



ST. STEPHEN'S

EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF RIDGEFIELD

1725

2025



CELEBRATING
THREE HUNDRED YEARS
OF LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF RIDGEFIELD
353 Main Street Ridgefield CT 06877



A LETTER FROM THE RECTOR

Dear People of St. Stephen's –

Aren't we lucky to be part of St. Stephen's when our community marked 300 years of Christian presence in the Anglican tradition?

2025 was a wonderful year when we remembered that we have inherited a faith community to carry forward for the next generation. From January to December we had special events. You will see highlighted in a special section: our Cookbook, Storytelling afternoon, Memorial Day Parade presence, our Gala, our Tricentennial Photo History book, special worship services with Bishop Jeff and Greg Farr, Nutmeg ice cream, and the Ridgefield Historical House Tour. These are some of the ways that we marked our 300th year.

2025 was a hard year, too. We found our nation abandoning some of the familiar commitments to love our neighbor and respect the dignity of every human being. As the church, we wrestled with how to show up for new and increased needs. We started the year by focusing on God's love through studying King's Six Principles of Nonviolence on Dr. King's day in January. This launched a weekly gathering of 10-12 people reflecting and working together to support the work in the world and on the ground. We called it *What Can I Do?* We invited the town into our gift buying for Hour Children with Christmas in July. We increased our awareness and giving to hunger services and immigrant protections. We encouraged one another in these efforts because the need is great, and the relief seems far off. You'll see that in these pages, too.

Faith gets passed on from generation to generation. This has always been the case. Paul says it beautifully in his Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12, verses 1-3:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

This is Paul's prayer for the followers of Jesus. This is Paul's prayer for the church, for us.

This is our prayer for ourselves.

In Christ,

Whitney +



Mary Brewster Fund Committee

The Mary Brewster Fund was established for the women of St. Stephen's in honor of Mary Brewster, a long-time parishioner. The Committee has strived to make use of the funds by offering events that foster spirituality, fellowship, learning, and fun! The committee members in 2025 were: Karin Fallon, Linda Berry, Frances Kimball, Jean Jaykus, Nina Newman, Peggy Thomas, and Lori Seibert (Chair). Linda Berry has rolled off the committee. We thank her for her many years of PR and raspberry bars! New members joining the committee include Lee Gregoras and Noel Baldwin.



In January, a gathering of women attended a dinner at Gallo for fellowship and good food.

We held our popular Valentine luncheon for the ladies of the church. Rector's Hall was beautifully decorated, including roses to take home. Derrick Goff played the piano for us. A catered lunch



accompanied by desserts made by the committee were enjoyed. It was wonderful. Mary Brewster's daughters, Ursula & Dina, were in attendance for the event.

For Mother's Day, we handed out beautiful roses to all the women who attended church.

The committee hosted our popular flower arranging event in May where we provided assorted, colorful cut flowers, and vases. Each woman made two arrangements: one to keep and one to give to a friend. A nice luncheon was served.

Our annual retreat was held at the Trinity Retreat Center in Cornwall, CT. The retreat was led by Rev. Mark Bozzuti-Jones, the Spiritual Director of the TRC. The participants enjoyed the spirituality, accommodations, grounds, donkeys, and the food!

On December 4, the fifth annual Wreath Decorating was organized by the Committee. Live wreaths along with all the decorations were provided, along with snacks and drinks. This event has gained in popularity every year. The Committee had a day of glitter-filled bow-making and organizing of the decorations. We want to thank the husbands who helped to serve refreshments: Tony Gregoras, Chris Fallon and Ted Seibert.

Fellowship Time

Our time together in fellowship after the Sunday service is a vital way for us to connect as a church



community. We are incredibly grateful to the many volunteers who hosted this past year, allowing us to hold fellowship time Sundays throughout the year. In



addition, we were fortunate to have hosts for our four Newcomers Breakfasts and a lovely reception following Carols by Candlelight. Please find your name listed in this report!

Beyond the delicious food, these gatherings provided wonderful opportunities for us to be with one another. Thank you to everyone who helped make this possible.



COMMUNICATION AND FELLOWSHIP

Pride in the Park 2025



Approximately twenty parishioners and staff attended Pride in the Park on June 1, 2025. We were pleased to greet guests at our booth and distribute treats, including candy and fliers about our church offerings. It is always an honor for our church to attend this meaningful town event in support of our LGBTQIA+ neighbors, and appreciate Jennifer Franz's leadership in this area!



Newcomer's Breakfast

Four breakfasts were held over the course of the year: September, November, February and May. The Newcomers Breakfast is a time to meet with members of the St. Stephen Community. It is also a time



for Whitney to share working goals for the church and encourage members to find their place in the community. Eighteen newcomers attended each breakfast, hosted by approximately 12 St. Stephen's current members.

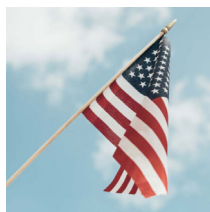
Social Media

Our social media posts on Facebook and Instagram migrated to the staff this year. A HUGE thank you to Ginny, Sue, Rev. Erika+ and Derrick for sharing in the creative responsibility in getting the word out. We continue to take feedback and suggestions on how to spread the word of the good things happening here.

Braver Angels - June 8, 2025, July 6, 2025

Braver Angels continued to give us good guidance on how to talk across differences on difficult topics. In May we offered Braver Angels' class – Depolarizing Within. We had approximately 30 people, from both the town and the church, reconsidering our tightly held beliefs about the “other side.”

June 8, 2025, was a last minute “debate” on whether an employee should expect their employer to meet their basic needs of adequate pay, healthcare, and retirement. It was a small but energetic group



 Braver Angels

that collectively recognized that federal programs allow non-profits and small businesses to thrive. Brave Angels continues to assist us in gaining skills for difficult conversations on entrenched beliefs and perspectives.

What Can I Do

What Can I Do is a weekly gathering that began in January 2024 in recognition that many people were seeking connection, clarity, and faithful ways to respond to the challenges of our time.

Recognizing that many people were feeling called to “do something” but were unsure what that might look like, the group formed as a space for prayer, reflection, learning, and connection. Without a fixed agenda, the gatherings emphasize community and discernment—listening for where God is at work, sharing questions, and helping participants identify



faithful, tangible ways to engage with issues they care about. Each meeting begins with reflection led by faith leaders, allows time for open dialogue, and concludes with Compline.

Over the past year, *What Can I Do* has explored a range of topics rooted in compassion, justice, and nonviolence. Conversations have included collective efforts for change, mutual aid and how it works in practice, faith perspectives on times of distress and uncertainty, and constructive tools for responding to societal challenges. The group has also taken part in shared initiatives, including organizing a Labor Day History Fair featuring U.S. labor history, a community trivia event, and a screening of *Matewan*. At the end of 2025 participants began collaborating on their largest undertaking to date: welcoming speakers from The King Center in Atlanta to present *Better Together*, a program grounded in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s six principles of nonviolence. Throughout the year, *What Can I Do* has served as a welcoming space for connection, thoughtful conversation, and faithful response.

Pot-Luck Suppers 2025

Join Us — One Year of Meeting with Intention



A year ago, about ten of us gathered around a table on a Wednesday evening, uncertain of what we might become. We've returned every week since—not because we are solving the world's biggest challenges, and not because we are more holy or scripturally literate than anyone else. Rather, we have discovered something more valuable: we don't have to face life's big stuff alone.

Our rhythm is simple: for about 60-90 minutes, we share a potluck meal, offer the highs and lows of our week, reflect on scripture together, and close in prayer. Within this structure, something profound unfolds. Week after week, we bring our whole selves—the questions that keep us awake, the transitions that unsettle us, and the hopes or insecurities we're afraid to voice.

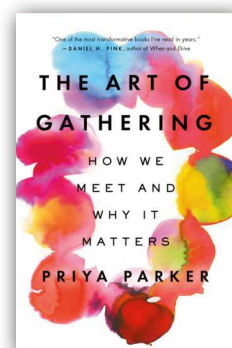
Many of us are navigating significant life milestones – celebrating birthdays, confronting illness, medical procedures or the realities of aging. Others are experiencing transitions in life and wrestling with what it means to make a difference in this new season. We share concerns about blaring headlines, democracy and name the shadows that haunt our days.

What we've learned is this: gathering in community doesn't necessarily change our circumstances. The diagnosis remains, the political landscape remains complex, the question marks about the future aren't magically resolved on Wednesday night. However, our outlook transforms. Burdens shared become lighter. Fears spoken aloud lose some of their power. A community is created.

Inspired by purposeful gathering and Priya Parker's book "The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters" — we have created a space where vulnerability is welcomed, where listening matters as much as speaking, where showing up consistently becomes an act of faithfulness. Wednesday nights have become sacred ground, not because we've escaped the messiness of life, but because we've chosen to wade through it together.

This is the gift of intentional community: not answers, but accompaniment. Not certainty, but solidarity. Not isolation but belonging.

All are welcome to join us on Wednesdays at 6:15 p.m. for a potluck dinner.





WORSHIP

Music in Worship

2025 was another strong year for the St. Stephen's Choir! Our full choir roster of regular members



numbers between 10 and 15 depending on the season. We offer beautiful music to glorify God and enrich worship and grow in our singing and musicianship skills. The choir is always welcoming new members. Be in touch with Derrick or any choir member if you would like to sing – or if you have family members or friends visiting who would like to sing! We have enjoyed having parents of parishioners join for a Sunday or two.

A pick-up choir sang throughout the summer as usual and



resumed regular rehearsals in the fall around Labor Day. We enjoyed extra-special musical offerings and a fantastic trumpeter for our 300th Anniversary Celebration in September, and on All Saints Sunday the St. Stephen's Choir offered Mozart's Missa Brevis in G Major with St. Stephen's own Lydia Toperzer, Kathleen Haaversen, Chris Fallon, and Thomas Carr as soloists. We welcomed a string ensemble to accompany the special music, and it was a beautiful way to celebrate the feast day. Each Sunday we enjoy presenting a variety of music in worship and are always looking to provide a good mix of the familiar and the new.

Worship Teams

We continue to work with our idea of worship teams to fill the lay leadership roles on Sunday mornings. This process has yet to take on the traction that was envisioned. However, those who have consistently served demonstrate a joy in getting to know other people, as well as a deeper worship experience. Ginny Fitzpatrick has consistently encouraged volunteerism. Together, she and Mother Whitney are pursuing ways to make signing up and changing dates easier in the 2026 year.



Livestream

In 2025, we continued the tradition of broadcasting our Sunday morning services and many other worship events on both our YouTube channel and our Facebook page. We originated 80 live streams from the Sanctuary last year. Our YouTube videos





generated nearly 30,000 views in 2025; about 5,000 of these views were during our live stream broadcasts, mostly on Sunday mornings. We now have 288 subscribers on YouTube, which is 59% higher than in 2024. YouTube reports that we have more than 1,100 unique viewers in our online audience base.

Live stream broadcasts remain on the Facebook and YouTube channels long after the worship service itself has ended, which gives our worldwide audience a chance to watch services and sermons at their convenience afterward. In fact, the viewership for these video replays is typically even higher than for the original live event.

In 2025, we began generating summaries of Sunday morning sermons using AI. Each sermon posted to YouTube now includes a one-paragraph summary of the content, as part of the textual description. By including these details in the description, our sermons are more likely to be found in search results. For example, a global Google search for “‘snow-day driving’ parable” leads directly to a video of Rev. Erika’s sermon at our church on the Third Sunday of Advent.

Altar Guild 2025

Altar Guild played an integral part of the weekend’s 300th anniversary celebration in September by decorating the church with portraits of our present and past Rectors and beautiful floral arrangements. Siobhan Santini was in the church that Saturday morning opening our front doors and greeting people who stopped in to learn a little more about our amazing church!



Altar Guild remains a small group of wonderful women willing to support Rev. Altopp and the whole congregation in their worship. This is such an important ministry, and we would be happy to have

anyone interested in joining, come and shadow us one Sunday morning.

Also, please consider contributing to our Flower Fund in memory or celebration of a loved one, so that we may continue to have gorgeous flowers each Sunday.

Blue Christmas Service

The annual Blue Christmas service was held on Sunday, Dec 14, 2025 at 4 in the afternoon. This ministry is an annual offering to the Ridgefield Community, in recognition that there are some for whom the holidays are not joyful. The bulletin shares, “We may be lonely, in mourning, feeling alienated and cast apart from family celebrations. We may be experiencing depression and sadness and yet, are often compelled to put on a happy face for others. There are years when we hurt at Christmas time and can’t enjoy the festivities as others seem to be able to do. We believe as we do these things together, God comes to shine light into our darkness.”



Approximately 30 souls came to our church to sit, pray, cry, and offer support. It included the choir, harpist, organist, and Rev. Hagan as officiant. We are so grateful to the loyal volunteers who help with planning this event and have built the tradition for over a decade. It is becoming both a holiday staple for some, and a meaningful ministry for those who attend and who facilitate.

Attentiveness to what participants need requires shifting from past traditions. At this time, space for prayer and vulnerability is of a higher priority to the community than fellowship and a reception time following. We will adjust our planning and communications for 2026 accordingly.

St. Stephen’s volunteers acted as planning team, lectors, ushers, fellowship hosts, and listening ears to those who needed to talk after the service. We offer thanks to: Minister of Music, Derrick Goff, and the St. Stephens Choir, Cynthia Armstrong, Steve Armstrong,



WORSHIP

Georgia Carrington, Chris Fallon, Karin Fallon, Lizzy Hanson, Bruce Lombardi, Libby Sassano, Lori Seibert, and Ted Seibert.

Evensong



The Choir offered Evensong in June for the Feast of Corpus Christi, and we welcomed the Rev'd Michael J.V. Clark, the Pastor of St. Paul's in Greenwich, Connecticut, as a guest preacher. Fr. Clark grew up singing at Exeter Cathedral and later at Cambridge and enjoyed being with St. Stephen's for the beautiful Anglican tradition of Choral Evensong.

Healing Prayer Services

The weekday morning Healing Prayer service, which started as a "try-on" in Advent of 2023, has become a regular part of the St. Stephen's weekly rhythm. It continued in 2025 Monday mornings, continuing the November 2024 rhythm through to Pentecost (with a break for Easter Week) and then took a "season after Pentecost" summer hiatus. It returned after Labor Day on Wednesday mornings through the end of the calendar year.

The services are about half an hour and are deeply contemplative – a space of quiet and calm. There is scripture reading, reflection, a litany of healing, and space for optional laying on of hands or anointing with holy oil.

Attendance is usually small – running from 3-8 people – but the number of people who attend overall is much larger. Nearly fifty-five St. Stephens members have dropped in for Healing Prayer at some point between 2024 and 2025, and community members

have walked in off the street several times.

In addition, the larger St Stephen's community now knows to contact the Rev. Erika or others who usually attend to ask for intercessory prayer for themselves or others at this Healing Prayer service. There is in an interplay of small intimate prayer interwoven with the health and life of the whole St. Stephen's community, which is enriching and spirit filled.

These services will continue in 2026 and are especially necessary in the tumult of this time in our nation.

Morning Prayer

December 14 was our first 8 a.m. Morning Prayer service. This service is being offered on Sunday for those who want an earlier worship experience in community. The first Sunday was led by Rob Locke of St. Thomas', Bethel, where he is a regular leader of Morning Prayer. Morning Prayer is a service that lay people can lead, even feel called to lead. A homily from Sermons that Work is shared, with the total length of service lasting approximately 35 minutes. Our attendance was always only 1-2 people throughout the end of 2025. Since people have requested an 8 a.m. service for convenience, perhaps it will prove to address that need in different seasons of the year.



2025 Outreach Report

February – Souper Bowl

We collect hearty soup on Super Bowl Sunday to donate to local food banks. This initiative helps the less fortunate – especially needed during the colder months. As always, the generosity of our parishioners is deeply appreciated.

May/June - Backpack Mission

This outreach project is in its 29th year at St. Stephen's! First we contacted Ridgefield Elementary Schools for their needs. We ask parishioners to sign out a backpack and fill according to the list inside or purchase items on one of the backpack lists or to donate \$40.00 for the purchase of backpacks.

- We collected \$1280.00. Thirty-five packs were purchased for \$712.23/supplies for \$215.23
- We also collected Target gift cards, which offset purchasing supplies.
- A total of 32 backpacks were distributed to Community Action, Family and Youth Services and two Ridgefield Elementary Schools

Total expenses: \$928.01

July Angel Tree Mission (Christmas in July)

This year St. Stephen's Church partnered with Hour Children, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting families impacted by incarceration, for a "Christmas in July" campaign. This special program brought holiday joy to the children of inmates served by Hour Children. Gift tags were available on a Christmas tree set up in the church's narthex, offering parishioners and Ridgefield community members an easy way to choose a gift for a child. We collected



24 gifts for ages 0-2; 35 gifts for 3-5 years; 52 gifts for 6-10 year olds and 43 gifts for ages 11 -17, as well as 32 gifts cards – which far exceeded all of our goals!

October Safe Walk



A St. Stephen's Safe Walk Team was set up online for donations, and parishioners were encouraged to also meet and walk with the Ridgefield group starting at Jesse Lee. St. Stephen's sponsored the Walk with a \$500 donation.

November In-Gathering



The Outreach committee prepared 100 bags with an attached list of food items for disbursement after church for two Sundays by the youth. We had a wonderful response! All donated

items went to the Community Action Food Bank for their Thanksgiving food pantry

December Alternative Giving

We offer parishioners the opportunity to donate to one of the following organizations in someone else's name, as a gift.

- Heifer
- House of Grace (veterans)
- Dorothy Day
- St. Joseph's Parenting Center

Once a donation was made the donor received an acknowledgement to include in a gift card and they then put a star on the Christmas tree in the Narthex to acknowledge donations. We had low turnout for this effort and thus are reflecting on the timing and the organizations.

Christmas Dinners

This year we worked in conjunction with Jesse Lee to prepare dinners, since they have a larger kitchen.

A team of great volunteers from both churches



OUTREACH

cooked a full Christmas Dinner for 6 shelters – including two that were new this year. We prepared 4 different side dishes to go with each meal – and, of course, dessert was included! We had a nice experience working together. This endeavor was at no cost to the church. Parishioners were asked to donate food items: turkeys, hams, pies and rolls. Other ingredients were donated by Community Action Food Bank. A parishioner shops, delivers and donates remaining needed ingredients.

Change the World

This year, at Nancy Murray's suggestion, the Outreach Committee is combining the "Change the World" and one dollar bills in the Sunday plate over a 3-month period to donate to one of our regular organizations. This has made for a larger donation amount for a larger impact. We were able to donate \$500 to the World Central Kitchen and \$527 to ARC. Additional donations were made to Interfaith Aids and IRIS.

Samaritan Garden Report 2025



We had a bountiful harvest this past year and had lots to give to Meals on Wheels and other deserving recipients.

Tomatoes for MOW	117 lbs.
Tomatoes for other	28 lbs.
Cucumbers for MOW	52 lbs.
Cucumbers for other	11 lbs.
Beans Green & Yellow for MOW	48 lbs.
Beans Green & Yellow for other	10 lbs.
Red Peppers for MOW	9 lbs.
Red Peppers for other	8 lbs.
Butternut Squash for other	17 lbs.
Italian and Curled Parsley not weighed for MOW	
Garlic saved for November planting	

Chapel on the Green



Located in New Haven, Trinity on the Green's ministry, called Chapel on the Green, provides the hungry and housing insecure a place to commune, break bread and share the word of the Lord. The church and its weekly volunteers provide a full meal, snacks, drinks and sometimes notes of encouragement and clothing to the guests. Chapel on the Green meets every week, rain or shine. It's a place to bring the community together with no obligation of attending the worship portion of the service to receive food.

In 2025, the Confirmation Class and other volunteers made the lunch sandwiches and packed it all up on a Saturday in March. The New Haven St. Patrick's Day Parade was on the day we volunteered, so they didn't hold the outdoor service at all and we had to drive up the food the day before since the roads were closed for the parade on Sunday. But the Chapel on the Green staff distributed the food and shared photos of them doing so with us.

Laundry Love 2025

Through Laundry Love of Greater Danbury, St. Stephen's continues to help to give the dignity of clean clothes to area residents who otherwise could not afford to go to a laundromat. On the second Wednesday of each month, volunteers give \$16 pay cards to people who are able to do their laundry at White Street Wash in





Danbury on that day. During the rest of the month, 16 local charitable organizations help to distribute pre-paid laundromat cards to their clients who are most in need. This past fiscal year, that added up to nearly \$38,000 given by 9 churches, 3 synagogues, and 39 other donors and organizations to fund over 6,000 laundry loads.

Partnering with Literacy Volunteers on the Green, LLGD volunteers offer free children's books and English language tutoring information to adult learners. We also collaborate with the manufacturer of Earth Breeze detergent to give out no-cost, environmentally friendly detergent sheets.

Georgia Carrington, Frances Kimball, and Chris Kimball are regular LLGD volunteers and leaders from St. Stephen's.

Hour Children at Bedford Hills



At Bedford Hills Women's Prison, Hour Children plays a vital role in supporting incarcerated mothers and their children. The organization operates the on site Residential Nursery, where mothers can live with their infants for up to 18 months, and provides daily care through the Child Development Center. Hour Children also enriches family visits with child friendly playrooms, offers transportation for visiting children, and provides parenting education and advocacy so mothers can remain connected to their children's lives and well being throughout their incarceration.

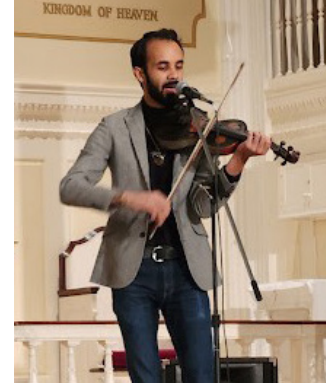
Black History Month Concert

In February 2025 St. Stephen's welcomed acclaimed folk musician, scholar, and activist Jake Blount in

concert. We were lucky to experience one of contemporary folk music's most innovative and thoughtful performers in the intimate setting of St. Stephen's historic sanctuary. Blount has earned recognition for his

groundbreaking work in reclaiming and recentering often-overlooked voices in American folk traditions. His music spans traditional spirituals, blues, and Appalachian folk songs, interpreted through his contemporary lens and informed by his intensive research into historical

African American musical traditions. As a skilled multi-instrumentalist proficient on banjo and fiddle, his performances showcase not only his musical excellence but also his deep knowledge of American folk music history. His work has been featured by prestigious organizations including NPR, Rolling Stone, and Billboard, and he has performed at renowned venues and festivals across the country. We were thrilled to have Jake with us and learned so much from his informative offering.





FAITH FORMATION

Sunday Morning Storytime



Storytime is held during the 10 a.m. worship service each Sunday for children ages 3 to about 10 with older youth and parents helping out as needed. Our Associate for Youth and Children's Ministry, Sue Vogelman, leads the children down to the choir room



during the Song of Praise. There we sing songs, light candles on our children's altar, look at the liturgical calendar, notice the seasonal colors, and read the Gospel. Sometimes we reenact the story using costumes and props like the Baptism of Jesus

or the calling of the disciples from their boats. We also often experience the Gospel as a Godly Play presentation with wooden figures, felt backdrops and simple props, and sometimes we read picture storybooks that have a similar theme or lesson included. We always end with questions that wonder about the story and how it relates to our lives using hands-on activities, games, crafts or conversations. We also learn about prayer and different ways we can pray. Children receive weekly bulletins with Gospel-related activities before returning to the service at The Peace



to celebrate Holy Communion with families. We average about 12 children each Sunday at Storytime with up to 25 at special services. Additional adult and older youth volunteers are needed to assist at Storytime for Safe Church – no experience required – just a love of God and kids! We thank all of you who have volunteered!

VBS



We had about 50 youth helpers and campers at VBS this year. Our theme was Compassion Camp: What Every Living Thing Needs. VBS

included outdoor games, crafts, snack, music and story time for three hours on five days in late August. Each day we had a kick-off gathering and we ended each day with a special closing that wrapped up the lessons of the day. We held a youth helper get-together after camp one day and had 12 youth stay for pizza, games, and conversation.



This VBS included activities that taught us to care for our environment including learning about monarch butterflies with a visit from an expert who brought us live butterflies to release together. We did science experiments about water, made binoculars to explore our beautiful world, and discovered what the word compassion means and how to be more compassionate to our world and its people. We even





made 60 sandwiches which were distributed at the Dorothy Day House lunch ministry.

A special thank you to our adult volunteers who made VBS such a success: Jennifer Franz – Craft/ Science/Campfire Stories Helper all 5 days; Kate Fitzpatrick – Snack Leader all 5 days; Millie Altopp – Music Leader all 5 days plus Millie made us amazing dance videos for each of our songs; Rob Kinnaird – Expert Window Opening and Closing and Cleanup 5 days; Lauren Tarantino – Recreation Leader 4 days outside; Cee Moreyn – Recreation Leader 1 day and Campfire Stories 1 day; Denise Loeber – Snack Helper 2 days; Robin Brown – Yoga Leader; Libby Sassano – Campfire Stories; The Rev. Erika Hagan – Campfire Stories and all the St. Stephen's staff, parents, and parishioners who helped in so many ways big and small!



Confirmation



Our Confirmation Class started up in the fall of 2024 and has 12 youth confirmands and 12 non-related adult mentors. We are continuing to use the new curriculum and two-year format using Confirm, Not

Conform which has led us to some wonderful caring conversations about our faith, our world, and our lives. The Confirmation service is on May 16 this year. Thank you to our volunteer mentors for supporting these young people on their faith journey.

Youth Confirmands:

- Claire Demas
- Duncan Hinkley
- Gabriel Simard
- Holden Hughes
- Hugh Ferrarone
- Jack Moskowitz
- Kai Hagan
- Kelly Fitzpatrick
- Matthew Prichard
- Miles Olsen
- Natalie Mettler
- Will Rebori

Mentors:

- Barbara Lawrence
- Cee Moreyn
- Colleen Cash Madeira
- Jennifer Franz
- Jim Brown
- Keith Carlson
- Libby Sassano
- Noel Baldwin
- Nora Cascella
- Pamela Back
- Tom Carr
- Tony Gregoras
- Shelley Keyes, Co-Leader

Life Long Learning

Our Life Long Learning Group consists of parishioners who like to read. The Decker Fund sponsors the books, so that each one, regardless of the cover price, is offered for \$10/book. Every month to six weeks, a new book is selected and then discussed on Zoom. Members of the group take turns leading.

The books for the year included:

- The Women
- Brooklyn & Long Island
- Hamnet
- Island of the Sea Women
- Intermezzo
- The First Ladies
- James
- The God of the Woods
- The Patron Saint of Liars
- Heart Lamp

Participants this year included: Linda Hughs, Karin Fallon, Harriet Dewey, Jean Jaykus, Reby Townsend, Georgia Carrington, Shelley Keyes, Frances Kimball, Peggy Thomas, Eileen McIntyre, Bonnie Figgatt, Kitsey Snow, Helen Smith, Sue McKnight, Gail Twomey, and



FAITH FORMATION

Lori Seibert. We are always open to new members who would like to read and discuss some awesome books.

Music with Mr. Derrick



Mr. Derrick comes down to Storytime every few weeks to teach us a song. Sometimes we come up to sing for the congregation at the main worship service as we did on the day of our Blessings of the Animals this October. Mr. Derrick teaches us the correct way to sing in church, how to project and use our beautiful voices, while having fun praising God! We love singing with Mr. Derrick!

The Path Ahead

While the work of Associate for Caring Ministries often includes supporting individuals on their faith formation, there was a community program offered in 2025 worthy of highlighting for the St. Stephens community.

In February and March 2025, Rev. Erika+ attended a weekly virtual facilitator training through Lifelong Learning at the Virginia Theological Seminary for a workshop called The Path Ahead: Spirituality and Purpose in Later Life. This workshop is a six-part curriculum on the spirituality of aging designed for small groups and team facilitation from Seabury's Congregational Resources program.

Participants grapple with ageism, identify changing spiritual needs, equip themselves with new prayer practices, and engage in discernment about God's continuing call.

Rev. Erika+ led an in-person session of The Path

Ahead in the fall of 2025, on Tuesday afternoons October 7, 14, 28 and November 4 and 11, ending with the final gathering on Sunday November 23 following Sunday worship. The workshop was geared towards people age 60 and older to align with the focus of the church's Decker Fund. It proved to be popular, with 13 registrations and 18 participants (guests and drop-ins were welcome) over the 6 weeks. To open up this workshop to those who could not attend in person on a weekday, a virtual Sunday afternoon offering is planned for the Lenten season in 2026.

It is a joy to walk with St. Stephen's members on their faith journeys, individually and in group programs. There is a wealth of life experience and wisdom in our community, and the work of connecting us to one another in our faith formation continues in 2026.

Global Philanthropy Leaders (GPL)



Co-taught by parishioner Rich Stein, and Sue Vogelmann, Associate for Youth and Family Ministry, Global Philanthropy Leaders is an initiative developed at St. Stephen's that allows our high schoolers to make the world a better place by lending money to budding entrepreneurs in some of the poorest countries in the world. Our youth also learn that loving one's neighbor isn't a matter of geography, but a matter of having a moral stance. During 2025, our youth made 121 loans, \$25 at a time, using church funds, in a thoughtful, diligent way, resulting in repayment rates that far exceed the average lender on the kiva.org website that we use to find loans. Thanks to our youth taking this seriously, the



excellent repayment rate of almost 98.8% means that we are still using the original church funds from 2017.

Some of the topics that we discussed include Immigration, Birth Rates, Prosperity; The Impact of Tariffs; and Exploring Currency Exchange Rates and more. We also start each of our monthly lessons with Dwelling in the Word, an ancient practice that allows our youth to reflect on a specific Bible passage that relates to the curriculum for the day. Our youth frequently have a fresh take on Bible verses that demonstrates insight and compassion far beyond their years. It is exciting to hear what they will come up with next!

It is our hope that if you have a teenager in your house, or know of a teenager inside or outside of the church who might benefit from the opportunity to help people financially while growing spiritually, please contact us about participating in the Fall. We look forward to hosting a presentation to the parish on May 3, 2026, after the service to allow our youth to share what they have learned and what they have accomplished.

Middle School Youth Group

In 2025, our Middle School-aged youth got together as part of our greater youth and parish events to help others while having fun at the same time. We went ice skating, played games at our kick-off, walked together at the Ridgefield Safe Walk, made sandwiches and brownies for Dorothy Day House, helped at VBS, helped with outreach projects such as Christmas in July, and the In-Gathering for Thanksgiving. We're planning some more fun this spring with another trip to the Fayerweather lighthouse in May.

Caring Assertiveness Book

Stephen Ministries, St Louis, LLC, continues to put out rich material for spiritual growth. Two groups of approximately six people each, read and discussed this book. Individuals grew in their ability to relate honestly and respectfully on matters extremely important for them.

Journey through the Bible

Approximately a dozen people set out to read

The Path, gaining familiarity with the salvation story of scripture in a broad sense. Two times a month this group has gathered for an hour to discuss and reflect on the text. Our meeting will continue on through the spring of 2026. People are building new relationships and a greater sense of God's love for them in the process.

Women's Retreat 2025



This year's Mary Brewster Fund-sponsored retreat dove deep into the theme of "Facing Reality, Naming the Truth, & Claiming the Love: Living a Faithful Life in Troubled Times". The retreat was held at the beautiful Trinity Retreat Center and led by The Rev. Dr. Mark Bozzuti-Jones. The theme was scaffolded by readings from the Bible, well-known spiritual writers and times of silence. We held deep discussions on facing reality both in the country and our individual lives, identifying where we need to be honest in our lives, and revealing how our faith helps us to be true, as well as how our actions reveal the love of God. The retreat was a special time of sharing and revealing God's love for one another.



SUPPORTING MINISTRIES

St. Stephen's Investment Committee Report

Investment Manager Overview: As approved by the Vestry, in March 2025, the Investment Committee implemented the decision, to invest St. Stephens' endowments with Morgan Stanley, a well-known and respected Wall Street money manager after an extensive RFP process. The monies were transferred and invested according to Environment, Social, and Governance ("ESG") filters and in accordance with the asset class allocation ranges established in our St. Stephen's Investment Policy Statement ("IPS"), previously approved by Vestry.

The administrative process for switching money managers was largely completed during Q2, with some specialized reporting commencing later in the year necessitated by our plethora of purpose-specific endowment funds. There was a lot of effort put forth by St Stephen's folks, staff and volunteers, as well as the Morgan Stanley team to set up the back-office processes, but all is working according to plan.

During Q3, Morgan Stanley presented specific options for Alternative Investments "(Alts)" in keeping with our IPS. Alternative Investments are a way of reducing overall portfolio risk by investing in non-correlated asset classes to reduce overall portfolio volatility, as our parish is heavily dependent on our draws from the endowment and can ill-afford a series of negative performance years.

Investment Results: (as of January 2026) Financial markets demonstrated resilience in 2025, extending the bull market that began in late 2022, as stocks weathered interest-rate changes, the implementation of significant tariff rates, and drastic changes in U.S. foreign policy, and the ups and downs of the Magnificent 7 stocks. The S&P 500 posted a gain of approximately 18% in 2025, including dividends. While there were some notable downturns during the year, they were followed by quick recoveries.

Advances in the U.S. and other developed markets led to positive returns globally, with emerging markets leading developed markets, which proves the point that maintaining a diversified portfolio with exposure to many different asset classes pays

off in the long run. The U.S. Federal Reserve made three interest rates cuts of ¼% each, Overall, US bond prices increased slightly over the course of the year. The 10-year U.S. Treasury benchmark fell more, pushing its spot yield to 4.18% as of the end of 2025. The year 2026 looks to be uncertain, as questions loom over the gargantuan investments in AI and when they will pay off, the impact of tariffs and trade wars, shifting geopolitical alliances, as well as the U.S. mid-term elections.

Committee Membership:

- Halley Bysshe
- Bruce Lombardi
- Rich Stein, Chair
- Parish Financial Administrator, ex officio

As of December 31, 2025, the market value of the combined endowments of St. Stephen's was 16,175,740.61, an increase of 9.93% year-over-year.

SUPPORTING MINISTRIES



Detailed performance information is summarized in the table below.

Morgan Stanley Performance 2025 MTD, QTD and YTD

(note that MS took over the portfolio as of Mar 31, 2025)

Investment Summary

St. Stephen's Church

TWR % (NET OF FEES)	
	Quarter to Date (\$) 09/30/25-12/31/25
Beginning Total Value	15,858,436
Net Contributions/Withdrawals	-131,605
Total Income Received	78,669
Appreciation/Depreciation	374,015
Ending Total Value	16,179,515
TIME WEIGHTED RATE OF RETURN (%) (Annualized for periods over 12 months)	
Return % (Net of Fees)	2.87
St Stephens Custom Bench w alts	2.03
60 MSCI AC World 40 BC Agg	2.46
S&P 500 Total Return	2.66

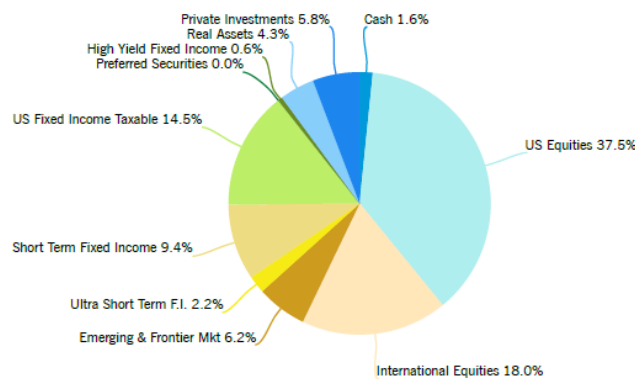
Allocation

Asset Allocation with Unrealized Gain/Loss

St. Stephen's Church

Data as of December 31, 2025

ASSET ALLOCATION - ASSET CLASS





SUPPORTING MINISTRIES

Property Committee Annual Report

In 2025, St. Stephen's Property Committee carried forward its stewardship of the campus with remarkable energy and dedication. Major infrastructure upgrades, essential repairs, and thoughtful preservation work ensured that our buildings remain safe, reliable, and welcoming for all who gather, worship, and serve here.

Major Improvements



Rectory: Thanks to funding from the Anne Richardson Foundation, the aging oil-based heating system was removed, 600 feet of asbestos were abated, and new high-efficiency gas boilers and an on-demand water heater were installed.



Volunteers assisted with the basement clean out, and coordination with Eversource ensured proper gas service.

North Hall: Both rooftop HVAC units were replaced with modern, energy efficient Carrier systems. The ADA door project, funded by the Parishioner Fund, was completed with a new storefront door, electrical upgrades, an automatic opener, and final trim and tile work.



Sanctuary Repairs & Restoration

Steeple & Ceiling:

The steeple railings were thoroughly scraped, primed, and repainted, with repairs made to areas where the spindle rails had begun to rot. Additionally, sections of the ceiling that showed water stains were repainted. Together, these projects improved both the appearance and long-term durability of our worship space.

Lightning Strike Response: After a September lightning strike, volunteers led an exceptional



restoration effort. Stef Karlson and the Arborscape team repaired nearly 380 feet of exterior downlighting, while Richard Cutting and Jonathan Taylor guided a full PA system restoration. With PASCOM's installation of a new digital audio matrix, the system was fully restored with minimal

disruption to worship and streaming.

Organ Blower Repair: A rare mechanical failure—unsolved even by Yale's organ curators—was diagnosed and repaired by Rob Kinnaird, who replaced a failed flex coupling, realigned shafts, and fabricated new bedding. His expertise returned the organ to full operation.



Campus Safety, Compliance & Efficiency

Fire Marshal deficiencies were corrected, quarterly fire suppression checks passed without issue, and potable water testing confirmed safe lead levels. Efficiency improvements included new storm windows in Rector's Hall and the insulation of more than 190 feet of Sanctuary heating pipes. Solar feasibility was also evaluated for potential savings.

Grounds & Interior Work

Routine maintenance was carried out throughout the year, with a particular focus on preparing the campus for our 300th anniversary. The Meadow in the Middle was planted and dedicated, creating a landscape that supports pollinators. The Community Garden fence was first temporarily stabilized, then fully replaced, providing essential support for the volunteers who sustain this





shared ministry. Interior projects included repainting the Meeting Barn, repainting the Sanctuary Lounge, and completing various heating and lighting repairs.

Looking Ahead

The Property Committee enters 2026 with plans to enhance the kitchen and banquet facilities in Rector's Hall, repaint the Church steeple, repair the Sanctuary front steps, seal the parking lot and continue the multi-year exploration process to restore the Rectory porches. Funding remains essential, and the committee's steady stewardship, especially the leadership of Chair Bill Murrell, is central to this work.

The accomplishments of 2025 reflect a shared commitment to caring for the spaces that sustain our worship, fellowship, and ministry. Through major projects, thoughtful repairs, and ongoing maintenance, the Property Committee helped ensure that St. Stephen's remains a safe, welcoming, and well cared for home for our parish and community.

Property Committee Members: Bill Murrell, Stef Karlson, Rob Kinnaird, John Kukulka, Richard Cutting, Jonathan Taylor, Libby Sassano, Lauren VanMeter

Stewardship 2025

Our commitment to growing the spiritual discipline of stewardship took 3 distinct forms in 2025:

- focusing our outreach efforts in Ridgefield and the surrounding communities
- assisting people in getting involved with time and talent through the Welcome Table
- messaging our fall annual giving campaign with "Rooted in Abundance" as the theme

The Outreach Committee determined a monthly giving focus and creatively organized them so the congregation could easily get involved. The stewardship message is that each of us has enough to give to those in need.

The Welcome Table was in operation during fellowship time during September and October. The four volunteers who hosted this table shared information and answered questions towards the end goal of helping people get involved. The stewardship

message was that in giving of our time and talent, we receive.

The Fall Giving Campaign theme, with the theme of "Rooted in Abundance", used resources from The Episcopal Network on Stewardship (TENS). Special thanks to our Sr. Warden, Jennifer Franz, for leading that effort since we didn't have a Stewardship Committee. The stewardship message was that the roots of our faith in God's abundance sustain us and make us fruitful.

Sunday Nursery

Our Sunday morning nursery continues to welcome our youngest parishioners to the lower level of North Hall in the beautiful RCK preschool room. This allows our little ones to enjoy playing with age-appropriate toys alongside our awesome paid staff caregiver, Miss Margaret Cush, who also works in the Ridgefield Public Schools. She was assisted by Anna D'Jay in 2025, and in 2026 we welcomed Noalee Darragh as our Nursery Assistant. We have an average of 2 to 5 adorable children each Sunday in our Nursery.

Personnel

No adjustments were made to personnel in 2025. This stable and strong staff team continues to work collaboratively and creatively in service to St. Stephen's. The thing of note is that Ginny Fitzpatrick, our parish administrator, marked 25 years of service to St. Stephen's in 2025!! Special thanks to Helen Smith for leading the charge to update our Personnel Handbook – a first since 2010.

Decker Fund Committee

Deep gratitude is owed to Carol Decker whose bequest to St. Stephen's supports the Decker Fund Committee. Our outreach is to parishioners aged 60+ with opportunities and programs which enrich and connect those of us who are the older children of God. In 2025, the Life Long Learners group continued with their monthly Zoom gatherings reading and discussing books of interest. Please let us know if you'd like to join this! Participants pay \$10 per book with the remainder of the cost covered by the Fund.



SUPPORTING MINISTRIES

Our Bible study continued from 2024 until June of 2025. This group studied the book of Acts, Paul's letters, and the lectionary readings. After a summer break, we all decided to participate in Rev. Erika's class, The Path Ahead for our fall offering which was a meaningful experience

Thanks to Lori Seibert, the Decker Fund sponsored a trip to the Morgan Library. Fifteen parishioners enjoyed a private tour of the library, including an exhibit celebrating the work of Belle de Costa Greene. Some of the attendees met afterwards for a Dim Sum lunch.

Aside from programming, the Decker Fund helps support the salary for Rev. Erika Hagan, our Associate for Caring Ministries at St. Stephen's. She has brought many wonderful offerings to our age group along with events for those of all ages which you can read about in the Caring Ministries portion of this annual report.

Other ways the Decker Fund has supported parishioners is to defray expenses for our age group so that all can join us in the varied activities.

Contact Libby Sassano with any ideas or questions: mrslibby11@gmail.com

Parishioners' Fund

In 2025, the Parishioners' Fund provided financial assistance to parishioners who were "sick or in want," as per the terms of the bequest donated to St. Stephen's by Louisa Hitchcock in 1979. The money in the Hitchcock endowment can only be used for parishioner assistance to help bridge the gap while a long-term solution is developed.

Specifically, we assisted 30 parishioners for a total of \$432,679 funding spent. This is a 11% increase in assistance compared to last year, which was a total of about \$384,000.

The fund covers such expenses as general financial needs, medical assistance, as well as counseling. The Fund continued to cover out-of-pocket costs of counseling, regardless of the provider, for any member of the parish who requested the assistance. (There is no requirement for the parishioner

to demonstrate financial need with regards to counseling costs.)

In addition, the Fund paid for two-thirds of the services provided to the parish by our Associates for Caring Ministries, The Rev Erika Hagan. The Fund also has been assisted by a volunteer expert drawn from the financial world who has provided professional financial counseling to assist those parishioners in managing their liabilities and expenses.

We are truly blessed to have this fund and will continue to support parishioners in need. The Parishioners' Fund committee is committed to confidentially supporting all of our parishioners, especially during these times of uncertainty, financial insecurity, and worry. We have a Fund that is available precisely for parishioners who are experiencing financial or emotional distress, be it job or medical related, or other needs. Please reach out to Mother Whitney, Rev Erika or a member of the committee if you might need some assistance. We can be a resource to help you bridge the gap. The hardest part is asking for help, but we are here for you in confidence.



Baptism

Nathan Haak McKinley
Ann Therese Emmetsberger
John Thomas Emmetsberger
Emilia Rosalie Garay
Luca Joseph Garay
Oliver Graham Garay
Henry Stewart Cleary
Serafina Camelle Rudolph

Burial

Alicia Iskric
Robert M. Dewey, Jr.
Roy Clark Kohli
Carol Ann O'Leary
Nancy Norton Pastula
Lois Maxine Clark
Marilyn Ann Olsen
Harold Eugene Saxton
Janet Media Morrison
Dolores Capone
John A. Bonanno
David M. Gushikuma
Richard T. Kinne
Barbara Goodhue Smith



SENIOR WARDEN'S REPORT

This past year has been one of celebration, reflection, and meaningful transition in the life of our parish.

A central focus of our shared life together were the Engagement Meetings designed to help us prayerfully and collectively discern the future of our church. These gatherings created space for honest conversation, deep listening, and faithful imagination about who we are called to be in the years ahead. I am deeply grateful to everyone who participated through showing up with openness and love for this community. This work is not quick or easy, but it is holy work, and it reflects our commitment to stewarding this parish for future generations.

This year was also marked by the extraordinary joy of celebrating our 300th anniversary. The celebration was a powerful reminder that we are part of something far bigger than ourselves, generations of faithful people who have worshiped, served, and built this community across three centuries. It was moving to see how many people contributed their time, talents, and energy to bring us together in celebration. The anniversary was not only a look back at our history, but a reminder of the responsibility and privilege we hold as current stewards of this church's legacy.

Again and again this year, I have been moved by the ways parishioners have shown up for one another and for the wider community. Through outreach, worship, children and youth ministry, fellowship, pastoral care, and all the behind-the-scenes service, this parish continues to be a place where people encounter compassion, generosity, and hope. In moments both joyful and difficult, this community shows what it means to live out our faith in tangible ways.

Behind the scenes, the parish also undertook a significant operational and financial transition. The shift from QuickBooks Desktop to QuickBooks Online was not simply a software change; it required thoughtful review of processes, roles, and internal controls. This work involved restructuring how financial information flows, how responsibilities are shared, and how we ensure transparency and accountability. While complex at times, this transition positions the church moving forward for greater continuity and accessibility. I am grateful to all those who dedicated significant time and care to making this transition successful.

Looking ahead, we will remain grounded in faith, guided by discernment, and committed to caring for one another and our community. The conversations we have begun about the future of our church will continue to shape how we prioritize ministry, steward resources, and welcome new opportunities for mission and growth. With prayer, collaboration, and trust in God's guidance, we can be well positioned to continue living out our calling as a church that serves, welcomes, and loves boldly.

I am continually thankful for the faithfulness, generosity, and commitment of this parish. It has been a privilege to serve as Senior Warden and to witness the ways God is at work among us.

With gratitude,

Jennifer Franz



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Ridgefield, CT

Sunday, Mar 22, 2026

- Opening Devotional
- Sr. Warden Address
- Table Work
- Recognition of Outgoing Leadership
- Election of Vestry and Parish Officers
- Budget presentation
- Acceptance of Budget
- Closing Prayer



VOLUNTEERS

Lessie Alexandre	Tom Carr	Duncan Hinkley	Ella Moskowitz	Helen Smith
Amanda Alfieri	Georgia Carrington	Grayson Hinkley	Jack Moskowitz	Kelsey Smith
Darrell Alfieri	Nora Cascella	Jessica Hinkley	Cameron Moss	Kitsey Snow
Beatrice Altopp	Margaret Cush	Jonathan Hinkley	Annie Mulgrew	Anne Stein
Gabe Altopp	Mimi Cushing	Kiera Hinkley	Bill Murrell*	Rich Stein
Michael Altopp	Richard Cutting	Holden Hughes	Will Newman	Lauren Tarantino
Millie Altopp	Marc DeLuca	Linda Hutchings	Nina Newman	Michael Taylor
Vivian Altopp	Claire Demas	Jean Jaykus	Marshall Odeen	Jonathan Taylor
Whitney Altopp	George Demas	Tara Karlson	Benjamin Olsen	Peggy Thomas
Cynthia Armstrong	Rachel Demas	Stef Karlson	Janine Olsen	Lydia Toperzer
Steve Armstrong	Christine DiCamillo	Bob Keyes	Miles Olsen	Reby Townsend
Paul Attaguile	Augusta Duffey	Eleanor Keyes	Val Ondes	Gail Twomey
Sterling Bachman	Josephine Duffey	Shelley Keyes	Chris O'Neill	Mike Twomey
Laurie Bachmann	Meta Anne Ela	Chris Kimball	Dave Otis	Lauren Van Meter
Peter Bachmann	Brock Emmetsberger	Frances Kimball	Elise Perri	Elisabeth Vieselmeyer
Pamela Back	Karin Fallon	Rob Kinnaird	Jane Petroff	Maddie Vieselmeyer
Noel Baldwin	Chris Fallon	Tim Klavana	Kim Philbin	Sue Vogelman
Anne Beatty	George Ferrarone	John Kukulka	Amy Polacko	Jeff Vreeland
Sarah Bernhardt	John Ferrarone	Barbara Lawrence	Matthew Prichard	Kathy Wong
Linda Berry	Hugh Ferrarone	Bill Lawrence	Melissa Raymond	Alison Zuckert
Kim Bishop	Katy Ferrarone	Angela Liptack	Emily Rebori	
Chris Bishop	Bonnie Figgatt	Jim Liptack	Will Rebori	
Bill Bliss	Tom Figgatt	Christy Llanos	Todd Rebori	
Lynn Bliss	Ginny Fitzpatrick	Denise Loeber	Ashley Roberts	
Ashley Brown	Kate Fitzpatrick	Bruce Lombardi	Andy Robertson	
Emily Brown	Kelly Fitzpatrick	Marie Londrigan	Annette Robertson	
Jim Brown	Nora Fitzpatrick	Colleen Cash Madeira	Mike Rodgers	
Robin Brown	Paul Fitzpatrick	Eileen McIntyre	Kathy Ryan	
Parker Brown	Jennifer Franz	Tom McIntyre	Mike Ryan	
Eileen Burton	Matthew Franz	Brian McKinley	Emily Santella	
Glenys Burton	Josephine Franzese	Emily McKinley	Chris Santini	
Halley Bysshe	Derrick Goff	Michael McKnight	Siobhan Santini	
James Bysshe	Rebecca Greenlee	Sue McKnight	Libby Sassano	
Peter Bysshe	Lee Gregoras	Eve Mencher	Ted Seibert	
Porter Bysshe	Tony Gregoras	Natalie Mettler	Lori Seibert	
Mike Campbell	Kathleen Haaversen	Rebecca Mettler	Peter Shanley	
Kate Campbell	Kai Hagan	Tami Min	Amelie Simard	
Claire Campbell	Erika Hagan	Cee Moreyn	Claire Simard	
Page Campbell	Mark Hannah	Martha Morris	Gabe Simard	
Keith Carlson	Lizzy Hanson	Geoffrey Morris	Nick Simard	
Jeannine Carr	Jack Herr	Adam Moskowitz	Brendan Smith	

MINUTES OF 299TH MEETING



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Ridgefield, CT
Sunday, March 30, 2025

Annual Meeting of the Parish Minutes

Mother Whitney opened the meeting with a prayer.

Moved to have the Clerk take the 2025 Annual Meeting of the Parish Minutes.

Moved to accept the Annual Meeting of the Parish Minutes from 2024.

The consent agenda was adopted.

The business agenda was adopted. The business agenda has been revised to include the devotional as part of the table exercise.

Devotional and Gratitude and Vision Table Work (Mother Whitney)

What is something(s) you are grateful for from past parishioners from St. Stephen's?

What is something that future generations will be grateful for from the parishioners from St. Stephen's today?

As a part of the discernment process planning for May/early June engagement meetings with parishioners for the future vision of St. Stephen's Church

- Looking to train facilitators to lead these meetings the weekend of May 4th

Sr. Warden's Address (Rich)

Reviewed accomplishments from the previous 4 years

Expand the leadership of Church

- Encourage parishioners to take the Ministry Match survey
- Increase our capacity as a Welcoming Church
- Potluck dinners
- Expand our capabilities to fund long-term capital expenses
- RCK lease
- Parking lot rentals
- Reviewed grant applications

Outgoing Leadership (Mother Whitney)

Recognition of outgoing leadership:

- Rich Stein



MINUTES OF 299TH MEETING

Election of Vestry and Parish Officers (Mother Whitney)

Bob Keyes to move the slate for election, seconded by Noel Baldwin:

Slate of Vestry Candidates:

- Halley Bysshe (2028)
- Noel Baldwin (2028)

Slate of Office Candidates:

- Jennifer Franz for Senior Warden (2026)
- Andy Robertson for Junior Warden (2026)
- Bruce Lombardi for Treasurer (2026)
- Peter Shanley for Assistant Treasurer (2026)
- Ashley Roberts for Clerk (2026)

Motion passed.

Acceptance of the Budget (Bruce Lombardi)

David moved, seconded by Anne Stein:

Overview of budget summary as provided at the Budget forum and as approved by the Vestry.

Motion passed.

Stewardship Update (Judy)

Note: Agenda item was inadvertently not covered at the Annual Meeting

Closing Prayer (Mother Whitney)

Bruce Lombardi so moved, seconded by Noel Baldwin.

Meeting adjourned at 12:50 pm.

We recognize:

Members of the Class of '26 - Kate Fitzpatrick and Tom Figgatt

Tom Carr - Chair of the Parishioners' Fund

Jonathan Taylor - IT support

Georgia Carrington - Altar Guild

2024 FINANCIAL ANNUAL REPORT



St. Stephens Church 2025 Operating Statement and 2026 Budget						
	2025 Actual	2025 Budget	2025 Variance to Budget	2026 Budget	2026 Budget v. 2025 Actual	
Operating Revenue:						
Pledge	\$ 361,550	\$ 377,500	\$ (15,950)	\$ 400,000	\$ 38,450	
Plate	43,005	41,000	2,005	52,405	9,400	
Grant Income	58,892	84,794	(25,902)	70,442	11,550	
Rental Income	71,599	73,120	(1,521)	74,120	2,521	
Fund Raising Revenue	-	50,000	(50,000)	70,000	70,000	
300th Anniversary Income	23,500	30,900	(7,400)	-	(23,500)	
Other Operating Revenue	30,592	9,450	21,142	37,100	6,508	
Total Operating Revenue	589,139	666,764	(77,625)	704,067	114,928	
Operating Expense:						
Diocesan Common Mission Support	84,585	84,585	-	84,585	-	
Parish Outreach	5,253	15,000	(9,747)	23,500	18,247	
Personnel Expense	595,881	605,164	(9,283)	622,735	26,854	
Administration / IT	60,755	51,350	9,405	62,550	1,795	
Property	127,122	172,018	(44,896)	162,807	35,685	
Property - Repair	30,295	33,844	(3,549)	52,020	21,725	
Education	12,116	7,900	4,216	12,250	134	
Music	23,481	14,850	8,631	17,110	(6,371)	
300th Anniversary Expense	43,863	51,925	(8,062)	-	(43,863)	
Other Operating Expense	36,936	15,889	21,047	16,425	(20,511)	
Total Operating Expense	1,020,287	1,052,525	(32,238)	1,053,982	33,695	
Operating Income/(Deficit)	(431,148)	(385,761)	(45,387)	(349,915)	81,233	
Withdrawals From Invested Funds:						
Fund for Ministry	15,868	15,868	-	17,555	1,687	
Beebe Fund	25,336	25,338	(2)	28,033	2,697	
Evergreen Legacy	5,600	5,601	(1)	6,196	596	
Unrestricted Endowment	238,552	238,552	-	257,106	18,554	
Excess Unrestricted Endowment Withdrawal	250,000	250,000	-	-	(250,000)	
Total Withdrawals from Invested Funds	535,356	535,359	(3)	308,890	(226,466)	
Net after Endowment Withdrawals	104,208	149,598	(45,390)	(41,025)	(4,365)	
Capital Projects:						
Church	37,850	33,500	4,350	95,200	57,350	
Rectory	121,886	170,000	(48,114)	67,900	(53,986)	
North Hall	49,733	20,605	29,128	43,376	(6,357)	
Grounds	11,868	35,000	(23,132)	35,000	23,132	
Total Capital Projects	221,337	259,105	(37,768)	241,476	20,139	
Less Capital Grants	66,000	66,000	-	60,000	(6,000)	
Net Capital Projects	155,337	193,105	(37,768)	181,476	26,139	
Net after Capital Projects	\$ (51,129)	\$ (43,507)	\$ (7,622)	\$ (222,501)	\$ (171,372)	



300TH CELEBRATION

St. Stephen's Cookbook

St. Stephen's officially kicked off our 300th-anniversary celebrations with the publication of a church cookbook. This collection includes favorite recipes from past and present parishioners as well as staff members.

We would like to thank the committee—Erika Hagan, Lizzy Hanson, and Janine Olsen—for their hard work on this project.

The book is dedicated to Ginny Fitzpatrick in recognition of her 25 years of service to St. Stephen's. In honor of Ginny's tradition of baking birthday cakes for her colleagues, the cookbook features all of the staff's favorite recipes.



The Steeple

It's Only a Number" Stories of Hopes, Dreams and Possibilities



On the occasion of its 300th Anniversary and in partnership with the Ridgefield Theater Barn, St Stephen's presented "The Steeple: Its Only a Number" on April 27. The evening consisted of a shared

meal and live personal stories told by six people; three from St. Stephen's (Lynn Bliss, Ben Brewster and Angela

Liptack) and three Ridgefield townspeople (Chris Belden, Elizabeth DiSalvo and

Andrew Levine). Each of these personal stories had been conceived of by the tellers and further developed with Bonnie Levison, a senior storytelling instructor with MothWorks, an educational division of The Moth.

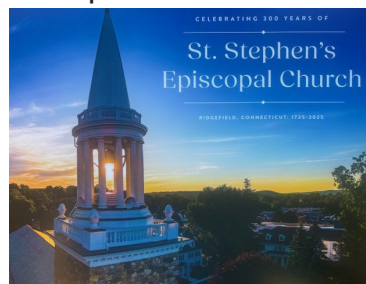


The evening's theme "Its Only a Number" served as a jumping off point for each of the tellers. There were stories about growing up in COVID times; learning truths about family; learning truths about oneself; rebuilding again from zero; learned frugality; or when a possibility bloomed into more than expected.

Each story was about five minutes long. Peter Bachmann and Michael Altopp served as the evening's emcees building on the theme. And after all the stories were told, there was conversation in the lobby and dessert catered by A' Table.

History Book

Throughout 2025 we celebrated the founding of St. Stephen's in 1725 as a mission church under the



name First Society in Ridgefield—Church of England. The celebrations took many forms, including the publication of a gorgeous, large format book: Celebrating

300 years of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. In a departure from two earlier histories, the 300th has more of an album format that relies on text as well as more than 300 photos and drawings. The project, begun in November 2024, culminated in the book's publication in September 2025—in time for the 300th gala at the Lounsbury House.

The book covers the founding of the church by the Rev. Samuel Johnson, our first three and current houses of worship (all in the same location), the American Revolution, church leaders, the role of women, St. Stephen's connection with Ridgefield, and our dynamic ministries.

Led by Mother Whitney, the project involved numerous parishioners, current and past. The team of writers and researchers included Rev. Altopp, Laurie McGavin Bachmann, Linda Berry, Lizzy Hanson and Courtenay Snellings. Ginny Fitzpatrick, our church administrator, guided the team through the archives, a treasure trove of photos and memorabilia. The book's last chapter, "Why We Need St. Stephen's Church,"

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contains essays by our senior warden, Jennifer Franz, and two former rectors, Mark Delcuze and John R. (“Dick”) Gilchrist. We are indebted to the many parishioners who captured St. Stephen’s life through photos and contributed to this book.

The Ridgefield Historical Society and the Keeler Tavern and Museum and History Center provided invaluable help with research and images, as did the Diocese of Connecticut. Finally, two pivotal roles were played by professionals from outside the church: designer Philip Yarnall of SMA Design and our production manager, Robin Arzt.

Gala

On Saturday, September 27, St. Stephen’s Church celebrated its 300th anniversary with a Gala at



the historic Lounsbury House in Ridgefield. The evening was a complete sellout, with 140 guests in attendance. Parishioners—

both longtime members and newer faces—came together with friends who traveled from near and far. It was a wonderful mix of generations and connections, all gathered to mark three centuries of faith, service, and community life.



The program began with a short and engaging overview of St. Stephen’s history presented by the Ridgefield Historical Society, highlighting the church’s founding in 1725

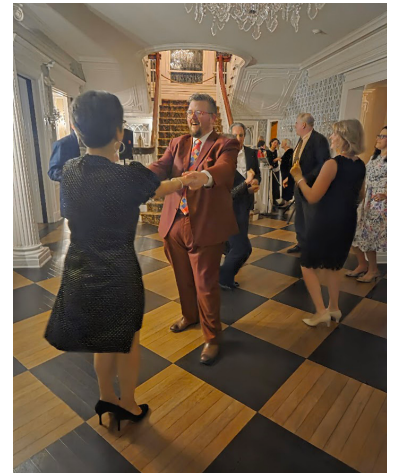
and its longstanding place in the town. Guests were also honored by the presentation of a formal



commendation from the Ridgefield Board of Selectmen in recognition of the parish’s contributions to the community. As the brief program concluded, the bells of St.

Stephen’s rang out to officially kick off the evening—a meaningful and memorable start to the celebration.

Following the program, guests enjoyed cocktails, dinner, and dancing in the beautiful setting of Lounsbury House. A highlight of the



evening was the “Patriot Punch,” made from an authentic 1725 recipe and created especially for the occasion. This fun historical touch added to the spirit of the night. The Gala was a joyful way to celebrate





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our past, reconnect with one another, and look ahead with gratitude and hope as St. Stephen's begins its fourth century.

Special thanks to the committee: Andy Robertson, Mimi Cushing, Lori Seibert, and Siobhan Santini

Meadow Planting

The acreage which is now the St. Stephen's Meadow has existed since the land mass we now call Ridgefield came to be. I like to imagine ancient native hunting parties crossing our Meadow in search of sustenance. I imagine Revolutionary troops marching across it, or even camping there. I imagine early healers collecting their magic from Nature's bounty.



I imagine herds of town sheep grazing those grasses. I imagine the Meadow heard the tolling of our bells marking the ends of two great wars.

The Meadow witnessed the erection of St Stephen's church as we know it today. It heard the squeals of laughter of children enjoying the Nutmeg Festival games. It hides a road map of piping that drain our new parking area. And, until a few years ago, the grasses that Mother Nature scattered there over the eons were simply mowed. Weekly.

Then the Meadow idea was born. We stopped the mowing. We released whatever was growing there to grow as nature intended...wild and graceful, bearing unexpected blossoms which create even more grasses and more blossoms. The St. Stephen's Meadow is now on the Main Street Pollinator Pathway, helping to ensure that our insect populations thrive. Remember, if they thrive, we thrive!

In this 300th year of St. Stephen's existence, the Meadow gratefully accepted a donation of a single tree to mark the year. A young native River Birch, *Betula Nigra*, was selected for its hardiness, for its beautiful textured bark and yellow fall foliage, and for its love of moist soil. With Nature's blessing, it could grow up to 70-90 feet tall. The



River Birch was planted to commemorate St Stephen's birthday, along with 33 native plants, generously made available by Dina Brewster of The Hickories. Thank you, Dina and staff!

I also thank the enthusiastic Boy Scouts who dug the 33 holes! I thank Kitsey Snow who transported the tree from the nursery, helped loosen its root-bound roots, and directed its planting. She then erected the protective deer fencing around it. I thank Mimi Cushing, the liaison with the 300th committee. I thank Andy Robertson for his continuing support and help. I thank all the parishioners who came out on that cold, raw planting day last November to place the young plants into their respective pre-dug holes.

It is up to God and Nature to assure that they all survive this challenging winter. I imagine they all are snug under their blankets of snow. I imagine they will reward us next spring with lush greenness and colorful displays for our wonder and enjoyment as we stroll the meandering Meadow path and find our peace.

Signature Ice Cream



Deborah Anne's created a signature ice cream to celebrate our 300 years! Nutmeg!!

It was on sale through the month of November. Folks stocked up to have this delicious treat throughout the cold months.



300th Celebration Eucharist

On September 28, 2025 our Sunday 10 a.m. service celebrated our 300th Anniversary. The Rt. Rev. Jeffrey



Mello, Bishop Diocesan, was our chief celebrant and preacher. We had special music throughout,

which included a guest organist and a trumpeter. A Litany of Thanksgiving for a Church, the renewal of our Baptismal Vows, and the reception of new members enhanced this special worship experience.



The Rectory as part of the Holiday House Tour



The Holiday House Tour benefits the Ridgefield Historical Society. The Rectory was among the six homes featured. For the first time, the home was

open to the public. Over 800 tickets were sold, and guests walked through the foyer and three rooms over the course of 8 hours on December 6. The Altopps made some of their own personal improvements and the church oversaw the painting of the trim in the foyer and dining room, giving it a “like new” look for the first time in 15 years. Meta Ela created a beautiful vision for the Christmas decorations, enlisting a small team of dedicated volunteers to realize it. Gail Gilchrist’s murals looked as good as ever, eliciting expressions of wonder from the guests.

Greg Farr: Historical Service, November 9

The Director for Archives & Records Management of our Diocese, Greg Farr, offered the homily for our Historical Service. He reminded us that the church is a living organism, built upon the saints of the past. He even referenced a line from one of Aaron Manderbach’s sermons, all of which are housed at our diocesan offices under Greg’s care.



