



**A People's History of St. Stephen Presbyterian Church
Houston, Texas**

February, 2007

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Introduction

As I left a 50th Anniversary Committee meeting recently, fragments of a Bible School song suddenly started bubbling up to the surface of my mind.

“I am the church, you are the church, we are the church together...”

At first I couldn't remember the next part, but in a few minutes it started coming back.

“The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people.”

But not just any people:

“Those who follow Jesus, all around the world –
Yes we're the church together.”

This simple children's song helped crystallize my thoughts about attempting to write the history of St. Stephen church – namely that it is not primarily about buildings or programs or Session minutes, but about the people who followed Jesus through the doors of St. Stephen, sometimes hesitantly, sometimes passionately, almost always imperfectly, even as Christians have done since New Testament times.

This history, then, is not just MY history, not just YOUR history, but uniquely and collectively OUR history, and so what follows is a somewhat random collection of individual remembrances – “things that made people laugh, or cry, or touched their hearts with the presence of God,” as Pastor Clark so aptly stated it. May they be a blessing as we celebrate this milestone of our spiritual journey together!

John Langston

A Brief Chronology

November 23, 1956 – First service conducted at South Houston Jr. High School, led by the Rev. William H. Arnold, pastor of the Presbyterian Church of the Covenant

February 17, 1957 – St. Stephen Presbyterian Church organized and named by Brazos Presbytery

September, 1957 – The Rev. Herbert Meza called as the first pastor of the 51 charter members of St. Stephen

Early 1959 – Completion of the Youth Building where services were conducted while the Sanctuary/Fellowship Hall was being constructed

July 3, 1959 – First service held in the new Sanctuary

July 31, 1960 – By-laws for the St. Stephen Kindergarten-Day School approved by the Session

January, 1961 – The Rev. William Reily called as second pastor

November, 1961 – Construction begun on the Sunday School wing

January, 1964 – The Rev. Phineas Washer called as third pastor

October 2, 1966 – Carol Yeary became the first woman Elder in Brazos Presbytery

February 5, 1967 – The Rev. Herb Meza delivered the message at the tenth anniversary celebration

October 20, 1968 – Dedication of a new church parking lot and the manse at 2415 Rodney

November 24, 1974 – The Rev. Richard Brand called as fourth pastor (following interim pastor, the Rev. Ron Sunderland)

July 13, 1975 – The congregation voted to co-sponsor the Nguyen family along with Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Early 1979 – Wednesday night Ministers' Mess initiated

August, 1983 – The Rev. Pat Abrams called as fifth pastor (following interim pastor, the Rev. Earl Phillips)

January 13, 1985 – Sanctuary Improvement Committee report is completed and reported to the Session

March 20, 1988 – The Rev. Dean Lindsey called as sixth pastor

1988 – St. Stephen Day School renamed "Cherished Children"

March, 1992 – Completion of the Stanley Don Sullenberger Fellowship Hall, the bell tower, and accompanying renovations and additions

July 1, 1995 – The Rev. Marty Shelton-Jenck called as seventh pastor (following interim pastor, the Rev. Lynn Crossman)

1997-98 – Laurie Kluth began work as a PCUSA missionary in Costa Rica

October 1, 2000 – The Rev. Pat Clark called as eighth pastor (following interim pastor, the Rev. Don Trent)

2000 – First mission trip to sister church in Diques, Costa Rica

August 24, 2002 -- Judy Snyder commissioned as Lay Pastor

2004 -- "Big Screen" and other technological enhancements to worship "A Door Opening"

Pastoral Letters

Fifty years? I can hardly believe it, St. Stephen.

By Rev. Phineas Washer

Sylvia and I were there for ten of those years. In fact it was during our time with you that the congregation celebrated its tenth anniversary, with Herb Meza preaching, no less. Herb also baptized our son Tim at that service. ("Timmy" turns forty this December.)

The great impression I carry from that decade is that the whole time was almost - I stress the word "almost" - a non-stop honeymoon. Sylvia and I felt such a sense of partnership with you who were in the church at that time. It seemed to me that we were as much friends as we were pastor-parishioners. How patient and loving you were with us and how much you cared for one another. What an inspiration! And what a privilege to have been associated with such a fine group for such an extended time.

Among the special joys for me was my involvement in the childcare program. We had kindergarten and then pre-kindergarten and then Mother's Day Out. Every Wednesday morning I led chapel, almost always telling an "action" story from the Bible. With the teacher's help we would follow the story up with a "play," acting out the story as the children had heard it. Sylvia's grandmother, Sudie Williams, had sewn enough Bible costumes that all the five year olds who wanted to could don themselves in appropriate Bible dress that fit their small frames. (They all wanted to.) The favorite story - at least among the five-year-old little boy set - was the story of the Good Samaritan. They all wanted to be the robbers who beat up the hapless traveler who made his way from Jerusalem to Jericho. (We offered special protection to the traveler on the road.)

Another engaging outreach that developed in those days was the breakfast program for the South Houston Elementary School on the other side of College. Under the auspices of the area ministerial alliance, congregations - and St. Stephen was one of them - mobilized resources, energies, and people to offer a breakfast program to all pupils not otherwise getting fed before they came to school. My sister Charlotte, who taught at the school and was a contact person for the program, reported the principal's comment on how much better those students were doing academically as a result of the nutrition they were getting to start the day off. A marvelous pay-off for all our efforts.

Please know that Sylvia, Tim, Sarah - who also came along while we were serving you - rejoice in this significant high mark in your life as God's people. It was a blessing to be your pastor, to serve and work among and with you, and to experience the leading and guidance of the God we all love and worship, the God so fully revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Members at St. Stephens

By Rev. Ron Sunderland

As you know, I came to St. Stephens following the departure of Phin and Sylvia. They were big shoes to fill (Phin's, I mean!) as I heard stories of their ministries—one does not speak about Phin, but about Phin and Sylvia.

My richest memories actually predate Phin's leaving. He called me while I was Director of Pastoral Care for the Hospital District, and booked me for five Sunday evenings to train Session

members to share with him in the pastoral ministry with members. He would not take “No” for an answer, despite my protestations that I was advocating lay pastoral ministry but did not have a clue as to how one would pull off that feat.

I don't have time to tell the whole story, but the St. Stephens Elders rose to the occasion, and were the starting point for the development of the Equipping Laypeople for Ministry program that has facilitated the preparation of thousands of laypeople for their congregations' pastoral ministries. Phin, the Session, and I learned together how to enable laypeople to hone their God-given gifts as they minister as servants of their congregations. That is a treasured memory that continues to flourish in cities across the United States! What a witness!

Dear Pat,

What delicious irony in the year of the 50th anniversary they are working to prevent flooding on Edgebrook! The very first weekend I was at St. Stephen in 1974 there was a horrible thunderstorm. I was at the church on Saturday. I had no clue what to do. I made a “wise” decision that the main roads would be better drained than the side roads, and so I tried to drive home on Edgebrook. Needless to say, I almost drowned. That irony is made even more delicious since much of my time in Houston was focused on the Southeast Cluster of the Metropolitan Organization, whose major drive was to resolve the problem of flooding at Sims Bayou. Now I hear that flooding is going to be corrected in the area. God moves in mysterious ways, and often much more slowly than we would like.

To prove that no the membership ever told go to the refrigerator of he could find good to eat. that he helped put together the religious question was much time trying to get my memory revolves cayenne pepper beets. much was learned. Betty Texas, so we have great May these past St. Stephen as the next write you on that



one is in charge of their own memory, all me about Herb Meza was that he would the people he visited and look to see what It was a long time before I ever learned the Houston visit of John Kennedy where addressed successfully. While I spent flooding fixed, I am told that, like Herb, primarily around food. Casseroles and What a legacy! But it was good, and and I got two wonderful sons out of memories of St. Stephen and Houston. fifty years be the worst years of the life of fifty are better and better. I doubt if I will anniversary, but grace will be there.

Rick Brand

Memories of St. Stephen by Rev. Dean Lindsey

Pastor, 1988 - 1994

The Pastor Nominating Committee first heard me preach in Natchitoches, LA. In an earlier interview, I had been so struck by the church's simple commitment to the gospel commandments to love God and neighbor. Right away, I knew this was a church I wanted to serve. Fortunately, that day, as the committee listened to me preach in a neutral pulpit, they felt led to call me as pastor.

So it was that my family (only Peggy, Caroline, and me at that point) set off on a great adventure. We arrived in Houston in the middle of a thunderstorm, driving a U-Haul truck and towing my car behind. Within fifteen minutes of arriving, someone tried to steal the trailer. Bill Johnson came to the rescue and scared the would-be thief away.

From the start, the church members were all warm and welcoming. We so enjoyed the fellowship of Minister's Mess, and it was such a blessing to be in a place where there was a wonderful ministry to preschool children. At that time, Mary Swan was the Director and Mary Lewis was her capable assistant. In those days, we also had an active hunger program, distributing USDA food products, and we were involved with the organization of SeAM, too. There was an abundance of love within the congregation and this spilled over into the wider community.

There were a couple of things I didn't like, but together we did our best to address these issues. First, there were nagging problems with the building. The porch areas had been bricked in some years before to deter nighttime trouble makers, the roof leaked every time it rained, and we started to provide after school child care without having adequate space for the program. Secondly, there were issues about our visibility in the neighborhood and some pretty strained relations with a rowdy Little League located next door.

Soon after my arrival, the men of the church installed a fancy lighted sign on Theta Street. We also received much inspiration and enthusiasm from several unexpected sources. Exiles from Covenant Presbyterian flocked to our church after their congregation voted to leave our denomination. We gained not only some faithful and energetic members but also our first paid organist Karen Hoak. Next, a long-lost son of the church named Don Sullenberger who, quite tragically, was dying of AIDS, left his entire estate to St. Stephen. Church members worked hard to dispose of the assets of the estate, and we netted over \$100,000 from this bequest.

We had considerable discussion about how best to use this gift. Some urged caution. "Best to put it in a C.D., and draw interest," they counseled. In the end we decided to consider this windfall an initial gift to which we could add our own in creating something new at St. Stephen. From that point, we were ready to embark on an ambitious expansion and renovation of the church facility to increase our visibility in the neighborhood and improve a range of church programs. Paul Knowles worked tirelessly on this building plan with Cal Perry and other members of the Building Committee. Eldon Currie did the beautiful woodworking in the office area and the kitchen. Avis Kingsley was the able leader of the gifts campaign. One amazing thing about this project was that no one outside of the church believed we could do it-not the Presbytery, not several banks that turned down our loan request, not even some of the contractors that bid on the work. However, we knew what we had been called to do, and God made it happen.

When I look back over my tenure at St. Stephen, I realize that my influence on this great congregation was quite minimal. However, the church's influence upon me was enormous. St. Stephen taught me a great deal about what a Christian community can be at its best, working together, ministering to others, and always ready to grow in faith. For our family, our time in Houston will always be remembered with special fondness, as well. We received the blessing of two more children, David and Julia. Meanwhile, Caroline graduated from Cherished children and began her elementary schooling at Garden Villas. We ultimately departed Houston not only with some wonderful memories but also with two Native Texans to transplant to the rich soil of Virginia.

May God bless you all on your 50th Anniversary

Dear Pat & All The Members of St. Stephen Presbyterian Church:

What a joy it was to receive the invitation to your 50th anniversary of the founding of St. Stephen. I am so excited for you and the whole congregation. Having participated in the 40th anniversary celebration, I know this one will be just as wonderful if not much better.

When I think of my time as the Pastor from 1995-1999, I have so many amazing memories. I remember how our relationship began when the congregation held a "pounding" for us. It was the first time I came to understand real Texas hospitality. I remember the incredible kindness and care shown to

us, especially at the birth of our two boys. I remember the monthly distribution of food to those in need. I remember the various youth mission trips to the Pan American School and the incredible heat. I remember with fondness the talent of Karen Hoak and the choir. I remember in prayer the many celebrations of the lives of those who have gone before us. I remember several of the Easter services when we invited a Dixieland jazz band to celebrate with us. I remember the many, many hospital visits and serving communion monthly to those members who couldn't make it to church. I could go on and on with memories. St. Stephen and Houston, Texas will always hold an amazing place in my heart

In fact, still to this day, when my sons are asked, "What is your favorite state?" They respond with, "Texas, of course!" As they say, once a Texan always a Texan.

As you probably know, my family continues to thrive. The last two years we have traveled twice to China to adopt two beautiful girls, Carmen and Cate. Now with a family of four children, I think you can imagine how exhausted Heidi and I must be at times. But many of you know so well from experience, when there is great love that is the foundation of the exhaustion, it is all good. My wife Heidi has now changed her career from being a teacher to a freelance writer. She is creating a whole new career from scratch using her many talents. Her first fiction story for children will be published in 2007. We are both so happy that her new career is going so well. As for me, I continue as the Pastor of Community of Grace Presbyterian in Sandy, Utah. I love serving the Lord here and I hope and pray God will give me many more years to serve in this beautiful state.

Unfortunately, I must decline your invitation to attend. I greatly appreciate the invitation, especially considering how it was sent so many months in advance.

May God bless all your endeavors!
Enthusiastically serving Jesus Christ,
Marty Shelton-Jenck

Hot Springs Village, Arkansas

February 17, 2007

Dear Friends,

Congratulations to you on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of St. Stephen Presbyterian Church! You can be rightfully proud and thankful to God for your faithful ministry, which extends from your southeastern Houston community all the way to Central America. The lives of countless people have been transformed for the good by your long and faithful service and witness.

I am very proud and thankful to have been your interim pastor for a year in 1999 and 2000. You and Pastor Pat are always in my prayers. I pray that your witness will continue and expand, and that you will always have such a wonderful time together doing it!

God bless you all in your continuing service to Christ.

Shalom!

Your friend in Christ --- always,

Don Trent

My Call to St. Stephen

By Rev. Pat Clark

I was happily serving as an interim pastor in Texas City when I received a call from Bill Bates inviting me to apply for the position of pastor at St. Stephen. I submitted the Presbyterian form of a resume, and Bill later called me for an interview. My first meeting with the pastor nominating committee happened in Laurie Kluth's home one evening after I got off work.

Besides Bill and Laurie, Laura Epps, Betty Fry, Janet Horsch, Rachel Watson, and Scott McNeill were on that committee, and they asked me a lot of questions. We met again in the next couple of weeks at Bill Bates' home, and I asked them a lot of questions. They spoke of loving relationships in this congregation, but said that spiritual passion was low, and they were hoping I could raise that. They wanted the church to grow and hoped I could lead this church in doing evangelism.

What drew me to this congregation, besides the wonderful people who represented you, was the strong sense of mission. Since the beginning of this church, you have been involved with the broader community, seeking to make a difference. Early on, when most churches refused to provide daycare to working mothers because it would encourage women to go to work, you provided daycare. You provided kindergarten and pre-K day school when there was no such thing in the public schools. You even went to an elementary school at dawn and provided free breakfast to children because the teachers said they were hungry. When the principal of another school asked you to start an after school program for children who were going home alone, you did that.

You had your own on-site food pantry feeding seventy-five families a month. A group had just returned from Costa Rica where they had been very moved by the people of Diques, a church nestled among the poorest people of that country. They were hoping to make that a sister church, and that happened soon after I arrived. You were involved "hands on" as a church in so many different things. I had never seen that kind of mission outreach in a small church. I came out of a thousand member congregation, and we had nothing to compare with that. I was fascinated!

Around that time Forrest had a business trip to California, and I went with him. My feet hurt on that trip. I had to walk a lot at the airport before we got to the hotel, and I was in excruciating pain. Here we were in sunny San Diego, and I was miserable because I couldn't walk. Forrest was busy in meetings, and I sat in a chair in the hotel room and looked out the window.

Looking at those palm trees, I began to see a door opening in my mind's eye. It was sort of a garden setting, and a door kept opening. I had a strong sense that God was opening a door for me to come to St. Stephen. What I began to see beyond the door was a community of joy, people of every age and race and income level, alive in the spirit of Christ. I thought of the Scripture from Nehemiah: *the joy of the Lord is your strength*. It was a vibrant place, full of prayer and praise, where people came and had so many needs met spiritually, emotionally, and practically. I knew that healing was somehow a part of the ministry, although I did not understand it fully at that time. Parts of that vision are only now beginning to unfold.

Soon after that I bought two pictures to hang on the wall of my new office. One of them is the picture of an open door, similar to the vision I had that day. The other is a picture of joyful Africans getting baptized in a river to remind me of Nehemiah's words, *the joy of the Lord is your strength*. I want God's vision for a community of joy before me at all times. We are well on the way!

The six years that I have been at St. Stephen have been great joy for me. You have always been about training pastors, and you are training me. I am grateful for your great love and for your spirit of openness that gives me the freedom to be creative. I have had wonderful fun serving God in this church and seeing people come more alive in Christ. May we have many more years together of joyfully serving God and living the gospel, while reaching out in love to the community.

Carol Yeary Remembers ...

By Carol Yeary

It was a lovely Sunday in the fall of 1956 that the girls -- Pam and Debra and I -- arrived home from Sunday School at the Baptist Church on Broadway. Bill was in his reclining chair waiting for us. He had just come home after two weeks on the road. Deb was 6 years old at this time and was really glad to see her Dad. After a few hugs from each of us, Deb looked up at her Dad and said, "Daddy, my Sunday School teacher said you were going to Hell." Stunned silence. Then she was asked why the teacher thought this. Her reply was that her daddy drank beer.

This came like a bolt of lightning to me. Even though I was raised Baptist, this seemed a bit strong. Then I realized the City of Houston was holding a dry election in the near future. I began questioning: is this what we want for our children's teaching? Still having problems in my heart, on Thursday of that week, I found a flyer on my screen door announcing the start of a Presbyterian Church at the South Houston Jr. High in South Houston on the next Sunday. "Come visit us." I felt sure my concerns were being answered. From that moment, my family became united with the yet to be known as St. Stephen Presbyterian Church. Bill, Pam and Debra were baptized in October of 1957.

From the beginning, one goal of St. Stephen was evangelism. Raleigh Bishop and I canvassed all the neighborhoods adjacent to the church. We were privileged to meet many wonderful people, and there were a good number of these who came into our congregation.

St. Stephen grew into a strong family related church. Help was always a telephone call away, as I can verify over and over. One Wednesday afternoon, a phone call came from C & H Transportation to inform me Bill was in the hospital at Perryton, TX (700 miles from Houston). A load of pipe had fallen on him, and I must go get him. Within an hour I was on my way. Pam, Debra, and the chickens (given to the girls for Easter by Sam King) were with Jo Ground, a St. Stephen member. Bill's mother, Lottie Yeary, was welcomed into the home of the Bishops. We returned on Sunday. Where else could you find such friends except in a loving congregation like St. Stephen!

This remembrance would be amiss if I left out the greatest gift from the St. Stephen family. In 1992, Bill was diagnosed with cancer. In the spring of 1996, the doctor ordered pain radiation treatments: five days a week for four months. To make sure I could continue working, ten couples volunteered to get him to his treatments, which worked out to be once every two weeks. Others brought lunch to him many times. The Lord answered my worries and concerns by sending us to St. Stephen. Thanks!

Early Days at St. Stephen

By Joanne Purdy

My first memory of St. Stephen was a visit we had from Rev. Herb Meza. We had been attending Covenant Presbyterian Church and especially enjoyed a Young Adult Sunday School class there. But when Herb came to see us he quickly insisted that we should be attending a church right here in our neighborhood...a good place to raise our children, etc. he argued. We attended an orientation class he had for perspective members and we were soon convinced. It wasn't long before two elders came to see us (Raleigh Bishop and Charlie Shane)...those charter members were really on the ball. They certainly made you feel welcome.

In the late 60's and early 70's, before a lot of us went to work, the Women of the Church (now Presbyterian Women) was a very busy group. I remember Billie Crockett, who was the president of WOC when we joined...with baby Kenny in tow...busy as she could be with meetings, projects, conferences, etc. Many of us, as young mothers, deposited our little ones at the church's " Mothers Day Out" and off we'd go on visitation calls. I especially remember Barbara Proff and I making regular visits to see Pixie Duckworth, a semi-invalid member of St. Stephen. We would be greeted at the door by "Mr. Dillon", her Boston terrier and after hearing about Mr. Dillon's current adventures, we would be wisely counseled by Pixie on all sorts of things. And I remember when we went to visit Dellora Wilson and had to be draped in cotton sheets and not wear any perfume...as Dellora was highly allergic to so many things in her world. But what great visits they were... Dellora was a neat person and a bonus was that we usually left with fresh produce from her organic garden.

We attended Presbyterial and Church Women United meetings faithfully - all decked out in dresses, hats and gloves...no pants suits at those affairs! Sylvia Washer and Gloria Burgoyne sometimes kept our kids at their homes so we could attend. Chuck Purdy once kept Sylvia busy, preferring to have his peanut butter sandwich on the roof of the storage shed in the backyard of the manse and Doug Proff once gave Gloria a run around her neighborhood trying to catch him. There were even rumors of some of the little boys in our church scaling the bricks in the front of the sanctuary - it's a wonder that "they" and the building survived!

A big event for the women was the year our church hosted the Presbytery meeting. Lots of cooking was done and pies were even stored in the freezers of a local convenience store. The men were served in the Youth Building, all went well...and we were very proud that our small church was able to pull it off so successfully.

Many trips to Mo Ranch for the Women's Weekend brought happy memories. The gals went off cheerfully leaving the kids at home to bond with Dad. If you were in the car with Mary Lou Bijak you were assured of hearing jokes all the way...even our sweet Marion Johnson was known to tell a few "risque" jokes on one trip.

On one trip we stopped at "Frank's Restaurant" in Schulenburg and Avis Kingsley bought a stuffed buffalo in their gift shop. (Avis was our card carrying Indian and wanted it for her Western room at home.) She named it Frank and we had fun when we returned home and told folks about Avis rooming with "Frank" at Mo Ranch.

I remember Judy Snyder and Sarah Nobles sitting up playing bridge till wee hours in the main room of the dorm right across the "cat walk". It seems a few gals didn't like to walk across the "cat walk" and instead took the long way to get to our meetings. On one trip a few St. Stephenites dashed out in their p.j.s to ring the big bell late at night. Imagine their surprise when several young men from the dining hall crew, returning to their lodgings, encountered that scene!

Then there were the "water" adventures of Betty Fry. Although she was not a swimmer, we all talked her into riding an inner tube down the Comal River at New Braunfels on one trip back to Houston. Unfortunately her tube capsized and we all had a few anxious moments...especially Betty. More recently - she and Billie Crockett got stranded between two low water bridges on the road into Mo Ranch, following a heavy rainfall.

They didn't arrive at the Music and Worship Conference till late at night. Betty vowed this was her last trip to Mo Ranch! And then there was the memorable time for Joanne, when sweet Loretta Campbell ran over part of her luggage...not once but twice. Such were the adventures at Mo Ranch.

I remember doing lots of activities as a young family. Our first trip to Camp Cho Yeh was to a family camp. We stayed at Hickory Ridge and at that time the cabins had wooden floors and screened walls. I remember having to clean the sooty kerosene lamps before we left for home -- quite an experience for our little ones. Janie Osborne and I went picking berries behind the dining hall at Sweet Gum Hollow on another trip and discovered that snakes had that territory staked out...we let them keep it!

Another memorable family affair was the day they delivered a load of filler dirt to create the playground for Cherished Children. We nicknamed it "The Garden of Eden" as young and old helped shovel and level the interesting stuff that was delivered. It seemed to have a lot of trash in it. And remember the "Bag" lady that adopted the church and camped out here when the Fellowship Hall was being built. I wonder what happened to her?

A large and active group of youth was sponsored by Phil and Gayle Anderson and Bill Bates. One Christmas they presented a living Nativity Scene at the Youth Building - including angels on the roof. And we'll never forget the Christmas Eve service when Scott Burgoyne rode the riding lawn mower down the center aisle of the church...wishing everyone a "Happy Hangover"... never a dull moment!

As I reread this, I seem to be rambling on and on...even as the story of St. Stephen Presbyterian Church continues and new memories are made. Thank God for such wonderful memories!

My Memories of St. Stephen

By Sylvia Williams

When I think about my memories of St. Stephen for all these many years, I see a number of vignettes, small incidents that stand out in my memory. Gene and I first came to St. Stephen in the early sixties with our two boys in tow. We came because a neighbor, Alice Morris, invited us not long after we moved to Houston. We had never visited a Presbyterian church before and thought we would try it out because my husband Gene was a Methodist, and I was a dissatisfied Baptist.

We were not sure what to expect when we came here. The worship service moved along smoothly, and at the end, the minister, Herb Meza, announced that he had accepted a call to another church, and that he was leaving. Everyone seemed upset. That afternoon I went to Alice's home to talk to her, and she was crying, so very sad that Herb was leaving. That was our initial experience at St. Stephen, and we did not go again until after the new minister had arrived.

When we returned, the Rileys were there. I was pregnant with my daughter, Gina, and the pregnancy was not going well. There were complications, and my husband and I were worried about my health. Rev. Riley came to visit us, listened to my health problems, and gave me great encouragement. His pastoral care greatly relieved my mind. Evan Carpenter was a Sunday School teacher in those early days. Gene really enjoyed him because he quoted Josephus, and the class discussion was interesting. Gene even bought his own copy of the book.

One Sunday while I was singing during worship, my son said, "Mother, you ought not to sing so loud because you don't sing too good." It made me laugh at the time, but I still feel shy singing. I like the old songs. I know them and don't feel so self-conscious.

One year they talked me into going to the women's conference at Mo-Ranch. I had never done anything like that before, but we piled into Carol Yeary's station wagon and went. I remember Joanne Purdy, Barbara Proff, Marion Johnson, and Mary Lou Bijak as part of that experience. We laughed and talked all the way up there, and all the way back home again. We saw deer that were so tame they came right up to the camp. The hill country was beautiful, especially at night, and I really got a lot out of it.

St. Stephen has been a major part of many of the key events in our family's life. I was especially blessed by pastoral care I received when my mother died, and from Marty Shelton-Jenck when my father died. Both funerals were very meaningful to me. Our daughter Gina was married at St. Stephen in a lovely ceremony. Gene's father (at the age of 74) built the slanted shelves that are in the choir room to hold the music. It was a labor of love, and we donated them to the church. Our children were baptized with water from the Jordan River that the Bishops brought back from the Holy Land. In those days, I think that every child at St. Stephen was baptized with water from the Jordan River until it was used up.

There are a lot of hard working and devoted people in our Church. I have a lot of long time friends at St. Stephen, and I am so glad to be able to have such a warm and blessed church home.

By the Way...*
By Mary Lou Bijak

St. Stephen had a choir director named Ruth Moore, who also was a teacher. Her daughter Julia was diagnosed with a serious illness. Ruth took care of her in the daytime, and the women of the church took turns staying with her at night, so that she would not be alone. All of them had young children of their own at home, but they did that until she died. Julia was 12 or 13 when she died, and it was a sad funeral. Afterwards the family went home to eat – lots of homemade food people had brought in, nothing frozen or fast food – hams, pies, cakes, etc. Ruth asked me to pray, but I had never prayed out loud in my life, and I felt tongue-tied. The words went out of my head the minute I said them. About that same time, Leafy Davis' son and Paul Thornberg's boy were both killed in car wrecks, and Charles Shane died at the age of sixteen. We were losing more children than older people.

Vivian Martin, who lives near Washington, D.C. now, was president of the women of the church one year, and she was quite a speaker. She always wore big hats. One day in worship she was speaking about the annual joy gift offering. She said, "I want you to know this goes to all the retarded (meaning retired) ministers." Everyone cracked up.

Herb Meza loved drama and said that seminaries ought to teach it. He was very dramatic and often put on plays. He did Job one time, and during the performance he used an off color phrase like "pissin' at a star" or something. Everyone winced, but he just kept on going.

We used to have "Come as you are" parties where the women would come and get you out of bed and take you down to church for breakfast. We all came in our baby doll pajamas with curlers in our hair. One day when we were all there in our baby dolls, someone brought the new minister into the room. It was the first time Bill Riley had met us, and there we all were in our nightgowns and pajamas!

*Editor's note: Mary Lou wrote a newsy column by this title in the Searcher for many years.

A Memorable But Sad Experience at St. Stephen.
By Cmdr. Ray Evans, CDR, USCG (Ret.)

Being a Coast Guard Commander with duties as Captain of the Port, Houston made me an ideal candidate to be named Chairman of the Decorations Committee for St. Stephen then under construction. If anyone didn't like the color or texture or whatever it could be blamed on that itinerant Coastie that wasn't there anymore. (This was before my 14 year return to Houston in a construction supervisor's position).

When it came time to choose the color and texture of brick for the church's exterior we had the contractor and brick supplier build three small walls about 3 feet high and 4 feet long so we could choose a color.

Of a committee of about six members, one lady opposed what the majority picked and stated that, "If that color is chosen I am leaving the church." It was, and unfortunately she did just that and we never saw her again. I never knew her name and have all these years regretted that we lost a member because the color of brick on St. Stephen displeased her.

Youth Becomes Youth Leader
by Pam Yeary Hillis

There are so many things I could tell you, all very special to me. I remember being a teenager in an active youth group led by amazing adults, and then being the adult leader of an amazing youth group. When I was a youth we spent many Sunday evenings in the home of Raleigh & Lucille Bishop, singing as one of the Bishops played the piano. As a youth leader we would borrow a karaoke machine so we could sing. My most special memories as a youth leader were the many camping trips we took, usually in the Yeary motor home. I cooked more pancakes on that little stove than I care to remember. Do you know how much Ross Bijak and Dustin Johnson could eat? or Rachel Hoak, Rebecca Heeth and Jessica Hillis? And then there was my little vegetarian Ruth Langston – I thought she would starve each trip. Camping, in tents, on the beach in Galveston, with the Yeary motor home as a back-up was one of the best. The boys were in a tent, the girls were in a tent, Pat & I were in a two-person tent, very small, and the Kubatzky's, Tim, Kathy, Cory, Lindsey, & Erin were in a tent. Around midnight the Texas weather hit – high winds and rain. The boys ran to the motor home and got on the top bunk, then the girls ran to the motor home and got on the back bunk, and I didn't move. Pat pointed out that the boys and girls were in the motor home alone. So I ran to the motor home. Next Kathy brought the twins, Erin and Lindsey to the motor home. They slept on the floor which is where I "tried" to sleep. Suddenly we heard thunder; no it was snoring, from the twins! No one slept that night because of the laughter, and the THUNDER. All of our adventures were great! And all this because of the experiences I had as a youth! Thank you, thank you, thank you.

So many highlights, so many memories
By Laurie Kluth

- Week long summer lock-ins with the youth in the Youth Building during the late '60s and early '70s
- Annual week-end church retreats at Cho-Yeh
- Sharing hot chocolate after caroling with the Berean Christian Church
- The food pantry out of our kitchen (forerunner of SeAM and the USDA program)
- Housing a Vietnamese family in the Youth Building
- Banner projects with the women
- New Year's Eve services at Almeda Mall
- Participation in the Metropolitan Organization and success in passing a moratorium on flooding for our southeast area (the first in Houston)
- The commissioning of Judith Snyder as lay pastor and her development of a senior ministry.
- Personally and more recently has been the congregation's support and love as I have answered God's call into the mission field in Central America, beginning with my acceptance into PCUSA's Reconciliation and Mission Program in '97-'98, I was sent to Costa Rica for ten

months, learning how to walk in the other person's shoes. What a heart growing experience! The people captured my heart, and I wanted to share that with St. Stephen. Dreams do come true! As God has led our people to partner with the Church of the Light of a New Day, a very special congregation with whom I continue to work, we have been able to have mission trips in 2000 and 2006 to work, study, and play with the congregation there. And now their pastor, Victor Alvarado and his wife, Maria Eugenia, will be visiting us in March for ten days. God is blessing us with the opportunity to meet and know each other, an opportunity to make my experience a reality for all the members of St. Stephen. Thanks be to God!

A Most Rewarding Program

By Chuck Finch

One of my fondest memories from St. Stephen was a very successful program called the "South Houston Elementary School Breakfast Program." It was started under Rev. Washer and continued for about two and a half years, ending during Rev. Brand's time.

The South Houston Elementary School contacted several churches in the area to see if they would sponsor the program with money and volunteers. The purpose of the program was to serve cereal, milk, and juice to underprivileged children coming to school hungry. (This was before schools provided breakfast as they do now). St. Stephen participated with money and several members who volunteered to go to school early, set out the cereal for the children, talk to them as they ate, and cleaned up after the meal. The school bought all the food, kept the records, and provided the space. All this was before school started, so it was early in the morning!

You could see that the children were hungry. When they came in, they were all business. They set about eating breakfast, never causing any problems, and leaving in good spirits, ready to go to school. Records showed a marked decrease with problems originating from the hungry children, as well as better grades. It was one of the most rewarding programs I as an individual and we as a church have undertaken!

Beam Me Up

By Joe Snyder

Early in our 50-year history, the church made a long range plan for the buildings we planned to build so that everything would be done properly and in good order. This area we are seated in was the first built. On the plan it was a Fellowship Hall, but of course it could double as a sanctuary until that could be built over towards Bronson. There was also supposed to be two Sunday School wings, one toward the south, which is where the nursery and the Cherished Children now meet, and another coming back east to enclose a courtyard where our current playground is. Over the years things changed. Theta became our address instead of Bronson, and we never seem to be able to have enough money to build the sanctuary building. Instead, we had several Sanctuary Improvement projects to transform this area, and eventually we built a new Fellowship Hall on the Theta side. It is a story from one of these improvements that I want to tell you about.

Have you ever noticed the big iron beams that hold up the ceiling in the sanctuary? They were turquoise back when I joined the church and not as inconspicuous as they are now. At one time they were a dark reddish-brown. If you look close back by the door to the choir room or on the stairway, you will probably find a place where the tan paint has been chipped off and the old colors are showing.

During one of our sanctuary improvement projects it was decided that they had to be painted a different color. Not so hard on the side beams or the stairway, but to get to the ceiling beams we had to erect a scaffold and it was quite a project with tarps spread everywhere. Somehow, Cal Perry and I wound up way up high on top of that scaffold painting away. Now some of the newer members may not know Cal, but he is a big man, generally easy going, but with a lot of determination. He was a long time elder and choir member who now belongs to Clear Lake Presbyterian Church, and he still comes back sometimes to sing and play his guitar.

Anyway, we were way up there painting, and it wasn't, "quote long," until I noticed that he was sweating profusely and that he usually had one hand with a death grip on the railing of the scaffold, so I asked him if he was all right. He confessed that he was really afraid of heights, but this was a job that needed to be done, and he would make it. Now that was real dedication. It is people like that that have made our church what it is today.

To thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul. O my God, in thee I trust, let me not be put to shame. (Psalm 25: 1-2a, RSV)

Cherished Children

By Mary Lewis

My first relationship with St. Stephen Day School was as a parent. I loved being a part of the school so much that I volunteered for everything! Cathryn Clegg was my mentor, and before I knew it, I had followed her as director after she retired. I hated being "in charge" and not working with the children. The director shared an office with the church secretary. (Remember that old office?*) It was dark, crowded, and so far away from the children. Sometime after going back to being a classroom teacher, the office moved. Of all the changes made in the history of the program – name changes, playground moving and developing, adding an after school program and day-care – making an office out of the former nursery was the best change, in my opinion, and I had nothing to do with it!

As I go through our file cabinet, I see the names of so many children who have so many stories, and these stories continue to be important in their lives. My own children still remember the friends they made at St. Stephen Day School. Cherished Children, as it became known, is as important to the development of children today as it was when our church had the foresight to start the school.

*Editor's note: The church office used to be in what is now the choir room.

How Do You Spell Relief?"

By Katie Koons

It was really a blessed relief when the small Presbyterian church (Good Shepherd) closed after the last service on Christmas Eve, 1992. Paul and I had been members of Good Shepherd for about 15 years. I had played the organ there for most of that time – which had been a real labor of love for me – but we were ready to move on to a new chapter in our lives, so we chose to join St. Stephen since it was in our general neighborhood, and we knew a few of the members there.

“Just As I Am”
By Sharon Juntunen

When I was new at St. Stephen, the Women of the Church had a catchy way to get new people into the group. My doorbell rang one morning; it was Beulah Hamm inviting me to the circle’s “Come as you are” meeting. I don’t remember my appearance, but I can still see Beulah’s head full of curlers!

Sincerely Thankful
By Bee King

I believe in my heart that Sam and I were meant to be members of St. Stephen. We lived across the street from Carol Yeary when this church was established and Billie Crockett was a neighbor, too. We attended many special occasions here: weddings, funerals, parties, and our kids squared danced here. We were always made to feel welcome.

When we were looking for a new church home, we visited many churches for about a year – always returning to St. Stephen. I was impressed with how friendly the people were – and still are! Finally we decided this is where we belonged. It has been a wonderful place to be. Sam enjoyed it so much, and it has nurtured and cared for me since his death. I love being here, and I love all of you. Unforgettable persons at St. Stephen include Gene Brodt, Judy Snyder, and Chuck Finch. Special times have been the first retreat at Cho-Yeh after we joined St. Stephen and also the retreat at the farm.

I thank the Lord everyday for guiding us to St. Stephen – a real church home!

Remembering Bob Duckworth
By John Langston

I don’t remember exactly when or how I first met Bob; by the time Teresa and I joined St. Stephen in 1974, Bob and his wife Pixie rarely came to church. Pixie was chronically in poor health, and Bob waited on her devotedly when he wasn’t working at his job as a laboratory technician. However it happened, Bob immediately impressed me with his quick wit, keen intelligence, and the slightly mischievous twinkle in his eye when he laughed – which was often! The son of a Methodist minister somewhere in the Carolinas (I confess I don’t remember the exact place), Bob quoted scripture with an easy familiarity, but you could tell that he was equally uneasy with some of the standard tenets of Protestant orthodoxy. “I believe in the Law of Love,” he would tell me when our conversation would sometimes take a theological turn, and Bob certainly did have a loving heart. Only slightly less special to him than his beloved Pixie was their miniature Boston terrier who was appropriately named “So Big,” and Bob was a loyal friend to many, including the Langston family.

After Pixie died, Bob approached Teresa and me with an idea suggested to him by Thelma Jones, a mutual friend and member of St. Stephen. Knowing that ours was a growing family, Bob offered to give us Pixie’s piano – including the bench for which Pixie had herself done the needle point. At the time, none of our four children played piano, but our youngest, Ruth, was showing signs of interest in music, and we thankfully agreed. As many of you know, Ruth continued piano lessons – along with playing the cello – well into high school, and music is still an important part of her life, an interest that was given a substantial boost by the generosity of Bob Duckworth.

A Journey of Faith

By Laura Epps

Ed and I came to St. Stephen Presbyterian Church in 1991 from Trinity Presbyterian Church. We live in Arlington Heights Subdivision and that was much closer to St. Stephen than it was to Trinity, but our journey to St. Stephen took several turns along the way, and this is how it happened. Our next-door neighbors were Trinity members and invited us to go with them to Church. We were long time Baptists but were looking for something different. I had long been attracted to an emphasis on education and as I looked more into the Presbyterian doctrine I found that the Presbyterians also had this as one of their priorities. The longer we attended the more convinced we were that we would change to Presbyterian. We made lots of friends there and among them was Emma Ruth Atkinson, a feisty little lady that was a long time Presbyterian and she placed a great priority on education. I learned so much from her. When she felt she could no longer live alone, she moved into the Oak Shadows Retirement Center on Shaver near us. For about a year we picked her up to go to Trinity. One day she told us that she didn't understand why we drove so far to church, and that we should make a change nearer because she couldn't drive all the way to Trinity when we couldn't go. We decided to visit around the churches that were closer. The first one was St. Stephen. I assumed we would visit Faith and 1st Presbyterian, which had been our plan. We had visited St. Stephen a few times and one Sunday morning she called and asked if we were both going (Ed had become sporadic in attendance at Trinity). I told her yes. She stated, "then we will just join this morning, I don't see any reason to keep visiting around." That morning we joined St. Stephen.

Emma Ruth Atkinson (Mrs. A, as she was known) was such an influence on us. She became good friends with Mary Gray, and she really loved St. Stephen. Because of her feeling about the importance of education, she was influential in establishing a scholarship fund at St. Stephen just like the one she had established at Trinity. For years, the fund at Trinity helped many young people with their education. As far as I know, it is still functioning there, and it has been an ongoing program at St. Stephen, so she still lives on through these funds. She died in 1994, and her funeral was at St. Stephen Church; many people from Trinity attended.

We love St. Stephen church and have found that it is a loving church that always seeks the Lord's guidance in everything. We have made many friends, and we love the church and its people. We have loved the ministers we have known – Dean, Lynn, Marty, Don and Pat. They have all had a part in the life of St. Stephen and a definite influence on our lives.

My Roundabout Way to St. Stephen

By Cynthia Knowles

I lived the first seventeen years of my life in a small town, Acushnet, Massachusetts, right across the street from the Advent Christian Church. No excuses not to go, but if our family went away on Sunday, we went to any church – Baptist, Methodist, Unitarian, Congregational, Quaker, Pentecostal. Next I left home to go to school and work near Boston. I worked for two years, and the lady of the house was a Quaker. Then I met Paul, married, and finally settled in Chatham, Massachusetts in 1946. The Methodist Church was across the street, so we went there.

In 1953 our family, now with three sons, spent life in Orange, Texas, where everyone at work went to the Episcopal Church. Finally, in 1955, we settled in the Park Place area of Houston, a few blocks away from Park Place Methodist Church. Paul Jr. got invited to a teenage program at Covenant

Presbyterian Church, and Paul and I decided to go to Sunday service to see what our son liked. We joined and stayed for eighteen years until the church split (PCA & PCUSA). We voted PCUSA and lost – a shock. Paul was an elder, and I was in charge of the food pantry.

Paul and I visited several churches over a few months until we found St. Stephen with its simplicity. I joined first, and then Paul joined after resigning as elder at Covenant. What we two found was a loving, friendly, and caring membership for which we were ever thankful.

A few years ago I found out that an ancestor of mine came from Glasgow, Scotland to New England in 1741 and became a Presbyterian minister, so in a roundabout sort of way, I have come full circle!

“Have Bus, Will Travel”

By Cynthia Knowles

Over the past ten years a small group of St. Stephen members – the Senior Saints – have enjoyed the Precinct II Senior Citizens’ Program. The program provides buses – 16, 24, or 38 passenger – and drivers, and we pay \$2 in town or \$3 out of town at least ten times a year, plus trips to Astros, Comets, and Aeros games, as well as free tickets to the IMAX theater and Harbor Playhouse.

We have enjoyed trips to Texas City, Kemah, Pasadena Heights, Orange, and Galveston; visited museums in and around Houston, painted and unpainted churches, the Bluebonnet Trail, and many more -- PLUS lots of good food and fellowship!

We hope all who have taken the trips will continue to support the efforts begun by Lucile Sandifer and continued by Cynthia L. Knowles and Katie Koons.

St. Stephen -- “A Warm, Welcoming Place”

By Lindy Hoggard

The Robert Hoggard family became members in September, 1991. My nephew, Steven Heysquierdo, started coming to church with David Swan and his family. I guess we can thank Mary Swan for bringing Steven, which got my sister Cathy coming, and she got us coming. Mary Swan took an interest in our family, and Robert and I felt this was a warm, welcoming place. Avery was two years old at the time, and Mary Gray sort of adopted him as another grandson. Avery would call her “Granny Gray.” She made a favorite pillow for him, which he still has today. Robert and I also helped with the youth, along with Pam and Pat Hillis. Dean Lindsey was pastor at that time, and I was involved with Brunch Bunch, which was started by Peggy Lindsey.

When I got pregnant with our twins, I had to quit work and was put on bed rest. We took Avery out of daycare since I wasn’t working, but Mary Lewis would pick me up three days a week and bring him to Cherished Children preschool. She was a big blessing to us, and often had to get Avery a Happy Meal on the way home! The ladies of the church gave me a wonderful shower and sent food to the house. When I had the girls, I had a lot of complications, and Dean was at the hospital everyday.

All our children have gone on mission trips and to camp at Mo Ranch and Cho-Yeh, which would not have been possible without the church. Marty Shelton-Jenck was a great inspiration to Avery

on mission trips with our youth. Avery went through confirmation class with Don Trent, and the girls had confirmation class with Pat Clark and Barbara Proff. This had been the only church our girls have known. Everyone has seen our kids grow up here.

Robert is an elder of the church now, and I have been very fortunate to work in our church office on Fridays and fill in for Pam Hillis when she needs to be off. I used to be active with the Pokeno group, which I miss!

This church, our church family, gives us a sense of belonging. Everyone here is so loving and giving. I know if there were ever any crisis, the church and Pat would be here for us. Rev. Pat has been an inspiration to me and my family by her words of wisdom, acts of kindness, and love. Along with Pam Hillis, I owe many thanks to Mary Lewis, as all three of our children have been a part of Cherished Children. I'm so glad they have gone through the preschool program, which gave them all a head start on learning.

I could not name all the people who have touched my life here because each and every one has in some way. This is a wonderful place to worship – thanks be to God!

A St. Stephen Memory

by Karen Hoak

St. Stephen was originally, to me, the church behind Rachel's school that looked kind of like a motel (with all the doors down the Sunday School wing). But when Presbyterian Church of the Covenant defected (despite my best efforts) to PCA, I knew I had to leave there. After the vote to leave PCUSA, Rachel went to church with friends at Sagemont Presbyterian (I couldn't, in good conscience, leave her in a church that didn't want women on Session or teaching Sunday School without male supervision). Through that experience, I met their pastor, Susan Bryan, to whom I unburdened myself about my distress at the whole Covenant experience and my desire to find a job elsewhere. She told me that she thought St. Stephen might be about to professionalize a church musician job in their church, and put me in touch with Dean Lindsey. And that was the start of something special.

Dean made me feel welcome instantly. He was as comfortable to be around as any pastor I'd come into contact with (except my dad, of course!), and working with him was a delight. Rachel began to do some babysitting for the Lindsey's, and we grew closer to the family as time went on. It was a shock when Dean announced his departure, but only because I didn't know he was even considering it. I should have been wiser: Dad moved every 5 years or so during his ministry until he arrived at Greensburg, Indiana, where he stayed for 18 years. He always said he felt he had to move on when he'd moved a church as far forward as he thought he could. I think Dean may have felt some of the same feelings. Anyway, I had always felt that Dean's biggest strength in the job was pastoral care. And just before he left, he had a chance to prove it to me - in spades!

Dean's last Sunday was to be a Sunday in June. On the day before, my brother Mark died suddenly and unexpectedly in Indiana. I had been over at Betty Bijak's house while my father was trying to reach me by phone with this news, and he finally ended up calling Dean, and asking Dean to come to my home and be there when I called Dad. Without hesitation, Dean complied, and came over, asked me to call home, and was there when I needed a shoulder to cry on and a sympathetic ear. I'll never forget his kindness and empathy. And all of this trauma on the day before his last Sunday! The support I

received from St. Stephen upon my return from Indiana was wonderful, as well. This church has been my church family for many years now, and I hope it will continue. Long live St. Stephen!

My Calling at St. Stephen

By John Lewis

Although I have been a member of St. Stephen since the late 60's, most of my early churchgoing activity was a result of my wife's deep need for a church home and the companionship of her church friends. I was a Deacon several times, and later an Elder, but although I hope I had some impact on the church, it wasn't until Pat Clark became our minister that I found my real calling. I was encouraged by her visions for the church and thought that I could really contribute by doing something I enjoy that would enhance the congregation's worship experience and maybe even help it to grow by being technologically up to date. I have always been interested in electronics and computers, and even though I am mostly self-trained in these endeavors, I thought I should try to pass along what knowledge I have. Since Pat's call we have started the Big Screen presentations in worship, upgraded our computer capabilities with a local network, updated the sound system, added a website and recently upgraded the computer lab so that we can start teaching classes again. There is still a lot to do to achieve the vision, and with everyone's blessing and prayers I will continue as long as I am able.

Mystery of the Sound System

By Forrest Clark

Like many people of my generation, I have trouble with electronic equipment. Fortunately my son hooks up my stereo and cable equipment for me. My VCR blinks 12:00 because I don't know how to set the clock and I can't record anything on either my VCR or my DVD, but that is OK because I usually do not care to anyway. In all the many years I have been working in Presbyterian Churches, I have successfully avoided dealing with electronic equipment. I was delighted to learn when we came to St Stephen that Jim Dixon took excellent care of the sound system. He even kept it locked up so no one would fool with it. When offered a key to the sound cabinet, I politely declined.

One Sunday, during Pat's sermon, I heard people talking out in the hall. Then it sounded like they were in the fellowship hall. I thought this was rather rude. The next Sunday they were talking outside or perhaps in the class rooms, but there was no one present. The next Sunday during the prayer, I heard Spanish music coming from the speakers and so did everyone else, especially Pat. After the service Pat asked me, since Jim was not present, what was going on. As the husband of a minister who is more "technology challenged" than I am, I knew my avoidance of church sound systems had ended. When I called Jim, I shuddered at his response: "Oh is that radio station back?" It seems that the problem had shown up before and they were told by the company that installed the equipment that a radio station's equipment was coming through our sound system and that the FCC said that the radio station would have to repair their equipment, but since we did not know which station it was they were unable to do anything.

The problem had gone away so Jim had not worried about it. But the problem was back and getting more and more annoying. Pat's annoyance with me for not fixing it was also growing, or so I felt. With the aid of the day school we figured out the radio station's call sign. We left the sound system on during the day and the teachers and staff would listen and try to pick out the call signs. It was hard since all conversations were in Spanish, but finally they figured it out. We went on line and got contact

information and after some delays finally got a response from the station that it was our problem and not theirs.

About this time God intervened. Pats step-brother, Steve Simpson, whom we had not seen nor heard from in 25 years re-entered our lives. We learned that Steve had taken over his father's business. His company sells, services and installs sound equipment for schools, stadiums and churches. Doesn't God answer prayer in amazing ways?

I jumped at the chance to explain our sound system problems. He thought the most likely problem was that a grounding wire was shorted out and creating an antenna which was picking up the radio station. The easiest solution was to reconnect that grounding wire and the problem would be solved.

At my first opportunity I told Jim about his suggestions and we met at the church along with John Lewis to find the loose wire. The first task was to isolate the microphones with loose wires. We turned all mikes off and then turned them on one at a time. We found that the problem was coming from the two podium mikes up front. We checked all the connections and found no loose wires. We tightened what we could but still we got Spanish music. Now, however, we had a strategy for Sunday services.

I would stand in the back of the sanctuary at the controls and turn the appropriate mike on only when it was going to be used. Using only one microphone made the volume from the radio station less distracting. Of course I now had to accept the key to the sound cabinet.

Unfortunately, the on and off buttons to the sound system were positioned in the reverse to the podiums' mikes. As a result I blew it on several occasions by turning the wrong mike on or off at the wrong times. Sometimes I was late in turning on the appropriate mike and sometimes I would forget either to turn the mikes on or off. This did not win me many "atta boys!" with Pat, but she was forgiving.

Steve again e-mailed further suggestions for things to try, but there was no improvement. Jim got the man who sold us the system to come out and check the connections. For a while we thought the problem was with the grounding of the electrical outlet, but further checks proved that was not the problem. Somehow, I'm not sure how, we discovered that if we took the hand held mike that connects to the back of the organ and carried it out into the fellowship hall that the Spanish music either disappeared or became too soft to hear. We had a new strategy and routine for church service.

On Sunday mornings before church started we carried the hand held mike to the fellowship hall. Pat was happy. I was happy. The congregation was happy and not annoyed by Spanish music for several weeks. Once during that time I forgot to string the mike into the fellowship hall and we were again annoyed by loud Spanish music. It was too late for me to do it when, during the time of prayer, we heard the Spanish music again. I apologized to Pat and promised not to forget again. Fortunately, she was understanding.

Several weeks later, in the middle of the prayer, the Spanish music sounded again. Pat gave me one of those looks. After the service I took her to the fellowship hall and showed her that I had not forgotten to put the mike in the fellowship hall. Over the next several Sundays we tried the mike in several places, but that solution no longer worked.

The huge Kirking of the Tartans service was looming. Dozens of guests were coming in their Scottish regalia. They wanted bagpipes not lively Spanish.

Pat again e-mailed Steve for help and this time he came to town to solve the mystery of the Spanish music. He quickly discovered that wires had been crossed, so he disconnected each and every connection and reconnected them.

After seven hours of rewiring and re-soldering, the system was up and running without any Spanish music and has been ever since. He also repaired and repositioned the microphones over the choir section so the system could pick up their voices better.

I had learned much more about sound systems than I had ever wanted to know. I thought my sound system worries were over, but alas no!

The portable mike is sometimes not reliable. I have to remember to buy batteries and change them. Not long ago the only new battery we had was dead. When the new sound system cabinet was installed, somehow the jack to the receiver was not plugged in and it took us several Sundays to figure out what was wrong.

So each Sunday I bring my key to the sound cabinet and do a mike test of the system and pray that nothing more goes wrong!

Memories of St. Stephen Presbyterian Church

By Mary Hume

The first two times I visited this church were for the funerals of my Aunt Margaret Paton and then my Uncle Ian “Scotty” Paton. I had met Rev. Clark previously at the hospital and immediately felt a connection with her. When my mother was dying, and she wanted Pat to have a prayer card of Pope John Paul that was very precious to her, I knew that this was a very profound moment in my life. My mother only wanted Pat when she was dying. Having met her and having been at St. Stephen’s for the same two funerals, my mom loved the church and the people. Soon after my mom passed away, I began attending St. Stephen and have found so much love and comfort. I know I have plenty of Moms here to rely on who love me!

I have not been a member for as long as most of the people here, but it seems like I have been attending this church and been a member of this family since I was a child. I have always believed in God and Heaven – St. Stephen’s is Heaven on Earth for me! Every time I walk in these doors, my body relaxes, and I am so calm. I believe this is the presence of God! I see one face, and it’s a smile or a hug or a kiss on the cheek. Some of my best memories are of a special woman named Judy Snyder – you all know her! Judy always made a point of checking on me to make sure I was OK. I only wish I could be as unbelievable as Judy was in so many ways. Every Sunday I get to remember that when I look at the stained glass windows in the sanctuary!

Experiences I had with a few special St. Stephen’s members this past summer were unforgettable and life changing for me, and that number has grown and will continue to grow as I grow in my faith and in feeling the presence of God every time I walk through these hallowed doors. God Bless you all!
Much love,

In the Kitchen at St. Stephen

By Mary Saunders

Breakfast with Santa

In November 2003 I was given the opportunity to go on the Session and become an Elder at St. Stephen Presbyterian Church. My term would begin January 1, 2004 and would run for a period of three years. What a great honor! Training with our minister, Pat Clark, revealed I leaned toward mercy and caring for others. Perfect! I love to cook and how better to care for others than through food? In her wisdom Pat assigned me to the Fellowship committee. Our committee chair was Joanne Purdy and what an adventure we had. Joanne had an agenda for an event each month and that year she proposed we do, "Breakfast with Santa," in December. The idea was to invite our congregation, family, friends, and neighbors to come in and have a pancake breakfast with us. Our menu would be freshly cooked pancakes with butter and syrup, breakfast sausages, and milk, juice, and coffee. We would recruit a Santa for the kids and take a picture of each child on Santa's knee. It sounded like a lot of work but at the same time a lot of fun. Joanne taught me that age doesn't matter - it's what's in the spirit and heart that counts so the child in me took over.

We set a date and made flyers to get the word out; the date and time was posted on our marquee on Theta Street; we found Santa's suit and Pat talked her brother-in-law, Gary Griggs, into playing that jolly elf. We bought candy canes for the children, red tablecloths for the tables, lots of sausages and pancake mix, and enough Polaroid film for 100 pictures. Everyone was excited and hoping our event would be a success. The big day finally arrived and early on that Saturday morning a small group gathered to prepare for our guests who would begin arriving at 9:00. Joanne was there with her Christmas apron and hat and her enthusiasm was contagious. I chose to man the griddle and soon the aroma of hot pancakes could be smelled throughout our church. A few minutes before 9 our first guests arrived - a family from our largely Hispanic neighborhood - shy children and their parents. They were followed by others and soon our fellowship hall was buzzing as everyone talked and laughed. Pat speaks Spanish and was a great help in welcoming our neighbors in their native tongue. Pat said a prayer of thanksgiving for everyone in attendance, for the food, and for the children and our festivities began.

You could see the children looking around for Santa and it was absolutely fantastic when a bell rang and suddenly Santa appeared. The kids were beside themselves and ran to give Santa hugs. A line formed as Santa made his way up to the podium and sat in his chair - the children had forgotten all about food and were focused on the jolly man in red.

More of In the Kitchen at St. Stephen

By Mary Saunders

The Chili and Gumbo Cookoffs

Each year in February and March the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo makes its appearance in our city. Each February we at St. Stephen celebrate by having our Chili Cookoff and western dress contest. It's fun for everyone. We have some pretty stylish dressers at our church and they all know how to do it up right. The Chili cookoff is a fun event and gives the winners bragging rights until the next cookoff. The Fellowship Committee plans these events and lines up judges. We chop up onions and

shred cheese to serve along with our chili, cornbread, crackers, garlic bread, and oh, yeah, Tabasco sauce and an assortment of desserts. Our wonderful cooks bring in chili ranging from mild to downright hot and spicy! It's all so much fun and good, too. There's chili with beans or without, there's chili made with beef and turkey, and there are jalapenos in others. One of the best pots of chili I've had came from Forrest Clark. He had some frozen some brisket from our Annual Garage Sale and he chunked that brisket up for his chili. Talk about good!!! It doesn't get any better than that. Needless to say he didn't have any leftovers that day.

Our gumbo cookoff occurs in November along with Commitment Sunday when we make our pledges for the coming year's budget. Our church is blessed to have so many great cooks and we always have lots of gumbo to go around. As with the chili, there are many different kinds - some with seafood, some with turkey, some with chicken-&-sausage. No matter how it's cooked it's good. Member Alba Herrera usually rolls up her sleeves and fixes a HUGE pot of rice to serve with our gumbo. We have garlic bread and rolls along with a variety of desserts. As with the chili there are not usually many leftovers which serves as a testament to how good everything was.

These events are special because they represent food, fun and fellowship for our congregation. We always have volunteers to help set up and clean up and this reflects on the love and goodness of our church and its members.

“You Go Nowhere by Accident”

By Betty Hoffmeister

I grew up in the Christian Church – that is, Disciples of Christ. I made my profession of faith and was baptized at East Dallas Christian Church, and later Bob and I were married there.

Some years later, when we had two small children and were living in Houston, we were invited by a neighbor to visit Trinity Presbyterian Church on Lawndale. We went several Sundays and decided to join. We went to an orientation class for about five Sundays, and imagine my surprise when I discovered that I had always been a Presbyterian, and just hadn't known it! We were active members there for nine or ten years. Then, with a group of other Presbyterians and the help and encouragement of Presbytery, we tried to start a new church in an area that seemed to need one on the corner of Martindale and Selinsky streets, across from Ross Sterling High School. Janet Horsch's parents, Phyllis and Louis Steffens were part of that group. We held Sunday School and worship services every Sunday, and even called a minister. We worked very, very hard, and prayed very, very hard. We made neighborhood surveys, put out flyers, and visited, visited, visited! However we were never able to get the number of people needed to start a church. At that time Presbytery required one hundred committed people, so the effort was abandoned.

Since we – our family, that is – had moved, we joined the Presbyterian Church of the Covenant. We were all involved in the activities of the church. Bob and I both served as officers, I taught Sunday School and was active in the Women of the Church (as the present day Presbyterian Women was known then). Our children finished growing up there and left home.

Many years later, our pastor at Covenant, and some of the congregation, decided that our denomination – the Presbyterian Church USA – was too liberal (whatever that means), and that Covenant should leave the PCUSA and join the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). This was a very difficult time for our whole church family. After much debate and many meetings, and with Presbytery's

involvement, a vote by written ballot was taken. The outcome was that Covenant would leave the PCUSA and unite with the PCA. That Sunday was the last time we attended the Presbyterian Church of the Covenant since we didn't feel God was calling us to leave the PCUSA.

We visited a number of churches, including First Presbyterian Church, Glenbrook Methodist Church, Scarsdale Methodist Church, and others, but we never felt God was calling us to any of them. In the meantime, Elaine and Jack Baxter had joined St. Stephen. Elaine had invited us to visit St. Stephen several times, and eventually we did. After several visits, we joined.

I know you are probably familiar with the Halverson Benediction, which Pat uses to close our worship service each Sunday: "You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you there..." I believe this, and I know God sent us to St. Stephen. We joined St. Stephen in July of 1989 – seventeen years ago. My goodness – how time flies! I was sixty-five years old when we joined, and I didn't realize how much more spiritual growth was ahead for me.

I have been given many opportunities to serve here in this church family. I have felt at home here from the first time we visited. One of the things that has encouraged my spiritual growth has been Pat's challenge to us to read the Bible all the way through in a year. This first happened in 2003. I had always read my Bible, but not all the way straight through. I was able to do this in 2003 and in 2004 and in 2005, and this last year was much easier but perhaps more meaningful. We read the New Testament – one chapter a day – starting in March and finishing earlier this month.

I am also taking turns with others teaching the adult Sunday School class, and also leading the Bible study for Circle One of the Presbyterian Women several times a year. I hadn't done either of these things for some time, and it is really causing me to study and stretch.

St. Stephen is truly a community of faith. I thank God for sending me here and putting me in this church family!

From Violet Macaluso...

Something I remember from when I first visited St. Stephen:

The friendly people when Philip and I joined on March 10, 1989.

An unforgettable person I've met at St. Stephen:

Mary Gray, Joanne and Charlie Purdy (Charlie's grandmother enrolled me in kindergarten)

A memorable experience:

Philip and I did the yard work. We took our lawn mower and weedeater. Philip would mow all the yard and I would weedeat and pull weeds. I liked it.

Another memorable experience was Philip's ordination as an Elder in 1992. I was so proud of him!

Reflections on St. Stephen Presbyterian Church

Often, when there are quiet moments in my life, fond memories come to me of my time at St. Stephen as interim pastor. Those twelve months, in 1999 and 2000, were among the most satisfying times of my almost 47 years (so far) in ministry. For me, there were only high points --- never any down times.

I think of the Session and how all members were almost always present for meetings and vitally interested and involved in the quest to serve the congregation and the community --- which came to be extended all the way to Central America. I know of no other congregation of limited means which has attempted and accomplished so much.

During my year, the first attempts at Hispanic worship were begun, and the Good Neighbor Food Pantry was growing every month. St. Stephen was a strong supporter of Se.A.M., and several members were involved in the H.O.S.T. program. Laurie Kluth became the congregation's first missionary to Costa Rica, and the first mission trip was held. , The pre-K, day care and after-school programs were flourishing, and were certainly a strong positive force in the immediate community.

Oh yes! The children! How I loved the children and our times together: from the Possum Pete stories, confirmation class and Vacation Bible School, to the chapel times with the Cherished Children. I remember the singing and the stories --- and, most of all, the hugs! I suffered withdrawal symptoms for months afterward.

The congregation was wonderful to me. The members always took my suggestions and even my slight reprimands seriously; and never even once did even a hint of criticism get back to me.

My greatest accomplishment? When the PNC was discouraged and feeling a bit low, I broke all the rules and recommended for their consideration my best friend in ministry and the very best Pastor I know in our denomination --- Pat Clark. Then I needed to convince Pat that St. Stephen was the best congregation I knew about. How great that it all worked out!

Congratulations on the 50th anniversary of service to God and community as St. Stephen Presbyterian Church!

Shalom!

Don Trent

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

By Pastor Pat Clark

It was both interesting and unusual that Monday morning when we gathered for prayer. I had read the Bible to the faithful women assembled there, lectio divino style, as was our custom, reading the same verses over and over, but pausing for a while in between the readings. For some reason that day, every person there focused on John 1:5: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. We commented on how unusual it was, that God had spoken the same verse to each one of us, and after praying together, we went on about our normal daily activities. Little did I realize how significant that verse would later become.

The next morning Forrest received an e-mail from our nephew telling him to turn on the television. An airplane had crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center. We sat together,

side by side, on the edge of our bed in stunned disbelief as we watched a second airplane crash into the second tower, then watched both towers crumble to the ground.

Fighting back tears, I immediately headed for the church. The television was on in the fellowship hall. Some parents had come to take their children home. The rest of the kids were happy and animated, and the teachers were going about their normal day-to-day routines, but that day and the next had a surreal quality to them. We were all numb and in shock, going through the motions of normalcy and eager to hear more developments.

By Wednesday the shock was wearing off and real grief began to emerge. We needed to pray as a community instead of listen to the usual Wednesday night Ministers' Mess program. I called a few people to bring candlesticks and searched through the church to find every candle that I could. We had dozens of them, in all colors and all sizes. We used everything available. People brought their candlesticks, and we put them on the communion table. Then we put piles of play dough on paper plates and put candles in the play dough. When we finished, there was a solid mass of candles on the table.

More people than usual came to Wednesday night dinner, and afterwards we went into the sanctuary for an impromptu service. Rachel Watson showed pictures that her second grade class had drawn. Bill O'Rear spoke eloquently and linked the terrorist attack to Pearl Harbor. Others shared their feelings and their impressions, and we began to sing the great hymns of faith:

A Mighty Fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our Helper He amidst the flood of earthly woe prevailing. O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds thy hands have made...Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on, help me stand...Abide with me, fast falls the eventide...

We prayed heartfelt prayer, and then each one of us lit a candle on the communion table. When all the candles had been lit, we darkened the lights in the sanctuary while Karen, our wonderful accompanist, played the piano. The communion table was ablaze with light, a beautiful and visual reminder that the light does indeed shine in the darkness, and no darkness shall overcome it.

Today, whenever the 911 anniversary comes up, or I see pictures of the World Trade Center or terrorists in the news, I think of that night. I remember all those brilliant candles and their message to us that evening that continues to this day. God does indeed comfort His people with beautiful, glorious light and will guide us into our future!