Adult Education Forums beginning April 16, 2023. The resolution passed by majority vote.
- Resolution for returning to the altar rail for communion.
  - Christopher Montella moved, and Miriam Aardahl seconded to accept the resolution read at the annual meeting to amend communion distribution protocol to return to the altar rail effective February 5, 2023 without requiring anyone to kneel and maintaining intinction as the exclusive mode of administering the cup. This resolution was amended via a motion by John Fortman, seconded by Caroline Morgan and passed unanimously to be effective as of February 26, 2023. The resolution passed unanimously.

7. Rector's Address:

- The four members of the vestry completing their terms – Jason O'Leary, John Noonan, Jay Clark, Claudia Alexopoulos - were thanked for their service.
- 2022 was the closest to "normal" since the beginning of the pandemic.
- Rev. Christopher shared "A Hope for the Future." Discussions the vestry had at their annual retreat and a fall follow-up retreat on how St. Stephen's could live into our baptismal covenant, become the heartbeat of the community, be an undeniable force for justice, a spiritual have and center of thought.
- Two seminarians, Payton Hoegh and Kathryn Nishibayashi, join us during 2022 as they discern their spiritual paths.
- St. Stephen's hosted an Interfaith service to commemorate the lives lost

and people injured in recent mass shootings that occurred in Laguna Hills, CA and Buffalo, NY in May.

- Christopher talked about the outside organizations we host on our campus and especially mentioned the Boy Scouts.

8. Treasurer's Report:

- John Fortman explained to the congregation that the Preschool and Church operated on different fiscal years and therefore there were two separate reports.
- John gave an overview of the Balance Sheets and the 2023 Church Operating Budget that was included in the 2023 Annual Meeting Booklet.
- A motion was made by Marv Aardahl and seconded by Dave Melton to accept the Treasurer's Report and the 2023 Budget. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Q&A:

10. Closing Prayer and Adjournment to Lunch:

- The meeting was closed with a prayer at 12 noon.

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Marianne Zinkewicz  
Vestry Clerk

Dear Friends in Christ,

On behalf of the Vestry, Staff, and ministry leaders of St. Stephen's, I am pleased to present to you the 2023 Annual Report. The reports that follow represent a dynamic community of caring people with a heart for justice, a profound love for God and an eye for the future. It is always a thrill for me to read these reports and think back to all that happened in the last 12 months. As you read these reports I hope you will all reflect on where you find yourself in these stories and how you have been woven into the fabric of our parish life and rejoice with me in the blessing that is the parish of St. Stephen's.

2023 was a big year in the life of our community as we marked our 60<sup>th</sup> year of seeking and serving Jesus Christ in the Santa Clarita Valley.

We set the tone for the year when we hosted a wonderful Interfaith Service of Peace Tolerance & Love to honor the legacy and ministry of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Folks from all across the city joined us and we were delighted to collaborate with our friends from Congregation Beth Shalom and the Islamic Center of Santa Clarita Valley with representative form each community and other civic leaders taking part in the experience.

As we entered February and found ourselves in the midst of Black History Month there were sights and sounds all around us lifting up the accomplishments and contributions of our Black siblings that all too often go uncelebrated. From carefully curated musical selections during worship from our beloved Music Director Judy Baity to the wonderful array of informative bulletin boards across our campus, coordinated by Rosa Holdrege and brought to life by a wonderful cohort of volunteers who keep our boards fresh and exciting all year long. Perhaps the highlight of the month was the panel discussion with our friends from the Santa Clarita chapter of the NAACP and brought to us by the St. Stephen's Anti-racism Coalition which brought together powerful voiced on the panel and drew an audience of those both the parish and the city community at large.

In early 2023 we took some time to retool the The Welcome Table format. As most of you know, TWT is a service created specifically for those in the LGBTQ+ community who have been hurt by The Church, have had The Bible used as a weapon against them and who have struggled to find a place to explore their faith and be their authentic selves. In March we were excited to welcome Kevin Wood to the table as he signed on as the music director for this experience. Kevin regularly serves as the Music Director of Christ Church, Redondo Beach and drives up from Long Beach each month. Kevin has leveraged his gifts as an accomplished musician to enliven The Welcome Table. It has been a blessing to share this work with him and we are grateful for the grant money from our friends at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Winnetka that makes paying Kevin for his contribution possible.

Of course, our annual pancake supper benefiting Children & Youth ministry here at St. Stephen's got us ready to enter into our Lenten observance. Big thanks to our YESS: Youth Engaged @ St. Stephen's and their families for all their hard work putting this sentimental favorite together each year.

As we journeyed through Lent, we engaged an exploration of the life and witness of Peter, the one who would become the rock upon which Jesus would build his Church. Using the book *Simon Peter: Flawed and faithful Disciple* by Adam Hamilton. Over 20 members of the congregation gathered on Monday nights during Lent to explore Peter's life and by doing so went deeper into the Lenten experience.

With the arrival of March and Women's History Month we were excited to host yet another powerful forum as we welcomed a distinguished panel made up of Canon to The Ordinary, The Rev. Canon Melissa McCarthy, former Vicar/Rector of St. Stephen's, The Rev. Canon Lynn Jay, parishioner, The Rev. Fran Cantella and Seminarian, Kathryn Nishibayashi to discuss the role of women in the Church.

Also in March, the vestry gathered for its annual retreat facilitated by theologian, David Tremaine. David is an organizational consultant working with faith-based organizations to better understand and respond to racial, ethnic, and power dynamics within communities. He led us through a daylong retreat which was broken into three categories of; "Where we have been.", "Where we are." & "Where we are going." This experience was not only where we began to lay out the framework of what would become our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, but also where we began to talk about paving the way into the next 60 years in the life of our community.

Our Holy Week and Easter services at St. Stephen's in 2023 were exceptional. We were thrilled to add a new service of Tenebrae into our Holy week services thanks to the collaboration and dedication of parishioners Roger & Jennie Lamb and our friends from The Scenic Hills Singers. Then in May we welcomed Bishop Taylor to St. Stephen's for his bi-annual Episcopal Visit with a special liturgy with confirmations, receptions, special music, and a festive celebration following the service.

June marks LGBTQ+ Pride month and St. Stephen's was proud to dedicate the First Sunday in June as "Pride Sunday" with a special liturgy and a celebration following the 10:30 service in collaboration with our friends from the Santa Clarita Chapter of PFLAG.

June also marked the unexpected departure of Director of Children's Education and Formation. We give thanks for Melanie's service to our community, and we wish her the best in all of her future endeavors.

Following Melanie's departure a hiring committee was formed to handle the search for a new director which comprised of St. Stephen's Teachers Christina Troupe & Laurie Crevier, Preschool Board member and parent, Heather Layman, COC Faculty member and Early Childhood specialist, Cindy Stephen's, myself and Jr. Warden James Mackey. I want to offer my deep gratitude to our Hiring Committee. This group of talented professionals took on a big and complex task and I want to honor their hard work and professionalism during the process.

I would like to give a big shout of thanks to Preschool Manager, Stephanie Rodriguez for all of her hard work and dedication and for all that she did during an extended leadership transition to ensure that things at our beloved preschool were maintained and running smoothly.

In September Gina Guaderrama-Frezieres signed on to the role of Youth Ministry Coordinator and immediately got to work building a strong fall program for our youth and establishing connection and relationship with the members of our youth group.

As we entered into fall much of our collective energy began to focus on our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. Beginning "Story Day" in early August facilitated by The Rev Thom Quijada-Discavage from the Bishop's office then continuing with a series of movie nights taking us through the decades to the creation of a dynamic visual timeline in Spurling Hall it became clear there was a lot to celebrate.



Of course, the culmination of our diamond jubilee was our gala celebration and auction in October, co-chaired by Jen Aston and Erick Long and produced by a whole host of volunteers. It was a glittering night where the people of St. Stephen's were joined by our community partners and civic leaders including Mayor of Santa Clarita, Jason Gibbs CA Assemblymember Pilar Schiavo and representatives from the office of Senator Scott Wilk. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Jen, Erick, and everyone who worked so hard to make this event such a success.

At the gala we celebrated our history and laid out a bold new vision for the future of our campus and community. And in doing so raised approximately \$40,000!

Earlier in the year the Vestry contracted the services of capital campaign consultant Maurice Seaton to advise us on the possibility of mounting a capital campaign. Following the gala, the newly formed Capital Campaign Committee, chaired by vestry member Dave Melton, put together a series of "cottage conversations" where members of the congregation came together to discuss their hopes for the future of St. Stephen's and our campus.

Our formal celebration of our anniversary came to a close on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, otherwise known as "Gratitude Sunday" with a special service and potluck in the morning and a rousing service of Jazz Vespers in the evening. Jazz Vespers is a labor of love that would not be possible without the tireless dedication of the inimitable Judy Baity who put together a stellar collection of music and gathered exceptional musicians to bring that music to life.

We continue to be enriched by the presence of the Scouts on our campus. With a wonderful celebration of Scout Sunday in February again in 2023 several scouts again chose to make St. Stephen's the beneficiary of their Eagle Scout projects as a symbol of their commitment back to us. In the past year we saw the transformation of our breezeway, the renovation and revitalization of our prayer garden and the installation of lighting in the courtyard. We give thanks for the hard work and dedication of the scouts, for their presence among us and for all that they do.

In 2023 we amended our service schedule to allow for a more meaningful program of Sunday Forums between services. 2023 forum topics ranged from an Inquirers' Class to an exploration of the Nicene Creed to a study of The Ten Commandments to budget reviews and a discussion about the future of our congregation.

We continue with our efforts to establish St. Stephen's as the heartbeat of Santa Clarita so we continue to make our campus available for local theater groups to use as rehearsal space, for special music presentations such as two concerts by The Scenic Hills Singers in July & December, providing space for 12 step meetings, PFLAG and other organizations and groups needing support. We also hosted "A Jazzy Christmas Carol" in December, a screening of the Christmas Classic accompanied by a live neo-soul jazz quartet. which was open to the whole community.

As I am sure you all know there is so much more that happened at St. Stephen's in 2023 and I look forward to expanding what I have shared here during my address at the meeting.

Of course, nothing would be possible without the dedication of all our volunteers, people who are deeply committed to service and the people our community serves.

Thanks be to God for our amazing Altar Guild and Ushers and Greeters for their holy work of preparing our sacred spaces and welcoming people into it and to the stalwart members of the Tech Guild who work so hard to make worship accessible to those who cannot be physically present. I give thanks for the blessing of our Music Director, Judy Baity, who along with Frank Browne led the choirs of St. Stephen's with skill and dedication and all of our choirs' members for their gift of music. Also, the members of our readers' team continued to beautifully illuminate holy scripture for us as part of our worship experience.

I want to honor our stellar vestry members who give so much of themselves to ensure the strength of our community, especially our wardens, Bob Gregor and James Mackey as well as our Treasurer, John Fortman, Clerk of the Vestry, Marianne Zinkewicz, and Bookkeeper, Donna Maldonado for their wonderful work on behalf of St. Stephen's.

As I always say, our Sexton, Maria Lopez, is an unsung angel at St. Stephen's. Many folks never get to see Maria, but her impact on our school and parish life is felt every day and we give thanks for her and for all she does for us.

Finally, I wish to express my profound appreciation for our Parish Administrator, Tracy Stapp. Tracy is the heartbeat of our community. Serving the people of St. Stephen's is Tracy's ministry. She is a gift to this community, and we are better because she is a part of us. I give thanks for the gift of spending every day with her and I could not ask for a better partner on the journey.

I hope you will see the pages of this report as a testament to the work of the Holy Spirit among us. My continued prayer is that you will rejoice in what we have accomplished and resolve yourself to participate in the work we have yet to do.

As always, I ask God's blessing on each and every one of you and on those you love. I can't wait to see what the Holy Spirit does with us next. For now, this is me sending you love and wishing you peace,

Christopher+

**St. Stephen's Vestry Portfolio Annual Report**  
**January 28, 2024**

Reverend Christopher and I met on a regular basis throughout the year, including breakfast meetings on occasion with the Junior Warden James Mackey, to discuss specific matters important to the Church at any given time. These included, but were not limited to, budgetary matters regarding the Church and the Pre-School, hiring a new Pre-School Director, responsibilities regarding our Capital Campaign, nomination of new candidates for the Vestry and selected on-going issues regarding community relations, e.g. collaboration with other constituents in the community on matters important to St-Stephens Church. I worked with five (five) separate committees during 2023 and this report will be organized around my responsibilities within each of those Committees.

**Stewardship Committee:**

I remained in touch with the **Stewardship Committee** and joined several meetings during year. My input to the Committee, initially, was focused on the development of our “*theme*” and the schedule of events and goals outlined for the Pledge Drive during the fall. The Pledge campaign began on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and ended on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The first few months of 2023 were focused on the timing and scheduling of events during the campaign and subsequently on the actual Pledge Drive itself. The eventual “*theme*” of the campaign was “*Rooted in Abundance.*” While the total amount of money obtained in Pledges did not meet the goal set initially by the Stewardship Committee, the final amount exceeded the amount we received in 2022. *(see the Stewardship Committee Annual Report)*

My primary role on the Committee was to schedule three speakers from the Vestry during the fall campaign of 2023. Having speakers from the Vestry present at each of two services on three separate Sundays actually started in 2022 with a central theme related to: “*What does are vision look like? What is our hope for the future? What do we need to make our Vision a reality and what are we willing to risk/invest to live into this vision?*” Maintaining this central theme, our four speakers in the fall of 2023 were Steve Plote, Mary Jo Higgenbotham, Kathleen Jensen and myself. We covered both services on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, November 5<sup>th</sup> and November 12<sup>th</sup>.

My final responsibility on the Committee is to send “thank you” notes to an assigned list of names; pledge units in the parish who committee to a pledge for 2024.

**Finance Committee:**

My primary role on the **Finance Committee** is to assist Reverend Christopher and John Fortman in my role as Senior Warden working with budget and issues related to income and expenditures to and from the Church and the Pre-School. I attended a meeting with Reverend Christopher and leadership in the Diocese regarding our financial responsibilities to the Diocese and to the parishioners of St-Stephens.

I also have “signing” responsibilities regarding financial matters for St. Stephens. *(See the Annual Report for the Finance Committee)*

**Security Committee:**

I am working with Steve Plote and Sheri Flay on developing a **Safety Manual for the Church**. We are at the point where we will send the Vestry a second draft of our document for further

recommendations. To date, we have a draft of the Emergency Manual that includes a proposed phone tree for emergencies, a list of important phone numbers, recommendations on an Emergency Response Team, Building Emergency Procedures and an Emergency Egress Plan. In addition, I have contacted local emergency organizations, i.e. the Fire Department, to explore resources for emergency response training. This includes the AHA and the Red Cross, for information on training selected individuals in CPR, etc.

### **Capital Campaign Committee:**

I was involved with our **Capital Campaign Committee**, Dave Melton as Chair, to help organize and conduct “*Cottage Meetings*” in the fall of 2023. The purpose of those meeting was to discuss, with our parishioners, their thoughts on campus improvements. During an initial Discernment phase, I and several others on the Vestry served as facilitators of discussions by attendees regarding their sense of needed improvements that should/could be made to our Church campus. Points of discussion focused on flexibility, accessibility, sustainability, responsibility and community. Notes were taken and organized into general categories and I joined further committee discussion on whether we should, given the information we took away from these meetings, move to a Feasibility phase. We are currently at the stage to make that decision. *(See the Annual Report for the Capital Campaign Committee)*

### **Vestry Nominating Committee:**

The major portion of my time this past five weeks has been spent going through the process, as Chair of the **Nominating Committee**, of generating a list of candidates for approval by the Vestry and subsequently by the parishioners to join the Vestry in 2024. Committee membership included James Mackey (Junior Warden), Julie Johnson (rotating off the Vestry), Jay Clark (Member at Large) and myself as Chair. We originally generated a working list of 34 names which came to me from Committee members, the Very Reverend Christopher, the Vestry members and long-time church members who declined to be nominated as a candidate but recommended individuals who they felt should be considered. For a variety of reasons this final list we called totaled 29 names. We began calling individuals on the list in mid-December and had the four candidates needed to replace the four members rotating off the Vestry on January 28<sup>th</sup> by the end of the second week in January.

These are the people who helped accomplish Portfolio Projects: All noted throughout the Report

I could use some help with: None at this time.

Projects that need discussion off consent agenda: None at this time.

Respectfully Submitted by: Bob Gregor – Senior Warden

## **Adult Empowerment Annual Report**

Daughters of the King: Please see separate report

Anti Racism Coalition: Please see separate report

Education for Ministry: Please see separate report

Sunday Morning Forums: Christopher and Shannon Brintnall have been meeting to discuss forward planning for Sunday Forums, adult education, and adult affinity groups. A parish wide survey is currently in process and will be sent shortly to get feedback from the congregation on areas of interest and availability.

Non-Credit Spanish and Women's History Classes: College of the Canyons, COC, has agreed to offer each of these classes at St. Stephen's. Julie Johnson is working on writing the curriculum for the Women's History class. An instructor needs to be found to write the Spanish language curriculum and to teach the classes. Once the curricula are finished plans can be made to offer the class to the parish and anyone in the greater community who is interested.

Praesidium Academy: Praesidium Academy is the Episcopal Church's partner in ensuring that church staff, ministry leaders, and volunteers are educated on safe practices regarding working with and around children as well as child abuse neglect and reporting procedures. Discussions on what types of trainings will be required for staff and ministry leaders are ongoing. Additional trainings for specialized ministry contexts are also available through Praesidium Academy. Tracy Stapp is the administrator for Praesidium Academy at St. Stephen's.

Submitted by Shannon Brintnall

## ALTAR GUILD

The ministry of the Altar Guild is to prepare the elements and space used for our worship. This includes vesting the altar and sanctuary in seasonally appropriate colors, arranging the flowers, maintaining the silver and crystal, cleaning the linens and preparing the priest's vestments. We support weekly services as well as any special services that are scheduled.

The Altar Guild also oversees and coordinates memorial gifts that will enhance our worship. This Christmas we were very grateful to the Scott Higginbotham Memorial Fund for the monies needed to make the coronation tapestry banner overlays. These overlays were made following Rev. Christopher's description of what he thought would make the white banners "pop" rather than disappear into the room, especially on our livestream.

We have appreciated members of the Men's Group, most specifically Steve Plote, and the assistance with the changing of the banners. This past December 24 we once again had the challenge of the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve falling on the same day. A very enthusiastic group of people joined the Altar Guild members on Saturday, December 23<sup>rd</sup> to prepare as much as possible and bring greens without lights or color into the Sanctuary. After our one 9 am 4<sup>th</sup> Advent service, some of the same as well as additional people helped us to finish preparing the sanctuary for our Christmas Eve services. Additionally, a small but energetic group of people helped us to remove the remaining Christmas decorations after Epiphany.

Nick Vestuto joined our ministry after the Ministry Fair in the fall. Nick has learned very quickly and is a great addition to our group. We appreciate his addition to the team. As a group, we continue to support each other, covering weekends as needed for travel and illness.

Miriam Aardahl  
Cathy Gero  
Donna Maldonado

Mary Mercogliano  
Kelsey Raub

Joanie Stanzione  
Brenda Thompson  
Nick Vestuto

We are actively looking for new members. If you have any questions, please reach out to any of us.

Faithfully submitted,

Mary Mercogliano  
Altar Guild Directress

## **Anti-Racism Coalition (ARC)**

St. Stephen's Anti-Racism Coalition was formed in early 2021 to help develop a better understanding of personal and systemic racism within our parish and the SCV community.

One of ARC's high points last year was hosting a live video presentation with Freedom Rider, Joan Browning, who was part of the 1961 Albany Freedom Ride. She was the only white woman to be put in jail where she spent five days. In 2005, Browning received the Martin Luther King Achievement Award.

In February, ARC was pleased to host a Sunday Forum featuring a panel from the SCV Chapter of the NAACP in honor of Black History Month. Valerie Bradford, NAACP President spoke about the history of NAACP and the SCV Chapter. Members of the panel then discussed why it was important to establish a chapter in Santa Clarita, along with some of the strides the group has made to create racial harmony in our community since its inception.

2023 saw ARC members participate in activities including:

- Attending "*An Afternoon with Dr. Angela Davis*" a special presentation at COC in February featuring a public conversation with social justice activist and educator Angela Davis.
- Hosting a table at the annual Ministry Fair.
- In conjunction with the Santa Clarita Branch of the NAACP, ARC members collected 79 new backpacks and filled them with school supplies for local students in need.
- In October, ARC joined forces with the St. Stephen's Sages to fill 29 large "Thanksgiving Bags" to give Santa Clarita families. Each bag contained a frozen turkey, gravy mix, cranberry sauce, a bag of potatoes, stuffing mix, dessert packages, and napkins! The Thanksgiving Bags were distributed by our local NAACP with help from a Hart School District social worker.

Weekly articles were written for the parish email and Sunday bulletins, along with bulletin board displays in the narthex, parish hall, and the preschool board outside the church office to help honor and celebrate Black History, Hispanic Heritage, Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI), and Indigenous Peoples, among others.

ARC continued its membership as a congregational member of the H. Belfield Hannibal (Diocesan) Chapter of the Union of Black Episcopalians (UBE), an organization created to fight racism and encourage the involvement of Black people in the total life of the church.

For more information about ARC, please contact Mary Jo Higginbotham at [maryjohigg@gmail.com](mailto:maryjohigg@gmail.com).

### **ARC's Mission Statement:**

- Explore, discuss, and understand personal and systemic racism to be able to:
- Provide educational opportunities to transform minds & behavior.
- Equip us & our parish with appropriate means to stand up against racism.
- Encourage reconciliation with ourselves, with God, & all of God's people.
- Inspire true acceptance of all persons as being made in God's image.

Submitted by Mary Jo Higginbotham

## 2023 Buildings and Grounds Annual Report

There were a number of repair projects around the preschool and church that were handyman level fixes. The B&G people were able to attend to those. Rain gutter cleaning, plumbing repairs, Hand soap dispensers, Doorstops, Light fixtures, Tree trimming, etc.

The tree in the Pet Memorial had to be cut back and trimmed due to severe wind damage.

Replaced the Sanctuary HVAC system thermostat to an older model which everyone in the Parish was familiar with the operation of. It matches the other ones in Spurling Hall and the Sacristy office. We tested for mold contamination in the preschool classrooms after the heavy rains in February; results were negative.

Had major leaks in the Sanctuary repaired and the exterior window recalked. Then recalked all of the windows on the south side of the Sanctuary building.

Repainted the preschool classrooms, doors and cubbies.

Lights in the Parking lot were fixed and the timer that controlled them and the timer for the lights on Rm 10 were replaced.

A new fence and gates were installed on the preschool play area to provide more privacy to the children. A subset of that project became the rerouting of the electricity to the Brian building for lights; etc.

The non-functioning Soda Machine from removed from Spurling Hall and the opening boarded up with plans for a dry wall replacement and reuse of the space in the chair room.

We added 4 Ring cameras to the campus for safety and security after a couple of break-ins at the breezeway gate.

Underground Termites that infected the mulberry tree in the preschool playground were treated and removed.

We installed a grab bar in the women's restroom in Spurling Hall

Lastly, a few Eagle Scout projects needed collaboration with the B&G committee to confirm successful execution.

For 2024 we want a couple of group cleaning projects and some light painting work around the Church and Spurling Hall.

2024 Priority repair is Church roof shingles on south facing side of building.

Submitted by Steve Plote



# St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

## Capital Campaign – 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

January 2024

Earlier this year Reverend Christopher brought to the Vestry the idea of a 10-, 15-, or 20-year plan for the future of St. Stephen's. With Vestry approval, a consultant, Maurice Seaton of Core Capital Campaigns, and an architect, SRK Architects, were hired to help us lay out a campaign plan as well as create a visual master plan. In September the Capital Campaign Committee was formed. The committee consists of John Fortman, Cathy Gero, Bob Gregor, Reverend Christopher, William Hendley, and Dave Melton. Once the committee was formed, we held cottage meetings to collect parish dreams and visions for the future of St. Stephen's. At the cottage meetings, we emphasized our 5 key points: *flexibility, accessibility, sustainability, responsibility, and community* for the future of St. Stephen's. The Vestry voted to have the funds from our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala go toward the Capital Campaign.

Respectfully Submitted: Dave Melton

## Children's Ministry Report 2023

Every year we strive in the Children's Ministry to foster a deeper understanding of biblical principles and stories as well as help children develop a personal relationship with God. However, we felt that these goals could be better achieved if we could give the children more community and a feeling of belonging with the church. This year we focused on providing a physical space dedicated to children's use and exploring more opportunities for the children to participate in or conjunction with the other church activities.

At the start of Sunday school year in the fall, we welcomed the children to the newly remodeled Godly Play space on the stage in Spurling Hall. Fresh paint, a cozy carpet for storytelling, and an activity center is now a permanent fixture for Sunday school use. Next to the stage, we included a play area for young children to use whenever they might be at church with their family. By having a place of their own, we hope to make the children feel welcome and at home in their place of worship.

We have also been looking at the various church activities and asking ourselves how the children could be included. This resulted in adding a children's component to our Gala fundraiser. Seven children attended their own pumpkin-themed party at the Gala. We had a great time eating pizza, playing pumpkin games, and making pumpkin crafts. We will continue finding other opportunities to include our younger members in church activities in the upcoming year.

Our established programs are thriving. Godly Play is our Sunday school program for preschool through 6th grade, and it has had an increase in attendance since last year. Pathfinders, our junior youth program, continues to meet after church in conjunction with the youth group, exploring the Sunday lectionary through Spark curriculum. The nursery was under the tender care of Maggie D'isa during the first half of the year and was followed by Paloma Lozano who now warmly welcomes the little ones into her care. Our Easter Egg Hunt was well-attended after both Easter services. Trunk-or-Treat, under the direction of Stephanie Rodriguez, was a great success with a balloon twister and professional face painter to add to the entertainment. The Gingerbread House Decorating party had around 50 in attendance from both preschool and church, and at the year's end, we celebrated the annual family Christmas service with 16 children performing in the pageant.

We have made modest progress, but not everything is going well in children's ministry. Due to a lack of volunteers, vacation bible school was canceled. Not having enough volunteers is a liability for the future of the children's ministry. We have come a long way in the last several years, but there cannot be any more growth without more adult participation. Adult volunteers are not only essential to providing safety and assistance, but they also bring creative ideas and help form bonds which bring the children into the church community. In the next year, our goal will be to bring more adult volunteers into our circle in order to be able to increase the fun and learning opportunities for those children who have come to us to be fed spiritually.

I do want to recognize Carol Vestuto who has given of her time and talent to Sunday school every year for the last 3 years. I want to thank my teenage volunteers; Clara Nold, Elise Mackey and Lain Nelson who assist with the children and contribute to the Sunday school experience. I also give my thanks to Mary Jo Higgenbotham and Carol Vestuto for their help with the Christmas pageant. And finally, I want to thank my partners, Gina Guaderrama-Frezieres of youth ministries and Stephanie Rodriguez of the preschool, for teaming-up with me to provide the events that make St. Stephen's Church into a more welcoming place for children and their families.

Submitted by Julia Nelson, Coordinator of Children's Ministry

## Coffee Hour Annual Report

Over the past year, coffee hour has been a highlight of Sunday here at St. Stephen's. Diane Shaw makes up our excellent coffee each Sunday. Mark and Kim Bridgeford, and Shari Schlaman are our hosts for most Sundays. They provide snacks and seasonal decor and have hosted themed coffee hours from time to time. Kim and Shari have also presided over "Deluxe Coffee Hour" on occasion! Those are the days when we honor special guests with cake, and other delicacies.

The Daughters of King hosts coffee hour the second Sunday of every month. We provide an array of treats and set up and clean up afterward. I look forward to continuing to work with everyone to continue this vital component of the hospitality ministry.

Leslie Smith  
Vestry Member, Hospitality Portfolio

## Annual Report for 2023 - Communications

The Communications Committee is responsible for providing publicity and information to the Parish and the local community regarding church activities. Last year, the Vestry decided to combine internal and external communications into one portfolio report. The Communications Committee has been engaged in discussions about what this vibrant ministry will look like in the coming year.

**60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala:** Much of 2023 was dedicated to the preparations for the St. Stephen's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala. The Communications Committee worked on recommendations for the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala invite, marketing materials for Story Day, Gala invite distributions, and Gala press releases. Through the skilled craftsmanship and artistry of our committee members, the Gala invite was designed and printed. Special thanks to Laura Hunt for her design expertise.

**Social Media:** Rev. Christopher leads the charge with our social media posts on Instagram and Facebook. The Tech Team Livestreams services on Sundays.

**Website/Weekly emails:** Our Church Administrator Tracy Stapp is also the main source of communicating church happenings via our virtual newsletter that goes out weekly via email to our parishioners. Website content and design are handled at the church office. The Committee is currently working on recommendations for a website revamp.

**On-campus Communications:** On-site communications include bulletin boards in Spurling Hall, new inserts for the monument, and large banners to advertise our livestreaming services. This year, the Committee would like to focus on communications with staff and pre-school families.

**2024 Committee Members:** Rosa Holdridge, Richard Holdridge, Laura Hunt, Julie Johnson, David Warburton, and Marianne Zinkewicz.

*If you would like to join us on the Communications Committee, we meet the second Tuesday of the month via Zoom. Please email Julie Johnson at [professorjuliej@gmail.com](mailto:professorjuliej@gmail.com) for more information.*

Submitted by Julie Johnson, 1/22/2024

## **“Woman at the Well” St. Stephen’s Chapter Of The Order of the Daughters of the King (DOK)**

Daughters of the King (DOK) is a worldwide spiritual sisterhood of women dedicated to prayer, service, and evangelism. DOK is an order (not an organization) because we participate in a period of study and discernment before accepting a “Rule of Life” and then take a vow to uphold the Rule of Prayer and Service.

DOK members participate in discussions of spiritual growth and development, discover new prayer practices, consider service projects, or listen and learn from empowering guest speakers.

In April we listened to a sermon titled “*All the Marys*” by Diana Butler Bass who shared information from her friend and colleague, Dr. Elizabeth Schrader, **an American biblical scholar**. Schrader studies discrepancies between the earliest [manuscripts of the gospels](#) and **concentrates on studies concerning Mary Magdalene and the Gospel of John**. It was a fascinating discovery!

A podcast hosted by Reza Aslan entitled “*Metaphysical Milkshake*” was our program for June. Aslan, a contemporary theologian, scholar of world religions, and author of four books, interviewed comedic actor, producer, and writer Rainn Wilson. who talked about his new book “*Soul Boom – Why We Need a Spiritual Revolution*”. Exploring the problem-solving benefits that spirituality gives us to create solutions for an increasingly challenging world, Rainn talked about his recent book titled “*Soul Boom – Why We Need a Spiritual Revolution*”.

We supported PFLAG on Pride Sunday by bringing food for the after-service luncheon and then met upstairs for a short meeting and an inspiring program led by Fran Cantella. Beginning with a reading of the poem “*Christ-hymn*” by Sandra R. Duguid, Fran helped us explore descriptive phrases of who Jesus was on earth and who he is as the post-resurrection Christ through creative writing.

There was a wonderful turnout for our “*Women, Wisdom & Wine*” social gathering the end of August at Joanie Stanzione’s home and in September, we hosted a table at the annual Ministry Fair. Once a month we host coffee hour after the 10:30 church service.

In recognition of All Saints Day, we presented an array of handmade crosses from parishioners in memory of those who had died. Another “gift” of service to St. Stephen’s was our annual Nativity Display, when parishioners were invited to bring their personal nativity sets for the presentation.

DOK meetings are held at church on the first Sunday of each month and are open to any women who want to learn more about the Order or who are interested in participating in our monthly programs. For more information, please contact Kathleen Jensen or Mary Jo Higginbotham.

Submitted by Mary Jo Higginbotham

## Education for Ministry (EfM)

EfM is a unique satellite program at St. Stephen's, sponsored by The University of the South, Sewanee, TN. Through small-group **study, prayer,** and discussion, **participants** move toward a more faithful encounter with the Christian tradition and the contemporary culture to bring all into conversation with their own experiences.

It is not easy being a Christian in today's world! Education for Ministry does not have all the answers that you may want or need to deal with this. But it does provide you with an opportunity to explore the Scriptures with others in an intelligent and guided format. Through conversation and reflection, EfM provides the opportunity to deepen your faith and help you discover your own unique ministry.

New participants register beginning with year 1 and move forward in sequential order:

Year 1 Reads: *The Old Testament*, *"The Hebrew Bible"* by John Collins & *"The Hebrew Bible: Feminist & Intersectional Perspective"* edited by Gale Yee

Year 2 Reads: *The New Testament*, *"Introducing the New Testament"* by Mark Allan Powell, & *"What Are Biblical Values"* by John Collins

Year 3 Reads: *"History of Christianity"* by Diarmaid MacCulloch

Year 4 Reads: *"Theology: A Very Short Introduction"* by David Ford, *"Mysteries of Faith"* by Mark McIntosh, *"The Christian Moral Life"* by Timothy Sedgwick, and *"My Neighbor's Faith"* edited by Jennifer Howe Peace

In addition to completing their respective texts, last year's participants read and discussed the book, *"Healing Our Broken Humanity"* by Dr. Kim and Graham Hill and then wrote a group lamentation. We also studied *"Reading the Bible from the Margins"* by Miguel De La Torres, evaluating how issues involving race, class, and gender influence our understanding of the Bible.

We wrapped up the 2022-2023 session with a potluck meal at the home of Claudia and John Alexopoulos. We discussed changes and improvements that could be made to the program and concluded with a "Farewell" Litany. For more information, please contact Mary Jo Higginbotham.

Submitted by Mary Jo Higginbotham

## External Community Outreach 2023

External Community consists of three categories: the Unhoused and/or persons needing living assistance, Children & Youth, and the wider Santa Clarita Valley Community. These are categories that our vestry has chosen to concentrate on for St. Stephen's to become the heartbeat of the valley. As a group we have tried to make sure that we live into our baptismal vow to strive for justice and respect the dignity of every human being.

Over the last year our Laundry Love outreach has continued to be led by Cindy Swaisgood and a small group of volunteers including Diane Shaw and Martha Lewis. Completely funded by parishioner donations they average 95 washes and 89 dries each month! This is amazing since the amount for each load continues to rise. Our volunteers also provide detergent, water, fruit, cookies, and clean bags for their clients. Many happy people are grateful for this service St. Stephen's provides.

At the same time as the food collection every month, Diane Shaw collects plastic, glass, and aluminum for recycling and averages \$72 per month. While this money does not go directly to a community partner it does indirectly by helping our bottom line. Mary Roberti and others can usually be seen helping with these collections as well.

Other ways we have helped the unhoused and those needing additional assistance this past year was through our annual Blood Drive in conjunction with UCLA where 15 units of blood was collected, and a donation of \$500 to Family Promise as a sponsorship for their annual Golf tournament. As for Bridge to Home, four members of St. Stephen's are on their Board of Directors.

Children and Youth in our valley are of great concern to St. Stephen's. In the past year we have provided space to the Boy Scouts for their meetings, and many of the scouts have chosen projects around our campus for their Eagle Scout projects. At Christmas time we "adopted" six teens through Fostering Youth Independence organization and generously provided wanted gifts worth an average of \$250 per person. Our other Christmas partner is Prison Fellowship Angel Tree. Again, our generous parish provided gifts to 72 children from 34 families with an incarcerated parent.

Throughout the year as we worked to get more name awareness out in Santa Clarita, we tried to participate in more civic events. Jason O'Leary again led the St. Stephen's Striders in raising money for Alzheimer's research. We had one of the largest teams at the walk, consisting of 25 members, and raised \$3,995 which was 7<sup>th</sup> highest overall. The walk raised \$168,765 and surpassed the goal of \$155,000!

St. Stephen's continues to be a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community. Not only did we continue The Welcome Table monthly, but we were also able to be part of Castaic Pride at the Park in July. Many volunteers came out to spread the word about all the good we are doing. In 2024 we will continue to build on this foundation.

Submitted by Sheri Flay

## Parish Financials

The accompanying financial reports represent the 2023 year-end for the church. The 2023 budget projected an almost \$14,000 net shortfall in our operating fund and that is close to where we ended up. While our operating fund showed a loss, you will see on the balance sheet that our bank account balances and our total of fund balances increased. This is due in great part to the Gala, which netted almost \$38,000 thanks to the generosity of our community and beyond.

There are entries still to be recorded for 2023, including typical year-end entries and depreciation of fixed assets. These will generate an expected net change in Operating Fund net income of less than \$3,000.

On the balance sheet we show \$100,893 in cash assets and the rest in fixed assets. We have two long term liabilities – the loan for resurfacing the preschool roof which will be paid off in February 2029, and the diocesan loan for the sanctuary build which the finance committee is in discussion about ways to pay this loan off sooner rather than later. The remaining section of the balance sheet shows the fund balances for all of the designated donations that have been given as well as the Eagle Scout project balances and the Gala fundraising balance.

We did very well in pledge income, exceeding projected by nearly \$26,000. This may have affected our plate as plate donors may have shifted to pledge donors. Plate income is about \$13,000 less than we projected. We did, however, receive a larger than expected Christmas offering this year. Overall, the church gross income for 2023 was almost \$16,000 more than expected.

Next we turn to our expenses. Primarily at Rev. Christopher's behest the treasurer has worked hard over the last few years to make sure our mission share assessment to the diocese is at the minimum of 12%. This is the second year now that our mission share is at 12%, and we are thankful that we can meet this standard.

The church also makes monthly transfers of \$500 each to the Operating Reserve Fund and to the Buildings and Grounds Fund. This is important as our campus gets older and work needs to be done. A \$300 transfer to the sabbatical fund is also made every month in preparation for the time that Rev. Christopher takes to renew his spirit.

The largest expense category is in payroll. Some of this is offset by a cost sharing agreement in place between the church and preschool for our Sexton and Bookkeeper, as well as some other utility bills that the church pays, and the preschool reimburses. Since these costs are easy to predict this expense has come in right on target.

Some of the utilities are hard to predict and we use historical information to budget those items. Some of you may have noticed your home gas bills higher than usual at the beginning of the year. The same happened with the church gas bill and you can see that it was \$1900 over budget. We also had some issues with the phone and fire alarm bills, but we now seem to have those amounts under control. Overall, utilities came in \$2839 over budget.

Business Expense—everything from utilities to paperclips—came in over budget by about \$11,300. A good part of this is due to costs associated with online giving. Other culprits were the printer/copier costs, a new laptop, and workers comp costs.



Through generous donations to the Music Fund, we were able to offset music expense by almost \$4,400 transferred from the Music Fund to the Operating Fund. Your generous donations to the Altar Flowers Fund helped to offset the costs of flowers applied to the Operating Fund. (These directed donations are not considered as part of your pledge.)

We were also over in hospitality expenses and other miscellaneous expenses, the biggest being \$2,375 paid to a consultant for the discernment phase of a capital campaign and \$2,056 for the creation of the Coronation Banner Overlays by Mary Mercogliano. This latter expense will be offset by a transfer from the Scott Higginbotham Memorial Fund.

The treasurer and the finance committee have worked hard over the year to put some good policies and procedures in place, especially for expense overages, and look to continue this into 2024.

Submitted by Sheri Flay  
(Some editing by John Forman)

**St. Stephen's Church - Statements of Activities - Operating Fund**  
**FYE December 31, 2023**

**Operating Revenue**

	*2022	Actual	Budget	Difference
Pledge	\$296,924	<b>\$339,152</b>	\$314,196	-\$24,956
Plate	\$46,920	<b>\$31,874</b>	\$45,000	\$13,126
Other Donations	\$3,010	<b>\$6,831</b>	\$4,200	-\$2,631
Fundraising	\$1,610	<b>\$1,821</b>	\$680	-\$1,141
Rental	\$5,240	<b>\$4,085</b>	\$4,060	-\$25
Other Income	\$392	<b>\$441</b>	\$100	-\$341
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$354,096</b>	<b>\$384,204</b>	\$368,236	-\$15,968

**Operating Fund Transfers and Expense**

Transfers

Transfers to and from Preschool - HR	N/A	<b>-\$31,853</b>	-\$31,512	\$341
Transfers to and from Preschool - Other	-\$65,836	<b>-\$64,464</b>	-\$65,565	-\$1,101
Transfers to Designated Funds	\$16,500	<b>\$16,200</b>	\$16,200	\$0
<b>Total Transfers</b>	<b>-\$49,336</b>	<b>-\$80,117</b>	-\$80,877	-\$760

Expense

Mission Share	\$40,416	<b>\$52,368</b>	\$52,364	-\$4
Interest on Loans	\$3,337	<b>\$3,029</b>	\$2,198	-\$831
Human Resources	\$280,482	<b>\$286,343</b>	\$287,948	\$1,605
Business Expense	\$91,166	<b>\$101,065</b>	\$89,735	-\$11,330
Program Expense	\$11,163	<b>\$9,871</b>	\$7,904	-\$1,967
Ministries & Outreach	\$1,088	<b>\$1,876</b>	\$2,200	\$324
Advertising & Communications	\$3,327	<b>\$6,910</b>	\$10,562	\$3,652
Music	\$6,766	<b>\$8,349</b>	\$6,766	-\$1,583
Other Expenses	\$5,832	<b>\$10,288</b>	\$3,430	-\$6,858
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$443,577</b>	<b>\$480,099</b>	<b>\$463,107</b>	<b>-\$16,992</b>

**Total Operating  
Fund Transfers  
and Expense**

<b>\$394,241</b>	<b>\$399,982</b>	<b>\$382,230</b>	<b>-\$17,752</b>
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**Net Change in Operating Fund Balance**

<b>-\$40,145</b>	<b>-\$15,778</b>	<b>-\$13,994</b>	<b>\$1,784</b>
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**St. Stephen's Church - Balance Sheet and Fund Balances**

	1/1/2023	Net Change	12/31/2023
<b>Assets</b>			
Bank Balances	\$83,444	\$14,965	\$98,409
Other Cash	\$3,699	-\$1,215	\$2,484
Fixed Assets	\$990,805	\$34,650	\$1,025,455
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$1,077,948</b>	<b>\$48,400</b>	<b>\$1,126,348</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>			
Accounts Payable	-\$2,288	\$11,726	\$9,438
Notes Payable	\$136,658	-\$6,038	\$130,620
Prepaid Pledges	\$6,200	-\$6,200	\$0
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>\$140,570</b>	<b>-\$512</b>	<b>\$140,058</b>
<b>Fund Balances</b>			
Operating Fund	\$12,551	-\$15,778	-\$3,227
Operating Reserve Fund	\$12,000	\$6,000	\$18,000
Chimes & Bells Fund	-\$6	\$0	-\$6
Bookstore Fund	\$767	\$0	\$767
Family Promise Fund	\$533	\$15	\$548
Memorial Garden Fund	\$370	\$0	\$370
Share The Grace Fund	\$99	\$15	\$114
Children & Youth Fund	\$10,003	-\$132	\$9,871
Rector's Discretionary Fund	\$10,703	-\$8,321	\$2,382
Project Fund	\$171	\$0	\$171
Other Directed Donations Fund	\$1,270	\$0	\$1,270
Altar Guild Fund	\$454	\$150	\$604
Altar Flowers Fund	\$3,747	\$935	\$4,682
Pet Memorial Garden Fund	\$564	\$4	\$568
Laundry Love Fund	\$2,149	\$562	\$2,711
Pass Through Donations und	\$1,412	\$121	\$1,533
Music Fund	\$3,427	\$0	\$3,427
Deanery Pass Through Fund	\$601	\$0	\$601
Outreach Fund	\$1,402	-\$50	\$1,352
Daughter of the King Fund	\$226	\$0	\$226
Buildings and Grounds Fund	\$9,796	\$85	\$9,881
EfM Fund	\$87	\$0	\$87
Immigrant Support Circle Fund	\$13,081	\$1,910	\$14,991
GLEAM-LA Fund	\$10	\$0	\$10
HVAC Compressor Emergency Fund	-\$685	\$685	\$0
Anti Racism Coalition Fund	\$620	\$595	\$1,215
Sabbatical Reserve Fund	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$6,000
Welcome Table Fund	\$8,198	-\$2,922	\$5,276
Endowment Fund	\$445	\$0	\$445
Scott Higginbotham Memorial Acolyte Fund	\$1,148	\$1,050	\$2,198
Patio	\$0	\$798	\$798
Scout Project Master Fund			
Meditation Garden Fund	\$0	\$232	\$232
Fundraising Master Fund			

	Gala 2023 Sub Fund	\$0	\$37,957	\$37,957
	Vision Master Plan Sub Fund	\$0	-\$4,500	-\$4,500
	<b>Total - Non Fixed Asset Funds Balance</b>	<b>\$98,143</b>	<b>\$22,411</b>	<b>\$120,554</b>
Fixed Asset Fund		<b>\$839,226</b>	<b>\$26,500</b>	<b>\$865,726</b>
	<b>Total Fund Balances</b>	<b>\$937,369</b>	<b>\$48,911</b>	<b>\$986,280</b>
<b>Total Liabilities and Fund Balances</b>		<b>\$1,077,939</b>	<b>\$48,399</b>	<b>\$1,126,338</b>

### Preschool Financials

St. Stephen’s Preschool has a different fiscal year than the church. Year end is July 30, so this narrative will first address the 2022/2023 financials and then give an update year to date (YTD) for 2023/2024.

#### Fiscal Year End July 2023:

At the beginning of the fiscal year, August 1, 2022, the Preschool total assets were \$271,119, almost all in various bank accounts. By July 31, 2023, the amount was \$278,346, a net increase of \$7,227. Liabilities increased by \$7,941 which are mostly in tuition deposits collected at registration to pay for the final weeks of preschool, and so are considered unearned tuition payments.

The preschool earned almost \$27,000 more in tuition than expected. This was partly due to an increase in fees and actual enrollment numbers. They also received a \$6,500 grant that helped increase the balance of the Preschool Buildings and Grounds Fund after some outlays for needed maintenance.

In contrast, budgeted expenses were exceeded by about \$25,000. Almost half of that amount being a shared salary with the church that only happened for part of the year instead of the entire year. The remaining excess came in the form of increased hours for assistant teachers because of higher-than-expected enrollment—a good problem to have. Amounts paid to the Preschool’s payment processor, Brightwheel, are higher than budgeted due to families paying using credit card payments rather than ACH. Beginning in June 2024, the Preschool will no longer absorb these fees.

All of this to say that the preschool ended fiscal year 2023 with a \$14,717 shortfall. This was better than budgeted though which anticipated a \$17,000 loss.

#### Fiscal Year End July 2024 – as of December 30

Bringing the assts balance of \$278,346 forward to begin the current fiscal year, as of December 30<sup>th</sup>, which is the fifth of twelve months, total assets number falls to \$257,995. This is also accompanied by a corresponding change in liabilities, indicating there are amounts to be collected which have not hit the bank yet.

Gross income is under budget by \$6,000 and is due to tuition not coming in as budgeted. This could be simply a timing issue. December tuition came in as expected, so we are expecting that to hold for

the remainder of the year.

As we move on to expenses, you will notice that salaries for the Admin Assistant, Teachers, and Assistant Teachers are higher than expected. This is because we did not have a Preschool Director during this time. Staff members stepped up to help when needed, and the Admin Assistant, Stephanie Rodriguez, was given a bonus for all the work she put in during that time. The preschool also had several students who needed one on one attention which affected the assistant teacher salaries. Since a director was not being paid during this time, the budgeted salary expense was only exceeded by \$3500.

A few other expenses that appear to be high currently include - Office Supplies, which are generally higher at the beginning and should even out over the rest of the year; Professional Development, which includes special training provided to staff that was unbudgeted; and the Brightwheel expense, which is about 45% over budget.

So far, for this current fiscal year the preschool is doing well. Total expenses through December are close to projected and are less than 1% over. Gross income minus expenses has the preschool in the black by \$10,628, which is less than projected but still positive.

**St. Stephen's Preschool - Statements of Activities - Operating Fund**  
**FYE July 31, 2023 and through December 31, 2023**

Operating Revenue	2022-2023			2023-2024 To Date		
	Actual	Budget	Difference	Actual	Budget to date	Difference
Tuition and other fees	\$614,08	\$587,15		\$295,37	\$301,85	
Other Income	0	0	-\$26,930	4	1	\$6,477
	\$2,142	\$1,500	-\$642	\$774	\$290	-\$484
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$616,22</b>	<b>\$588,65</b>	<b>-\$27,572</b>	<b>\$296,14</b>	<b>\$302,14</b>	<b>\$5,993</b>
	2	0		8	1	
<b>Operating Transfers and Expense</b>						
Transfers						
Transfers to and from Church - HR	\$24,706	\$13,572	-\$11,134	\$13,718	\$13,556	-\$162
Transfers to and from Church - Other	\$64,359	\$64,264	-\$95	\$26,275	\$27,475	\$1,200
Transfers to Designated Funds	\$15,900	\$12,600	-\$3,300	\$10,800	\$10,500	-\$300
<b>Total Transfers</b>	<b>\$104,96</b>	<b>\$90,436</b>	<b>-\$14,529</b>	<b>\$50,793</b>	<b>\$51,531</b>	<b>\$738</b>
	5					
Expense						
Human Resources	\$474,44	\$471,60		\$208,57	\$206,34	
	7	6	-\$2,841	1	5	-\$2,226

Office	\$2,655	\$3,500	\$845	\$2,521	\$1,759	-\$762
Program	\$12,903	\$9,750	-\$3,153	\$5,947	\$5,836	-\$111
Professional Development	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,523	\$2,200	-\$1,323
Maintenance	\$6,493	\$4,500	-\$1,993	\$1,072	\$1,875	\$803
Membership and Subscriptions	\$2,333	\$3,043	\$710	\$2,255	\$3,130	\$875
Technology	\$13,034	\$9,108	-\$3,926	\$6,643	\$6,566	-\$77
Insurance (P&C)	\$11,861	\$10,788	-\$1,073	\$2,091	\$3,288	\$1,197
Other Expenses	\$2,248	\$3,110	\$862	\$2,104	\$485	-\$1,619
	<b>\$525,974</b>	<b>\$515,405</b>	<b>-\$10,569</b>	<b>\$234,727</b>	<b>\$231,484</b>	<b>-\$3,243</b>
Total Expense						
<b>Total Operating Transfers and Expense</b>	<b>\$630,939</b>	<b>\$605,841</b>	<b>-\$25,098</b>	<b>\$285,520</b>	<b>\$283,015</b>	<b>-\$2,505</b>
<b>Net Change in Operating Fund</b>	<b>-\$14,717</b>	<b>-\$17,191</b>	<b>\$2,474</b>	<b>\$10,628</b>	<b>\$19,126</b>	<b>\$8,498</b>

#### St. Stephen's Preschool - Balance Sheet and Fund Balances

	8/1/2022	Net Change	7/31/2023	Net Change	12/31/2023
<b>Assets</b>					
Bank Balances	\$270,537	\$7,234	\$277,771	-\$46,891	\$230,880
Other Cash	\$582	-\$7	\$575	\$0	\$575
Grant Receivable	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$26,500	\$26,500
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$271,119</b>	<b>\$7,227</b>	<b>\$278,346</b>	<b>-\$20,391</b>	<b>\$257,955</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>					
Tuition Deposits	\$16,252	\$5,740	\$21,992	-\$27,747	-\$5,755
Accounts Payable	-\$5,216	\$2,201	-\$3,015	-\$481	-\$3,496
Total Liabilities	\$11,036	\$7,941	\$18,977	-\$28,228	-\$9,251
<b>Fund Balances</b>					
Operating Fund	\$113,937	-\$14,717	\$99,220	\$10,628	\$109,848
Pass-Through Fund	\$0	\$370	\$370	\$1,381	\$1,751
Operating Reserve Fund	\$139,201	\$6,001	\$145,202	\$5,000	\$150,202
Scholarship Fund	\$1,979	\$0	\$1,979	\$0	\$1,979
Buildings & Grounds Fund	\$4,966	\$7,632	\$12,598	-\$9,172	\$3,426
Total Fund Balances	\$260,083	-\$714	\$259,369	\$7,837	\$267,206
<b>Total Liabilities and Fund Balances</b>	<b>\$271,119</b>	<b>\$7,227</b>	<b>\$278,346</b>	<b>-\$20,391</b>	<b>\$257,955</b>

## Notes to the 2024 Church Operating Fund Budget

In August we created, with the approval of the Vestry, an annual Operating Fund budget as a template for the Stewardship committee and to provide a stretch goal for our pledge campaign.

We revised this budget in December to more closely match the total amount pledged. The vestry considered, suggested changes, and eventually approved the revised budget which we present here in a distilled form.

We are pleased and thankful we have for 2024 a net zero Operating Fund budget.

Addressing a couple of the larger differences from 2023:

**Transfers to and from Preschool** - The Preschool budget for 2023-2024 included an increase in their monthly Occupancy transfer amount beginning January 2024. (Occupancy is the amount the Preschool contributes to the Church to help pay for the shared resources they use.) This line reflects that increase.

**Human Resources** – In addition to regular cost of living raises, this line includes an amount for an additional staff member to work with children and youth. The Children and Youth Fund is contributing the same amount to the Operating Fund and that amount is reflected in the total amount in **Transfers to and from Designated Funds**.

**Ministries & Outreach** - We increased the budget here to ensure available amounts for giving a regular, predictable amount to certain community charities.

**Music** – We plan to pay for certain predicted expenses for musicians either directly from the Music Fund, or through approved reimbursements from the Music Fund to the Operating Fund.

A full, detailed budget broken down by general ledger account and by each month is available to anyone who would like to review it by contacting the Church office or the Treasurer.

**St. Stephen's Church - 2024 Budget - Operating Fund**  
**FYE December 31, 2024**

**Operating Revenue**

	2023 Actual	2024 Budget	Difference
Pledge	\$339,152	<b>\$346,235</b>	\$7,083
Plate	\$31,874	<b>\$33,000</b>	\$1,126
Other Donations	\$6,831	<b>\$4,200</b>	-\$2,631
Fundraising	\$1,821	<b>\$1,300</b>	-\$521
Rental	\$4,085	<b>\$3,460</b>	-\$625
Other Income	\$441	<b>\$100</b>	-\$341
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$384,204</b>	<b>\$388,295</b>	<b>\$4,091</b>

**Operating Fund Transfers and Expense**

Transfers

Transfers to and from Preschool - HR	-\$31,853	<b>-\$32,455</b>	-\$602
Transfers to and from Preschool - Other	-\$64,464	<b>-\$78,080</b>	-\$13,616
Transfers to and from Designated Funds	\$16,200	<b>\$11,512</b>	-\$4,688
<b>Total Transfers</b>	<b>-\$80,117</b>	<b>-\$99,023</b>	<b>-\$18,906</b>

Expense

Mission Share	\$52,368	<b>\$53,954</b>	\$1,586
Interest on Loans	\$3,029	<b>\$1,957</b>	-\$1,072
Human Resources	\$286,343	<b>\$300,145</b>	\$13,802
Business Expense	\$101,065	<b>\$96,637</b>	-\$4,428
Program Expense	\$9,871	<b>\$9,529</b>	-\$342
Ministries & Outreach	\$1,876	<b>\$10,100</b>	\$8,224
Advertising & Communications	\$6,910	<b>\$6,346</b>	-\$564
Music	\$8,349	<b>\$5,220</b>	-\$3,129
Other Expenses	\$10,288	<b>\$3,430</b>	-\$6,858
<b>Total Expense</b>	<b>\$480,099</b>	<b>\$487,318</b>	<b>\$7,219</b>

**Total Operating  
Fund Transfers and  
Expense**

**Net Change in Operating Fund Balance**

<b>\$399,982</b>	<b>\$388,295</b>	<b>-\$11,687</b>
<b>-\$15,778</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$15,778</b>



## St. Stephen's Food Pantry & Nonfood Collections

On the first Saturday of every month in the church parking lot, we host a collection of food and non-food products for needy families in Santa Clarita. Although the summer months at times become very slim collections, we often collect 20 or more large bags of groceries, paper products, and other needed items like socks, underwear, feminine products, and detergent.

We are very grateful to parishioner John Alexopoulos for making four beautiful large wooden boxes for the narthex to be used for collections on Sundays or between our monthly dates.

The total donations received and delivered in 2023 included the following:

- *Santa Clarita Food Pantry* – 198 large bags of groceries and 3 bags of small personal products
- *Bridge to Home* – 51 large boxes of cereal, 10 packs of socks, 9 packs of underwear, a dozen shower slippers, and 5 large bags of small personal products
- *Family Promise* - 38 large bottles of dish detergent, 26 bags of feminine products, 20 large packs of diapers, 9 cases of toilet paper, and 5 cases of paper towels
- *Church of Hope* – 24 bags of groceries, 10 cases of canned vegetables, and 3 large bags of personal products

Our outreach volunteers went to work immediately after the **7.8** earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria in February last year. We collected 13 tents, 23 blankets, and 15 sleeping bags to donate to the earthquake victims through the College of the Canyons Student Center.

In September, the Santa Clarita Veterans Services Collaborative was added to our list of recipients, and we were able to donate 3 cases of toilet paper, 3 large packs of paper towels, and a case of Kleenex for distribution to veterans in need.

Anyone interested in helping with our monthly collections should please contact Mary Jo Higginbotham by email at: [maryjohigg@gmail.com](mailto:maryjohigg@gmail.com)

Submitted by Mary Jo Higginbotham

## HUMAN RELATIONS 2022

*Human Relations Portfolio was updated in 2023 to solely include Human Resources which supports both the parish and the preschool.*

**Human Resources** is a committee that was formed to update the Church and Preschool Handbook in 2020. It did not meet as a committee in 2023. The committee includes: Jennifer Aston, Mark Young, Bill Brintnall, Shannon Murchison, Marian Krabach, Brendan Krabach. Vestry Member Jennifer Aston oversaw Human Resources for both the Church and the Preschool during 2023. Jennifer and Christopher Montella worked on the following:

- Oversee the Preschool Board's decision to supplement all employees' STD benefits
- Support the Interfaith service at St. Stephens with Congregation Beth Shalom and The Islamic Center of SCV held on 1/12/23,
- Update timecards to include *I certify, under penalty of perjury, that I have taken all breaks I am entitled to under the law. I also certify that this time sheet fully and accurately reports all hours that I have worked during the covered pay period.*
- Update Pay Bands
- Addressed cell phone stipends
- Updated EDD posters in breakrooms to 2023
- Performed Exit Interviews for outgoing employees
- Melanie Long, Director of Children's Education & Formation, gave her notice to terminate employment 7/11/23
- Support Stephanie Rodriguez as Interim Director of Children's Education & Formation from 7/11/23 through 1/2/24
- Updated and distributed Handbook for 2023 to ensure our handbook was compliant with 2023 laws, changes with St. Stephen's, and dioceses benefits packages.
- Supported two days Professional Development & Team Building for the Preschool Staff prior to children starting school in August.
- Human Resources was able to meet with each preschool staff member one on one during the month of December. The purpose of these meetings was to understand each employee's current temperature in regard to personnel matters and begin to cultivate a positive culture with room of every person to feel comfortable, safe and allow them to grow. Jennifer Aston has made herself available to be on call for any personnel matters that arise in the future.
- Director of Children's Education& Formation position was filled by Vivien Firta on 1/2/24

Submitted by Jennifer Aston

## Internal Community Relations Annual Report

Parishioners at St. Stephen's continued to contribute to a thriving parish life in 2023, as witnessed by a number of service/participation groups and several new events.

The SAGES, a group that promotes service within the community and the church, is open to all senior members. The group holds monthly lunches on the second Thursday of each month, and this year included outings to Marston's, Red Robin, Spumoni's, California Pizza Kitchen, Mimi's Cafe, Olive Garden, Old Town Junction, Brophy Brothers at the Ventura Marina, and the homes of several members. Movie Days are held on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Laemmle Theater in downtown Newhall. As part of their outreach, SAGES donated 12 backpacks fully stuffed with school supplies as part of the "Backpack Project" for school-age children in the Hart School District to make sure they had a backpack on the first day of school. The group also volunteered their time to help needy families at Thanksgiving, filling 29 Turkey Baskets with donated food and turkeys for needy families within the Hart School District.

The St. Stephen's Men's Group continues to grow, following the end of the pandemic. They meet for breakfast the first Saturday of the month at Dink's Deli in Granary Square in Valencia, and all members of the St. Stephen's community are welcome to join. The group helps maintain the building and grounds, assists the Altar Guild in getting the church prepared for Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and other important days in the Church calendar, as well as help out with church fundraisers.

The St. Stephen's Book Group holds monthly meetings in the sacristy and on Zoom. Books discussed this year include The Faith Club, which is about three mothers, Jewish, Moslem and Episcopalian, who started to write a children's book about religion, and Sister Joan Chittester's book, The Time Is Now.

The Angel Network is a new group at St. Stephen's this year, and the group has grown significantly over the past 12 months. The Angel Network is a ministry to help us provide care and support to one another. The network includes smaller communities of warm-hearted friends called *halos*. The *halo* groups consist of 8-10 members who intentionally care for one another, and find fellowship together by meeting during coffee hour, sitting together at church, participating in Bible study groups, etc. The group is in the process of recruiting new members as well.

The second annual "Trunk or Treat" took place on Saturday, October 28 from 4-6 pm in the church parking lot and was a huge success on all fronts. As a safe and fun way for families and children to dress up in costumes and trick or treat, the event was well attended with over 100 participants and featured parishioners and local residents serving treats from over 30 decorated cars and trucks, as well as a face painter, balloon artist, food truck, and more.

St. Stephen's became an official congregation in 1963, and a series of events were held throughout the year to celebrate the church's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. The Diamond Jubilee Gala Event & Fundraiser took place on Saturday, October 14, but the celebration kicked off June 23 with the first in a series of "Movie Nights." Each month a film was screened in Spurling Hall, beginning with 1963's "Beach Party," 1973's "Jesus Christ Superstar," 1983's "Return of the Jedi," 1993's "The Nightmare Before Christmas," and 2003's "Finding Nemo." Then, on Sunday, August 6, it was St. Stephen's "Story Day": a celebration of the church's history and a means of helping create a historical archive for the church.

St. Stephen's Diamond Jubilee Gala & Auction celebrating 60 years in Santa Clarita, which took place on October 14, was an astounding success on every level, involving more than 75 community and parish volunteers. More than 220 guests mingled at a cocktail reception with silent auction, live music, and raffles, in Spurling Hall, followed by a live-auction dinner and dessert auction in the "outside ballroom" in the church's courtyard. The event was attended by a number of civic guests, including Santa Clarita Mayor Jason Gibbs, and Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo, who issued a proclamation to St. Stephen's, co-sponsored by Senator Scott Wilk, as well as a number of our community partners, like PFLAG, Child & Family Center, Bridge to Home, and the NAACP. Over \$40,000 was raised, which is going towards the feasibility stages of a Capital Campaign for the church.

The 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration concluded on Gratitude Sunday, November 19, with a rousing Jazz Vespers concert put on by Judy Baity and the St. Stephen's Choir, followed by a reception in Spurling Hall, at which more than \$700 was raised for the music program.

Submitted by William Hendley

## ANNUAL MEETING REPORT - MUSIC MINISTRY

We still want and need you to join us!

The members of the music ministry of St. Stephen's continue to enthusiastically serve our church community. We are most fortunate to have a music program that is made up of devoted and dedicated members who are committed to God and to the service of this church.

- The **Parish Choir** provides choral music for our regular and special worship services. Sheri Flay continues to faithfully serve as the choir librarian and Caroline Morgan energetically serves as assistant to the director. Currently, there are 10 members. The choir is under the leadership of the music director, Judith Baity. Rehearsal is on Thursday evenings at 7:30 P.M. We are desperately in need of additional members in all parts
- The **Ringers** are only playing at special times. If anyone is interested in leading this ministry, we would love to have you. There continues to be a lot of interest from parishioners who want to serve as ringers.
- The **Stones**, our praise group, provides praise and contemporary music for the 10:30AM service several times a year. Frank Browne continues to serve as the leader of this group.
- The **Music Director** gives private musical instruction to any member who makes a request.

In addition, we have been blessed with the special assistance of the following persons:

- Ann Drexler
- Edward Maxwell
- Gertrude Bradley
- Wendy Stackhouse
- Terry Dexter
- Yolanda West
- Harry Christianson
- Jonathan Kirsh
- Laurie Melan
- Melanie Rockwell
- Roger Greene
- Travis Bird
- Angelina Rivera
- Vince Suzuki
- Anne King
- Chris Yahnker
- The Elegant Music Brass and String Trios
- 

A special thank you to all of our special musicians. We also wish to thank the congregation for your continued support and to acknowledge the participation and encouragement of our rector, Christopher Montella.

Respectfully submitted,  
Judith M. Baity, Music Director



## St. Stephen's Preschool Annual Report

St. Stephen's Preschool continues to be a staple in the faith based preschool community serving a little over 100 children, their families as well as employing 17 regular staff members and 2 substitute teaching staff. The preschool program serves children ages 2-5 and operates Monday thru Friday from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm. Our school year begins in mid-August and runs through early June. We also offer a special parent-tot class on Friday mornings for children ages 12 -24 months and 5-week Summer fun program.

Each month the preschool staff plan and prepare activities that are geared around various themes that may include seasons, holidays, and other special/significant events.

The preschool families continue to utilize both the early bird as well as lunch bunch options available for extended care. The full day program has seen consistent enrollment of around 10 children per day. We saw a decrease in enrollment for our pre-k or 4-year-old program as elementary schools are again changing the age cut-off for children to be enrolled. This is expected to continue into the 2024/2025 school year as children may enroll with local districts as preschoolers. We did see an increase in 2-year-old enrollments and foresee having to add another three year old class for next year, should we not have enough enrollment in our pre-k program.

Families and staff take comfort in the fact that children are happy and in an environment that is committed to their health, safety, and well-being. We greatly appreciate all the church parishioners who give to preschool in a variety of ways whether it be materials, support, or their time. We are grateful to Reverend Christopher Montella for his leadership as well as our wonderful preschool staff. Without their continued commitment to St. Stephen's, none of this would be possible. In July 2023, Melanie Long resigned as director and Stephanie Rodriguez continued her role as preschool manager while also performing all of the director duties for the remainder of the year. We are thankful for her hard work! This year three of our former employees returned as lead and assistant teachers. We welcomed Lead Teacher Brenda Astorga to our school and two of our former employers remain as St. Stephen's substitute staff. Most of our preschool staff have been at St. Stephen's for over 10 years with our most veteran staff members serving multiple decades. Vivien Firta was hired as the new director of education and formation with her start date as Jan 3, 2024.

<i>Teachers</i>	<i>Asst. Teachers</i>
Laurie Crevier	Yesenia Pappas-Mendez
Brenda Astorga	Sandra Duran
Julie Davenport	Gwenda Brown
Shannon Murchison	Diana Patino
Parminder Bhogal	Kristin Sargeant
Christina Troupe	Adriana Santana
<i>Substitute Teachers</i>	
Jennifer Lackey	Sexton
Robin Silver	Maria Lopez

Director
Melanie Long
Rector
Rev. Christopher Montella
Preschool Manager
Stephanie Rodriguez
Bookkeeper
Donna Maldonado

The preschool program's enrollment has been lower than what was projected prior to opening in the fall. We ended the year with about 105 children enrolled, compared to August's enrollment of 122. The program as it is currently operating should meet the current projected budget or fall just short. The preschool budget was finalized in July, but then absorbed an increase in assistant teacher pay as we had shadows to help a few kids in the classrooms. We are currently preparing for our 2024/2025 enrollment and plan to bring in more 2 and 3 year old students to meet the needs of the community. The preschool received a grant through the State of California which was used to replace the wire fence surrounding the school's

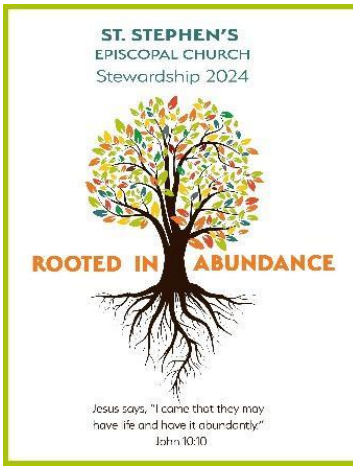
playground (facing the church parking lot). A durable gate with mesh cover was installed, providing the school with more privacy and protection.

The preschool board continues to be very supportive of the preschool program. They value the importance of ensuring that St. Stephen's Preschool remains the caring, nurturing, developmental preschool that it is. We held a trunk or treat Halloween event as well as Gingerbread House night in December. Our hope and goal is to bring other family friendly events to St. Stephen's that can be enjoyed and attended by families from both the congregation and preschool. It has been very helpful having the participation of two staff representatives on the board in addition to two family representatives. We appreciate the opinions and expertise offered by all and the time that each dedicates to attend our monthly meetings.

The 2023 Board members were:

The Very Reverend Christopher Montella	Tricia Foley/Heather Moss-Layman
Melanie Long until July 0f 2023	Rebecca Beltran
John Fortman	Marv Aardahl
Steve Plote	Mark Young
Monica Bellows	Colleen Gibbons
Christina Troupe	James Webb

Submitted by: Vivien Firta, Director of Children's Education and Formation



## St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Stewardship Committee Report of Work 2023

Committee members: Cathy Gero, Chair, Michael Branda, Bob Gregor, Richard Holdredge, Kathleen Jensen

The Stewardship committee strives to help parishioners discover the joy in stewardship and in taking care of our church and community by making conscientious use of our gifts of time, talent and treasure.

The committee meets monthly January through May and bi-monthly June through December. In 2023, we began the year by reflecting on the previous year's pledge drive and contributing information to the Annual

Meeting. Our first project was thanking everyone for their contributions and letting them know they are appreciated with handwritten thank you notes. This was completed in March of 2023.

During the first half of the year, we carefully chose the theme, logo and Bible verse for 2023/2024 which began in October with our pledge drive. This theme and logo is used throughout the year as we emphasize the importance of stewardship in newsletter articles and bulletin announcements. The theme that we used for most of 2023 was Engaging our Faith, Opening our Hearts, Doing God's Work. Our current theme, which you will see through most of 2024 is Rooted in Abundance.

A mid-year Financial Update was presented to the Parish on July 23 in a forum at 9:00 in Spurling Hall. Thanks go to John Fortman, Parish Treasurer, Reverend Christopher Montella and Cathy Gero for all of their work making sure that everyone in the congregation is aware of and kept up to date with information about our financial situation.

The Stewardship committee organizes the annual Ministry Fair to highlight all of the time and talent that shines in our congregation. This year the fair was held on September 17 and more than 37 ministries were represented! Thanks to all of the ministry leaders who worked so hard at creating informative and engaging tables.

The pledge campaign began in October. Speakers this year included Senior Warden Bob Gregor, Steve Plote, Kathleen Jensen, and Mary Jo Higginbotham. We are so thankful for their words and support of the campaign. Pledge packets that included a narrative budget and letters from the Rector and Stewardship committee chair were emailed and hard copies sent for those who do not receive email. Thank you to Tracy Stapp for all of her work in getting the information out and collected as people completed both electronic and physical pledge cards and prayer requests.

We concluded our official pledge drive with pledges and prayers being offered on Gratitude Sunday, November 19, and celebrated during a single service at 9:00 with a potluck following. It was a successful pledge drive in that we were able to connect with most parishioners and exceeded last year's amount pledged by 3%. Our work, however, continues as we did not achieve our goal.

We are so thankful to everyone for their stewardship, their use of time, talent and treasure on behalf of St. Stephen's and the work we do together. We have strong and abundant roots, together we produce amazing fruit!

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kathleen Jensen



# Technology – 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

January 2024

As our world evolves and parishioner needs change, technology has become increasingly important at St. Stephen's. Our committee has two main areas of focus: infrastructure and operations. Our campus has an infrastructure of equipment like, computers, cameras, audio and video equipment, lighting, internet, and Wi-Fi. Our parish uses the infrastructure to conduct daily operations to communicate with one another and the outside world.

The Technology Committee consists of Dave Melton, John Noonan, and John Fortman. We also have a Tech booth team headed by Erick Long.

The following is a summary of our activities this past year.

## **Campus Technology added or updated**

- Hired a contractor, Hearing NOW USA (<https://hearingnowusa.com>) to install a hearing loop system for the sanctuary
- Purchased a laptop for Reverend Christopher
- Purchased needed audio and video devices for combined in-house and remote meetings, as well as to play movies and show pictures
- Upgraded Preschool Director's computer components
- Purchased and installed remote controlled sanctuary lighting

## **Campus Technology repairs and maintenance**

- Removed AT&T phone lines in favor of VOIP phones
- Updated sanctuary sound system
- Repaired campus security gate problems
- Maintained and updated staff desktop computers
- Replaced failing computer parts as needed

## **Technology Outreach**

- Another project the Technology team worked on this year was to assist with the troubleshooting and repair of the sound system at St. Mark's Van Nuys. They were unable to use their sound system. With our help, they now have a functioning sanctuary sound system again. We were able to troubleshoot the system, cables, microphones, sound mixer, etc. We replaced their nonfunctioning mixer with one we had here at St. Stephen's and we repaired cables and other components. When they can purchase a replacement mixer and supporting items we will go back and help with the installation and setup, if needed.

Respectfully Submitted: Dave Melton

## Greeters and Ushers Annual Report

Our church ushering staff grew quite a bit with the addition of several new and returning ushers in 2023. Co-Head Usher Michael Richards, as always, has been doing a fabulous job with *both* the 7:45 and 10:30 am services. Michael goes above and beyond. Our staff members came through all kinds of challenges in 2023 from handling Sunday's second service time change, to bringing communion back to the railing, to Advent, Christmas, Holy Week, and special events such as the Interfaith Service in January.

Our fabulous usher team includes so many great people that donate much of their time each week to help things run smoothly: James Mackey, Gina Freziers, Avery Vestuto, Carol Vestuto, Mia Behrens, Mary Beth Knox, Keith Thompson, Desiree Spencer-Walters, Tom Spencer-Walters, Bill Nold, Marianne Zinkewicz, Marian Krabach, Marilyn Pisa, Julie Hagerty, Claudia and John Alexopoulos, Sara-Anne Nelson, Julie Witter, Tricia Foley, Linda Weifenbach, Michael Branda, Ginny and Bob Gregor. Plus, our newest members: Dora Lozano, Cheryl Sena, Peter Cairo, James and Kimberly Torres.

Also, our greeters: Rosa Holdredge, Cindy Swaisgood, Mark and Kimberlee Bridgeford are always there to welcome new and old friends - making everyone feel like family.

Submitted by: Nick Vestuto (Co-Head Usher/10:30 am)

## **2023 Worship Leaders – LECTOR, MC and CB REPORT**

I am very grateful for the group that has volunteered to support our Worship in 2023. The highlight of the year was Caroline Morgan creating a Google Doc for all parts of the weekly worship services; including acolytes and Crucifers and allowing all participants to view the document on-line.

By the end of 4Q2023 for 7:45 we have a pool of 9 readers, 3 MCs and 5 CBs to draw from for any given Sunday.

By the end of 4Q2023 for 10:30 we have a pool of 15 readers, 5 MCs and 7 CBs to draw from for any given Sunday. Requiring 3 diverse gender readers per service; not all female and not all male.

I love the St Stephen's family; the way we all pitch in when a cause is created and get the job done. This is one of those causes.

There are too few MCs and CBs. Some of the MCs were required to be CBs at the other Sunday service just to fill the roles. We need more 10:30 MCs and more 10:30 CBs. This is a general call out to the parish to request more volunteers for these worship roles. Anyone and Everyone will be trained on the nuances of each role so that they can be confident in the role and what actions they have to perform, and their ability to successfully fulfill each role.

Please, consciously, and faithfully consider joining one of these roles in 2024.

As the scheduler of the worship team for each service I appreciate every single member of the volunteer groups for their service and commitment to St Stephens. Coordinating and scheduling these volunteers across their commitments to the Usher role, Reader, Tech Table, Master of Ceremony and Chalice Bearer roles is a challenge. For 2024 we will continue with 1 google doc schedule that has all of these disciplines listed out on it as well as the contact information for everyone that supports the 7:45 service and the 10:30 service. This should make it easier to follow through on our commitments and scheduling and help when any of us requires a substitute for any given service date or role.

May God Bless us all and give you Peace.

Respectfully submitted, Stevan Plote, 2023 Worship Teams Coordinator

## Youth Engaged at St. Stephens (Y.E.S.S.) Annual Report

Y.E.S.S. is for youth in grades 6-12 and provides foundation, formation, and fun in an inclusive environment to help young people grow in their faith, their understanding of themselves and the world we live in as they journey towards adulthood.

YESS meets on Sundays after the later service from 12:15 pm to 1:30 pm in the upstairs youth room. Typical meetings follow the schedule of greeting, game, lesson/discussion, and closing prayer. At least once a month, YESS will include an off-site field trip or a fun activity day at the church. Overall, we have a solid group of 10 members with weekly attendance between 5 to 6 at a time.

During the year, YESS also gets involved in larger activities with the rest of St. Stephens. This year, several YESS members were instrumental volunteers at the Anniversary Gala in October. In December, YESS took on key roles and responsibilities in the Christmas Pageant during the 4 pm Christmas Eve service. In February, we look forward to hosting Pancake Supper for Shrove Tuesday as we have in the past.

As we move into the rest of the year the members of YESS are eager to explore our faith through lively discussions and activities and have plans to engage in fundraising events to beautify and “funnify” the youth room.

Submitted by Gina Guaderrama-Frezieres

