

OCTOBER 2025



FATHER BAILEY

One of the things I enjoy most about my vocation as your priest is the sharing of stories. It is listening to the life experiences each of you bring. It is your invitation to hear something about my life. These visits often progress into exploring how our experiences reveal how and where God is moving among us. Often these conversations steer toward the harder and darker parts of our journeys where we've experienced grief, hurt, betrayal, or times where people have been downright evil to us or to someone else we love. I say often that my privilege is being able to walk with you in these sacred spaces that are not always beautiful or tidy because you trust me enough to let me in these vulnerable places.

What if we looked at everyone as a person with a story to tell? It sounds hokey, and obviously we experience people who overshare (telling us WAY too much about themselves without asking if they could!), are narcissistic (everything you say about you is twisted into something that's about them), or look for vulnerabilities to exploit or hurt you in some way for their benefit. Many of us at some point – and some throughout their life – struggle to understand their own story because of abuse, neglect, addiction, mental illness, growing up in poverty, or some experience that has caused us to see ourselves and the world through a damaged lens.

Yet it is this latter group that often gets overlooked, misunderstood, or even shunned by the world – and, yes, by the church. In other words, there is a whole group of people who can manifest as quiet, aloof, defensive, or perhaps even absurdly ebullient that might make us uncomfortable and off-putting. They don't act in a way that makes us immediately rtable, and as human beings, we tend to naturally gravitate toward those who not only look and act like us but who also

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FATHER BAILEY (CONT.)

make us feel good about ourselves. This tendency to drift toward what is familiar and comfortable applies across so many things – racial, cultural, economic, orientation – but ultimately it comes down to being with people whose behavior and background affirm something about our own origins and experiences.

So, what if we flipped the script and began to be intentional about seeking out the stories in others? What would that look like?

At our Annual Meeting in November, I will present a mission project for us at St. Stephen's to begin looking at how we can come to understand our own stories better AND how we can be better equipped to inviting conversations with others to share their stories. Why would we want to do this? After all, we have a predominant majority of introverts in Oak Ridge who'd be very happy to keep to themselves, right? Simply put, the story of God as told in Scripture, the lives of the saints, and the life of the church today is revealed through the lives of human beings in countless generations who are seeking how to understand their place in the universe. God does not operate in a vacuum. The coming of Jesus Christ into the world is a reminder that the almighty and all-powerful God chooses to operate within the limits and struggles of daily human life.



Share Your Stories

All of us crave in some way an affirmation of who we are and a place where we can be authentic without being judged. At the same time, this sense of authenticity allows us to step into places where we know we will be challenged to grow, be transformed, and understand that our ways are far from perfect. Beyond overt abuse, the greatest trauma I have seen afflicted on people by churches in our time is a demand that people must think of themselves as terrible creatures with no redeeming value, repent of their supposed worthlessness, and only then be recognized in this perpetually broken state that they can be accepted into “Christ-like community.”

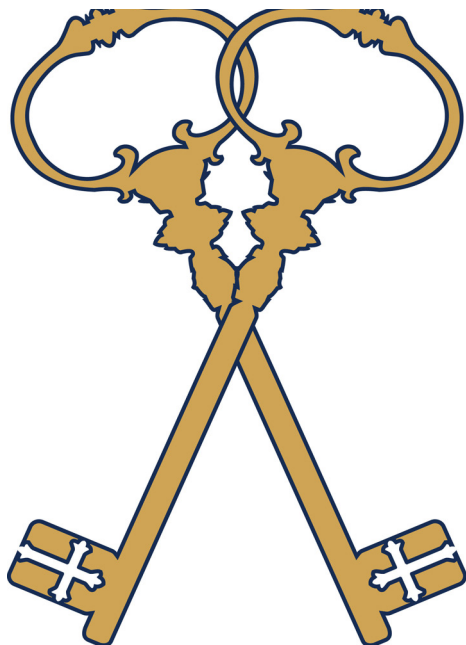
FATHER BAILEY (CONT.)

What if our starting point instead was a place where every human being is valued for being created in the image of God, recognized for the intrinsic value that they possess in this context, affirmed that God has already been doing good work in their lives, and ONLY then do we begin the hard and necessary work of striving for repentance, forgiveness, and transformation from the limits of our human perspective to living in the ways of God? When people ask me why I'm an Episcopalian, it is this reason – we begin the narrative not with wrath or fear but with the reality that every human being has a story to tell, one that is full both of goodness and of deep and profound pain. Our journey together can only happen when we acknowledge this.

Before November, I will say this regarding what I will be calling us to do. If you've written a spiritual autobiography, shared something of your background in a small group, shared something troubling your conscience in confession, made public amends in an AA or AlAnon group, spoken about your spiritual journey as a stewardship speaker, or reflected on the meaning of a piece of Scripture on your life in a Bible study, you've already done this work. For the introverts among us (myself included), I promise that I will not be asking all of you to stand and offer your story in front of the congregation, a group, or even me. I will be giving you tools – and an invitation to participate in groups as you are comfortable – to articulate your own story; to learn how to engage a person in sharing something meaningful about themselves; and how we can use these skills to build a community which truly reflects our belief that the church consists of all people who believe in God and desire to live in true and authentic community in Christ with each other. My charismatic friends would correctly say, "How can we better understand the work the Holy Spirit is doing in each of us?"

So, I leave you with that cliffhanger. In the meantime, I am happy to sit down and articulate this vision to anyone who wishes to learn more. Please be mindful of the fact that appreciating the stories of God's work in others and in ourselves requires a great deal of intentionality. We can't assume we will always see people in this way because the fact of the matter is we don't. Ask yourself the question, "What are the reasons why I'd rather not learn about others' stories?" What are the reasons I don't want people to learn about mine? And then ask yourself, "Why is it important for my faith and my ministry in God's service to learn these stories?" These are the questions I will explore with you soon. I look forward to this and seeing the ways we at St. Stephen's can begin looking at ourselves as a community fervently seeking how God's story is playing out in us and through us as we speak!

NEW BUILDING ACCESS UPGRADES COMING!



At our September meeting, the Vestry approved the acquisition of a new key card system that will provide more secure access to our church facilities. Thanks to the good work of our Gifts and Memorials Committee working in conjunction with the families in whose name memorials have been given, a sizable amount of money has been designated for use by the Vestry to provide necessary building upgrades. One of the key upgrades we have identified is providing hard-wired locks for our building that can be opened through key fobs or through pre-set timers.

We have contracted with a company called Purple Mouse Smart House who has provided the same level of access features for places such as our neighbors, First United Methodist Church and the Episcopal School of Knoxville.

The keycard access system will be installed over the next several weeks, and the system will not go fully online until sometime after Christmas. Once we are acclimated to the system, it will prove just as easy to use as the keys we have now. But we want to provide some time for people to get used to the system and to ask any questions.

Anyone who currently has access to a key – or any future ministry leaders or participants who require keys – will be able to receive a key fob. There will be readers placed at main entrances (the office doors, the east side door by the clergy parking, the ramp room, and the landing door on the north side by the Tulane parking lot) that will simply require you to tap your fob on the reader. The door will unlock and, a few seconds after unlocking, will automatically lock behind you. This will eliminate the need for any physical keys to be handed out save for a very small number that will be kept by the parish staff. For those who also need to access interior spaces that are locked (e.g., the Altar Guild), you will continue to have access to any of these spaces as you normally would.

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The main requirement for receiving a church key continues to be completion of the Safe Church Training and renewal of said training every 3 years. This is per policy adopted by the Diocese of East Tennessee that is applicable for every worshipping community in the diocese. As an aside, I receive occasional complaints concerning either the length or the content of the training. I fully appreciate the time commitment and the difficult content of the training, as I am required as clergy to go through every single module of this training every three years as well. However, I can also tell you that every single item discussed in that training is something which I have either seen directly or have heard about from colleagues in other churches. In other words, the abuse and harassment – sexual, physical, verbal, emotional – is an unfortunate reality of the world, including within the church. All of those examples mentioned in the training are there because they have actually happened somewhere – and more than a few times. Our training – and our access to the building as a result of it – are meant to serve as a safeguard to keep any of this from happening at St. Stephen's.

Lastly, I know some of you will ask why it is necessary for us to spend a sizable portion of money to upgrade our building access and security. While none of the misconduct mentioned in the Safe Church Training has happened at St. Stephen's, what has happened is that we frequently find doors unlocked or even left wide open. Since I returned five years ago, on at least five occasions I have walked into people roaming our buildings during the week whom I didn't know. Two of those happened to be workmen that I didn't know were coming but who were supposed to be there. The other three times, they turned out to be random people who gave stories about why they were in the building ("I needed to go to the restroom") but had simply walked in through an unlocked door. We have had a break-in and several other occasions where expensive items have gone missing from our building. The keycard system is not an attempt to control access to the building, but it gives us the tools to better manage that access so that we know who is in the building.

Likewise, one of our difficulties on Sunday is managing the doors. We have struggled finding the balance between leaving all of the main entrances unlocked (and thus the church wide open) versus locking them all shortly after the service begins which has literally locked some people who arrived just a few minutes late out of the service. Doors are locked manually by the ushers, but occasionally they will forget to unlock them for later services or events that take place after church. One of the ways in which our keycard system will help with this is that we can set automatic timers to lock certain doors in vulnerable areas immediately after service begins (for instance, the office doors near the

FATHER BAILEY (CONT.)

nursery), but we can make sure to leave key doors like the red doors and the ramp doors open but under supervision from the ushers. These timers can then unlock doors for a brief time after service to allow people in for events before then automatically locking again when all events are completed for the day.

This feature will not only assist the ushers greatly, but it also gives us an added ability to manage access to the building in preparation for a worst-case scenario like an active shooter. Again, I don't have to tell you that none of us want to think of that reality. But, as we've seen in the news, shootings in houses of worship are on the rise again. The ability to set timers and to control locks remotely when needed is a great help in making sure that we have eyes on every unlocked door when services or events are taking place. At some point down the road, we will have conversations about active shooter training, particularly for our staff, lay leaders, and ushers. But this tool gives us some ability to narrow the possibilities of how someone may enter our space when we are engaged in worship, fellowship, or service of some kind.

This is a lot of information to absorb, but I invite you to reflect on this and come up with any questions you may have. I know our Wardens, Leah Bailey and Ben Shassere, are available, but I also encourage you to come to me. We still have the ability to adapt and alter our plans to some extent for how this system is laid out. Your input, especially as we begin the process of implementation, will be extremely valuable to us. If you continue to struggle with understanding why we are implementing this type of system in the first place, I'm more than happy to discuss this. For all the legwork and research that has already gone into this project, the current stage of research consists primarily of your input. Above all, in this day where things aren't as safe as they once were, we want to strive to find a healthy combination of maintaining a safe space and reasonable access to our facilities for all who wish to worship and serve God and others through St. Stephen's. I look forward to hearing from you.

Christ's Peace,
Bailey



WARDEN'S CORNER

We kicked off our Stewardship Campaign this month with Adam Cavender chairing the annual pledge drive. Pledging is incredibly important for the financial well-being of our church as our yearly budget is built based on our pledges, but stewardship is more than monetary gifts. Good stewardship also encompasses the gifts of time and talents.

As adults, we put a great deal of our time, talents and treasure into where we live. We maintain, update and decorate, and make our house a home. What is the difference between a house and a home? I read somewhere that a house is simply a structure. A home is more; a home gives us peace at the end of a hard day, it restores us, and it prepares us for what is to come.

St. Stephen's is certainly God's House, but it is also our spiritual home. Within this home we celebrate using outward signs like water, oil, bread, gestures, or words. Through these outward signs we receive inward spiritual gifts such as forgiveness, divine presence, or spiritual strengthening.

In times of stress or trouble, a spiritual home becomes even more important. When we leave after services, we too have achieved some measure of peace. We are restored, we're stronger, and we are ready to face what is to come. We have the support of our church family, and we know—God's got this!

Please prayerfully consider how you can contribute to this year's Stewardship Campaign in support of our spiritual home.

LeahB



**Thanks
for Your
Support!**

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR SENIOR WARDEN

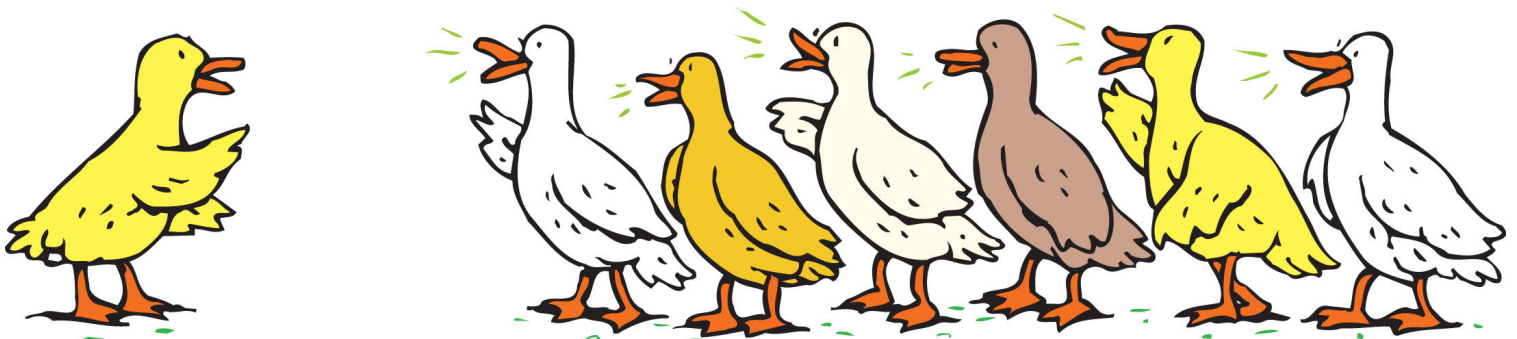
NOMINATIONS ARE NOW OPEN FOR VESTRY AND CONVENTION DELEGATES!

Our Annual Meeting will be Sunday, November 16, immediately following the 10:30 service. During the meeting, we will elect the next cohort of Vestry members. St. Stephen's Vestry is composed of 12 members who serve a 3-year term. Rotating off of the Vestry will be Leah Bailey, Ashley Hillis, Courtney Manrod, and Gary Dreier, who completed the term of Cleon Hartman. Roger Johnson is eligible to be elected to a two-year term after having served this year for Ray Evans.

Vestry members must be adult, confirmed members of the church. The Vestry meets monthly, and is the Board of Directors of our Parish. They administer the temporal affairs of the Parish, and assist the Rector in developing the spiritual life of the Parish.

Nominations are now open for the Vestry. You may nominate—with their permission—a fellow parishioner. You may also self-nominate. Submit your nominations to Leah Bailey, Chairman of the Nominations Committee (leah.bailey@ststephensor.org). In order to publish candidate biographies two-weeks prior to the election, nominations will close on October 29.

Additionally, we will be selecting 3 delegates to the Diocesan Convention and alternates. The Convention will be February 20-21 in Knoxville. Please contact Father Bailey or the church office if you are willing to serve as a delegate or alternate.



ANNUAL MEETING



Get ready! St. Stephen's inaugural lobster fest, "Claws for a Cause," is approaching, with proceeds going to support the ministry of Grace Point and various local children's ministries. We are flying fresh Maine lobsters in via Delta Airlines on November 7th in time for our November 8th event. We will be serving dinner from 4:30-6:30 which will range from \$35-\$40 depending on whether taking away or eating at the church under the tent. The menu will include steamed whole Maine lobster, drawn butter, hush puppies, potato salad, and coleslaw.

For this to be a success, we need everyone's help! Whether you're setting up, greeting guests, serving the meal, or cleaning up, your time and enthusiasm will be vital to the event's success. Together, we can make Claws for a Cause an annual celebration of faith, fellowship, and giving back.

Claws for a Cause is co-sponsored by Parish Life, Evangelism, and Outreach committees. Claws for a Cause is co-sponsored by Parish Life, Evangelism, and Outreach committees.



St. Stephen's is blessed to have many quiet "Church Mice" who go about the church building and grounds making updates and improvements.

The hospitality area has received a face lift in memory of Terry Burgess. Fresh paint, blinds, and area rug say "welcome" to parishioners and visitors as they enter through the glass portico doors. The brightening of the hospitality area called for fresh paint in the hallway.

Room 209—St. Stephen's very own Calm Room is ready for "visitors." This space has been thoughtfully designed as a peaceful retreat for adults and children alike who may need a quiet moment to reset, decompress, or self-regulate during services or events. Featuring sensory elements and soothing decor, the Calm Room will serve as a supportive sanctuary for anyone feeling overwhelmed or overstimulated. Whether for those with special needs or anyone navigating a tough day, this innovative addition reflects our commitment to being an inclusive, compassionate, and welcoming church home. Many thanks to everyone who has contributed time and effort to this project.

Refurbished outdoor directional signage will soon be installed around the property. Thanks to Nancy Carow and Michael Trank for all their efforts in making our exterior more accessible and attractive to visitors.

The lovely flowers do not just magically appear on the retables in the sanctuary. Barbara Neill is another faithful church mouse who orders the flowers for Sundays and special occasions such as funerals and weddings. She coordinates with the donors to honor any special wishes. She also is in charge of the special Christmas and Easter flowers. Thank you Barbara.

MINISTRY UPDATES

Blessing Box and Food Distribution

Each Sunday at the 10:30 service the Little Red Wagon filled with your donations is wheeled to the chancel steps for a blessing. What happens to the donations next?

The food, hygiene items, and cleaning supplies are stored in the resource room in preparation for distribution during the week. Some things are placed in the Blessing Box and others are given to those who need them in person under the portico three times a week.

Here is a visual record of some things that are taking place.



MINISTRY UPDATES (CONT.)

October Loose Offering Recipient

TORCH

TORCH (Tennessee Out-Reach Center for the Homeless) is a nonprofit whose mission is to rapidly house the homeless, and help to stabilize the family once placed. Since its opening in 2013, TORCH has continued to grow as it strives to meet the growing homelessness issue in Anderson County. Referrals come from area churches, other nonprofits, Methodist Medical Center, United Way, individuals, and Oak Ridge and Anderson County Schools.

In 2024 TORCH assisted 373 individuals through street outreach, and helped 40 households transition from homelessness into housing. TORCH also assisted 28 individuals in transitioning into recovery housing, sheltered 17 families in hotel rooms, and sheltered 13 families at Bookhart Village, Agape House, and another home available to victims of domestic violence. Six TORCH employees provide a multitude of services, including: advocacy, basic needs, bus tickets, case management, emergency shelter, food, gas cards, housing, hotel/motel stays, material goods, street outreach, referrals, rent deposits, rent assistance, safe housing, utility deposits, and utility assistance.

Oak Ridge Housing Authority manages all three TORCH properties, and provides necessary support as the families work towards self-sufficiency and obtaining permanent housing.

Currently TORCH staff state that are approximately 80 people that sleep outside each night in Anderson County. Please give generously so that TORCH can continue to do the vital work of alleviating homelessness in Anderson County.

MINISTRY UPDATES (CONT.)

The September Loose Offering Recipient was Together Podmos.

Your generosity of \$1200.00 will help them serve our
Hispanic families' needs.

Together Podemos (Together We Can) is a nonprofit organization serving Oak Ridge, Anderson County, and surrounding areas. Our mission is to empower and support Hispanic families through education, workshops, and vital resource connections. We strive to create a welcoming and inclusive space where families feel valued, respected, and celebrated while preserving and honoring Hispanic heritage.

Founded in January 2024, Together Podemos remains a 100% volunteer-led organization, sustained entirely by generous donations. Thanks to the ongoing support of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church and many other churches, businesses, and individuals, we continue to offer impactful services, including:

- English as a Second Language (ESL): 4 hours per week, with 17 students currently enrolled
- HiSET/GED Preparation: Supporting 12 registered students
- Literacy Initiatives: In partnership with the Consulate of Mexico and Friends of Literacy
- Driving Safety Class
- Personal Finance Workshop
- Service Referrals to local Resources organizations
- School Registration Day Support: Offered in 2023, 2024, and 2025

In response to growing uncertainty and fear within our community, we've expanded our services to include critical family preparedness programs:

- Emergency Family Plans: Developed with 60 families over the past four months
- Notarized Legal Documents: Including powers of attorney and travel consent letters for 125 children in the last six months

We also believe in celebrating joy and culture. A highlight this year was our Día del Niño (Children's Day) celebration on April 30th, where over 120 attendees—including 72 children—gathered to honor a beloved Latin American tradition. It was a beautiful day filled with laughter, heritage, and community spirit.

Your kindness and support are essential to our mission of improving the lives of hundreds of families. Please continue helping us help others—together, we can make a lasting difference.
Gracias

MINISTRY UPDATES (CONT.)

Mite Boxes Donations bring hope through Episcopal Relief and Development's "Gifts For Life" Program

We wanted to share with the parish an update on the Mite Boxes, which raised \$623.76 this past Lent. The money collected was used to purchase "Gifts For Life" that were chosen by the children. This was done with ballots they collected in each plastic egg during the Easter Egg Hunt. Not only did this help raise the children's awareness of the needs of others, but it provided an opportunity for them to participate more fully in the wonderful tradition of Mite Boxes. This joint effort of children and adults working together is bringing hope to many people struggling for a better life.

Here are the Gifts of Life that were purchased:

- 2 Beehives
- 2 Clean Water (for 2 persons)
- 1 Pig
- 1 Share of a Cow
- 1 Goat
- 2 Shares of a Flock of Chickens
- 3 Mosquito Nets and Training
- 1 Care for Moms and Newborns
- 2 Shares of a Fruit Tree
- 1 Financial Literacy for one student

Thank you for your generous donations and participation! If you want to learn more about "Gifts For Life", detailed information can be found on the Episcopal Relief and Development Fund website:

<https://www.episcopalrelief.org/>

MINISTRY UPDATES (CONT.)

A Halloween for All to Join

Do you know where Halloween started? It was the eve of Samhain, a pagan Celtic celebration of the beginning of winter and the first day of the new year. This time of the ingathering of the harvest and the approach of winter apparently provided a reminder of human mortality. The church “adopted” this time of celebration for Christian use by observing All Saints' Day on Nov. 1, and All Hallows' Eve on the evening of Oct. 31.

WE NEED YOUR HELP! St. Stephen's is celebrating this year with a lot of events - There are several ways that you can participate. If you can help out, please contact Brittany Shassere at (865)789-9460 or at brittany.shassere@knoxschools.org. We appreciate any time you can give, even an hour helps!

Every year, the City of Oak Ridge hosts its annual Halloween event and it's a great time for kids of ALL ages! This year we'll be there in costume, handing out treats and having fun.



DONATE CANDY – From now until October 22, 2025, we will be collecting treats. Look for the collection wagons in the Nave and in the Parish Hall. Please note – all candy/food ideas must be prepackaged and not homemade (the city's rules!)

SETUP/ TAKE DOWN THE BOOTH – We will be setting up our booth from 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM on Oct. 24th, and then taking it down from 8:00 PM – 10:00 PM

GIVE OUT CANDY – We need volunteers to help give out candy and other treats from 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM. The City is expecting 1200-2000 kids. We'd love to have you come in costume and have fun

CARVE PUMPKINS – On Sunday, October 19, 2025, following the 10:30 service, we're having a pumpkin carving party in the parish hall. Bring your own pumpkin and carving kit – we will have a few extras if you just bring your family! There will also be some seasonal treats and of course fellowship!



THE BISHOP IS COMING – Holy Boocharist! Bishop Brian will be our celebrant. We will have “Brunch With the Bishop” from 9:00-10:15. After the 10:30 service, there will be coffee and cake with the Bishop and the newly confirmed. Bishop Brian is looking forward to the young and not-so-young in wearing their costumes to church!



Looking Ahead



October 26

November 2
All Saints' Sunday
Stewardship Ingathering



November 8
Claws for a Cause

November 16
Annual Meeting

November 27
Thanksgiving Service
Family Dinner



November
30



*First Sunday
of Advent*