

# St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

128 Chester Pike, Norwood, PA 19074  
Office: 610-461-0490  
Preschool: 610-237-1043  
Pastoral Emergency: 610-996-0657

The Rev. F. Michael Knight  
Priest-in-Charge  
[michaelknight@ststephens-norwood.org](mailto:michaelknight@ststephens-norwood.org)  
[www.ststephens-norwood.org](http://www.ststephens-norwood.org)

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## Dear Friends,

This month's "Dear Friends" will be brief. I am pleased to report a bunch of little milestones:



- Our plan for the third and final year of Transformational Congregation funding in 2009 is in to the diocese.
- The 2007 Parish Audit is completed.
- The 2007 Annual Parochial Report is long-since submitted on time.
- Work is underway on the Fourth of July Parade Float.
- A draft Customary (how we worship) for Eight O'Clock worship has been given to that team for preview and a run-through is scheduled. Ten will be built next.
- Finally, Your Priest-in-Charge is actually taking some time off. When you read this, Kit and I will be back from a trip to Gettysburg with old friends.

And this last, dear friends, is why this Dear Friends is brief!

Many Blessings,

## Sunday School Update: June 2008

The size of Sunday School has remained relatively constant at about 8-10 children per week. The highlights of the year included: performance of "The 12 Days of Christmas" illustrated with signs; making candles for Easter "to show that Jesus is always our light," and tiny birdhouses as gifts for mothers on Mother's Day. Joan Geiger and Kathy Corrigan run the Sunday School with additional help provided by Jaime Mango and Cheryl Daly.

## St. Stephen's Christian Pre-School: End of Year Update

This year the Pre-School flourished. Approximately 48 children participated in the school's program. There were 2-day, 3-day and 5-day morning sessions. And the school did well financially, no longer "in the red" in relation to the total Church budget.

### Ms. Sharon Riess, the School Administrator, writes:

The staff is starting to prepare for closing exercises. Graduation will take place June 4th. Caps and gowns have been ordered and I am in the process of typing diplomas for our munchkins. For anyone interested, please feel free to join us and experience the joy of our students for closing exercises. It's always a hoot!

Among the year's activities was a visit to the Giant Store on Providence Road as an out of school trip. Students learn what goes on behind the scenes in a grocery store, instead of just riding as a cart passenger while Mommy shops. This is part of our "Community Helpers" unit. At the end of May we will have our annual class picnic, pet show and summer birthday celebrations. That will just about wrap up things at the preschool for another year.

It's hard to believe that the school year is coming to a close. The entire staff is thankful for the privilege of being part of our student's first school experience. We wish all our graduates, going on to kindergarten, a wonderful year and those returning next year a great summer vacation. Many kudos to the parents for their continued support of our preschool program

My personal thanks to the teachers. They are determined to love the children, and have nothing but the highest expectations for their futures. I am so very proud to be associated with them and this organization.

At this point in time I am gearing up for the next school year starting in September. Supplies need ordering, registrations continue to come in, and the first of the year packets to new students will need mailing before I know it.

Should any parishioners needing information of registration for themselves, friends or relatives please contact me through the preschool number, 610-237-1043. I'd like to close by using Rose & Barbara's good-bye saying each day with the children, "May the love of God surround you everywhere you may go."

# New Figures Confirm St. Stephen's is Growing!

**"Nickels and Noses"  
numbers are heading in the  
right direction.**

Countless stories in this newsletter over the last year and a quarter have described specific examples of how our Saint Stephen's mission has been being redefined and how we have been growing in effectiveness. Recent figures compiled for the Transformational Congregation Program and our Parish Audit help confirm the trends that make the stories possible.

**Average Sunday Attendance (ASA)  
up 15%**

Comparing 2q07-1q08 to 2q 06-1q07, ASA is up 15% year to year from 46.4 to 53.2. (Our parochial reports that show virtually identical ASA for calendar years 2007 and 2008 are misleading: They mask a steep decline starting in Feb 06 that was not reversed until the effects of transformational work began to take hold well into 1q07.) ASA for Jan through April 2008 is 59.9. All periods include Easter. In calendar year 2008 we expect to exceed the 10 year high ASA of 62.

**First Time Worshipers (FTW) totaled 36  
in 2007, 27 more in 2008:**

Our definition of FTWs is restricted to real prospects, people who live in our mission area, who are shopping, and who give us enough information to follow up. Other guests are counted as "casuals," just passing through. We generated three FTWs a month in 2007 and just under 7 a month through April of 2008. Put another way, 1.4% of ASA in 2007, in and 2.7% of ASA in Jan-Apr 2008 were FTWs who were legitimate prospects for active involved membership.

**Over Half Participate in Mission:**

Speaking of involvement, 48 of 87 resident adult members have an identified ministry function beyond attendance at worship. This 55% compares to 20% nationally, 30% for smaller churches. It reflects a strong hands-on culture in the parish coupled with an intentional process whose

mission is to help eighty percent of resident adult members find that place of ministry where they can "serve with joy in Christ's name."

**2007 Membership End Strength up 33%**

After corrections (+5) to the 2006 parochial report we added 23 adults and 6 children and lost two adults for a net gain of 27 during 2007 to End strength of 110, up nearly 33% over corrected list from last year. These 110 (87 Adults 16 and over, 23 children under 16) are an accurate active membership list rather than an inflated wishful-thinking list. We are managing an additional list of 134 prospects, regular guests, and non-member family members.

**First Quarter '08 Operating  
Income up 56% over First Quarter '07**

Not including money from the Diocese, operating income in Jan-Mar is up \$9,409 (56%) from \$16,684 to \$26,093 in the same period last year.

**Pledges for 2008 up 47%,  
over half from New Members:**

Pledges are up \$23,916 from \$51,216 to \$75,132 or 47%. Of the increases, \$14,440 is from persons new to the parish in 2007. First Quarter Pledge completion is 98% (\$18,313 received of \$18,783 pledged.)

**So much more than "Just Numbers"**

The Bible's word for "Church" never envisioned a building, an institution or even a "vendor of religious goods and services. "Ecclesia" literally means an intentional gathering or assembly called out into public for a common purpose. Assembly is, by definition, "coming together." Average Sunday Attendance (ASA), and even more, the degree and direction of change measures the health of the Assembly/Church and of the people who are currently and potentially part of this "Community of Worship and Mission. We count people like a new mom tenderly counts the fingers and toes of her newborn baby.

**We're not done yet**

We are blessed with good numbers. Ratcheting down anxiety about St. Stephen's future has been a good thing. Anxiety is now replaced with a healthy sense of urgency to keep moving forward in mission: "Now would be good!"

**We count people  
because people count.**

There's an old quip that says "If God didn't think numbers were important, he wouldn't have named a whole book of the Bible after them."

## Parish Audit shows Preschool in the Black.

### First time in years.

During the routine Annual Parish Audit in May, the Preschool's accounts showed a slight operating surplus of \$2,445.61. This was extraordinarily good news after a projected shortfall \$1,000 in the 2007 budget for preschool operations. There were much larger subsidies in previous years.

When Fr. Michael's appointment as Priest-in-Charge was signed in 2007, he literally drove directly to the preschool and sat in the closing circle with the children. After the children had been picked up, the staff was told "This is our preschool. It has our name on it. It meets on our property. It's ours, and we're going to make it work." As the staff gathering ended, he said "OK. You are henceforth and forevermore forbidden to use the word 'hopefully.' It's not hopefully, it's 'we will....' 'Hopefully is a discouraging word." The staff has run with that challenge. They've increased enrollment and added classes to successfully redevelop the preschool operation. When you see Sharon, Rose, Barbara, Sheila and Jo Ann, congratulate them for a job well done.

## St. Stephen's and Immanuel Lutheran offer combined Vacation Bible School

VBS is Aug 18-22, Mon-Fri mornings from 9-12 with a closing extravaganza on Friday night from 6:30-8 PM. Mark your calendars. Registration forms will be available at church and on the website starting in mid June.

Think about who you or your kids can bring to VBS. It's a fun time and a great starting point for people thinking about finding a church.

Adults who want to help are welcome as teachers and helpers, musicians, registrars, snack helpers, crafts, transportation and logistical support. Fr. Michael has blocked out the week for VBS again this year.

Parish contact person is initially Sue Grosso with an assistant to be announced later.

## St. Stephen's to collect Spam and Peanut Butter for Loaves and Fishes Food Bank.

Last week at *Loaves and Fishes* Linda Freeman, the

***Hunger***  
doesn't go  
"down-the-shore"  
for the summer.

Director, and Fr. Michael were talking about the serious summer shortfall of food contributions while people are on vacation and organizations tend to scale back their programming. Linda was enthusiastic about the possibility of another Spam and Peanut Butter Drive. These are convenient accessible sources of concentrated nutrition, especially for those with few or no cooking facilities. In 2006, Mother Jill led St. Stephen's to a crushing victory in an informal contest with St. John's and Immanuel Lutheran. The result was lots of food during the summer dry months.

## Contest Challenge expanded to all Interboro Ministerium Churches.

This year, the challenge is being issued to the rest of the Interboro Ministerium Churches. St. Stephen's is the "Defending Champion." The others will be just waiting to beat us in this worthy cause. Fr Michael doesn't believe in the Super Bowl curse....

## Norwood Library Dedicates memorial to Betty Christiansen

On Saturday, 17 May, the Norwood Public Library dedicated a dogwood tree and memorial plaque to the memory of Betty Christiansen. Betty was a long-time member and benefactor of St. Stephen's.

## Mother's Day Breakfast

by John Mango, Jr.

On May 11, 2008 the men and children of Saint Stephen's held the second annual Mother's Day Breakfast. The men did the cooking and the children were oh so helpful with serving those who usually serve them. The kitchen was strictly off limits to the women of the parish for the day.

The menu included scrambled eggs, French toast, sausage and bacon, with orange juice, coffee and milk to wash it all down. As was the case for last year's breakfast, the local Giant supermarket was the benefactor of the feast donating ample gift cards to purchase all the supplies we needed. A special thank you has to go out to both managers of the local Giants, Mr. Coffee and Mr. O'Hagan, who donated \$50.00 gift cards each from their stores.

In the end, everyone ate their fill, enjoyed good fellowship and the moms received a small sample of the appreciation we all have for all they do for us the rest of the year.

Something Funny

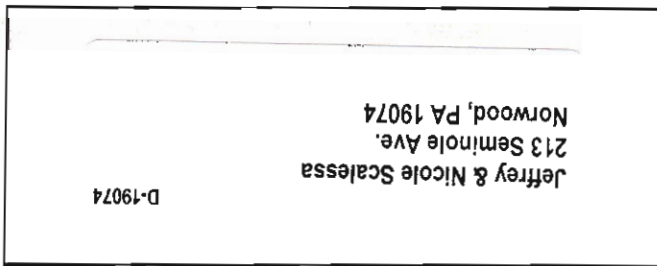
by Jan Myers

Lately, I've been feeling blue, still grieving the loss of my sister. Maybe I should say beginning the grief process as poor Bud's knee put everything on hold. I've not felt particularly motivated but I woke up this morning with a need to do something so I started with my desk at home. It was an embarrassment of mailings, store ads and paperwork that needed to be thrown, shredded or put away. Since I no longer work from home, the desk has become the end of the line for "I'll decide later," "I need that," or "I have no clue." I know I'm not alone in this circumstance and the knowing makes me feel better!!

Maybe cleaning the clutter is a beginning of the clearing of my mind. Maybe it's a place to put all this weird energy. Maybe it's because the darned desk was so dirty I couldn't stand it anymore. Anyway, I'm cleaning and throwing and shredding (my new favorite hobby) all the minutia, when I found a beautiful card, a Christmas Card. I open the card and immediately feel the love of the entire parish wrap itself around me like a safe place. I realize it is the card given to me at Christmas from my church family. I read every single signature and every sentiment enclosed. I was laughing and crying at the same time. And I thanked God for each and every one of you as, once again, you blessed me with a gift. It's funny how gifts given a long time ago, can still hold as much love and as many blessings as when they were first given.

I think that helped me have an "epiphany" moment. Love and blessings have no expiration date. I love you all! Thank You.

June 2008



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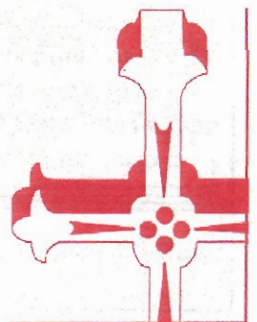
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St. Stephen's



The Prayer That  
Shapes Our Community

For the Community we  
serve give us generous hearts,  
O Lord...

Let us be that Community of  
Worship and Mission where all  
can become who they are in  
Christ and serve joyfully in  
Christ's Name.  
Amen