

The Shield

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER | ST. STEPHEN'S UMC | SEPTEMBER 2026 – VOLUME 92

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Shine Kids—September 2026

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- Sunday Night Live is in full swing and we have some very exciting activities planned. Please bring your kids, grandkids, and friends on Sunday evenings from 4:30-6:00 pm for fun and fellowship!
- October is Children's Sabbath month and we have a lot of things going on.
 - October 18th is CROP Walk and we will participate with our church family (watch bulletin for more details.)
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Church Events

- **Sep. 1—Lunch Bunch**
- **Sep. 7—Labor Day—
Office Closed**
- **Sep. 13—Youth Sunday**
- **Sep. 13—Ice Cream
Social—Goodrich**
- **Sep. 15—Lunch Bunch**
- **Sep. 16—Adult Ed
Meeting**
- **Sep. 17—Care Team
Meeting**
- **Sep. 28—Finance
Committee**

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NCRS Update

The State of Housing in NCRS Refugee Resettlement

"Housing is a core part of the resettlement process, ensuring refugees have a safe place to start rebuilding their lives in the U.S.," according to the Global Refugee immigrant advocacy organization. Social service professionals are quick to point out the importance of a stable home in a family's efforts to succeed in the U.S. economy. Fortunately, the NCRS is well-funded and the 20 families it supports have stable, reliable housing, due in large part to the monitoring by the NCRS through their "family-liaison" and leadership teams. This article is not an additional fund-raising appeal, but rather an opportunity to share with the St. Stephen's church members and all stakeholders, how the NCRS accounts for housing.

The NCRS budgeted 21% of its 2026 budget for housing and related expenses, for a total of \$19K. The actual 2026 housing expenses for the NCRS is expected to be over 30%. Even the Spero Project, in OKC, sites housing as one of their top expenses. Common in the field of refugee resettlement is housing uncertainty and unexpected expenses. Much of the uncertainty comes from the unstable housing affordability market that often prices refugees with their low income margins out of the market. So, most live

on the edge. In August alone, the NCRS unexpectedly spent over \$4K to move 3 families out of a closing apartment complex. The NCRS could not know when budgeting for 2026 that the 300-unit+ Overlook Apartment complex, in southeast Norman, would be bought by a venture capital company in the spring and decide to turn it into OU student housing starting this summer! Overlook has a large immigrant population. Most of the NCRS families at Overlook were enjoying a degree of independence. Any surplus income usually goes to used clothing for the children. So, a quasi-forced move was not in their budget. Most would have to pay 1 1/2 times their rent on average to move into another apartment complex or rental house. Some families may eventually get a portion of the deposit returned. But, with large Afghan families, deposit refunds are rare.

Another uncertainty is that of unexpected changes in immigration policy. St. Stephen's was affected by these changes this summer when the church custodian, Mykhail, could no longer work while his work authorization renewal is pending. This was allowed in prior U.S. administrations. Mykhail agreed to volunteer

his time and continue completing the custodial church tasks that are so needed. Fortunately, the NCRS is able to fully support Mykhail and his wife, for the time being.

NCRS volunteers often ask, "how does anyone living on the edge ever survive in this economy?"

Thanks to generous donations from the NCRS coalition of seven churches, such as St. Stephen's, and grant awards, the NCRS is well-funded and able to help their refugee families through transitions such as mentioned here. Most of these families are near independence, as is the goal. Instead of these transitional experiences being trauma-filled with potentially drastic financial setbacks, they are now learning experiences. There are still some housing and legal expenses expected through the end of the year, and an educational opportunity. If there are no other large unforeseen expenses, the NCRS will end the year with a slim reserve to carry over into the 2027 budget year.

Music Ministry

I'm so excited that our choir is back to leading Sunday morning worship! Hooray! We've also jumped quickly into learning some beautiful and festive Advent music. Please come and join in the fun! We rehearse Wednesday evenings from 7:00 - 8:30 pm in the sanctuary. We are a lively bunch of fun-loving, music making, good hearted people and there is ALWAYS a place for you with us.

I'd also like to make a desperate plea for a few more handbell ringers! We have two wonderful groups - one that meets at 4:30 pm on Sundays and one that meets at 6:00 pm on Wednesday evenings. If you'd like to get started with handbell ringing we have an event over at McFarlin on Saturday, September 12th that includes a "Rookie Ringers" session which will provide you with a "crash course" on all the basics! If you're interested, let me know

and I'll get you signed up. Our Sunday group will resume rehearsals on Sunday, September 13th at 4:30 pm and the Wednesday group will resume on Wednesday, September 9th at 6:00 pm.

Our children's music programming associated with Sunday Night Live resumed regular meetings on Sunday, August 30th and will meet again after Labor Day weekend on Sunday, September 13th.

As always, if you have any questions, please

email Marci at music@ststephensnorman.org or catch me or Julie at the church on Wednesday evening or Sunday morning!

Youth Shenanigans

September will kick off with our annual Stockholders Dinner. If you haven't received your invitation and purchased stock in our summer mission trip, please get with Alyssa. You will have until Sept. 9, 2026 to RSVP for the dinner. It will be a fun filled evening of delicious food, videos, slideshows, and stories from our trip to Fayetteville, AR.

Come join us on Sunday, September 13th, for Youth Sunday. The youth group will be speaking at both the 8:30 and 10:50 service.

We've also kicked off

the new school year and had a wonderful time at our swim party. It was graciously hosted by George and Laurel Wulfekotte for the 3rd year and they provided a wonderful atmosphere and food for our students and adults. We always enjoy our time welcoming in the new 6th graders and this year was no different.

If you know of anyone looking to get their teen plugged in with a pretty awesome group of kids (the adults are pretty cool too, but I'm biased) and have any questions, please reach out to Alyssa or Grace. There is always room

for more at God's table, and the same goes for our youth group. Right now we are learning about all the books of the Bible on Sunday morning watching The Bible Project, and on Sunday evening we are focusing on a study called The Theology of Meals. If you want to know more, reach out.