

# the SPIRIT

SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2026 | THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

## Holy Week and Easter information

The Holy Week journey begins one week from today on Palm Sunday. Details about services for Holy Week and Easter are available on our website under the menu tab, "Lent and Easter," and in brochures at Information Central.

## Palm Sunday: important things to know

NEXT SUNDAY, MARCH 29

The worship schedule for the Sunday of the Passion, Palm Sunday, is slightly different from our regular schedule. Please note that the first service which usually begins at 8 a.m. will begin at 7:30 a.m. The 9 and 11:15 a.m. services begin outside at the Three Chopt entrance to the church with the Liturgy of the Palms, after which we process into the church for Holy Eucharist and the Reading of the Passion. Those who attend the 9 a.m. service in Palmer Hall join those attending the 9 a.m. service in the main church for the outdoor portion, then they follow Oslick the donkey to Palmer Hall for the remainder of their service. The evening services are at 5:30 p.m. and 8 p.m. as usual, with supper at 6:30 p.m. There is no morning formation on Palm Sunday, but Trailheads will meet at 7 p.m. that day. Childcare is available during the 9 a.m., 11:15 a.m., and 5:30 p.m. services. All services held in the church will be livestreamed.

## Give us your wisdom today

St. Stephen's Church is in the midst of a discernment process to which the entire parish is invited. While the focus is ministry among children and youth, everyone is encouraged to participate. Christian formation is a lifelong process, and we all want the best for the young people of this parish in the early stages of their spiritual journey.

Today our consultant, Emily Gowdy Canady, is at St. Stephen's to hear from you. Emily has served as a lay professional in the Episcopal Church for more than 25 years, including 15 years on the staff of the Diocese of East Carolina, first as Program Officer for Youth, College Campus and Young Adult Ministries, and since 2020 as Missioner for Lifelong Christian Formation.

You have wisdom to share, whether or not you are a parent or grandparent. Everyone's voice is important. **Take this opportunity to offer your insights and hopes during one of two sessions, both in the Café @ St. Stephen's: during the 10:10 formation hour and then again at 12:30 p.m. (lunch provided).** Even if you did not register in advance, we'd love to have you join us.

## Easter memorials due today!

St. Stephen's gifted flower guild creates stunning arrangements for our Easter services, and many people make memorial gifts toward the cost of the flowers. The names of those remembered are listed in our Easter service booklet. To give an Easter memorial, please visit [ststephensRVA.org/easter-flowers](http://ststephensRVA.org/easter-flowers) and complete the form by tonight! It's important that you complete the online form; making a donation online or by check without a form will not alert us to add your loved one to the Easter booklet.

## The 2026 icon workshop: register by tonight

WORKSHOP DATES: JULY 26-31, 2026

For more than a decade, St. Stephen's Church has offered a summer icon writing workshop. This way of painting religious images is less art activity than spiritual practice, and artistic skills are not required. A description of the workshop, taught by iconographer Suzanne Schleck, is available at [ststephensRVA.org/icon-workshop](http://ststephensRVA.org/icon-workshop).

This workshop is so popular that registration for its limited spaces became stressful over the years, so last year we began using a lottery system designed to reduce the anxiety. To add your name to the lottery, use the registration link of the icon workshop webpage. The process opened last Sunday and closes tonight. Names will be drawn Tuesday, March 24, and registrants will receive an email that day with next steps.

## Visiting? Newer to St. Stephen's?

We'd love to welcome you personally. It helps us get to know you better if you fill out a visitor card. If you prefer to do this digitally (or there's no visitor card near your seat), just scan the code and take it from there. If you take this newsletter home (we hope you will!) you can scan the code and complete the form later.





## Challenged by the Word: difficult Biblical texts

TODAY AT 10:10 A.M.

The Bible is full of passages that challenge us. How do we contend with these passages faithfully while also honoring what the Bible teaches us about God and the life of faith? In this series we have been considering a range of thought-provoking Biblical texts to discover the hidden treasures within. The forum takes place in the fellowship hall; no registration is needed.

As we draw closer to Holy Week, we turn our attention to one of the central Biblical texts of this time. The church's Good Friday liturgy centers on the Passion narrative from John's Gospel. As powerful as that account is, its scapegoating of the Jewish religious leaders (as opposed to Pontius Pilate or the Roman authorities) has contributed to centuries of antisemitism. How can we read this text without perpetuating harm against our Jewish siblings? Join members of St. Stephen's clergy team as we dive into this complicated text. **(A reminder:** Sunday morning formation does not take place on Palm Sunday, March 29, or Easter Day, April 5.)

## Praying shapes believing: Trailheads series continues

SUNDAYS THROUGH MARCH 29 | 7:00-7:50 P.M. IN THE CAFÉ

How we pray shapes what we believe; this is a deep truth that involves the style and content of the worship service as much as how one approaches and participates with the mind, body, and heart. This Lenten series explores aspects of our evening services as well as those for Holy Week. Each topic will consider practices to help you deepen or enliven your experience of worship.

Tonight, Vicki Gardiakos, Catherine Whitham, Henry Burke and the Rev. Judy Webb Davis will discuss the lineage of healing prayer in Christian practice and focus on how to open and present oneself for the healing ministries St. Stephen's offers at the Celtic service and beyond. All are welcome and all are encouraged to bring a question or observation about healing prayer, the laying on of hands or anointing, or obstacles to receiving the grace of these ministries. Next Sunday, March 29, is the threshold to Holy Week, and this series' final session will explore the worship at the heart of Christian proclamation.

## Series on immigrant and refugee neighbors concludes this week

Our three-part evening series concludes this Wednesday at 6:30 p.m. in Palmer Hall. A panel of representatives from organizations providing direct service to immigrants and refugees will discuss current challenges and how the community can support their efforts.

## Shrine Mont news

JUNE 26-28 | SIGN UP BY APRIL 22

Parishioners of all ages are invited to share in a weekend of relaxation, beauty, and fellowship at Shrine Mont this summer, June 26-28. This is the time of our traditional parish retreat, though it will be a more relaxed weekend this year without a formal program or structure. Many regular members of our planning team are not able to help or attend this year, so we decided to conserve our staff resources and put that energy into a year of recalibration as we consider the best format and timing for future St. Stephen's retreats at Shrine Mont, a place that remains near and dear to our hearts. Fortunately, Shrine Mont welcomes us sending parishioners for a more relaxed, self-organized, and fellowship-based weekend, which will still feature many of the elements that we have come to love—pool time and pickleball, bonfires and butt buns, morning hikes and nighttime prayers. Visit our website to learn about fees and to register, [ststephensRVA.org/shrine-mont](http://ststephensRVA.org/shrine-mont), or scan the QR code. (Adult fees are lower than last year since we have fewer expenses to cover this year.)



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Also, at the Sunday Forum on April 12, we will welcome Kirk Gibson, Shrine Mont's director of development, and Mary Beth Abplanalp, former interim director of Shrine Mont camps. Kirk and Mary Beth will share highlights of life at the Shrine, including summer camps and an ongoing capital campaign to which St. Stephen's has contributed. We value and celebrate our relationship with Shrine Mont, and we look forward to nourishing that connection and partnership for years to come.

## Agape Meal welcomes all ages

MAUNDY THURSDAY, APRIL 2 | 5:30 P.M.

On the day before he was arrested, Jesus gathered with his friends for a meal and the proclamation of a new commandment to love one another, demonstrating it by washing the disciples' feet. Remembering that night, we gather to break bread, to pray, and to be washed clean during an "Agape Meal." Agape (ah-GAHP-ay) is the Greek word for the highest form of love; this service is sometimes known as a love-feast. The custom originated in the early church and is a time of holy fellowship for us as it was for the first Christians. All are welcome, and footwashing is not mandatory—so even if you're not sure about that ritual, join us as we gather at the table to draw close to one another and to Jesus. This offering is for everyone and it is also suitable for families with children. Childcare will be available for babies and toddlers. The menu includes tabbouleh, pita bread, hummus, chicken skewers, cucumber yogurt dip, and cookies for dessert. In addition, there will be child-friendly options (pasta with butter and cheese, and fresh fruit).

## Maundy Thursday's overnight vigil

Following the 7:30 p.m. Maundy Thursday service in the church (April 2 this year), an all-night vigil is kept in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit with the reserved sacrament and the vigil candle. The chapel is filled with greenery and flowers to recall the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed in the hours before he was arrested. Participants take turns staying awake with Jesus, praying for one hour. A sign-up sheet is available at Information Central outside the parish office to ensure that at least two people are in the chapel each hour, but if your preferred slot is filled, come anyway. Security is present throughout the night.

## Help with St. Stephen's Easter egg hunt

GOODIES DUE MARCH 29 | EASTER EGG HUNT APRIL 5

St. Stephen's Church will host an Easter egg hunt on Easter Day following the 9 a.m. services in Palmer Hall and the main church. We will begin the hunt after both services have concluded.

**Will you donate treats?** Please bring plastic eggs already stuffed with candy or non-candy treats by Palm Sunday, March 29. Our goal is to collect 1,000 filled Easter eggs. Donation receptacles are set up outside Palmer Hall near the parish office. If you are donating specifically allergen-free treats, be sure that the packaging is marked as such so that these can be made available to children with food allergies. Questions: Abby Kocher, [akocher@ststephensRVA.org](mailto:akocher@ststephensRVA.org).

**Can you help hide eggs on Easter morning** between 9 and 10 a.m.? This is an opportunity for youth and adult helpers. Volunteers will meet in the Palmer Hall annex at 9 a.m. Use the QR code to volunteer.



## Contemplative living for contemporary life

SATURDAY, APRIL 18, 12:30-4:30 P.M.

Dr. Westina Matthews will lead a half-day retreat exploring contemplative living in the context of contemporary life. In a noisy world and anxious time, how are we to live faithfully, now? This retreat, which begins in Palmer Hall, will feature holy listening and discernment that nourishes body, mind, and heart through prayer, reflection, laughter, movement and music. The retreat is crafted for St. Stephen's and led by Dr. Matthews, a highly-sought speaker, teacher, author, and spiritual director. Come and rest in peace, be awakened in joy, and listen for the simple presence of God in our midst. This retreat was originally scheduled in February and postponed due to inclement weather. If you signed up for it earlier, you do not need to do so again. If not, please scan the QR code to register.



Dr. Matthews will also be our forum speaker and preacher on Sunday morning, April 19.

## Bible study to focus on lesser-known epistles

THURSDAYS AT 10 A.M. BEGINNING APRIL 9

After a short hiatus, our Thursday morning Bible Study will return April 9. This spring we will study the New Testament epistles. The word epistle means "letter," and in the New Testament there are 11 short epistles that often don't get our attention, including 1 and 2 Timothy, James, Philemon, and others. These short texts tend not to be read in church, or privately, and are not as well known as Paul's epistles or the Epistle to the Hebrews. In this six-week study, we'll explore these letters and sermons for what they can show us about their authors and audiences, and how we can learn from them today. No registration is needed for this offering; we meet in Room 14.

## Orientation for visitors and newcomers

SUNDAY, APRIL 12 | 10:10 A.M.-11 A.M.

To welcome and support those newer to or exploring St. Stephen's Church, we host orientation sessions every other month in the Café @ St. Stephen's. We share information about the community, our values and culture, and ways to get connected, serve or learn. We also respond to your questions. To let us know you'll be there, scan the QR code. The sessions are hosted by Jennifer Bousquet, director of outreach and engagement, and the Rev. John Jenkins. You are always welcome to email Jennifer ([jbousquet@ststephensRVA.org](mailto:jbousquet@ststephensRVA.org)) or John ([jjenkins@ststephensRVA.org](mailto:jjenkins@ststephensRVA.org)) or call 804.288.2867.



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## A reception for visitors and newcomers

THURSDAY, APRIL 30 | 5:30-7 P.M.

The rector, staff and hospitality committee of St. Stephen's host periodic receptions for those who are new to this community of faith, and the definition of "new" is up to you. If you've recently joined St. Stephen's, or you have been away for a season, or you have visited but have not yet decided whether to make this your church home, please come to the next reception. RSVP at [ststephensRVA.org/newcomer](http://ststephensRVA.org/newcomer).



## Spring Ministry Night

THURSDAY, MAY 7 | 5:15-7:30 P.M.

A few times during the year, members of various standing committees of the vestry gather for supper, fellowship, and sharing about what is happening at St. Stephen's Church. This gathering time concludes with a simple worship service, after which individual committees may meet to discuss upcoming plans for their area of ministry. **Everyone is welcome at Ministry Night, whether you are on one of the committees or not.** This is a great way to learn about the various ministries happening here, and how and where you might plug in. If you plan to attend, please let us know so we'll know how much supper to prepare. Visit [ststephensRVA.org/ministry-night](http://ststephensRVA.org/ministry-night).



## Women of St. Stephen's program: 'Meditations on Eastertide'

TUESDAY, APRIL 7 | GATHER, 9:30 A.M. | PROGRAM, 10 A.M.

Angier Brock, who spoke here in 2024, will return the Tuesday in Easter Week to present "Meditations on Eastertide." The 50-day feast known as Eastertide takes us from Easter Day until the Day of Pentecost. Angier, who is retired after more than 30 years of teaching, is a communicant of Grace Episcopal Church in Yorktown, where she serves as an Education for Ministry mentor and centering prayer facilitator. Over two dozen of her hymn and anthem texts, set to music by various British and American composers, have been sung at worship services and concerts in the U.S. and abroad. She has a master of arts in Christian education and master of fine arts in creative writing. We'll be in the fellowship hall, and no registration is required.



## Spring cleaning?

SATURDAY, APRIL 18 | 9 A.M.-2 P.M.

Are you spring cleaning? On April 18 we will partner with Caritas here at St. Stephen's, receiving household goods and furniture in good condition for their furniture bank. The furniture bank provides essential household items to individuals and families transitioning from homelessness or crisis situations. The truck will be parked near the playground at St. Stephen's. A list of items accepted can be found at [ststephensRVA.org/outreach](http://ststephensRVA.org/outreach). Please note that furniture and other items must be in good condition; if Caritas is not able to accept your item(s), please be prepared to take them with you. St. Stephen's will not be able to accept or dispose of them. Also, we cannot accept any items before 9 a.m. on April 18, or after 2 p.m.



## Upcoming outreach events

Save these dates; visit [ststephensRVA.org/outreach](http://ststephensRVA.org/outreach) for additional details and sign-up.

- Rebuilding Together Richmond: Saturday, April 25
- Sons and Daughters of Ham cemetery clean-up: Saturday, May 2
- Shalom Farms volunteer day: Wednesday, May 13, 9 a.m.-noon



**St. Stephen's**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

A community of hospitality, healing, and hope, sharing the love of Christ.

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