

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Parish Profile 2023

**422 W. 2nd Street
Grand Island, NE 68801**

www.ststephengi.org



Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a rector for this parish, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Welcome to St. Stephen's Episcopal Church!

As we worked together to prayerfully prepare for our next rector, listening and reflecting about where God is calling us in the future and who we are today, one word kept coming up over and over again: *Commitment*.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, in Grand Island, Nebraska, is a *committed* parish! We are *committed* to God, to our own faith lives, to our parish family and to our community!

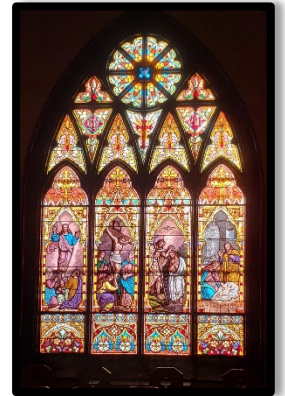
Our faith is strengthened by our beautiful, historical building, worship grounded in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and music that glorifies God.

We encounter Christ by helping others. We gather food and essential items for our local shelter; we have planned and organized mission trips, and helped feed the homeless- just to name a few of our outreach ministries.

We enjoy fellowship and fun, whether around coffee or an ice cream social. We gather inside our parish and outside the church walls as well. We are ecumenically minded and enjoy collaborating on special worship services with our neighboring ELCA, UCC, and Presbyterian congregations.

We share in the ministry of pastoral care, supporting each other through a prayer chain, home visits, and just showing up when needed.

We've been through good times and bad. We've been through prosperity and hardship. Through it all, we have maintained a vibrant and faithful parish family that has stayed committed and connected to one another as well as our faith tradition and the person of Jesus. Today, we are a healthy and lively small parish.



We Can't Wait to Meet You!

We are seeking a Rector who will walk alongside us in good times and bad, who will love us through prosperity and hardship- a priest, pastor, and companion in Christ.

Christian formation is important to us, and we seek a Rector who enjoys teaching and supporting small group ministries, such as Bible and book studies.

We pray for a priest who will support our current outreach activities with our local homeless shelter and challenge us to spread God's gifts to others in need.

It is important to us to have a priest who is approachable, present, and available during life's events, both happy and sad. Someone who will visit the sick and home-bound; be available for pastoral care; give comfort during crisis and be there with a "high five" for milestones, achievements, and special occasions.

Our next Rector will welcome newcomers and help us continue fostering an all-inclusive atmosphere, working with lay leaders to encourage and deepen lay ministries throughout the church.

We seek a priest who will teach and challenge us with thoughtful and spiritually focused sermons that can be applied to our daily lives.

We pray for a Rector who is community minded and will be involved not only with St. Stephen's but with the larger Grand Island community as well.

Are you looking for a committed community of disciples with whom you can work side-by-side, doing God's work and bringing our faith into the next generation? We hope you are, and we hope you hear God's call to join us.



Stewardship

We are prayerful and thoughtful stewards of the many financial gifts we've received over our church's 150-plus years. Our current members are generous and are committed to sacrificial giving from our "first fruits." We manage a healthy endowment and other savings, which allow us to invest in our community and our future. Like many historic congregations, we are ever mindful of the balance between leveraging our savings and living within our means, and our goal is to reduce the conservative but impactful reliance we have on our endowment by continuing to grow in membership and in stewardship. Our next Rector will find solid partners in the work of faithfully managing our money for the purpose of mission and ministry, as well as strong support in encouraging growth.

	2022	2021	2020
MEMORIAL FUND:			
Memorial gifts	\$15,656.52	\$9,317.49	\$3,385.00
Balance of memorial fund	\$24,974.01		
ENDOWMENT FUNDS/ASSETS:			
Endowment balance	\$2,163,607.04	\$2,143,940.11	\$2,146,622.50
Total other assets	\$1,777,452.41	\$1,846,730.43	\$1,716,747.12
Total assets	\$3,941,059.45	\$3,990,670.54	\$3,863,369.62
Pledged for 2023	\$77,332.00		
Pledged income 2022	\$67,300.00		
Pledged income 2021	\$78,840.00		

Parochial Statistics

We know that numbers only tell part of the story, and there are no available statistics to measure the spiritual impact of our many ministries. The numbers below, however, offer a snapshot of the extraordinary transition our congregation has experienced in recent years.

Our previous Rector departed in 2019 and the Sudanese congregation we had been hosting in a separate service disbanded (indicated by the reduction in ASA). We were without a priest when the pandemic began, and per diocesan guidelines we suspended all public worship for much longer than other churches in our community. We called a Priest-in-Charge in 2021, who discerned a new direction in his life- like so many of us! - as the pandemic continued. His departure was a surprise and a disappointment, but we bid him farewell with our prayers and blessings.

Our Interim Rector arrived in January of 2022 and ushered in a season of new life, energy, and growth. After so much change, we are enjoying the momentum we've picked up- welcoming 90 people to our Easter celebration this year and are already seeing an increase in our ASA for 2023. We believe that we're on the right track, and that our next Rector can help us renew some ministries we feel called to continue and also identify new ministers that speak to who we are today.

	2022	2021	2020	2019
Average Sunday attendance	26	22	49*	61
Sunday Eucharists	49	44	14	79**
Weekday Eucharists	4	39	6	43
Hospital or home communions	41			
Other services				
Baptism	1	1	0	2
Funerals	4	3	6	2

*This is an average of the Sundays prior to the Covid-19 pandemic

**This includes the Sudanese services at St. Stephen's

Growing and Learning

At St. Stephen's, we believe our relationship with God is a life-long learning process. Our current parish groups include:

- I. A weekly Bible study held on Saturday mornings. The readings discussed are from the scripture that will be read during the next Sunday's worship service.
- II. A weekly book study is held on Friday mornings. We discuss the book and listen to God's message in the readings. One book we discussed was "The Book of Joy" by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama. We are currently exploring the book "Inspired" written by Rachel Held Evans.
- III. Once a month on Thursday evenings, we meet at a local microbrewery for Theology on Tap. A different topic is discussed relating to our Christian beliefs and the church. It is led by our rector. It is also a time for fellowship among our parishioners.



Outreach

Shared worship services: Several years ago, we began sharing a few special services with Messiah Lutheran church. These services included Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. In 2022 the First Presbyterian church joined the Ash Wednesday service and this year, 2023, the United Congregational church also joined. These shared services are a wonderful experience to share our worship styles and worship spaces.

Hope Harbor: Over the past year and a half, St. Stephen's has adopted Hope Harbor as an active outreach partner. Hope Harbor is a non-profit organization that provides services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness and near homelessness. Our parish has had several "breakfast" food drives, sock drives, etc., to help meet the ever-increasing needs of this organization.

AA Meetings: Alcoholics Anonymous has a long history of using our Parish Hall for their meetings, three times a week. We are happy to open our doors to this group and we know they are grateful for a centrally located space to meet.

Girls Scouts: A local Girl Scout Troop uses our parish hall for their monthly meetings and special gatherings throughout the year. Although we typically aren't there during their meeting times, it is nice to know there are youngsters using our space!!



Lay Ministry and Caring for Others

Altar Guild: We have a small but dedicated group of women that take care of the altar, vestments, and linens. They prepare the sanctuary for services and clean up after services. They truly keep our sanctuary and sacristy in tip-top shape.

Lectors/Chalicers/Ushers: We are very fortunate to have a committed group that reads scripture and prayers of the people each week; another devoted group of chalicers that help the rector with communion; and a wonderful few who usher and play music for each service.

Coffee Hour: Our weekly coffee hour is hosted by a different parishioner or family each week. Coffee hour follows the Sunday morning worship service and gives us time to catch up on the week's activities. This weekly tradition strengthens our bonds between members and gives us a great opportunity to get to know new-commers and ask them to join us again.

Prayer Chain: Our prayer chain has been in existence for more years than most can remember. With over 30 dedicated prayer warriors, we keep in contact through email when family, friends, neighbors, or others who are in need of prayer.

Prayer Garden: Our prayer garden is a place parishioners can find a quiet place to pray or enjoy a cup of coffee. We have also used the prayer garden for our annual blessing of the animals.



Signs of Growth and Restoration

The interim season has been blessing to us as we restore some of the ministries impacted by COVID and initiate new ones that reflect who God is calling us to be right now. After two clergy departures in close succession, we are experiencing joy, growth, and positive momentum alongside the ministry of our Interim Rector, and we are delighted to be in a strong place to call a new Rector.

During the interim we have noticed: An increase in volunteerism; an overall atmosphere of positivity and joy; new families attending and getting engaged; increased attendance; new ministries of fellowship, faith formation and service.

We are prayerfully anticipating our new Rector, who will join a healthy and engaged congregation and partner with us as we continue to assess what God is calling us to be in this new season of ministry.



Rediscovering Who We Are Called to Be

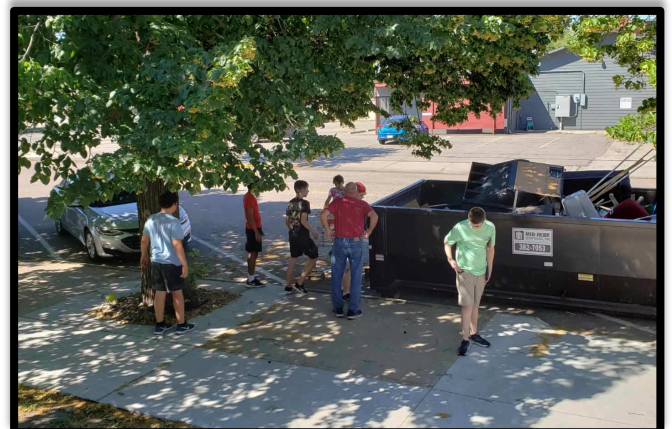
St. Stephens is a congregation full of talented and committed disciples. The transition we've experienced through the pandemic (see "Parochial Statistics") has taught us that while we eagerly anticipate the leadership of our new Rector, we are grateful for the strong lay ministries that keep us connected to Christ, our community, and one another.

Like many congregations, we find ourselves thinking of our identity "before" and "after" the pandemic, wondering what we can and will return to as well as what we are called to be right now and into the future. Prior to COVID (and our concurrent Rector transition), we had a strong music program, and active youth group, and life-giving rotation of lay eucharistic visitors. All three of those ministries were strongly impacted by suspending public worship, and we are in the process of rebuilding what we have lost and reimagining what might replace it in this new season.

Our music program is especially in need of prayerful attention, which we hope our next Rector will help us with. Prior to COVID, our adult choir was a cherished and active ministry. In 2020, our Choir Director moved away and our beautiful pipe organ was damaged due to a water leak. Our goal is to repair our organ and hire a new Choir Director – two strategic decisions we would like our new Rector to be involved in. In the meantime, we've been leveraging technology to provide music in worship, which is working well.

Youth Group has been an important part of our weekly programming – both on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. We have had independent programs for youth and have also participated in strong ecumenical programs, especially with our closest ELCA neighbors. Many of our families with young children drifted away during the pandemic, and we would like to re-engage that population and once again lift up the ministries of children and youth.

Communion to the home-bound, by a lay person, is another ministry that we would like to see start up again now that it is safe to visit nursing homes and retirement communities. Our homebound members are well-served by our Interim Rector and have enjoyed the addition of remote worship (a silver-lining of the pandemic!), but we all miss the connections formed and relationships nurtured by a strong lay pastoral care program.



A Brief History of St. Stephen's

St. Stephen's is one of the oldest congregations in Grand Island, dating back to 1870 with R. C. Jordan and his family arriving in Grand Island and his wife Mary beginning a Sunday school. By the next year, a wood frame church was built.

In the early years, St. Stephen's, as one of the only Protestant churches holding regular services, was attended by many prominent local citizens including O.A. Abbott, first lieutenant governor of Nebraska and father to social work pioneers Grace and Edith Abbott.

In its early years, St. Stephen's also survived grasshopper plagues and the subsequent loss of parishioners fleeing the grasshoppers.

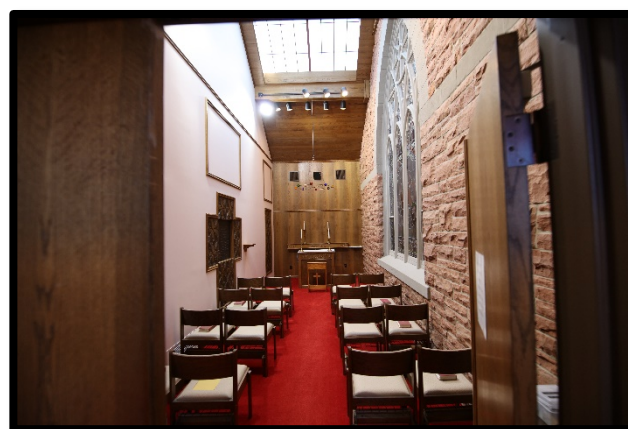
The present stone sanctuary was built in 1888 in the location of the frame church and was consecrated in 1892.

In 1903, former president Teddy Roosevelt attended services at St. Stephen's while in town for the groundbreaking of the Carnegie Library, and in 1905, Henry Fonda was baptized in the sanctuary.

The Parish Hall was added in 1956, adding fellowship space, a kitchen, and Sunday school classrooms. The Memorial Chapel and Columbarium were completed in 1997.



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A Brief History of Grand Island, Nebraska

The first permanent settlers settled in the area in 1857 south of the present city. By 1868, the settlement had moved to its current location and the Union Pacific Railroad soon built a maintenance yard in Grand Island. Grand Island was incorporated in 1872. In the late 1800s sugar beet processing became a major industry.



During World War II, Grand Island played host to the Cornhusker Army Ammunition Plant and a camp for German Prisoners of War.

In June 1980, a large area in the south part of Grand Island was destroyed in the Night of the Twisters when 7 or 8 tornadoes hit erratically all in one evening. The area has since been rebuilt.

In 2010, the Nebraska State Fair moved to Grand Island and is held in late August and early September.

In the 21st century, major industries consist of Case New Holland, Chief Industries, and JBS.

Grand Island Today

- Population: 53,131
- 4th largest city in the state and largest city west of Lincoln
- 1.5 hours west of Lincoln and 2.5 hours west of Omaha by car
- Home to the Central Nebraska Regional Airport which has daily flights to Dallas-Fort Worth, TX and regular flights to Mesa, AZ and Las Vegas, NV.
- Sizable Hispanic, Somali, and Sudanese populations
- Two public school districts (Grand Island Public Schools and Northwest schools); Roman Catholic middle school/high school (Grand Island Central Catholic which will soon have an elementary school); Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod schools (Trinity Lutheran and Heartland Lutheran)
- 2 hospitals (CHI St. Francis and Grand Island Regional, affiliated with Bryan Health)



Points of Interest

Railside

The heart of Downtown Grand Island, this area is home to boutiques and numerous building renovations, as well as the summer Hear Grand Island concert series. The historic Grand Theatre is also located in Railside and shows movies Friday-Sunday nights.

<http://arriverailside.com/>



Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer

Located on the south edge of town near Central Community College, Stuhr Museum consists of year-round exhibits about the local area, and seasonal Living History areas showing what life was like in the 1860s, rural 1890s, and small railroad adjacent 1890s.

<https://stuhrmuseum.org/>

Heartland Event Center and Fonner Park

The Heartland Event Center plays host to sporting events and concerts throughout the year. Fonner Park has horse races each spring and is home to Grand Island's casino.

<https://heartlandeventscenter.com/>

<https://www.fonnerpark.com/>



Sandhill Cranes

The Crane Trust is a habitat conservation non-profit organization located on the Plate River. The Trust offers tours of one of the greatest migrations in the world and preserves nearly 10,000 acres of critical habitat for the endangered whooping cranes, sandhill cranes and countless other species sharing fragile river and prairie ecosystems. <https://cranetrust.org/>



The Diocese of Nebraska

The Diocese of Nebraska, which encompasses our entire state, is comprised of 50 congregations and one small monastic community. Our Bishop, J. Scott Barker, has served here for eleven years and is focused on church growth and renewal through faithful discipleship. While we are a big state, we are also a close-knit Episcopal community where diverse clergy have access to leadership and will find a high level of collegial support and friendship. We have a full slate of diocese-wide programs to help enrich our common life, including Sacred Ground, Education for Ministry, Episcopal Preaching Foundation Lay Preacher Program, Camp Canterbury, “Balancing the Scales of Justice” Criminal Justice Reform Ministry, Daughters of the King, Episcopal Church Women, Cursillo, and many others including countless local feeding programs and mutual aid ministries.

Discern With Us

If you feel called to learn more about St. Stephen’s, we would love to get to know you. Interested applicants may contact Canon Liz Easton, Diocesan Transition Minister, directly:

The Rev. Canon Liz Easton

Email: leaston@dioneb.org

Phone: 402-341-5373