

For your Daily Prayers:

Parishioners asking for Prayers: Gerry, Andrea, Ferne, Lowell, Charlotte, Martha Sue, June, Joyce, Gene

Friends with Urgent Needs: Jeffrey, Susan, Porter, B., Duncan, Ann Elizabeth Kay, Leila, James, Alice, Larry, Roy, Onetia, Katy.

Ongoing Prayer List: Dave, Dorothy, Edwinna, Charles, Jo Cathy, Ron, Antonio, Ellen, Debbie, Brock, Logan, Winn, Shari.

Expectant Parents: Mary Chandler and Tyler, Jacqueline and Michael

Preparing for Holy Matrimony: Baird and Veronica

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

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The Rt. Rev. Brian Seage, Bishop of Mississippi

The Rev. Giulianna C. Gray, Rector

Mrs. Jennifer P. Zeponi, Parish Administrator

May 2020

Vestry

David Allen, Senior Warden

Raymond Woo, Junior Warden

Debbie Allen

Ernie Baker

Stan Berry

Jimmy Clayton

Lynn Eastland

Walton Gresham

A Note from your Senior Warden

Dear St. Stephen's Parishioners,

In ending our past vestry meeting, which was Giulianna's last with us, I noted what a blessing it had been to have walked with her as we all cultivated our relationship with our Lord. I am so happy for those times and equally as happy for the future of Giulianna's family. Thanks be to God! I am very confident in St Stephen's future for we are composed of so much talent and have been so well prepared, so on to God's work!

I want to start off by thanking Pam Woo for the great work she has done as chairwoman of St Stephen's outreach program. Our church supports many worthwhile programs and Pam has been integral in not just giving the funds but also validating the program's goals. THANKS, PAM! I also want to thank Walton Gresham for volunteering to head our ongoing outreach program.

So now I will try to give you a glimpse at what the near future looks like. The search process will most likely take a year. During this time our vestry has chosen to pursue a part time interim priest. We are in communication with the diocese but as you can imagine the corona virus has thrown some kinks into the process. I will keep you posted as this progresses.

On the matter of the search for our next priest, the vestry has asked Woods Eastland to be the chairman of the search committee. Thank you Woods for accepting. We are moving forward with creating the committee and will pass this info on soon.

In ending, I want to encourage you to reach out to Giulianna to find a way to say good bye. I also want you to continue to follow worship within our parish through online services. If you need help with this, call the office and we will find you some tech help. Please be mindful of your health and safety during the pandemic.

God's Peace,

David Allen

St. Stephen's Mission is to be a growing Christian family, led by the Holy Spirit, and united as we love God and love our neighbors.

Worship Online at 11am

Join us on Facebook Live!

A Note of Goodbye and Thanksgiving from your outgoing Rector:

Priests come. Priests go. You've been in the church long enough to know that by now.

I'm aware that the news of my departure likely struck each of you in different ways. The news of priests leaving is sometimes met by relief, sometimes ambivalence, and sometimes sadness.

I first learned about the congregation when I read about you from the parish profile now-retired Canon David Johnson passed along to me for my discernment back in the end of 2013. I remember reading about your hopes of calling a priest who would be an apt preacher, teacher, and pastoral care giver. I also remember reading a hope that your next priest would increase your presence in the larger community.

I'm grateful we now have had more than 6 years together. I accepted the vestry's call to come serve St. Stephen's in 2014. The primary hope I had when I started was simply that I would leave the parish in a better place when my tenure came to an end.

At the first book study I led at St. Stephen's, we read The Altar in the World, by Barbara Brown Taylor. I still remember a quote we discussed in the group that has stayed in my mind all these years: "Those who belong to communities of faith have acquired a certain patience with what is called organized religion. They have learned to forgive its shortcomings as they have learned to forgive themselves."

As we part ways this month, I hope you will forgive me for my own shortcomings and for mistakes I may have made through the years. Even if a given rector has done his or her very best, there is never a guarantee that a leader's best has been a good fit for a community. Furthermore, not a single one of us is perfect, and all of us do make mistakes along the way.

I thank you for the multitude of graces I have received from you over the years. You have walked with me as we have done such good work together. You have shepherded our children in ways I will never forget. We have shared holy work and holy time.

No community is perfect. No priest is perfect. But God's love for us is perfect! How good, brothers and sisters, that we have a savior who blesses even our best, imperfect efforts that they might bear fruit for Christ's own beloved kingdom.

I believe, wholeheartedly, that St. Stephen's Episcopal Church will still be in a good place when our family moves to Sewanee, Tennessee later this month. St. Stephen's is a small church with big heart! Your love for one another, your loyal commitment to serve the church and larger community, and your steadfast faith in Christ *will* carry you from this season to the next.

I wish that the circumstances were different, and that we could plan our final gatherings as we had first imaged. I was looking forward to a final Spring picnic with you this year! Nonetheless, we persist and will find ways to share conversation this month. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you would like to share time on the phone, or if you would like to meet for a socially distant gathering on a patio over the next few weeks.

Finally, know that I will continue holding you in my prayers during this coming time of transition. I pray that God pour upon you an abundance of faith, hope, and love in this life and in the life to come.

Giulianna+

Time flies! Look how our family has grown!



We Persist!

Needless to say, the plans we had for worship and fellowship in March and April were changed dramatically due to the Covid-19 virus. Below are photos of parishioners worshiping from home during Holy Week, and then of folks coming to visit our glorious flowered cross on Easter Sunday. Many thanks to all who participated in our online worship!

Moving Forward this month, please join us:

- **Each Sunday morning for worship** livestreamed at 11am from St. Stephen's
- **Wednesday, May 6th and 13th at 7pm by way of zoom.** This will be a chance for us to catch up with one another, and Giulianna will close each gathering with Compline. More information will be sent by email

It is Easter Anyway!

