



Newsletter February 2015

## Feast and Fast Feed the Soul

"Between endings and beginnings,/ there is a blank time/ when nothing is supposed to happen./ It's frustrating,  
fearful,/ but it's supposed to be that way./ Like a tree in winter,/

on the outside/ there is nothing going on, but/ inside is hidden growth./ This growth explodes in spring./ Spring can't  
happen/ without the blank time./ We need winter/ and so it is forced upon us."

Recently, someone sent me this poem by Peter McDonald. As snow piles up, I am captivated by the notion that "we need winter and so it is forced upon us." The words resonate because I would never choose the frozen, bleak, lifelessness of winter but I know spring and summer abundance depend on this time of incubation. Just yesterday, Debbie Potter reminded us that our summer gardens would be glad for this week's snow.

I'm clear that our spirits also require times of introspection and reflection. In the Episcopal Church, our liturgical calendar knows that we need seasons of fast as well as feast. Having celebrated Christmas joyfully with friends and family, and welcomed the Epiphany with Rev. Sarah's ordination and Bishop Alan's first Episcopal visit to St. Stephen's, we are doing a fine job with our seasons of feasting. Clearly, on February 1, we all need to be in church to pray for the Patriots and prepare for our Superbowl parties!

On February 8, when we gather for our Annual Meeting and Potluck, the feasting will continue as we enjoy good food, give thanks for the abundant ministries of our parish, and celebrate leaders who are stepping down as well as those who are stepping in. Having read countless drafts of our Annual Report over the last week as it moves toward completion, I am awed by the over-flowing blessings that St. Stephen's both is and receives.

Of course, February also brings us the queen of parties—Mardi Gras! While we don't even try to rival New Orleans or the Caribbean, we do maintain the tradition of closing out Epiphany on Shrove Tuesday with a family friendly feast of Pancakes and Gumbo as we reflect both our English/Canadian Maritime and Caribbean heritage. Since Shrove Tuesday falls during School Vacation Week this year, the Youth Ministries Team invites Middle and High Schoolers to join Neil O'Donnell in the kitchen at 1:00 to make Gumbo. At 3:00, Rev. Sarah will join the fun with Mardi Gras crafts and more cooking. Eating and games will begin at 5:30 with our liturgy for burning the palms happening in the parking lot at 7:30.

On Ash Wednesday, as we come to church to receive ashes on our foreheads as signs of our humanity and mortality, we will be invited to "the observance of a holy Lent, by self examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word." Join us for worship at 7:30am, noon, or 7:00pm and every Lenten Sunday. Lent is our season of introspection as we examine our lives and reflect on whether we are right with God and our neighbor. Do our lives truly reflect God's glory?

Just as few of us would choose winter, few of us would choose Lent "so it is forced upon us." Our spirits require both feast and fast. Let God grow quietly in you this Lent so that you are ready for the abundance of spring and Easter when they come in April.

Dear Friends,

As I look ahead to the month of February I'm once again amazed by just how much stuff St. Stephen's fits into four weeks. Of course it's all good stuff, even amazing stuff: Lenten Bible Study, mid-week Healing Services, youth retreat, Food Pantry, ECCO dinners and many more. That's what I love about this community—there's something for everyone and if we don't have we'll help you create it!

This has been on my mind as I reflect on Bishop Gates' sermon from his visit in January. As he spoke about Jesus' baptism he asked us again and again, "What are you doing here?" What are **you** doing as a Christian? What are **you** doing as a member of St. Stephen's?

As I mentioned above there are a lot of options. In listening to God we find the possibility of new options as well. One that I'm particularly excited about is a growing team that is committed to creating space for intentional conversations about race and privilege. The team was formed out of a shared realization that God didn't intend the world to become what it is now. God did not create the world to be divided in terms of race, class, age, etc... So as people of God, how do we love and serve across those divisions? Working with the Leadership Development Initiative trainers we will use the tools of community organizing to engage this topic in conversation, prayer, and action. But in order to fully do this work we need all voices and all hearts. This is not for just black people or just white people—it's for all of us because we are all part of God's creation.

In the next few weeks we will enter the season of Lent. It's a season to put aside sweets and temptations but it's also a season to do something new, to step outside of your comfort zone for 40 days.

So, what are **you** doing?

Peace,

Sarah

## **A View from the Pew**

It is that time of year again when St. Stephen's gears up for its Annual Meeting. The treasurer's office is busy making sure the end-of-the year budget and the next fiscal year's budget is all set for printing. Leaders of various ministries and groups are writing their reports to be compiled in the Annual Report. Vestry members whose terms are expiring are now part of the Nominating Committee and are soliciting others to offer themselves up in a leadership role.

Annual Meeting...it's a time of planning ahead and reflecting on the past year. It's about celebrating all the hard work that has been done and taking pause to remember where we fell short. It's a bitter-sweet time where we rejoice with those who have been added to our rolls in Baptism and grieve those who have died over the last year. It's about electing our lay leadership who will oversee our Annual budget, our physical property, will lead us through our mission statement and will represent St. Stephen's at the Deanery and Diocesan levels. It's a time to see how St. Stephen's grew the talents you entrusted to the Vestry. It's about life at St. Stephen's!!

The Parish By-laws are very clear as to whom can vote and run for office. Any person sixteen years of age or older, who contributes financially and worships regularly at St. Stephen's is eligible to vote and run for Vestry, Deanery and Delegates to Diocesan Convention. Due to the laws of the Commonwealth, the minimum age for the positions of Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Clerk and Treasurer is eighteen. However, all are welcome to attend the meeting to hear about the life and vitality of the parish...Sunday, February 8, 2015 in the Dining Room after the 10am service.

For me, I decided not to run for a third successive term as the Senior Warden. I feel that it is more ideal, whenever possible, to have staggered warden terms. This allows for at least one warden to have "institutional knowledge" of programs, decisions, contracts, etc. providing for a smooth transition. When two wardens start together and end together, the transition process can be a little more difficult for the new wardens. The other piece that helped form my decision not to seek another term was that the major projects were either now done or established. The Apse Wall Restoration Project and the grant work with the Massachusetts Historical Society are now closed. The year long process working with the Vestry to write a new Mission Statement and redefine our mission goals is now complete.

It has been an honor to be able to serve on the Vestry at St. Stephen's. The talent that abides in each person on the Vestry is wide and varied. Some are great with numbers, some with words, some are visionaries and some are practical. We work together...we share a common love for our parish...making each meeting both important and meaningful. I am truly grateful to all of you who have supported me in this role; I could not have done it without all of your help.

Thank you,

Chris Trahan

**COME TO THE ANNUAL MEETING**  
**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2015 AT NOON**

**Why should you come?**

**To enjoy food and fellowship with our church community**

**To hear about the year past and the year to come**

**To review the parish finances**

**To elect leaders for the Parish, Deanery and Diocese**

**To fulfill your responsibility as a member**

***Please let us know what you plan to contribute to our Potluck Feast!***

**2014 ANNUAL REPORTS AVAILABLE FEBRUARY 1.** Our Annual Report tells the story of an amazing year in the life of St. Stephen's. Many thanks to all who did the ministry and all who pulled together the reports included in our summary of 2014. Pick up the Annual Report at the church and check out the ministry reports, 2014 financials, and 2015 budget. The Report of the Rector, which will be the sermon on Sunday, February 8, 2015, will be available on February 15. If you would like a copy of the Annual Report including the Report of the Rector, send a check for \$5.00 and your name and address, and we would be happy to mail one to you.

**STEWARDS OF RESOURCES**

**VESTRY SUMMARY: JANUARY 11.** The Vestry reviewed end-of-year financials, and discussed and approved the proposed 2015 budget. The Vestry is mindful that our near-balanced 2015 budget depends on our Diocesan assessment abatement given in gratitude for our hosting the 2014 Diocesan Convention. Maintaining the staff and ministries we have will require us finding at least \$30,000 in additional income for 2016. In addition to discussing recruiting candidates for Vestry, Deanery, and Diocesan Convention, we offered words of gratitude for leadership of out-going Vestry members: Senior Warden Chris Trahan, Irene Axelrod, Joanne Droppers, Jeff McAvoy, and Hazel Johnson who resigned effective at the Annual Meeting due to her serving as Church School Coordinator for St. Paul's, Brookline.

**FROM THE TREASURER'S OFFICE.** January is a very busy month for the Treasurer's Office as final financials for 2014 needed to be prepared as well as a budget for 2015. The good news is that the Vestry approved a near-balanced budget and it as well as all the 2014 financials are included in the Annual Report. 2014 donation statements have been prepared and will be mailed by early February. If you have any questions or the statement differs from your records, please call the church and Treasurer Heather Collis Puro will get back to you.

## NURTURING THE CONGREGATION

**WELCOME FATHER FLYNN ON FEBRUARY 1 AT 10:00.** Fr. Brian Flynn, Pastor of the Roman Catholic Collaborative of St. Mary's and Sacred Heart Parishes, will be our guest on Sunday, February 1. As we reflect on the "Week of Christian Unity," Frs. Flynn and Frank Clougherty will preach at St. Stephen's and First Lutheran on February 1 while Rev. Jane and Pastor Jon Niketh preach at St. Mary's and Sacred Heart at 4:00pm on Saturday, January 31.

**TUESDAYS FEBRUARY 3 & 24 AT THE MONASTERY.** Celebrate the Feast of the Presentation with the monks in Cambridge. On Tuesday, February 3 and on February 24 as we begin Lent, we will join the SSJE Brothers for worship and supper at the Monastery. Sign up is required but everyone is encouraged to join us. Cars leave St. Stephen's at 4:15 and return about 8:00.

**FAITH FORMATION: BIBLE STUDY AND TEA & TALK.** As we journey through Epiphany, travel with Ruth and Naomi at Bible Study on Wednesdays from 6:30-8:00pm. And join us Thursdays at 1:00 for Tea & Talk about Faith as we explore what God is doing in our lives and in the world. We encounter God in sacred texts, contemporary writing, and in each other!

**HEALING PRAYER AND PASTORAL CARE TEAM MEET FEBRUARY 5.** The Healing Prayer and Pastoral Care Teams will meet at 10:30 on Thursday, February 5th. Our discussion will conclude our discussion of The Shack.

**AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE CELEBRATION FEBRUARY 15.** Sunday, February 15, in recognition of Black History Month, the Kids' Choir will sing and our Epistle will be taken from the inspiring and challenging words of Nikki Giovanni read by Helen Patmon. At noon, we invite everyone to stay for some soul food as we watch and discuss an address by Children's Defense Fund founder Marian Wright Edelman.

**CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP OFF TO A GREAT START IN THE NEW YEAR!** On Sunday, January 18th, people filled Lawrence Hall to sing upbeat worship songs, pray, and listen to Joe Brown III as he talked about his experience as a black man in Lynn. While the topic of his message was inspired by it being MLK Day weekend, Joe didn't focus on issues of race per se. Instead, he shared his story of growing up in a loving family, a welcoming church, and a community where he built friendships with people of different colors and cultures. He said that folks have asked him at times, "Is St. Stephen's a white church or a black church?," and his response has always been that it's both and more. All of us, after all, are made equally in God's image, as the night's Scripture reading from Genesis reminded everyone. Following the message, folks split up into small group to reflect on how Joe's words spoke to them, challenged them, and invited them to take action. The evening ended with more music, open prayer time, and a litany of lament and praise. Food and fellowship followed for those who didn't rush home to watch the Patriots beat Indy. **Join us on Sunday, February 15 at 6:30 as we praise God in song, scripture, prayer, conversation, and community.**

**LDI TEAM ENGAGING CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND PRIVILEGE.** The Diocesan LDI trainers are coming to the North Shore on Saturday, February 7 to work with St. Stephen's folks interested in engaging a community conversation about race and privilege. The conversation will continue on with a St. Stephen's LDI Team Dinner on Thursday, February 26 at 6:00. All are welcome to join St. Stephen's LDI team committed to creating space for intentional conversation about race and privilege as a means of listening to how God is calling us to possible ministries. An open and willing heart is the only prerequisite! Please see Rev. Sarah with any questions.

**JOIN US FOR MARDI GRAS/ SHROVE TUESDAY ON FEBRUARY 17 AT 5:30.** Whether you go for Mardi Gras Gumbo or Shrove Tuesday Pancakes, we will have food and fun for everyone as we celebrate the last day of Epiphany. Middle and High Schoolers (and interested adults) are invited to join Neil O'Donnell in the kitchen on Tuesday at 1:00 to make the Gumbo! Starting at 3:00, Rev. Sarah has Mardi Gras games and activities planned for young people. Food will be ready by 5:30 for our last day of indulgence before Lent. At 7:00, we will serve King's Cake to see who will be blessed! At 7:30, we will gather in the parking lot for prayers and burning of the palms as we prepare for Ash Wednesday. **Don't forget to bring your old palms on Sunday or Shrove Tuesday.**

## **JOIN US ON ASH WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 18**

### **EUCCHARIST AND THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES**

**7:30AM      NOON      7:00PM**

**Make a right beginning on the season of Lent**

**Pick up a token to carry with you through Lent**

### **Take on a Lenten Discipline**

- ❖ Come to church every Sunday during Lent and practice Sabbath Sundays
- ❖ Commit to talking to one person that you don't usually talk to each Sunday
- ❖ Commit to a daily practice of prayer (the prayer list in the bulletin is a great place to start) and the Prayer Cross is a great place to "stick" your prayers
- ❖ Write and read our God Blog of moments of transformation
- ❖ Pick up a free Lenten Daily Readings booklet to focus your thought and prayer
- ❖ Join us for Tuesdays at the Monastery starting February (cars leave the church at 4:15)
- ❖ Join us for Wednesday evening Soup and Study—Soup 6:00, Study 6:45, & Prayer 7:45
- ❖ Join us for Healing Eucharist at noon on Thursdays and come to Tea & Talk at 1:00
- ❖ Open yourself to Reconciliation – Prepare to make your confession
- ❖ Give up a daily or weekly treat and donate the money you save to support ERD
- ❖ Take a quarter card and fill it during Lent to support ERD
- ❖ Serve people in need at the Food Pantry (Fridays), or My Brother's Table (4<sup>th</sup> Sundays)
- ❖ Get involved with ECCO addressing economic insecurity, racial injustice/criminal justice reform, or immigration
- ❖ Bring a non-perishable food item for The Pantry each Sunday
- ❖ Visit one of the Blessed of God—someone who is lonely, sick, grieving or struggling
- ❖ Engage the daily video series "It's time to... Stop, Pray, Work, Play & Love" from the Society of Saint John the Evangelist at [www.ssje.org](http://www.ssje.org)

**Whatever practice you choose, may it draw you closer to God & Community in love It's not about how good & disciplined you are, it's about how much God loves you**

**Give it up; take it on—Live a Holy Lent**

**JOIN OUR LENTEN GOD BLOG; SHARE A GOD MOMENT.** Again this year, we hope to offer by email, on our website, and on paper Daily Lenten Reflections written by members of the parish. The clergy and other eager editors will encourage, collect, edit, scribe... whatever it takes to encourage you to offer a short reflection that describes an experience or a moment of transformation when you saw yourself or someone else or an event in a whole new light.

**WEDNESDAY EVENING LENTEN SOUP & STUDY: Bible Study and Confirmation Journey.** Beginning Wednesday, February 25, get to know your pew mates over homemade soup and salad served at 6:00pm. At 6:45, we will offer two study options. Using the themes of the SSJE Lenten Study Program, Bible Study will discuss scripture passages related to what it means for us to Stop, Pray, Work, Play, Love. Confirmation Journey is for all teens and adults interested in Confirmation or Reception in the Episcopal Church as well as their sponsors; of course, anyone who wants a refresher course in Episcopal Church Basics is most welcome.

**BAND-AID PRAYERS DURING LENT.** The season of Lent is a great time to try out different forms of prayer both as individuals and as a community. This Lent I invite you to offer your prayers with band-aids! A large wooden cross, created by Neil O'Donnell and our OASIS crew, will be placed in the sanctuary to carry our prayers. Simply write a name, place, thought or image on a band-aid and attach it to the cross as an offering to God.

## **HOSPITALITY TO CHILDREN, YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS**

**AFTER SCHOOL KIC STARTS IN FEBRUARY!** Beginning February 2nd and running until June, Kids In Community will offer a program after school most Mondays from 2:00-6:00 pm. Kids will play *djembes* and other drums in a percussion ensemble, sing in a choir, and do homework and other activities with KIC mentors. Children in grades 2-5 are eligible to participate. Registration for After School KIC is now open and is first come, first serve. Forms are available in the office and the Galahad area. A registration fee of \$10 is required. We look forward to this new chapter of KIC programming! Please contact Audrey Gutfreund, KIC Director, in the church office or at 617-435-3325 for more information.

**CHURCH SCHOOL HAPPENINGS.** Sunday mornings returned to their usual liveliness at St. Stephen's as classes resumed on January 11. Our teachers Kendra, Beatrice, Keri, Paul, Irene, Neil and Paulina continue to do a great job sharing God's love with our young people through Bible lessons and other fun activities. As we move into February, we are looking to recruit some additional teachers to ensure two teachers for every class and to make certain that all grades are covered. If you have been looking for an opportunity to get more deeply involved in the mission of St. Stephen's and to make a difference in the lives of young people, this might be your opportunity. If you want more information about Church School opportunities for your child or yourself, please talk with Rev. Sarah or Dan Bell.

**KIDS' CHOIR SINGS AGAIN.** Kids' Choir will sing on Sunday, February 15 as we focus our worship on African American Heritage. For music education and for performance preparation, young people need to attend Choir Practice Saturdays, January 31 and February 14, noon-2:00. All 2<sup>nd</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders are encouraged to join the Choir. We also need parent helpers. Please call the parish office or talk to Juliana Davis for more information.

**FAMILY DINNERS RETURN ON FEBRUARY 15!** Kick off School Vacation Week on Sunday, February 15 at 4:30 with an old classic: family game night! Come enjoy fellowship while we eat, talk, and play together. All ages are welcome. Contemporary Worship service will follow at 6:30 for those who wish to attend. Contact Audrey Gutfreund, KIC Director, at 617-435-3325 for more information.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL GROUP: OUTDOOR ICE SKATING TRIP SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22.** Our monthly gathering will be an afternoon of ice skating in Lynnfield followed by a surprise sweet treat! Don't worry if you can't skate, Rev. Sarah can't skate either but it will be FUN! We will leave church around noon after a quick lunch and return by 2:00ish.

**HIGH SCHOOL RETREAT AT BCH CAMP FEBRUARY 6-8.** Join young people (grades 9-12) and adults from across the diocese for a weekend of games, song, discovery, and inspiration. Organized and led by the Diocesan Youth Council, the retreat is designed to give high school students a chance to get off the treadmill and get in touch with themselves, their peers, and their Loving Creator. The cost of the retreat is \$120, which means that the Diocese hopes for a minimum family contribution of \$40 but they and we are committed to every teen who wants to attend being able to attend. So, don't let the money get in the way. The retreat fills up quickly so please see Rev. Sarah or Dan ASAP!

**OASIS FRIDAYS FEBRUARY 13 AND 27 6:30-9:00.** OASIS community youth group is open to all youth grades 9-12. On February 13th we will continue conversations that arose after our viewing of the movie "Selma" and begin to brainstorm our own St. Stephen's film project. On February 27 we'll travel to Boston to see the play "The Sam Cornish Project: An Apron Full of Beans" at Roxbury Community College. Cornish is a former Poet Laureate of Boston. The performance uses his eloquent and witty words, set to movement and music, to reveal the poet's thoughts about family, race, music, and civil rights. Stitched together as echoes of ancestors and experiences, "Apron" is a thought-provoking quilt that gives a glimpse of African-American experiences as told through a multi-racial, multi-generational cast of professional actors and musicians. This performance is open to the public and all are welcome. See Bonnie Bishop, Jason Cruz, or Rev. Sarah for more information.

## DEEPENING COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

**SOUPER BOWL OF CARING FEBRUARY 1.** As we plan for yummy snacks to enjoy during the Super Bowl let's not forget that many of our brothers and sisters are in need. To that end Bishop Gates and Bishop Greg Rickel of the Diocese of Olympia have set up a challenge to see which diocese can donate the most to Episcopal Relief & Development before kick-off on February 1 at 6:30pm. People who want to donate should go to [www.episcopalrelief.org](http://www.episcopalrelief.org) and click "Donate Now," then select "Global Needs" and enter the amount you wish to donate. After entering your address and other information, there is an option asking "Would you like to dedicate this donation?" Click "Yes, in honor of" and type in "Super Bowl Patriots." ERD will announce the results after kick-off.

**KEEP OUR PANTRY SHELVES FULL.** In recent weeks the lines have been long at our Pantry. All contributions are welcome but canned tuna and chicken, beef stew, and spaghetti sauce are always good choices. Also, we could always use extra volunteers at the Pantry. Talk to Sally Gosselin, Harry Jackson, or Neil O'Donnell if you want to volunteer on Friday afternoons.



**LITERACY HOUR COMES TO THE PANTRY.** Books are flying from the shelves at our Food Pantry on Friday afternoons. If you would like to join Joanne Droppers as we give away books, read stories, and otherwise encourage community literacy, talk with Joanne. We've discovered that the combination of books and food is a great way to build relationships.

**JOIN THE TEAM AT MY BROTHER'S TABLE ON FEBRUARY 22.** St. Stephen's Table Team did a bang up job again in January. There were plenty of food and vegetables to be chopped and desserts to be served up and much much more-- all nutrition for body, mind, and soul. We worked side by side resting on the hope that we were doing what Christ would have us do: love one another and spread that love to the guest. The guests responded by also being loving and kind. Next month come on out! Join us in fellowship! A raucous time will be had by all on February 22 from 1:00 until 4:00! It would be a great way to live your first Sunday in Lent.

**ECCO ST. STEPHEN'S DINNER & CONVERSATION FEBRUARY 12 AT 6:30.** Debbie Potter invites anyone with pain for the world and a heart for justice to come to her house for dinner and conversation on Thursday, February 12. Having successfully raised the minimum wage and provided all workers with earned sick time, ECCO is listening in house meetings and one-to-ones. Our core issues of addressing economic insecurity, racial injustice especially in the criminal justice system, and immigration continue to hold our focus but where is there urgency and opportunity? Come to Debbie's on February 12, say yes to a one-to-one, or come to our community conversations about race and privilege. On February 24 at 7:00, ECCO will launch our spring listening campaign (Debbie's just getting a head start) with a large rally. Rides from St. Stephen's will be available so that we can join with others and feel the power we have working together.

**NORTH SHORE DEANERY GATHERS FEBRUARY 2 AT TRINITY TOPSFIELD.** All Deanery delegates and any interested members of the congregation are encouraged to attend the North Shore Deanery Assembly on Monday, February 2 at 6:00 at Trinity Topsfield. Our friends in Topsfield provide Christmas gifts for the young people of St. Stephen's. This gathering of the Deanery would be a great opportunity to thank the folks from Trinity for their generosity and meet people from other parishes on the North Shore. It also will be a great chance to learn more about the North Shore Mission Hub of which our Kids in Community After School Expansion and our LDI (Leadership =Development Initiative) Team are part.

**NORTH SHORE MISSION HUB LAUNCHES.** In November, Diocesan Convention recognized the North Shore Mission Hub. St. Stephen's looks forward to working with Grace Salem, St. Peter's Beverly, and St. John's Gloucester as Mission Zones. We also are excited about being part of deepening the relationships among the congregations of the North Shore through leadership training with LDI and ECCO as well as spiritual retreats. If you are curious about the Mission Hub, please speak with the Rector, Irene Axelrod, or Chris Trahan.