



The Quill

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN CHURCH

Williamsburg, Virginia

June 2026



MERCY OVER MERIT

*Choosing grace in a "gotcha" world
(Matthew 9:9-13)*

We live in a "gotcha" culture. Every week brings another scandal, another outrage cycle, another quick verdict about who is "in" and who is "out." Mistakes are weaponized, and society keeps a moral ledger: you get what you deserve, you earn your standing, and there's little room for failure (let alone restoration).

Then Jesus breaks the ledger. In Matthew 9 (which we will hear in church on June 7), Jesus sees Matthew (a tax collector) sitting at his booth and simply says, "Follow me." Matthew gets up and does. But the real scandal is what comes next: Jesus sits at table with Matthew and "many tax collectors and sinners." In that world, eating together wasn't casual. It signaled belonging. And tax collectors weren't merely disliked; they were seen as collaborators with an oppressive system; religious and political outcasts.

So the Pharisees ask the question many would ask today: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Why associate with the wrong people? Why risk the stain?

Jesus answers: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.... Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'" In other words: God is not running a purity contest. God is doing rescue and repair.

In this context, "sacrifice" represents the world's way; rigid rule-keeping, performative righteousness, and the satisfaction of pointing out others' failures. "Mercy" is God's way, it is grace that moves toward people without waiting for them to earn it, prioritizing restoration over public punishment. The world often demands accountability without a path back; Jesus offers redemption as the ground for a new life.

What does that mean for the church? We are called to be a counter-cultural community, a safe harbor in a harsh world. Not a place that ignores sin or harm, but a place where people are not reduced to their worst moment, and where confession is met with care rather than spectacle.

So we should ask: Who are today's "tax collectors" we hesitate to sit with? Are we more invested in being *right*, or in being reconciling? Jesus reminds us: the sick need a physician. The church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. A society fueled by judgment eventually consumes itself. But a community fueled by mercy can heal.

This month, choose mercy over merit; online, at home, and at work. Before joining the pile-on, ask whether it leads to healing or only punishment. Remember the good news, God's ledger is ruled by grace, and the peace of Christ grows wherever mercy is practiced.

In Christ,
Pastor Jon

CONGREGATION COUNCIL



What's Happening at Congregation Council

The Congregation Council met on May 12 and after devotions and prayers, the work of Council was begun. Minutes were reviewed, amended and approved.

There were a number of reports under old business, including the HVAC project. There have been concerns about fine-tuning of the temperatures in various parts of the building with much of the church feeling quite cold at times. This is not acceptable and the manufacturer is sending a representative from the Netherlands to troubleshoot and see how this could be improved. Because of this, final payment is being withheld pending resolution of these issues. Collection of pledges for this project continue to go well.

The committee looking into a new website for the church has met and they are studying websites for other churches and looking at features that they do and do not like and trying to look for what does and what does not work. They feel that this will lead them towards the best design and possibly to a good developer for the website.

The Call Committee has met and they are working on materials to attract the best pastoral candidates.

The Nominating Committee for Church Council is entertaining nominations for Church Council positions that will be presented at the June 28 Congregational Meeting for possible election. Three council members rotate off Council including Jeffrey Berry, our Youth Representative. Ideally, we would like to have another high school student nominated to fill that role. Also, Roberta Sulouff will rotate off Council – she has been a representative particularly watching the needs of parents of younger children in the church and she commented that it would be wonderful to have a person with children step up to take that role on Council.

Pastor Jon brought up the initiative for Luke 10 training which is essentially training in community organizing for human rights issues. By that time (May 12) three people had stepped up to possibly participate in the training but he hopes to enlist more.

The proposed agenda for the June 28 Congregational Meeting was then discussed. The major item on the agenda will be elections of new members to Congregation Council. The Congregational Meeting agenda will be further set at the June Council meeting.

The time is also right to conduct a Vision Process. This would be a five-year visioning considering where the church will be going over the period from 2026 through 2031 using the World café model. We know there will be major changes in that period in that we have started the call process, we have heard from our Director of Music that she will retire in that period and other changes will undoubtedly go on. Imagining them ahead of time and being prepared is the best way to have the bases covered.

There will be a Council Meeting on July 28 at which time, Council officers will be elected. There will not be a Council Meeting in August.

Committee Reports were then presented. Of note were the following:

- **Pastor** – Pastor Jon is recovering well from his surgery and is undergoing physical therapy. That has been painful but he is making progress and is back preaching!
- **Building** – Paul Reier reported on several projects including: (1) The trimming of the bamboo to the left of the church has helped clear the jungle and a combination herbicide has been painted on the stalks to decrease likelihood of regrowth; (2) Women on Council reported that a blind should now be added in the Women's lavatory on the second floor; (3) Lights in cupola will need replacing or reworking.

The Finance Committee report shows that giving slowed in April, being 4.6% below budget.

The Treasurer's report was presented, and now allows comparison of actual expenses vs. budgeted amounts.

The Endowment Committee Report was given reporting that the Endowment funds did better in April after a rough month in March with the Iran War effects on the markets. Also, the Endowment Committee and 1956 Society are sponsoring a dinner at Ford's Colony Country Club on June 18. The guest speaker will be Wais Kharooti who immigrated to the United States with his family

from Afghanistan as the Taliban took over and who, along with his family has been supported by our church. He has been attending William & Mary Business School and will talk about his experiences in this process.

After some other brief discussions and after a closing prayer, the meeting was adjourned.

Bill Dichtel, Council Member



JUNE

2	Karen Chenault Tim Weidman	Sara Osborn
3	Leonard Bosworth	Rosa Parks
4	Denny Krieger	Stephanie West
6	Brad Leek	
7	York Doerr	
8	Ron Harris	Becky Pittman
9	Ethan Jansson	Rita Kristiansen
10	Charles Osborn	
11	Randy Punched	
12	Christina Nelson	Peter Raquet
14	Terry Hinders	Sandy Reed-Bryant
15	Ruth Fenstermaker	
16	Jon Nelson	
20	Lou Rossiter	
21	Michael Powell	Katelin Cosby
22	Carol Harman	Audrey Root
23	Brian Crittenden	Alaina Dabel
25	Carrie Bailey	Zhou Hui Stauffer
26	Susan Britcher Brett Powers	
30	Lisa Fisher	Linda Olson



MEN'S & WOMEN'S BREAKFASTS

- **June 2** – Women are invited to join together for breakfast the first **Tuesday** of this month.
- **June 4** – Men are invited to join together for breakfast the first **Thursday** of this month.

Both gatherings take place at **8:00 a.m.** at the Colonial Pancake House, at the corner of Page Street and Penniman Road, Williamsburg, VA. The get-togethers promote conversation and friendship in a casual setting.



NOTES FROM THE FINANCIAL SECRETARY

As everyone knows, costs are going up. Checks and stamps are more and more expensive. The Finance Committee would like to recommend some ways for you and for St. Stephen to shave expenses.

- Our electronic giving platform, Vanco, is a convenient and secure way to make donations weekly or monthly. The St. Stephen website has instructions to sign up listed under "Contact us" and then "Giving." If you need assistance, let me know and I will walk you through it.
- If your bank has a bill paying option you can have them send a weekly or monthly donation directly to the Church. The bank should send it directly to the office address at 612 Jamestown Road, Williamsburg VA 23185.
- Please consider making a qualified charitable donation. If you qualify this is a great way to lower your taxable income. I can give you the instructions for your financial company.
- If you do not use envelopes at all and still receive them, please notify me or the church office in order to have your name removed from the list, saving the cost of unused envelopes.

I will be happy to answer any questions.

Karen Nester, Financial Secretary
 finsec@saintstephenlutheran.net
 757-869-2949

STEPHEN MINISTRY AT ST. STEPHEN



Cleaning out some old papers, (downsizing, you know!) I came across my Stephen Ministry materials. I was commissioned as a Stephen Minister on May 21, 2006, some four years into my tenure as Parish Administrator at St. Stephen. As a Stephen Minister, I worked with a number of care receivers, but my ministry extended far beyond those “officially” assigned to me.

I found that many of our members, LSA students, and Preschool parents wanted to talk...about life, deaths, families, work, retirement, children, classes at the College, missing family, and, well, you get the picture.

My training in Stephen Ministry helped me to be a compassionate listener, helping folks come to terms with their problems, ideas, or situations. I didn't always follow the Stephen Ministry rules! Men were to be care givers to men and women cared for women. I cared for anyone who came in, sat down, and needed to talk.

The point is, Stephen Ministry training is invaluable in helping those assigned care receivers, but it may be even more valuable in everyday life and conversations.

I was “retired” from active Stephen Ministry and was called by Stephen Leader, Bill Dichtel, asking if I'd come back for an assignment. I prayed for guidance before beginning Stephen Ministry in 2006 and I prayed again in 2025. Was this something God wanted me to do? I heard the answer and agreed to help -this was a call I needed to answer. I have found that caring for someone in need, while being a help and possibly a blessing to them; it is also an incredible blessing to me. We walk together and shore each other up.

When my care receiver no longer needs to regularly meet with me, as has happened with others, we will remain in contact for an occasional check-in. While the formal Stephen Ministry relationship ends, the personal caring does not. The love that develops does not end – and it certainly extends to the family of loved ones of the care receiver.

Thanks be to God for the many people I've had the privilege to talk to and talk through difficult times. I

encourage you to listen for the call of the Spirit, too. It's a wonderful thing!

If you are so moved, I encourage you to speak with Stephen Leader, **Bill Dichtel** of **Pastor Jon**. They are both very helpful in discerning your path.

Sandy Peterkin

1956 SOCIETY DINNER



The Endowment Fund Committee will host its annual *1956 Society Dinner* on **Thursday, June 18**, beginning at **5:30 p.m.** at **Ford's Colony**.

This special evening celebrates the ministry and impact of St. Stephen's Endowment Fund and the generosity of those who help sustain it. It is also an opportunity for fellowship, reflection, and learning more about how the Endowment Fund supports meaningful outreach – both within our congregation and in the broader community.

We are honored to welcome **Wais Kharooti** as our featured speaker. Wais will share the story of his and his family's journey as Afghan refugees since arriving in the United States in **February 2025**. Through Wais's story, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how the Endowment Fund helps support refugee families and other initiatives that advance St. Stephen's mission of service, compassion, and outreach. His experience reminds us of the tangible difference our collective generosity can make in the lives of others.

Paula Agor, Chair, Endowment Fund Committee



VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL



July 27-31, 2026 from 9:00 -12:00 757-229-6688
At St. Stephen, 612 Jamestown Rd, Williamsburg, Va 23188
All children 6-12 yrs-old and Crew helpers 13-16 yrs- old.

Register at: www.Saintstephenlutheranpreschool.net

Summertime at St. Stephen

Originally, we had hoped to hire a student intern and provide a series of family and children events over the summer. We have scaled back to just offering a Vacation Bible School program. From our experience with that, we will spring into other family and children ministry opportunities next summer.

Vacation Bible School (VBS) needs your help

We are excited to offer Emerald Crossing VBS this year from July 27-31 from 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon. It will take 10-25 volunteers to staff the VBS this year. We need administrative support, Snack Preparers, Games leader, Craft leaders, Music helpers, Story tellers, and group leaders. It is often said that VBS is for children, but that is not entirely true. It is for us. It is a way for us to evangelize our community and its young families. It is a way for us to connect and have fun at the same time. So, consider being part of the fun group of volunteers and see and laugh and bless the young children that will be coming to our church (many for the first time). We definitely will make great memories. If you are interested in helping with VBS, please contact **Gerry Johnson** (pastorgfj@gmail.com).

SUMMER FILM SERIES



Our film series this summer will take place on the **second and fourth Sunday of each month**. We'll gather in the Fellowship Hall starting at **2:00 p.m.** with popcorn and other light refreshments and start the movie approximately

15-20 minutes afterwards. After the movie there will be a 10-minute intermission for people to stretch, then a group discussion for those who are interested. Assuming this is a popular event, we'll continue the film series into the fall. Each month the movies have a theme: June – Happiness; July - The Great American West; and August - Faith. Any questions/suggestions contact **Elara Strand** at elaram@mac.com.

June 14, 2:00 p.m. - Barbie (2023) PG-13

Come For: What else? Barbie. It's hilarious, it's pink, the songs are catchy, and the stars are gorgeous.
Stay for: The surprisingly trenchant examinations of feminism, patriarchy, and personhood, as well as a monologue that is becoming legendary.

June 28, 2:00 p.m. - Harvey (1950) Unrated, but very mild

Come for: Jimmy Stewart pretending his best friend is an invisible 6'3.5" tall rabbit. It's a movie that genuinely makes you feel good and happy from beginning to end.
Stay for: A discussion about where goodness comes from. Does it matter? How do people react around us if we're truly good?

Coming attractions:

July 12, 2:00 p.m. - Reel Injun 2009 Unrated

July 26, 2:00 p.m. - True Grit 2010 PG13

August 9, 2:00 p.m. - Rain 1932 Unrated

August 23, 2:00 p.m. - Of Gods and Men 2010 PG-13



MUSIC NOTES

Through the years, I have written a couple of articles about the benefits of singing. My ulterior motive for writing such articles was to recruit folks to join our community of singers in the Matins Choir at Sunday morning rehearsals (and naturally sing for the 8:30 worship service) or join the Chancel Choir on Wednesday nights for rehearsals and sing for the late service on Sunday mornings. Recently, I was listening to a replay of a conversation on NPR's *Here and Now* program with Scott Tong. Scott was interviewing Elinor Harrison who had written an article about the health benefits of singing specifically for those with Parkinson's disease. Professor Harrison is a lecturer in dance at Washington University in St. Louis. Harrison begins her article in *The Conversation*, an independent non-profit news source, reminding folks of Pope Leo XIV's first Sunday (May 2025), where he stood on the St. Peter's Basilica balcony and sang a traditional prayer that his predecessors normally spoke. Since that time, the Vatican has encouraged more liturgy singing by the people in the pews, even offering tutorials called "Let's sing with the Pope."

There are many scientific theories about the evolution of singing with plenty of data supporting that singing existed in all cultures of which we know. Musical instruments (probably some sort of ivory or bone flute) date back over 40,000 years, however, singing is much older. A 60,000-year-old Neanderthal hyoid bone discovery suggests such. One often hears how singing is associated with healing and spiritual practices going back thousands of years.

Does it really matter about the evolution of singing? Today's scientific discoveries conclude that singing and chanting can have profound immediate and long-term benefits to physical, mental and social health. Singing has been noted to be the "world's most accessible stress reliever." Studies shows singing lowers cortisol levels (that is the primary stress hormone – I did not know there was such a hormone!). I also was unfamiliar with the vagus nerve. A google search showed that the vagus nerve is "the longest and most complex nerve in your body. Originating in the brainstem, it acts as a primary two-way 'information superhighway,' connecting your brain to your major internal organs to control vital,

involuntary functions like heart rate, breathing and digestion." So, guess what singing does – it stimulates the vagus nerve and improves the body's ability to respond to outside stresses. Other "singing" attributes include strengthening the lungs and diaphragm and increasing oxygen levels in the blood, lowering the heart rate and blood pressure, and reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases. And one more thing for the non-singer in your circle of friends, singing improves your immune system by increasing levels of immunoglobulin A, one of the key antibodies that wards off illness.

Usually, I write this sort of "don't you want to join choir" article at the beginning of the school year in late August or September, however, we have some summer opportunities that do not require near as much commitment. This summer while the choirs are on hiatus, we will be having "pick-up" choirs on each 4th Sunday of the summer months – that's **June 28**, **July 26**, and **August 23**. Come at **9:00 a.m.** that morning, surround yourself with fellow "shower" singers, learn a peppy tune, and improve your health while singing an anthem during the offering. And then, maybe, just maybe, you might be enticed to join one of our community of singing choirs – I did not even go into all the social benefits!

Karen Ives, Music Director

CHORAL SCHOLARS



Sam Watkowski (Alto), Nick Jobe (Tenor), and Brian Hesse (Baritone) sang both services on May 10, Mother's Day. Joining with **Christina Nelson**, they sang a rousing rendition of *Waterlife*, a hymn from our *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* hymnbook. We say goodbye to Nick this

year and wish him Godspeed in his future away from Williamsburg. Sam and Nick both graduated this year; however, Sam will be returning to work on a Master's degree at William & Mary and along with Brian will remain as part of our Choral Scholars program here at St. Stephen for the 2026-27 school year.



ST. STEPHEN LUTHERAN PRESCHOOL

May was full of fun new experiences for our little learners!

This month, we watched caterpillars grow and transform into butterflies and observed ladybugs develop from larvae. Our preschoolers especially loved releasing these special friends into the prayer garden.

A big thank you to **Lou Rossiter** for scheduling Juggler and Magician Jonathan Austin to perform for our school. The students were absolutely mesmerized by his amazing show.

We also enjoyed water days, dance parties, face painting, bike riding, exciting science experiments, and so many incredible art projects. We wrapped up our Community Meal Series on Cinco de Mayo with a taco dinner and hosted our final Spirit Night of the school year at Shoofly Dairy Bar — right where we kicked things off back in September! Thank you to everyone from the congregation that came out in support of the preschool.

This month, we celebrated our wonderful mothers and mother figures at our annual Mother's Brunch. We then closed out May with our Planting with Parents Moving Up Celebration for the Giraffe Class and a special Graduation Ceremony for our Hippo, Bear, and Frog classes. We are so proud of these students and cannot wait to see how they continue to grow both here at St. Stephen and as they begin their Kindergarten journeys.

Now it's time for summer camps. We would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to **Jeanne Garrison** and **Sandy Johnson** for sponsoring camp weeks for a special preschool friend. If you feel called to sponsor another week for this child, the family would be incredibly grateful. You can use the QR code to donate toward summer camp fees.



Thank you for another joyful month together!

Jessica Kimball, Preschool Director



Thank You



I am most appreciative of your contribution of \$600.00. Your gift brings peace and comfort to beloved community members who come to us during one of their greatest times of need.

For over 20 years, guests and their loved ones have received extraordinary, loving care at Hospice House of Williamsburg. With our recent renovations and your continued support, we are prepared to provide end-of-life services and bereavement support, free of charge, for decades to come.

On behalf of our staff and board of directors, I thank you for enabling us to serve.

Brandon Randall, Executive Director



Thank you for your recent generous gift of \$1,500 to Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center. We are deeply grateful for your support and the trust it represents.

The truth is, most of our clients are just like you and me – people navigating the ups and downs of life, doing their best to move forward. When you support PPCC, you are helping your own neighbors – the people you see at the grocery store, the driver next to you at the stoplight, the families in our community who might be struggling in silence. Your generosity ensures that no one has to face life's challenges alone.

Because of you, individuals, couples, and families have access to compassionate, professional counseling grounded in dignity and respect. Your gift makes it possible for someone to find hope, build resilience, and take meaningful steps toward healing.

Thank you for being part of this work and for investing in the wellbeing of our community. We are honored to partner with you.

Ford McFall, Development Director



Thank you for your continued support of GraceInside, our chaplains, and our work of remembering those in prison. Your donation makes it possible for us to increase our chaplain availability in the coming year.

Keeping Grace Inside.

Shari Allen, Administrative Assistant



Thank you for your in-kind donation of 89 pounds of food, diapers/wipes and feminine hygiene products to the Williamsburg House of Mercy. On average we receive 18,000 pounds of in-kind donations per month and rely on these to supplement our costs in providing to the most vulnerable in our community.

Thank you for remembering the Williamsburg House of Mercy through your donation.

Liz Buckley, Executive Director



Marcie Clark

Preston Burton

Jim Mayfield

Rosalie and Chuck Frey (Homeless Fund)

SUMMER WORSHIP SCHEDULE

We have moved to one worship service for the summer. We will have coffee at **9:00 a.m.** and worship at **9:45 a.m.** on these Sundays. This worship service will be live-streamed as well. We hope that this joint service will help foster connections between "8:30 folk" and "11:00 folk" as well as give our worship leaders a lighter Sunday morning for these weeks of summer.

Our final joint service will be on **September 6.**



JUNE BAPTISMAL ANNIVERSARIES

The significance of baptism, Luther teaches in the *Small Catechism*, is “that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”

Your baptismal anniversary is an opportunity to light a baptismal candle and to give some prayer time to reflecting on your experiences during the past year on your journey in faith!

Pastor Jon Nelson

6	Alan Balma	Danya Zimbauer
12	Doug Moore	Art Nelsen
13	Rachael Wiers	
15	Jenni Punched	
16	Jane deSolms	
17	Ethan Owens	
18	Sarah Harms	Reed Nester
28	Terri Larsen	

Others who were baptized in June:

Pete Davis	Brad Leek
Jon Lund	

Were you baptized in June but your name isn't on the list above? Let us know!



PRAYERS



Join your prayers for healing with God's desires for **Kristin Carter, Ginny Cummings, Craig Eichfeld, Edith Haecker, Dave Hoyer, Jim Ivey, Sharon Jacobs, Donna Kittelson, Terri Larsen, Carole Meyer, Pastor Jon Nelson and Marie Nelson.**

Pray for those unable to come to worship: **Ailene Bartlett, Ed Brown, Pat Janot, Marilyn Johnson, Jon Lund, Jeanne Nelson, Darlene Simon, and Kay Wasaff.**

We hold the family and friends of **Jim Mayfield**, especially **Janice**, in prayer as they grieve his death.

Pray for these loved ones of our congregation: Bob Alt, Randy Altona, Phyllis Andrews, Kristin Carter, Bob Bastian, Carol Baum, Robi Bayard, Jeffrey Berry, Sr., Lila Bradley, Carol Bergh, Mary Bloom, Doug Bolick, Bob Britcher, David Carr, Ruth Ann Coski, Amaree Cluff, Dru Dowdy, Judy Drezek, Hollis Fulton, Danny Gass, Keith and Debbie Glenn, Joan Goodhart, Charee Hampton, Sue Hassan and family, Andy Havola, Nick Havola, Bradley, Kim, Joan and Laurie Heintzelman, Char Henry, Lisa Hill, Doris Hillenbrand, Bob Hirsch, Michelle Holdsworth, Jaxon Ireland, Don Johnson, Connie Kendrick, Jenn Kramer, Bob Loubach, Pat Layton, Marnah Lund, Doug MacKenzie, Keara Mahony, Trish Macerelli, Laura Margolin, Barry and Mabel Martin, Ellen Martin, Mabel Mater, Jackie Mazzone, Jimmy Mitchell, Marian Mongelli, Liz Montalvo, Bob Myers, Jim Ogborn, Jeanette Osborn, Rodger Osborn, Maricel Paulin, Janet Popelas, Coral Pumley, Scott Radley, Kurt Recktenwald, Carol Sue Repass, Brian Ritter, Ruth Sandoval, Lou Schuster, Pamela Sharp, Kelsey Slay, Valerie Smith, Helen Soultoukis, Vasili Soultoukis, Laura Spencer, Charlie Stayton, Chad Strausbaugh, Al Stern, Monika Stern, Lara Templin, Lenorah Thomas, Karli Wallace Thompson, Betty Lou Tulloh, Jenn Tyson, Matt Weilmuenster, Elaine Wrich, and Lynda Wright.



**St. Stephen Lutheran Church
612 Jamestown Road
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The Quill www.saintstephenlutheran.net June 2026

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