

Final Report of the Task Force on Service

May 20, 2014

Prelude

***"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."* – John 20:21**

The stated mission of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church is to walk, without judgment, with those taking different paths to God *so that we may be transformed through Jesus Christ as we serve others.*

St. Stephen's Episcopal Community has a long history of serving others. But change now swirls around our campus; economic, social, and spiritual trends reshape our neighborhood, our church, and our world. So we take this moment to pause and ask ourselves: what is our theology of service, and how should we best express it today?

Our findings are presented in four sections, corresponding to the four charges given the Task Force (*see Appendix A*).

Charge 1: Articulate the theology of service for our community

"He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.'" – Mark 9:35

***"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."* – Amos 5:24**

For centuries, Christians have followed the call of Jesus to be servants for all in need without hesitation or question. Moreover, Christians have listened to the voices of the Hebrew prophets and worked alongside the poor, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised to question why injustice exists, and how it can be righted. At St. Stephen's, we recognize this dual nature of Jesus' call to serve: *to work with our hands to promote the welfare of all, and to work with our hearts and minds to promote justice and peace in the world.*

In speaking with long-time members of St. Stephen's about our history of service, we found one idea which surfaced again and



again: that service arose to address a current need, often one not addressed sufficiently by the broader church or society at large. Our efforts, in the words of one parishioner, “just happened.” In this way, we have been *a listening church*. Our service has been responsive, authentic, and organic, arising from the realities we’ve faced in our history. It is not an additional “thing” we do, but a sign of who we are as Christians. Service is our way of being in communion with the world, both within and beyond our doors. In the words of one member, “*At St. Stephen’s, loving God and loving our neighbor are distinct — and the same.*”

*“At St. Stephen’s,
loving God and loving
our neighbor are
distinct — and the
same.”*

Our service always honors the human dignity of those we serve. It is always a person-to-person connection — never an impersonal one — and is based on mercy, compassion, and total acceptance of the uniqueness of each individual served. Above all, we recognize the power of service to change the giver as well as the recipient.

Charge 2: Define the crucial role service plays in the spiritual formation of all members of our community

“For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.” - Luke 22:27

How does service connect with the spiritual development of our members?

St. Stephen’s is a place of growth and renewal, a place of rest and resurrection. We recognize we are each on unique spiritual journeys. So St. Stephen’s offers all members opportunities to serve, teaching those hungry to serve how to do so. Our spiritual formation programs must recognize the strong reciprocal nature of service and faith: growth in faith demands growth in service, which spurs further growth in faith. All spiritual formation programs should include a service component, from study and discussion, to actual service opportunities.

Clear communication of these opportunities, through our various print and online channels, will make it easier for all (especially new members) to connect with these projects. For instance, collecting individual service announcements under a section of the weekly E-Star will make it easier for members to see what options are available.

In integrating service with spiritual formation, we must employ age-appropriate techniques. In St. Stephen's School, for example, students progress from participation in opportunities such as World Peace Day in the lower levels, to bi-weekly service in middle school, to full-scale service projects taking 150 hours over two years in high school. Again, in Children's Chapel and EYC, older youth serve as role models for our younger members, showing them the meaning of service by their actions. Our Kadosh program has had spirited discussions of social justice and being a servant.

Essentially, our call to be servants arises from our faith and shapes it. From the newest member to the oldest, all of us are called in our time at St. Stephen's to experience the love and mercy of God in serving others. All of our efforts as a community arc toward that goal.

Finally, it must be noted that some of us arrive at the doors of St. Stephen's hurt, scarred, or broken by damaging experiences, both personal and spiritual. Service opportunities may not call to them until they have had both the calendar time (*chronos*) to rest and the sacred time (*kairos*) to experience renewal. The call to serve will unfold gradually in their resurrected lives; no undue pressure to serve is placed on their shoulders as a condition of membership. We are called to serve them as they seek our community as a place to heal.

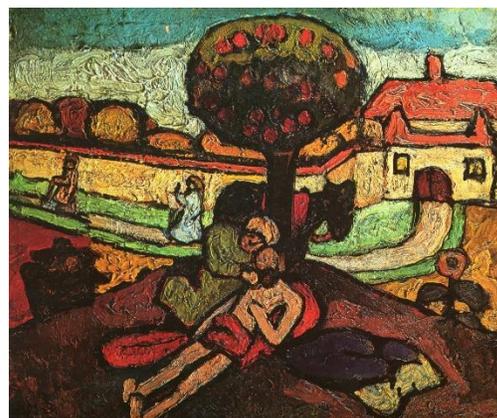
Charge 3: Define the scope of our service in terms both of both people served and areas of involvement

"Service is the rent that you pay for room on this earth." Shirley Chisholm

"The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was: 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?' But the Good Samaritan reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'" – Martin Luther King Jr.

So where do we serve?

Opportunities to serve occur every day, everywhere, in each of our lives. We serve those both inside and outside our St. Stephen's Community. Many of us already serve through our jobs, careers, volunteer efforts and professions. We can be found feeding the hungry, or healing the sick,



comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable throughout the year.

Our concerns are local, regional and global. Poverty, isolation, injustice and oppression happen inside and outside our neighborhood, and Jesus' call to serve does not end at any border. Therefore, we support service efforts wherever need exists.

In particular, we encourage our community to follow a long Episcopal tradition of examining the structures in society which create need. A full theology of service incorporates both helping the homeless and examining the reasons why homelessness exists; offering support for the LGBT community, and protesting exclusion. Service without justice can devolve into mere housekeeping; justice without service into pure politics. Jesus calls us, not to one or the other, but to both.

Our concerns are local, regional and global.

Admittedly, our reach and resources are not boundless, and we feel it is important to focus our efforts on problems where we can make a deep and long term impact. How do we measure our impact? This is an issue on which we need to develop a clear process. We recommend the development of an initial list of a few areas of focus, through a community dialog. We recommend that these focus areas cover local, national, and world issues. These focus areas should guide our efforts as a community for the next 3 years, at which time they should be revisited, their continuing importance determined, and our impact measured and evaluated. All discussions should be open forum. The areas of focus will be promoted throughout our campus, and serve as themes for our programs.

The process of choosing areas of focus will be aided by reviewing our own history, and understanding how we have made an impact in the past. Many of us are unaware, for instance, that our School had its origins in a decision to offer space to a Montessori school which had lost its lease twice, or that we offered temporary shelter to Covenant Baptist for three years. Our AIDS Respite Care Teams led to our challenging both the Diocese and the City of Houston to address the epidemic. Members can list many examples of service: hosting refugee families through Interfaith Ministries, providing space for community organizations, etc. One such need merits particular attention: the challenges presented by the changing economics in the Montrose area.

We note that focusing will not prevent individual members of St. Stephen's from proposing, initiating, or promoting projects deemed important by those members. Nor

does it mean the elimination of any existing effort — multiple projects can fit within a focus area. Focusing will, however, increase our impact, guide our funding, and highlight our values.

If we are to have a sustained impact on these issues, partnerships are crucial. The Honduras mission trip — an example of a partnership with Christ Church Cathedral and the Archdiocese of Honduras — is an example of the global reach we are capable of by working with other churches and agencies whose values we share. Partnering with CCSC and Interfaith Ministries are outstanding examples of how we can extend our reach in Houston.



Charge 4: Suggest how our financial resources might be best employed to embody our values

"Core Values do not inform only who we are and what we care about. They also engage us on how we spend our money. St. Stephen's budget demonstrates our values." - St. Stephens' website

Churches, like secular organizations, can express values which die for lack of follow-through. Embodying values often comes down to positions, policies, procedures and finances. In order to best demonstrate our values, we recommend some structural changes as follows:

- Establish a position of **Service Projects Coordinator**. Such positions are relatively common in Episcopal churches, under such job titles as Director of Community Engagement; Director of Outreach Ministries; Justice Administration; Discipleship Programs Coordinator; or Director of Peace and Justice.
- Re-commission the current Mission and Outreach Committee as the **Service Committee**. This committee should develop the policies and procedures for selecting areas of focus, reviewing project proposals, and developing service opportunities; it should also assist the Service Projects Coordinator in his/her work, learning processes and guaranteeing successor transitions in the future; and liaison with the Director of Communications to publicize these opportunities.

- As early Christians used the notion of free will offerings to fund their community endeavors, St. Stephen's should **offer a portion of its revenues annually to insure funding of service projects**. As individual giving encompasses time, talent and treasure, organizational giving includes both monetary and non-monetary resources, including contributions of space, staff time, etc. The appropriate amount for this portion can be developed by the community; what matters is that it exists, is repeated annually, and grows (or shrinks) in correlation with St. Stephen's budget as a whole.
- A **process should be developed for the submission of requests for funding**, with a standard application process, a clear timetable for submission and review, and a clear set of standards for decision making, including reporting out to the community a list of funded projects each year. To reinforce the connection between service and spiritual formation, we strongly encourage proposals which call for participation by numerous members of our community.
- To the extent possible, **our financial contributions to service projects should be demonstrably visible in our budget**. If it is not possible to do this within our standard financial reports, an annual statement of our expenditures in this area should be made available by the Finance Committee, and shared with the community at our annual parish meeting. Such financial transparency will demonstrate to all the value we place on service.
- Finally, if the community opts to phase out support for a specific program it has funded in the past, notification of the change should be given well in advance, and the option of a phased reduction in funds offered for one year.

Final note

We wish to acknowledge that, in naming the Service Committee, we are not using the term Outreach — that term, and the committee that used it, has a long and significant history in St. Stephen's, which we honor. However, in our discussions we found that the term often led to the question: "Is it outreach if we're serving those inside the

AT ST. STEPHEN'S, OUR WALLS ARE PERMEABLE — WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE THOSE IN NEED, WHETHER INSIDE OR OUT.

community?" More as a matter of direction than theology, we use the term Service to avoid confusion. At St. Stephen's, our walls are permeable — we are called to serve those in need, whether inside or out.

Appendix A: St. Stephen's Task Force on Service – Charge

March 2014

The Task Force on Service is charged by the Vestry to make recommendations on the service and social justice ministry of St. Stephen's Church and School in light of our **core values**. It should:

1. **Articulate** the theology of service for our community;
2. **Define** the crucial role service plays in the spiritual formation of all members of our community;
3. **Define** the scope of our service in terms both of people served (Houston / international, Episcopal / in partnership etc.) and areas of involvement (based on our values and ability to make a deep and lasting impact).
4. **Suggest** how our financial resources might be best employed to embody our values.

If time allows, the Task Force should also offer suggestions about structure of this ministry. A preliminary report is due at the Vestry's May 20 meeting. The second phase of the work will engage the congregation at a later date to define future partnerships, stewardship, and lay ministry opportunities.



St. Stephen's Community Core Values

Appendix B: St. Stephen's Task Force on Service – Members

Ryan Beatty
Sarah Beauchamp
Mary Egert
Patrick Flannery (Vestry)
Susan Hawes
C.J. Johnson
Julie Lindenburg
Lee Lozano
Madeline Mauk (Vestry)
Todd Parker
Lucie Tredennick

