

the SPIRIT

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2022 | THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Our missionaries are here!

We're delighted that our missionaries, Heidi Schmidt and Monica Vega, who live and work in Argentina, are here through Monday, February 14.

- **Today**, Monica is our guest preacher at the 9 and 11:15 a.m. services.
- **On Thursday, February 10**, from 6 p.m. until 7 p.m., you can join Heidi and Monica on a Zoom call; the link is in the weekly **eSpirit**.
- **On Sunday, February 13**, Heidi and Monica will speak in the Sunday Forum.

Annual meeting is today

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6 AT 10:10 A.M.

The annual parish meeting takes place in the church today, and online. All presentations will be accessible to in-person attendees as well as online viewers, but voting on the vestry slate will be limited to those who attend in person. Confirmed members age 16 and older are eligible to vote.

Next Sunday's preacher

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 13 | 9 AND 11:15 A.M. SERVICES

We're pleased to have as our guest preacher next Sunday **the Rev. Tony Pompa**. Tony recently retired as dean and rector of the Cathedral Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, to begin a new ministry with the Episcopal Church Preaching Foundation. Tony has served the church in various roles throughout his ordained life, including as a member of the diocesan staff during the Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee's episcopate.

More than 1,800 seminarians have passed through the Foundation's Preaching Excellence Program since its founding in 1987. The Rev. Will Stanley and the Rev. Gary Jones have been on the PEP faculty and participants have visited St. Stephen's to learn from our lay staff and clergy about the ministries of our large and complex parish.

We look forward to having Tony here as our preacher!

Visit from brothers from SSJE cancelled

We're sorry to announce that the two brothers from the Society of St. John the Evangelist who were to be with us the weekend before Ash Wednesday have had to cancel their visit. COVID has spread through the monastery and the brothers have curtailed travel for now. The brothers had also been scheduled to speak in the Forum on February 27; we'll announce the new speaker as soon as possible.

COVID-related safety measures will shift beginning tomorrow

We're grateful that the Omicron surge is now receding in our area. Parish leaders have continued to monitor the data and are making adjustments to our practices in response. On Thursday we sent an email communication about changes that begin tomorrow; see page 4 of this edition of the **Spirit**.

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Discernment committee listening sessions

The parish discernment committee, the group charged by the vestry to lead a self-study and a search for our next rector, has been conducting listening sessions to learn what parishioners think about who we are at St. Stephen's and where we want to go. These listening sessions are offered both virtually and in the parish house; please participate in the way you are comfortable. Each session will have 10 participants, plus a facilitator and a scribe from the discernment committee. You can sign up at ststephensRVA.org/discernment.

If you sign up for a virtual session, the Zoom link will be provided to you by email at least 24 hours before your session. For those who sign up to participate in a session in the parish house, we require masks (worn over the nose and mouth the entire time you are indoors) and we'll be socially distanced, with no more than 12 people in a single session.

If you have questions about the discernment process or the parish self-study, please send an email to Jay Moore (tjaymoore3@gmail.com) and Shelley Spalding (spaldingshelley@gmail.com), committee co-chairs.

Sacred Ground continues diocesan-wide

BEGINNING FEBRUARY 20

St. Stephen's continues to seek community understanding and action regarding systemic racism and injustice. In partnership with the Diocese of Virginia and Dr. J. Lee Hill, the diocese's first Missioner for Racial Justice and Healing, we invite you to participate in "Sacred Ground: A Film-Based Dialogue Series on Race and Faith."

Many members of our community have participated in this program here at St. Stephen's, and now we are joining the wider diocesan community to continue this important work. Folks from across the diocese will gather for online conversation groups to explore the stories of Indigenous, Black, Latino, and Asian Pacific Americans as their histories intersect with European American history. (This is for those who have not already participated in a group here at St. Stephen's.) Questions? Contact the Rev. Cate Anthony, canthony@ststephensRVA.org or 804.288.2867. To register, visit ststephensRVA.org/sacredground.

The Feelings Wheel of Fortune (a Lenten Bible study)

THURSDAYS AT 10 A.M. BEGINNING MARCH 3

The Thursday morning Bible Study will regather beginning on March 3, 2022, for a special Lenten study series, "The Feelings Wheel of Fortune: Emotions Throughout Scripture." Please join the Rev. Cate Anthony and other members of the St. Stephen's community as we gather to reflect on the breadth of human experience throughout the Bible and our own lives. The feelings wheel or wheel of emotions, created by Robert Plutchik, offers a visual representation of primary emotions, displaying the varying degrees and complexities of different feelings. Each week will dive into a different segment of the feelings wheel (wheels provided by Cate!) and its stories in Scripture. All are welcome! We gather at 10 a.m. in the Small Fellowship Hall.

Masterworks concert moved to April 1

As the Omicron variant led to an increase in the spread of COVID-19, we made a several changes to our plans at St. Stephen's, including rescheduling our annual Masterworks Concert from February 18 to **Friday, April 1, at 7:00 p.m.** Reservations will be available soon.

Assisting a refugee family from Afghanistan

Many will remember the Ahmadi family whom we assisted when they arrived in this country as refugees from Afghanistan. The family is doing very well (and has grown to five people!). Relatives of the Ahmadis arrived in central Virginia last year after the fall of the government there and the rise of the Taliban, and our outreach director, Ron Brown, has been in regular contact with them. Ron is aware of several needs the family has, including reliable transportation for work, medical appointments, and other things; computers for the children who are in school; and additional items. If you have a car in good repair that you can donate, and/or a computer in good working order, please contact Ron at 804.288.2867 or rbrown@ststephensRVA.org. Ron will also be able to tell you about specific needs for clothing and backpacks for the children. (Please do not bring items to church until after you speak with Ron.)

Women's Forum date changes

Like many other groups, the Women of St. Stephen's has made changes to their schedule this winter and spring. Here is the most up-to-date information.

Tuesday, March 1, 2022: Lauren Zaller Moore

10 a.m.

The president and CEO of the Children's Hospital Foundation will discuss the status of health care for children.

Tuesday, April 5: David Pippin

10 a.m.

David is a popular speaker at the Women's Forum. He will join us again with beautiful spring floral arrangements.


Tuesday, May 3: Ladies Night Out

Reception, 6 p.m.; Dinner, 7 p.m.

Our annual "Ladies Night Out" includes dinner with a special guest speaker; this year, it's super swimmer **Courtney Paulk**, who has swum the English Channel and the Catalina Channel and circumnavigated Manhattan—three times! Tickets are \$28 per person and will be available next month.

Environmental stewardship group invites you!

NEXT ZOOM MEETING: FEBRUARY 7 | 5:45-7:30 P.M.

St. Stephen's environmental stewardship group will meet Monday, February 7—tomorrow—from 5:45 to 7:30 p.m. via 

Zoom. All are welcome! Please send an email to Barry O'Keefe, barrywilder@gmail.com, to receive the Zoom link.

Thanks to everyone who responded about interest in an eco-spiritual book club. The first meeting will be on Monday, February 28, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. on Zoom, and will continue on the fourth Monday of the month through May. The first book is John Philip Newell's *Sacred Earth, Sacred Soul*. Contact Sue Wootton, swootton@outlook.com, to participate.

Solemn Communion series for children, adults

BEGINNING THURSDAY, MARCH 3 | 6:30 P.M.

Children age 7 and older are invited to participate in a five-week series that explores the mystery of Holy Communion. As children enter what is known as the age of reason, they are highly capable of delighting in the mystery and wonder of receiving the bread and the wine. This series is rooted in what are known as the Parables of Mercy; sessions explore ideas such as forgiveness, reconciliation, and abiding love. While Holy Eucharist is indeed a celebration, we are mindful of the solemnity of the sacrament and wish to companion children both in their questions as well as their delights.

Parents of these children, and any interested parishioners, are welcome to attend a parallel series in which similar presentations are offered for adults at the same time. We hope to offer this formation in person but will move to Zoom if needed due to COVID.

These presentations are on Thursday evenings, 6:30-7:30: March 3, 10, 17, 24, and 31. The series concludes with an all-day retreat on Saturday, April 2, and participants will worship together on Sunday, April 3, at 9 a.m. in the main church. Please contact Betsy Tyson with any questions, btyson@ststephensRVA.org or 804.288.2867.

Gumbo for Good: an outreach fundraiser

DEADLINE FEBRUARY 21; PICK UP FEBRUARY 27

St. Stephen's outreach committee will sell gumbo this month as a fundraiser for outreach ministries. Just in time for Mardi Gras, order a quart—or several—for \$20 each, which includes a pan of cornbread. The deadline for orders is Monday, February 21; you'll pick up your order curbside on Sunday, February 27. Order online at ststephensRVA.org/gumbo. If you do not have access to the internet, you can pick up a paper form at the outreach table. Orders must be prepaid with a debit or credit card.



Updates to our health and safety measures

Thankfully, we appear to be on the back side of the Omicron wave, so we are adjusting or eliminating some measures while continuing to reassess and make additional changes as the situation warrants. The following take effect tomorrow.

MASKS

The following provisions are based on the assumption that everyone will wear a mask while indoors, whether in the parish house or the church, and that all will maintain safe distances from others. We are assessing when and how to introduce a mask-optional policy, knowing that many will welcome the change, while others will feel less safe coming to church if masks are not required.

DURING THE WEEK/IN THE PARISH HOUSE BEGINNING MONDAY, FEBRUARY 7

- We'll resume normal office operations, with staff working on site Monday-Friday.
- Small groups will be allowed to meet, masked, and advance room reservations will be required. Large meetings should plan to meet virtually or, weather permitting, outdoors.
- Volunteers may work in the food pantry, the kitchen, and May Fair House.
- Customers will be permitted in the May Fair House.

SUNDAYS BEGINNING FEBRUARY 13

- Congregational singing resumes
- The choir present at Sunday services will continue to consist of staff singers for a few more weeks.
- We'll no longer mark off every other row of seating in the church.
- The Palmer Hall service will continue in Palmer Hall.
- We are in active discernment about the return of healing prayer and anointing in the Celtic service.
- The nursery will be available beginning February 13; pre-registration will be required, and we'll need parent volunteers to assist paid workers (ststephensRVA.org/nursery).
- The Sunday Forum resumes with Heidi Schmidt and Monica Vega as our speakers on February 13. The Forum will continue to be held in the church to permit safe distancing as well as livestreaming.
- Formation for children and youth will resume February 20.
- Livestreaming of the 11:15 a.m., 5:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. services continues, as well as livestreaming of the Sunday Forum.

MEALS, RECEPTIONS, ETC.

- The Sunday Community Supper will return March 13, when Daylight Saving Time will have begun and we can gather outdoors.
- We are reassessing the use of the parish house for funeral receptions, Sunday coffee service, parish suppers, and other food and beverage service.

GOING FORWARD

The world is moving from the pandemic phase of COVID-19 to an endemic phase. While we will live with some risk, we will continue to adjust our practices and norms to this reality, as we consult with other churches to learn from their experiences. In everything, we are called to promote the health and well-being of all God's children as we seek ways to be together, offer praise to God, and do the work to which God calls us.

Bear one another's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:2

