



The Shield

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | ST STEPHEN'S UMC | APRIL 2026 – VOLUME 87

Music at St. Stephen's

April is a super busy month for the music ministry at St. Stephen's UMC! The choir is looking forward to providing beautiful and contemplative music for the Good Friday service on April 3rd while also looking forward to joyous and celebratory Easter Sunday services on April 5th. The bell choirs will join in the celebration on Easter Sunday with an uplifting handbell anthem. The youth praise band will be getting into the action as well as they provide worship leadership at both services on April 19th.

Looking ahead - the choir and bell choirs will continue to provide music for our worship services in May, but we also have something very special that we'll be working on for May. The choir and bell choirs from St. Stephen's UMC have been invited to provide music for the Memorial Service at the OKUMC Annual Conference 2026. The service will be held on the evening of May 28 at Church of

the Servant. The choir and bell choirs will provide 30 minutes of pre-service music and the choir will also prepare two anthems for use during the service in the anthem and offertory spot. We are honored to have been invited to be a part of this meaningful and special time of worship and remembrance.

Sunday Night Live is still going strong and we are so excited about all of the wonderful music and special activities that Morgan and Jenn have provided for our elementary aged children. If you're at the church between 4:30 and 6 pm on any given Sunday, be sure to peek into Community Hall and see the energy and joy that our wonderful staff and volunteers are offering to our fabulous children!

As always, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions - music@ststephensnorman.org or catch me or Julie at the church on Sunday!

Church Events

- April 2nd—Maundy Thursday Service
- April 3rd—Good Friday Service
- April 5th—Easter
- April 7th—Lunch Bunch
- April 11th—Peacemaker Training
- April 12th—Blessing of the Animals
- April 15th—Adult Ed Meeting
- April 18th—NCRS Potluck
- April 20th – Ad Council
- April 21st—Fiction Club
- April 27th-Finance Committee

Shine Kids

Hello everyone!

Hard to believe that when you read this we will be a few days away from Easter. It has been a wonderful Lent season and I am grateful for the creativity of Venita MacGorman and our "Lent Madness." I am excited to see who comes out as the winner of 2026 St. Stephens Saint of the Year.

Sunday Night Live has had some creative and interesting topics taught

by some great teachers. We have so much talent at St. Stephens and thank you to all who have participated. We hope you will make Sunday Night Live a weekly commitment for your child as we continue to grow this program.

Mark Your Calendars:
April 5th: Egg Hunt at 1015 (no SNL)
April 12th: Sunday Night Live
April 19th: Sunday Night Live FAMILIES PLEASE JOIN US

April 26th: Sunday Night Live

Looking ahead:
May 17th: Sunday Night Live End of the Year Party
June 15th-18th: Interfaith Friendship Camp

As always, please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

Happy Spring.
Ms. Jenn

Proverbs 22:17

"A merry heart does good like medicine"

Please collect your dishes!

There are several dishes in the kitchen that belong to congregation members. Please come to get them this week.

Queerlit Collective

Why we contribute to the Queerlit Collective at St Stephen's

Schools and libraries are banning books that are explicit or suggestive, but there are kids who need to read about their own struggles and lives in our community. This mission is essential for us as a Reconciling Congregation. The kids who come to us for those books may not pay much attention to our efforts now. But later they will remember there was a church once that actually cared. This is a

vital way of growing our caring community for years to come.

Katie Barwick-Snell and Dan Snell

Volunteers Needed

We are seeking volunteers to serve on our church communications team.

Participants will be involved in updating the church website, assisting with social media and other communications and outreach activities. If you would like to participate, please email Sharon at office@ststephensnorman.org. Help us extend God's love to our community and share what makes St. Stephen's special by joining our team.

Peacemaker Training & Lunch

Saturday, April 11, 10:30-12:30

Fran Roberson and Mary Lee will offer a review/advanced training (which furthers the November Roundtable introduction) of the Non-Violent CLARA method used in navigating constructive dialogue and de-escalation within contentious conversations. If you plan to attend, please let Sharon in the office, Fran, or Mary know.



Beyond the Pew

Giving Feet to Our Faith This Lent

As we move through the final weeks of this Lenten journey, many of you have asked for a compiled guide to the "actionable benedictions" we've shared each Sunday. In a world that feels increasingly like a wilderness—marked by the shadow of new wars, the anxiety of ICE raids in our neighborhoods, and the rolling back of hard-won civil rights—it is easy to feel paralyzed. We can find ourselves staring at the "cup" of our own despair, watching the ripples of uncertainty until we spill over into apathy.

But as we've discussed since Ash Wednesday, **the waiter doesn't look at the cup; she looks at the horizon.** At St. Stephen's, we are practicing a faith that moves. We are leaning into a "New Birth" that has hands and feet. We are looking toward an Easter that the Empire cannot take, and a Resurrection that rises precisely where the resistance is most fierce.

Here are some of our Lenten "Labors of Love" to guide you as we approach Holy Week:

1. The "Beyond the Screen" Resistance

It is easy to "post" our outrage; it is harder to practice our peace.

- **The Action:** For every hour spent consuming news of conflict or raids, spend ten minutes in tangible service. Redirect the "luxury money" from a skipped coffee or subscription to a local **Mutual Aid fund** or **Humanitarian Relief** for Ukraine and Iran.
- **The Goal:** To move from "slacktivism" to actual labor. Let your faith have a physical footprint.

2. The Fast from Condemnation (The John 3:17 Rule)

The Empire thrives on "us vs. them" tribalism. Our faith thrives on "we."

- **The Action:** When you catch yourself in a cycle of self-shame or vitriol toward a political enemy, stop. Recite: *"God did not*



world, but to save it." *

- **The Goal:** To refine your heart so that you can offer mercy when it is least expected.

3. The Nicodemus Walk

Honesty is a revolutionary act in a world of performance.

- **The Action:** Go out into the Oklahoma night. In the dark, admit to God one thing you are afraid of in the daylight—whether it's a fear for our democracy or a doubt in your soul.
- **The Goal:** To move from performative certainty to the "strangely warmed heart" of authentic faith.

4. The "Side Door" Provision

Like the woman at the well, we are called to meet people where they are, especially those the world deems "unclean" or "unwelcome."

- **The Action:** Identify a "rough road" for a neighbor—an immigrant family navigating legal hurdles or a veteran struggling with PTSD. Be the "Side Door" for them. Provide a meal, a ride, or a listening ear without judgment.
- **The Goal:** To be a "servant" rather than a "volunteer."

5. The "Eastern Gate" Advocacy

On Palm Sunday, we chose the donkey over the war horse.

- **The Action:** Do not be a "silent stone." If the (continued on next page)

Beyond the Pew

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status quo demands your silence in the face of xenophobia, speak up. Write the Letter to the Editor, call your representatives about the escalating war, and stand as a witness when the "tow truck" of the state tries to pull a family apart.

- **The Goal:** To proclaim that **Jesus is Lord**, and the Empire's power is temporary.

Looking to the Horizon

This Lent, we are not just "giving things up." We are taking things on. We are becoming a "Living Starter"—like that sourdough in Oslo—rising quietly but relentlessly in a heavy world.

The Empire may try to shut the tomb, but they cannot stop the sunrise. We are going **through** the valley, and we are doing it together. Keep your eyes on the horizon.

Be gentle with yourselves. Be fierce for each other.

Rev. Jinx Barber
Senior Pastor, St. Stephen's UMC



Youth Shenanigans

March is always a fun month for the youth because that is when we have our annual Spring Break retreat. This year we went to Camp Egan from the 19th-22nd, and we had a wonderful time. Our group was small but mighty and we got a chance to enjoy some sunshine and outside activities while we were there.

April brings in time of fundraising and really starting to get things together for our summer mission trip. It will be here before we know it, and we are looking forward to staying a little closer to home and spending our week in Fayetteville, AR touching hearts and lives with the work our students and adults get to do. We will have our annual Easter Breakfast fundraiser on April 5th, and that is just the start to our fundraising activities. We will have the stockholder sale in May and all the fun things that come with being a stockholder in our trip to

x x **be excited** for.