

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Virginia

Standing Committees and Ministry Nights: An Overview

Updated March 2024

Introduction

In a church the size of St. Stephen's, it is critical to build good systems of communication and collaboration between the vestry, staff, and broader congregation. One key way to do this is through the formation of standing committees, comprised of staff members, vestry liaisons, and at-large parishioners. A number of standing committees at St. Stephen's are well established and have a long history of operation; others have been out of commission and have needed to be reimagined. Still others are new and address areas of need.

In each case, the goal is for the committees not only to share the planning and strategy in a given ministry area, but also to aid the staff in hands on ministry and coordination. We are a big enough ship to need all hands on deck, so these are both advisory and working committees. More broadly, these committees provide a means of awareness and engagement, shared creativity and leadership. This structure of shared staff/parishioner leadership helps ensure transparency in decision-making, sustainability in the face of staff transitions, attention to good processes and procedures, and a broad base for generative ideas and ministry implementation.

Here is the full list of committees and purpose statements, with vestry and staff liaisons listed (each committee also has a number of at large members who are not listed below). Committee chairs may want to copy and paste your committee's purpose statement at the top of your printed meeting agendas, to keep the purpose and mission top of mind.

Standing Committees for 2024-2025

Adult Formation

Purpose	Works with staff leaders to develop adult formation offerings, focusing on the Sunday Forum, other Sunday morning classes, Sunday evening offerings, weekday classes, and small groups. May also support the planning and implementation of seasonal retreats, occasional trips or pilgrimages, and other programs.
Leadership	Chair: Hank Chambers Staff Liaisons: Cate Anthony and Bill Sachs Vestry Liaisons: Kathy Brock, Bill Davis, Gayle Royals
Schedule	Meets bi-monthly or quarterly

Buildings and Grounds

Purpose	Works with staff leaders, vendors, and key parish volunteers to monitor immediate and long-term capital needs and ongoing maintenance of the physical plant and surrounding grounds.
Leadership	Chair: Jim Snowa Staff Liaisons: Larry Bidwell and Fred Staley Vestry Liaisons: Jeff Johnson
Schedule	Meets monthly

Communal Care

Purpose	Works with staff leaders and pastoral ministry liaisons (representing Pastoral Visitors, Lay Eucharistic Visitors, Gracious Gourmet, etc.) to facilitate the on-going congregational care of members who are recovering from surgery, navigating an illness or loss, homebound, or facing other challenges. Also serves as a liaison to outside groups focused on health and wellness.
Leadership	Chair: Laurie Rogers Staff Liaisons: Mary Feldman, John Rohrs, Bill Sachs Vestry Liaisons: Kathy Brock, Andy Luke, Nan O'Connell
Schedule	Meets bi-monthly or quarterly

Family Ministry

Purpose	Works with staff leaders and formation/worship liaisons to support the children's and youth ministries of the church, including planning and implementing special events, Sunday School and youth group offerings, children's worship participation, and more.
Leadership	Chairs: Valerie Abbott and Greta Kidd Staff Liaisons: Cate A., Caroline Harris, Abby Kocher, Will S. Vestry Liaisons: Katherine Farley and Greta Kidd
Schedule	Meets monthly

Finance

Purpose	Works with staff leaders, financial professionals, and key parish volunteers to monitor monthly income and expenses, draft an annual budget, and make recommendations to the vestry to ensure the sound financial health of the parish.
Leadership	Treasurer/Chair: Staff Liaisons: Susan McNamara, John R., Fred S., Will Stanley Vestry Liaisons: Anne Pinion, Randy Seibert, and Chris Smith
Schedule	Meets monthly

Front Porch Ministries

Purpose	Works with staff leaders, at-large members, and representatives from the Farmers Market, Café, and May Fair House to ensure good oversight, collaborative strategies and resource-sharing (in areas of marketing, accounting, event planning, etc.), and creative support of these key public-facing auxiliary ministries.
Leadership	Chair: Laura Wilkinson Staff Liaisons: Sarah B., Anna Jones, Robin Raver, Fred Staley Vestry Liaisons: Andy Luke and Brenda McDowell
Schedule	Meets bi-monthly or quarterly

Hospitality

Purpose	Works with staff leaders and key parish volunteers to foster a culture of hospitality and inclusion that helps visitors and newcomers feel welcome and at home, and helps them connect to the life of St. Stephen's in a meaningful way.
Leadership	Chair: Mary Virginia Scott Staff Liaisons: Mary Feldman, John Jenkins, Will Stanley Vestry Liaisons: May Fox
Schedule	Meets bi-monthly or quarterly

Outreach

Purpose	Works with staff leaders, community organizations, and key volunteers to facilitate parishioner involvement in outreach ministries in Richmond and beyond. Comprised of three subcommittees – Local, National, and International. There is also a grants committee that administers grants to organizations, with vestry oversight and approval.
Leadership	Chair: Donnan O'Keefe Staff Liaisons: Kitty Ball, Sarah B., Anna Jones, John Rohrs Vestry Liaisons: John Crowder, Mary Ashburn Pearson, G. Royals
Schedule	Meets monthly

Stewardship

Purpose	Works with staff leaders and key parish volunteers to foster a culture of sustainable giving for the mission of the church. This includes facilitating the annual giving campaign, supporting the Legacy Society, and other year-round stewardship efforts.
Leadership	Chair: Blair Nelsen Staff Liaisons: Susan McNamara, John R., Fred S., Will Stanley Vestry Liaisons: Robert Birdsey, May F, Anne P., Whitney VDH
Schedule	Meets monthly in the fall, bimonthly rest of year

Please note: vestry liaisons are separately appointed to the Board of Dogwood Preschool and to the St. Stephen's Endowment Committee. Members of the Executive Committee serve as the core constituency of the Personnel Committee.

Dogwood Board vestry liaisons: Jeff Johnson and John Rohrs
Endowment Committee vestry liaison: John Crowder

Notes on New Committees

The Communal Care Committee is designed to bring together the various ministry groups offering pastoral care within the congregation, as well as coordinating with outward-reaching groups that provide broader communal care through ministries related to health and wellness. Examples of the former groups are pastoral visitors, Eucharistic visitors, Gracious Gourmet, the prayer shawl knitters, etc. The goal here will be to weave those threads together through good process and communication so that we are offering connected touchpoints of care to members who are grieving, celebrating the birth of a child, recovering from surgery or illness, homebound, etc. In addition to coordinating among our existing ministries, this committee may support additional periodic activities, such as end of life planning workshops or mental health fairs, services/events at Westminster Canterbury or Cedarfield, flower deliveries around Christmas or Easter, and so forth.

The Front Porch Ministries Committee is designed to foster communication and collaboration among our various outward-facing "retail" ministries, particularly the Farmers Market, the Café, and May Fair House, but also extending to Dogwood Preschool, art shows, and more. The goal is to look for areas of synergy and cooperation, such as shared publicity and marketing, and coordinated work around issues of zoning, parking, staffing, bookkeeping and financial reporting, safety and emergency preparedness, etc. Members of this committee will be representatives of those retail operations and also will include staff members and at-large parishioners with particular interests or skills related to helping us shape sustainable business models and realize the vision of being a village green marked by vitality and welcome.

The Hospitality Committee is designed to help invite, welcome, and connect newcomers to the life of St. Stephen's. There is a wonderful culture of hospitality at St. Stephen's, noticeable in everything from our Sunday greeters to our Wednesday and Sunday suppers. But in such a large church, we need to be more intentional about how we welcome and integrate new members. How well do our digital media, our print materials, and our building signage speak to visitors? How accessible and welcoming is our nursery? Who is following up with phone calls, hand-written notes, or welcome packets? How often are we scheduling newcomer receptions, and who is attending? How do we connect newcomers to small group ministries, outreach opportunities, etc.? Do we have enough intentional minglers and ambassadors at

coffee hour? These are the types of questions that the Hospitality Committee can help us answer, as we strive to help others make this a parish home.

Ministry Nights

Some of these committees meet monthly, while others are designed to meet bi-monthly or quarterly, with periodic email communication in the interim. Either way, all committees gather in the Large Fellowship Hall three to four times a year for a Ministry Night. The next Ministry Night is Thursday, May 2. The purpose of these periodic gatherings is to provide clear and open communication and to foster that sense of shared ownership and leadership. We may occasionally skip the summer meeting if too many folks are out of town, but the goal is to have three to four of these ministry nights annually, spread out roughly on a quarterly basis.

At these ministry nights, all committee members will gather together beginning at 5:15 p.m. and share a meal in the Large Fellowship Hall. During the meal, clergy, staff, or wardens share key parish updates or highlight particular ministries. Following those updates, members break into their committee groups for regular meetings from 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. Unless there is particularly sensitive business, meetings are open for interested people to attend; it's a great way for newcomers to learn about the life of the church and see where they might like to get involved. It can also be a chance for two or three committees to meet together on overlapping areas of planning or coordination.