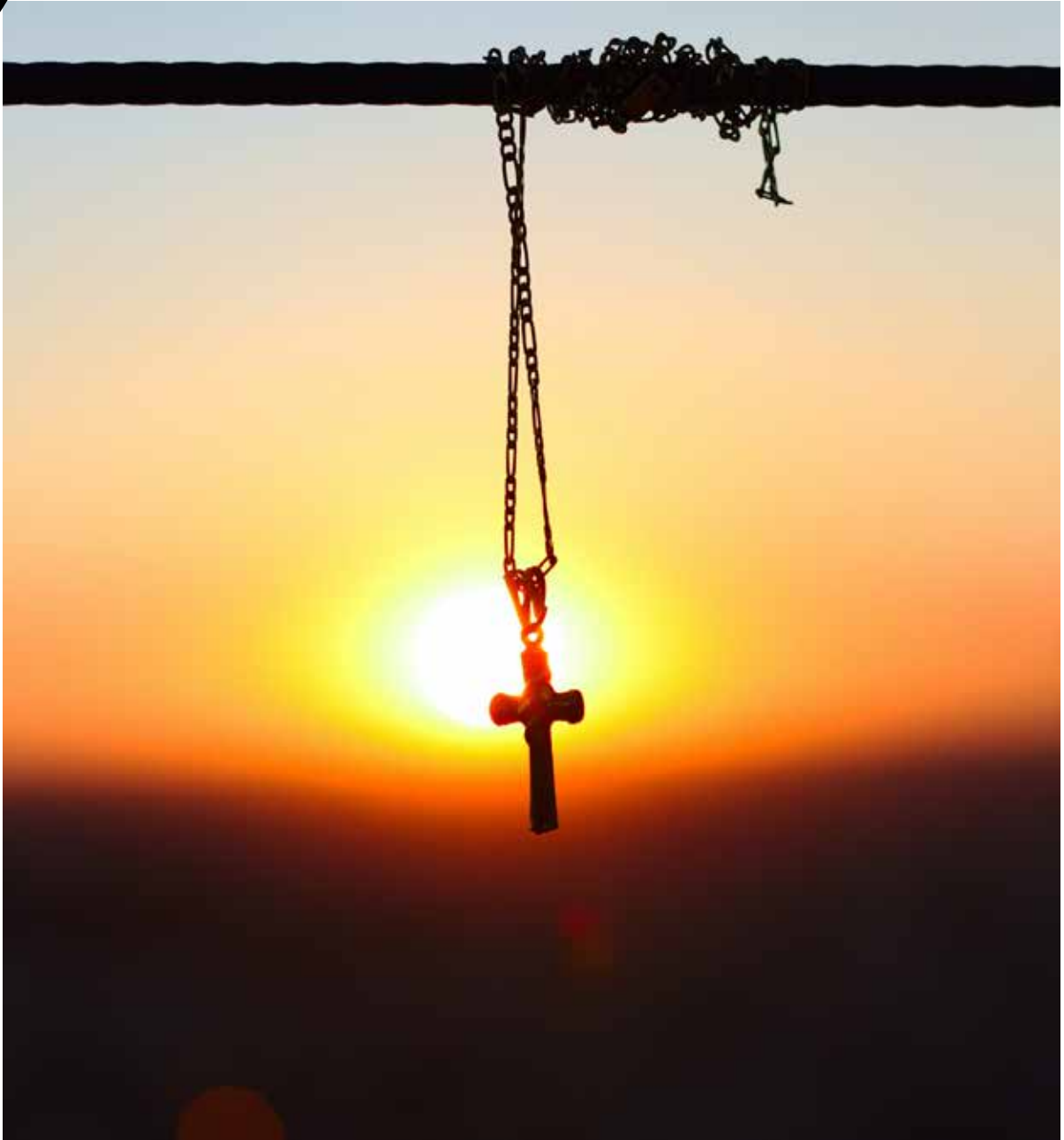


The Scroll

LENT 2024



RECEIVE, REFLECT, AND RELAY CHRIST

St. Stephen's 
United Methodist Church
9203 Braddock Road • Burke VA, 22015
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The Movements of Grace

Each year, in the weeks leading up to Easter, we set aside forty days for the season of Lent. An excellent explanation can be found on our denominational website, www.umc.org.

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays. It begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. Lent comes from the Anglo-Saxon word “lencten,” meaning “lengthen,” and refers to the lengthening days of spring. The period of forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting, and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts and later became a time of penance for all Christians. Today, Christians focus on our relationship with God, growing as disciples, and extending ourselves. Often, we choose to give up something or volunteer and give of ourselves for others.

Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a “mini-Easter.”

A movement from despair to joy begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Easter Sunday. That’s the central movement, but as we just read, there are others. Every week of Lent, we spend Monday through Saturday in preparation and then emerge into celebration every Sunday, or as the article names them, “mini-Easters.” For your daily devotional life, we have daily Lenten devotionals available in the church lobby or digitally here, published by the Society of St. Andrew.

However, this year, inspired by Bishop Tom Berlin’s most recent book, “The Third Day,” we will set a different tone for Sundays. Rather than waiting for Easter to celebrate the power of the Resurrection, we will reflect on it each Sunday of Lent. We will explore the lives of some who were profoundly changed by encounters with the resurrected Savior. Reflection on their stories will help us experience that movement of grace in sharper detail from week to week. And once we arrive on Easter morning, I pray our joy will multiply as we encounter an empty tomb and experience the ripples of resurrection power still flowing out of it.

We hope you will join us in worship on our Lenten journey this year as we follow the movement of God’s grace that shifts from darkness to light, despair to hope, and death to life.

May you observe a holy Lent,

Pastor Spencer

I pray our joy will multiply as we encounter an empty tomb and experience the ripples of resurrection power still flowing out of it.

Confirmation and the Lenten Journey

This January of 2024, I began a 16-week confirmation class with eight students. The confirmation class offers students an opportunity to publicly ‘confirm’ their personal commitment to follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. In preparation for this year’s class, I have been deeply contemplating how to present the basics of the Christian faith to our young students in the most compelling way. My conclusion was to select four images that vividly portray the essence of our Christian faith, encompassing our doctrine, history/heritage, scripture, and mission.

The first image is that of a journey, demonstrating that our faith transcends what we understand intellectually or believe in our hearts; it is about how we walk our daily lives with Christ as both companion and destination. The second image is a caravan, symbolizing that this journey is not meant to be undertaken alone, but rather in the company of a community, including the ‘cloud of witnesses.’ The third is a tree, illustrating how trees rooted in Christ not only bear fruit across generations but also provide shelter, wisdom, and life to those to come. The fourth image is a table, representing how our journeys are sustained by gatherings where we sit together, sharing food and drink.

All four concepts are frequently discussed during the Lenten journey. This means that the season of Lent consistently brings us back to the fundamentals of faith—what it means to follow Christ, who journeyed to the cross. I invite you to find your own meaningful way to participate in the upcoming Lenten journey, whether by joining our Sunday schools or following our Lenten sermon series. I may have mentioned it before, but let us keep calm and journey on!

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Minoo



Justice January

We began 2024 with St. Stephen's first-ever Justice January – a series of events and opportunities hosted by our Church and Society Committee that focused on learning and taking action on social justice issues. Our children led the month by participating in Mission Possible Kids, where they made colorful and incredibly soft baby blankets. These blankets were added to the layette kits that we put together as part of our remembrance service for Rev. Dr. Martin Luther



King Jr. on Sunday, January 14.

In the afternoon, Rev. Camille Henderson-Edwards, a staff member at the UMC's General Board on Church and Society, delivered an inspirational sermon titled "Seeking Justice, Pursuing Peace." She highlighted the challenges and issues related to maternal health faced by women in the United States and around the world.



Rev. Camille Henderson-Edwards

After the worship service, the congregation gathered in the Fellowship Hall to assemble 40 baby layette kits, which were later provided to the Inova Cares Clinic in Falls Church for new mothers. We also enjoyed a delicious dinner prepared by Chef Johnnie and the team.

Further events during Justice January continued our focus on maternal health, with a particular emphasis on the challenges faced by black women in the United States. We held two Zoom discussions based on videos developed by Rev. Henderson-Edwards.





On January 31 and February 1, four members of St. Stephen's United Methodist Church participated in the United Methodist Day at the Virginia General Assembly in Richmond. The event is sponsored and directed by the Virginia Annual Conference in coordination with the Interfaith Center for Public Policy.

Vickie and Chris Bateman, Lauri Snider, and Carolyn Brewer, members of St. Stephen's, joined with many others from United Methodist churches across Virginia to advocate for pending legislation related to social justice issues. The conference's chosen issues included affordable housing, utilities relief for disadvantaged families, protecting and providing health insurance for children, and common sense gun reform. Importantly, the process involved advocating for key issues, not specific elected officials. Each representative met with House Delegates or Senators from their districts. St. Stephen's representatives had engagements with Senator David Marsden (35th District), Delegate Laura Cohen (15th District), and Delegate Dan Helmer (10th District).

The representatives from St. Stephen's received an orientation and preparation materials from Virginia Assembly members at the PACE Center United Methodist Campus Ministry, where the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Episcopal Church, and the United Church of Christ are also partners working with students at Virginia Commonwealth University.



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They heard informative presentations about the political process and the status of bills from Kim Bobo, Director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Ben Hoyne of Virginia Interfaith Power and Light, and a keynote address by Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson. The event concluded with an inspiring worship service.

All of the St. Stephen's representatives reported that the event was educational, informative, enjoyable, and worthwhile. Walking the halls of the new General Assembly building, the tunnel to the state capitol, and the outdoor sights, including the Women's Memorial, were added attractions that made it memorable.

St. Stephen's Church and Society Committee advertises and supports this event annually. The Virginia Annual Conference emphasizes that engagement with lawmakers should be a continuous process, something that the St. Stephen's Church and Society Committee strives to do. The goal for 2025 is to increase participation by members of St. Stephen's.



Children's Ministries

What do Superman and Jesus Have in Common?

According to Holy Heroes by Scott Bayles, the story of Superman serves as a modern-day parable pointing us to God. The story of Superman reflects the gospel story in multiple ways. It is the story of a father who sends his only son, who has powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men, to be adopted. The son is raised in a small town and eventually saves the world. Jesus and Superman may have fought different monsters, but the outcome was the same. The Bible tells us that when we were unable to help ourselves, at the moment of our need, Christ died for us, even though we were living against God. Very few people will die to save the life of someone else (Romans 5:6-16).

Could you use a hero right now? We can introduce you to one that doesn't need a cape. Join us for 10:00 a.m. Sunday School this Lent season. Small groups are offered for children and adults.

Want more information? Contact Devin at children@ststephensfairfax.org

**Could you
use a hero
right now?**

Want to learn more about what your faith walk superheroes have in common?

Courage Quest 2024 is happening on April 20. This year, we will discuss what superheroes can teach us about following God and living out our faith. Courage Quest is open for 3rd-6th graders to attend with one parent. The goal of the day is to enjoy time with your tween through fun activities and games, as well as to grow closer spiritually by participating together in a tween-centered Bible Study. We will meet at Escapology in Fairfax at 10:00 a.m. for an escape room challenge, then meet at the church for lunch, Bible Study, and more games. Registration will open in February.

Looking Ahead to Summer

Camp Firelight VBS is happening July 15-19, 1:00-4:00 p.m. for rising 1st through 6th graders. Registration will open in February! If you are interested in volunteering for VBS, contact Devin at children@ststephensfairfax.org

Join us during the Youth's Pancake Supper for Lent Stations on February 13 from 5:30-7:00 p.m.

Each household is invited to create their own set of Resurrection Eggs. Resurrection Eggs walk the user through the story of Jesus' death and resurrection using objects hidden inside plastic Easter Eggs. A booklet is available with scripture readings that coincide with each egg.



St. Stephen's United Women in Faith, formerly known as our United Methodist Women, is a group in our church that exists to support families in need. We receive funding from church members, Circles, and other women's groups or individuals who pledge their money each year with the hope of improving and enriching our community.



United
Women
in Faith

Last year, our funds were allocated as follows:

- Over a thousand dollars were sent to our United Women in Faith District and Conference to support similar causes in our state and around the world. They assist in funding missionaries in low-income areas as they strive to make a difference in those communities. They study and support projects that address issues such as homelessness, hunger, human trafficking, environmental improvement, and more. They also work to improve education in areas where it can have a positive impact on families.
- Additional contributions totaling \$900 were voted on and sent to local groups that are doing valuable work. These groups include Fairfax FISH, The Lamb Center, Rising Hope United Methodist Church, FACETS of Fairfax, Wesley Community Center, St. Stephen's Unaccompanied Youth Scholarship fund, and St. Stephen's Preschool.

These donations are made possible by the pledges made by our church members to St. Stephen's United Women in Faith each year. We welcome donations from all of our church members, and contributions can be made by writing a check to St. Stephen's United Women in Faith and mailing it to the church office.

Holy Week Activities

- **Palm Sunday Worship:** March 24, 9:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m. with special music
- **Maundy Thursday Worship:** March 28, 7:30 p.m.
- **Good Friday Worship:** March 29, 7:30 p.m.
- **Easter Eggstravaganza:** March 30, 2:00-4:00 p.m., bring your Easter basket!
- **Easter Sunrise Worship:** March 31, 6:30 a.m.
- **Easter Sunday Worship:** March 31, 9:00 a.m. & 11:00 a.m.

Please note that all events are open to the entire congregation. We look forward to celebrating Holy Week together with you.



Looking Back With Gratitude, Looking Forward With Confidence and Hope

If you're like me, you are probably surprised that we've already passed Ground Hog Day and maybe even forgotten about what happened to 2023! Before we get to Easter, I wanted to share how we are doing with our church finances. The Finance Committee is charged with taking care of the financial health of our church. This means establishing and gaining approval for a budget, ensuring that spending is focused on the mission and operations of the church, and planning for potential risks that need to be addressed in the short and long term. I thank God for the Finance Committee members who give their time and talents to these efforts.



In 2023, our congregation continued to show faithfulness in their generosity, with total giving coming in just over \$50,000 above the expected giving budget. At the same time, our church leaders, staff and volunteers were good stewards with their spending with expenses coming in at just over \$37,000 below budget. As a result, the church finished 2023 with slightly positive Net Income of \$14,000. These year-end figures include St. Stephen's continuing to pay our full conference and district apportionments. As James Harnish puts it in his study, "A Disciple's Path," "Generosity begins not with what I give to God, but with what God has given to me....We are generous to others because God has been so extravagantly generous to us."

Your generosity continues to provide all of what is needed to support our church staff, worship, education, and missions. Your gifts also provide facilities for the Preschool, the Boy and Girl



Scouts, and Outreach programs like Green Groceries, Grace Ministries, Food-4-Thought, Hypothermia sheltering, scholarships for Unaccompanied Youth, and support for families working their way toward housing and work stability. The impact is broad and, like the rest of our daily lives, we lose sight of how meaningful and important our gifts are to the church and the community. Thank you for your generosity!

As we look ahead to the future, we look over our shoulders and realize that the church's expansion occurred over 20 years ago. Our building and facilities are aging, and our Trustees are dedicated to taking care of the church and the parsonage with the time and money available. As an example, when the parsonage was prepared for Pastor Minoo and family, the church invested \$15,000 to support the effort. At the same time, thousands of dollars in donations and hundreds of hours of time were spent by volunteers to get the job done. These moments are a hallmark of a loving and dedicated church family. However, these efforts cannot sustain larger capital improvements, like the church roof and heating and air conditioning systems, that we will need to make over the next 5-10 years.

An assessment of capital improvements was completed in 2023 by the Trustees and provides a basis for capital improvement funds needed in the future. While the church has some reserves and an ability to borrow money, it is clear the full scope of capital improvements will require more funds in the future. Addressing the financial support needed for these improvements is an ongoing priority of the Finance Committee. We ask for your prayers and support as we take the steps needed to ensure that our church continues its mission and impact in the world.

On the second or third Sunday of each month, we report on the overall financial health of the church in the bulletin. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our church's finances, please feel free to contact me, Mike Keppler, your Finance Chair. Thank you all for your generosity and good stewardship as we follow Christ together!



- Mike Keppler

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Scenes From Our 60th Anniversary Dinner

