

ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

PARISH PROFILE



Our mission is to glorify God by reaching out to others, locally and universally, with hands that serve, hearts and minds that welcome, and voices that carry the good news of God's redeeming love to all. We embrace diversity by celebrating the worth, dignity, and gifts of every person as a child of God. We seek to expand our Christian community and share God's love more widely.

1935 The Plaza, Schenectady, NY 12309

Church Office: 518-346-6241

Office Hours: Monday through Friday

8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

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<https://st-stephens.church/>

1. The History of St. Stephen's Church



A quilt showing the history of St. Stephen's Church, created by our parishioners

St. Stephen's began in 1927, as a chapel of Schenectady's historic St. George's church. The first services were held in a remodeled store; as attendance grew, services moved to a nearby house, and, ultimately, in 1947, to a new church building, constructed of stone from an abandoned nearby armory. (A person interested in history can still see stones bearing chalked numbers indicating the locations from which those stones were removed and where they were to be installed as the church was built).

In the 1970s we expanded the church building to provide wheelchair access and so that we could support a senior meals program at the church. In 2010, faced with a building with environmental problems, and recognizing a need for a larger, more flexible space, we committed to replace the outdated parish hall with a newer, larger structure that would provide a more modern parish hall, as well as classrooms, a nursery, a library, and utility rooms.

Part of the effort to construct the new building was the creation of a stone labyrinth courtyard, a space for quiet meditation (or a romping space for youngsters.)

Recognizing the importance of music in our worship, in 1981 we installed a 15-rank Carey pipe organ, and in 2018 we added two more ranks and modernized the instrument's keyboard and electronics.

2. The Region We Serve

Located in Schenectady, a city in the valley of the Mohawk River in Upstate New York's Capital District, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church serves an area rich in colonial and industrial history as well as modern, technological activity.

Nearby are Union College, Schenectady County Community College, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, SUNY Albany College of Nanotechnology, Science, and Engineering, and other colleges and universities. It was here that Thomas Edison began what would grow to be the General Electric Company, here that George Westinghouse began his work on electric motors and reliable brakes for trains, and here that General Electric created and still operates its GE Global Research and Development Center.

Dutch colonists moving up the Hudson River created the first settlement here in the mid-seventeenth century, lending terms from their language to a variety of geological features of the area. Over the years, as Schenectady's two major employers, General Electric and American Locomotive Works, grew and prospered, the population of Schenectady and the surrounding area increased, but in recent years that trend reversed, reducing the city's population to one-third of its peak.



The needlepoint altar rail kneelers at St. Stephen's, created by our parishioners illustrate the industrial history of our area



General Electric

3. The Region's Culture and Entertainment

Culturally, the Schenectady area offers an environment rich in entertainment, dining, and recreational opportunities, and a culture that reflects the nationalities and heritages of not just the people who came here initially to work in the factories, but also of more recent arrivals from around the world, who come seeking a better life; all of these people are now active in every aspect of business and social life. Within a few hours of the city, the Adirondack, Berkshire, and Catskill mountains offer hiking and outdoor recreational activities year-round, and the cities of New York, Boston, and Montreal provide entertainment, enrichment, and international experiences of all kinds.

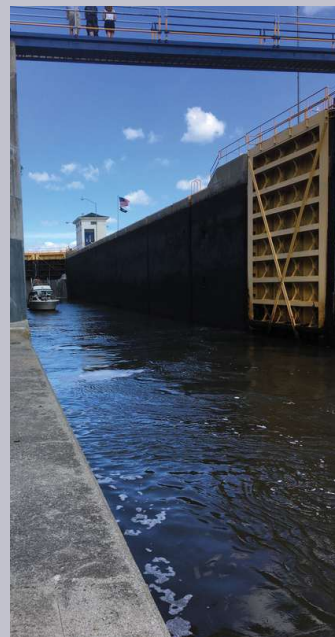
Closer to home, the city of Schenectady is home to the beautifully restored Proctor's Theater, a classic vaudeville theater which each year hosts a variety of events, including Broadway shows and dance troupes; nearby is the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, summer home to the Philadelphia Orchestra and the New York City Ballet.



Historic American Locomotive Company
kneeler



Lock 7 on the Erie Canal kneeler



Lock 7 on the Erie
Canal -
Niskayuna

4. Family Entertainment in the Area



The City of Schenectady and its surrounding areas offer many opportunities for entertainment for children and adults. Among them are miSci (Museum of Innovation & Science), the Empire State Aerosciences Museum, the Plotterkill and Bosenkill Nature Preserves, and more.

the Via Aquarium, Albany Pine Bush Preserve, Maple Ski Ridge, Bowman Orchards, Ellms Family Farm, and others.



5. The Church's Organization

St. Stephen's has been a part of the Episcopal Diocese of Albany (DOA) since we began. The Diocese of Albany was formed in 1868 when it became separate from the Diocese of New York. While we think of ourselves as a progressive and inclusive parish, our individuals and families are not all of the same persuasion. The Diocese of Albany in recent years has been more conservative than other dioceses; however, with the election in 2023 of The Rev. Jeremiah Williamson, and his consecration as 10th Bishop of Albany in 2024, we are feeling the hope and reality of change and greater inclusion.



Church Staff and Lay Leaders

Interim Priest-in-Charge
Senior Warden
Junior Warden
Office Manager
Treasurer
Clerk
Organist
Choir Director

The Vestry

The Vestry is the body within our congregation that, together with the clergy, leads the parish. Currently, there are five Vestry members who were elected by the parish during our annual meeting.

6. The Church's Physical Plant

The campus of St. Stephen's resides in the heart of a residential neighborhood in the Upper Union section of Schenectady. We are very much part of the community, both in the neighborhood and the area in general.

The focus of our campus is the church building itself, a stone structure in the pattern of English country churches. Above the altar are three large stained glass windows portraying Jesus Christ, flanked by Saint Stephen on one side and Saint George (honoring our mother church) on the other. Stained glass windows along both sides of the nave bear illustrations of significant events in the gospel stories.

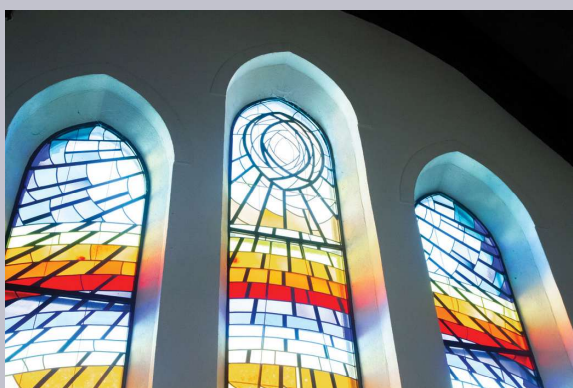
Adjacent to the nave, the Chapel of the Resurrection houses a columbarium, and provides a quiet space for prayer and contemplation.

A new building, completed in 2008, connects to the church itself and includes a spacious parish hall for coffee hour and other fellowship, a library, Sunday School classrooms, a youth lounge, a conference room, a choir practice room and utility rooms.

Just steps from the church building is the rectory, which housed the Rev. James MacDonald and his family for decades. It is a 4-bedroom, 2-1/2bathroom home with an enclosed back yard; recently the house has undergone considerable renovations and would be a welcoming home for a new rector.



The rest of the campus includes our administrative office building and a separate building that formerly housed a preschool that served the needs of the community for many years.



7. The Labyrinth

One unique aspect of the grounds at St. Stephen's, in addition to our gardens, is the labyrinth in the heart of the campus. The entrance to the labyrinth is in our courtyard, situated between the library and the fellowship hall. The walk to the center is intended to quiet and calm the mind. The walk back from the center can evoke the return to one's life. The labyrinth is a common point of attention for both parishioners and guests of St. Stephen's. This past summer we held "labyrinth evenings" that offered an opportunity for members and neighbors to gather to learn more about labyrinths and to experience this.



8. Worship

Worship is the heart of St. Stephens! All are welcome to join with our sisters and brothers in Christ to praise the Lord, hear God's word, and pray.

Our Sunday morning worship service is a joyful and meaningful experience. We draw on the rich tradition of Episcopal liturgy to foster understanding of the word of God and to engage in praise and prayer to God's glory, following the Rite II Eucharist service. While the service of Holy Eucharist is the norm, occasionally we have services of Morning Prayer, led by a worship leader from our congregation.



The sermon and choice of music are inspired by the scripture of the day. Children are welcome and are invited to come forward during the service for a children's moment. We distribute a weekly children's sermon, recognizing that it is difficult for many families to get to church. Lay people of all ages serve as readers, greeters, and eucharistic ministers. Most Sundays we offer an optional time of healing prayers and anointing in our library.

As in most faiths, music plays an important part in our worship. Each service includes hymns from *The Hymnal 1982* and *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, a choir anthem, and organ music to engage us in further expressions of the week's readings and the church season. In addition to our chancel choir, on occasion we have music provided by our handbell choir, members of the congregation, and by artists from outside the church, including students from Union College.



Worship continues throughout the week. Every morning a group gathers via Zoom to read the service of Morning Prayer. At this intimate service, we pray for parishioners and others who are in need of support.

For the last two years, we have celebrated an autumn month-long season of creation, focused on God as loving creator and ourselves as we seek to be responsible stewards. This has included encouragement to our surrounding community to join us in meditative walks on our outdoor labyrinth. Our All Saints Day celebration lifts up all those who are interred in the columbarium in our Chapel of the Resurrection adjoining the main sanctuary.

9. Christian Education and Formation

As a parish on the cusp between a family-sized and a pastoral-sized parish, our events tend to be multi-generational. We seek to be aware of the richness of the learnings and interactions of this reality. With Covid and the interim time, during which a few families moved away, we have lost the small critical mass of children and youth that provide opportunities for continuing programs. However, we are ready with volunteers from our congregation (who have gone through the Safe Church/Safe Congregation program) to offer a lectionary-based curriculum for church school offered by The Episcopal Church.

Whenever there are children present, we offer an interactive children's sermon. Recognizing that many activities compete for the attention of families on Sunday mornings, we recently began "Bringing It Home: Sunday's Message for Kids" that is distributed via email and posted on our website. We are fortunate to have youth serving as lectors and occasionally as acolytes and to have their involvement, along with our college and university students, in community outreach as well as parish activities. These endeavors range from serving lunches in the summer feeding program for children in Schenectady through Sycamore Collaborative, joining us in singing Christmas carols at a health-care facility, helping with parish clean-up days and the Shrove Tuesday pancake supper, having artwork in our exhibits, and writing prayers for our creation season. We also have a teen room with attractive new furniture.

Our adult programs during this interim time are varied. While we have had a variety of Sunday forums, we have begun offering more programs in the evenings so that we can continue to build our post-Covid community through the hospitality time; our members take turns hosting. Our programs draw on the wisdom, energy, and interests of members, clergy, musicians, and other community leaders to engage in learning and discussion. Quiet Days in the church and days at Holy Cross Monastery offer rich times for reflection.



Our Lenten simple suppers are times for exploring the rich Anglican theological and liturgical tradition. Our Earth Day Weekend in the spring and month-long season of creation in the fall develop more mindfulness of our charge to care for the earth, reinforced by strong participation in considerations of how our food shapes us, through our serving as a distribution site for the organic produce of Roxbury Farm through its CSA (community supported agriculture) program.



After a period of relative isolation, members of the parish are re-engaging with the Episcopal Diocese of Albany such as the Parish Leadership Institute. We have begun participating in Sacred Ground, the Episcopal Church's reading-, video-, and dialogue-based program exploring the legacy of racism. We have engaged in advocacy for political prisoners through a letter-writing campaign organized by Amnesty International.

We initiated a parish wide Safe Church program in 2023 primarily focused on children and Sunday School that also recognizes the needs of vulnerable adults. As we have concentrated on the Safe Church program, we realized how much the modules in the Praesidium program can help all of us become more aware of safety and inclusion in all aspects of our lives. The various modules take us through the background of the program to scenarios bringing us to realize how sometimes words or behaviors might be interpreted differently by others. Some of us through our employment will find familiar themes in the modules.

10. Parish Life

Spiritual enrichment is very important to the parishioners at St. Stephen's, but personal and community involvement are at the heart of our identity and life together.

Within our parish:

Pastoral care teams in conjunction with the clergy regularly visit elderly, sick, and homebound parishioners.

A group of creative people, the "Fabricators and Yarners," gathers regularly to make quilts, shawls, and lap robes, to carry our wishes and prayers to shut-ins, wheelchair-bound veterans, and others in need. Our latest group of lap quilts, after having been on display for a few months in our Parish Hall for all to enjoy, will soon be going to the residents of the Firefighters' Association of the State of New York retirement home in Hudson.



Fabricators and yarners who created a quilt showing the women of the Bible

We enjoy featuring the many creative gifts of our parishioners with exhibits and related presentations with contributions from artists, photographers, woodworkers, and fabric arts.

The Over The Hill Gang, a group of people oriented towards repairs, maintenance, (and fellowship), gather each week to address the physical needs of our church buildings, seeking to be good stewards of our extensive property.

Musicians and singers enhance our worship services, as choir members, instrumentalists, soloists, or bell-ringers.

A monthly book club discusses both classics and new writings that interest and challenge participants.

In the fall of 2023, we began annual celebrations of a "Season of Creation," during which we display the variety of means by which our parishioners express their own creative spirits and the glory of creation itself.

11. Community Outreach

We are a loving community who cares not only for ourselves but also for our neighbors and the city of Schenectady.

We contribute to and volunteer at Sycamore Collaborative, which provides food and support services to needy area residents, with a particular focus on community-building, social justice, and food insecurity. For the last two years we have offered a benefit concert in our sanctuary in conjunction with our season of creation.

We provide food and items of clothing for the Street Soldiers, a group of volunteers that addresses the needs of the hungry in Schenectady.



Assembling sandwiches for the
“Street Soldiers” food program

We provide monthly lunches for St.
Joseph’s Place, a drop-in center
which supports residents in need.

Our spacious parish hall enables us to support a variety of community programs, including:

- Serving as a distribution site for Roxbury Farm, a community-supported agriculture farm.
- Hosting Red Cross blood drives,
- “Moon Bees” —work sessions in support of MoonCatchers, a non-profit organization in which people from the community gather to fabricate reusable menstrual pads, which go to girls in poor parts of the world, so that they don’t have to miss school.

On a broader scale we gather and deliver supplies for Church World Service and raise funds for Episcopal Relief and Development.



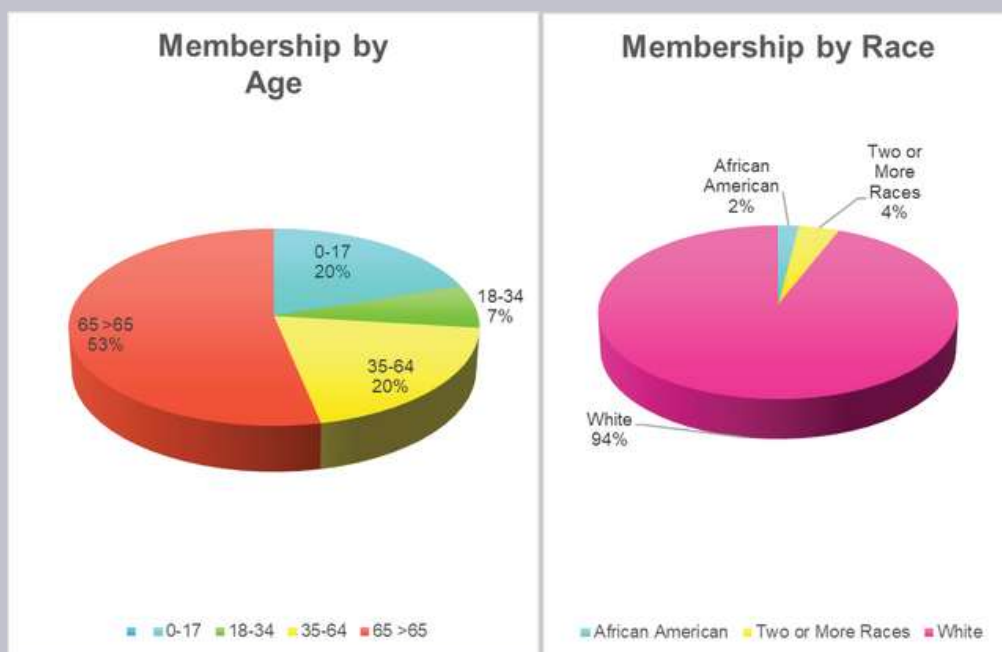
Making menstrual kits for the
“MoonCatchers” project

12. Parish Demographics

Most of our parishioners are longstanding members of the church. They are generally mature, older adults who regularly attend church with their families. 77% of our families are local to the City of Schenectady and the Town of Niskayuna; however, we have families that travel from Voorheesville, Albany, Colonie, Clifton Park, Rotterdam, Glenville, and Scotia. Our worship is conducted in English. The current average attendance on Sundays is 48 people; during the last ten years, in-person attendance has ranged from 34 to 97 parishioners. Our current membership is 71 parishioners; in the last ten years membership has ranged from 71 to 147 people, with an average of 120 members.

One of the goals for the future of our Parish is to expand our congregation to reflect the diversity of our neighborhood. We are hoping that our essence as a church of volunteers within our parish and the community at large will attract more parishioners.

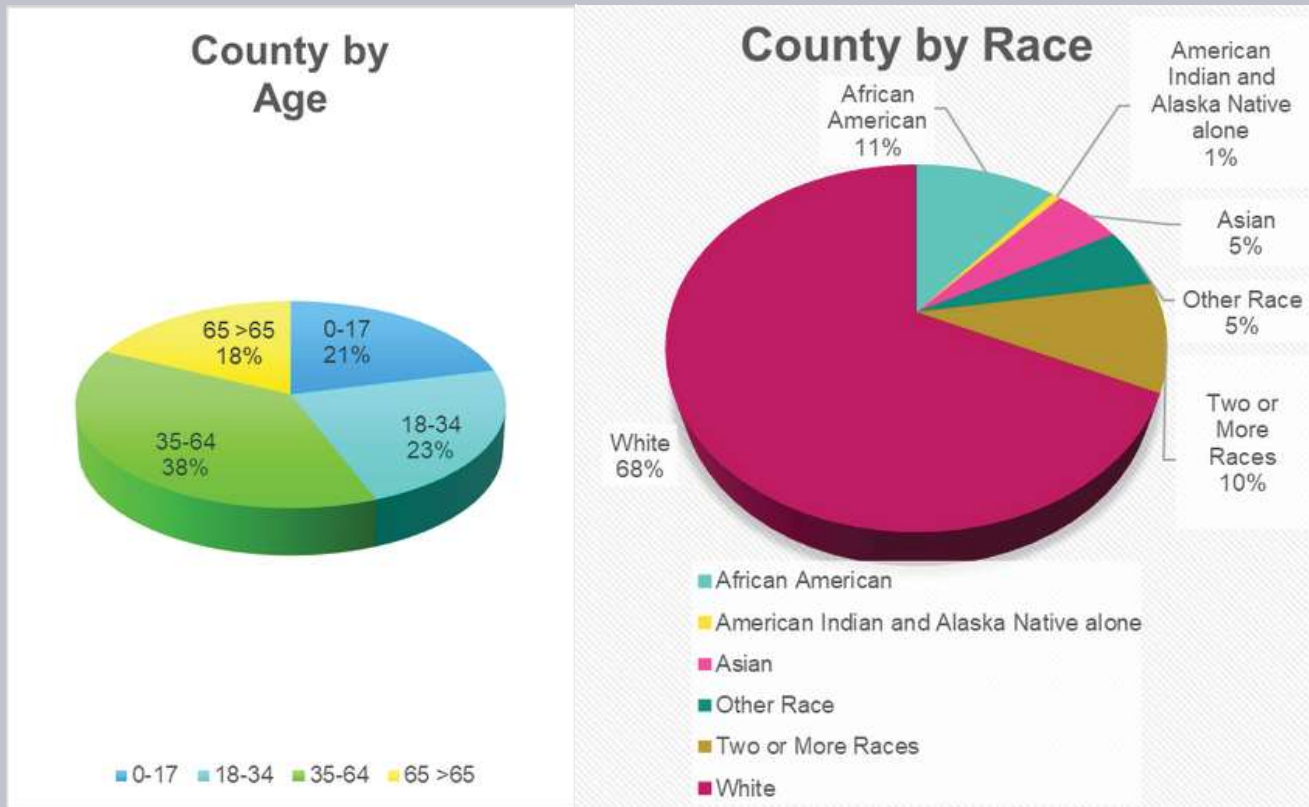
Demographics of our current congregation composition[1]:



[1] Data obtained from St. Stephen's 2023 Parish Directory and Parochial Report, and the Explore Your Neighborhood section of The General Convention of The Episcopal Church (<https://generalconvention.org/explore-your-neighborhood/>)

13. Schenectady County Demographics

Schenectady County[2] for comparison purposes:



[2]<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S0101?g=060XX00US3609365508&tid=ACSST5Y2022.S0101>

14. Financial Summary

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Schenectady is in good financial condition and is meeting all its current commitments. The Treasurer oversees the creation and management of the yearly budget. In addition, St. Stephen's has an unrestricted endowment and is the beneficiary of a trust. The Finance Committee works with the Rector, the Vestry, and the Treasurer to develop and maintain a well thought out budget plan.

The church works very hard to produce a balanced budget each year. Our pledges and plate cover approximately 55% of the budget, a sustainable draw from our endowment another 16%, and the trust contributes the remaining 29%. We have budgeted 55% of our funds to personnel costs, 6% to mission (a combination of our Diocesan Assessment and our Parish Outreach), 20% to property operations, and 19% to other. St. Stephen's does not have any debt or mortgages.

Although the foundation of our finances is sound, we are also blessed with a strong desire to do more, including more outreach and care for our parish family. This desire to do more has continually helped us to stretch and prioritize every dollar. At the same time, our worship community has been willing to step up when the appropriate need/opportunity presented itself (for example, a capital campaign to refurbish the organ). As we look to our future, we acknowledge that we will always be stretched to do all that we want to do! At the same time, we give thanks for being able to make decisions from a stable position.