

✠ ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

## *Beyond* The *Red* Door



### **LOVE AND CARE FOR NEIGHBORS AND STRANGERS**

By E. Ray Walker

The Bible abounds with verses on hospitality. Among them:

—“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” (1 Peter 4:8-9, NIV)

—“Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” (Romans 12:13, NIV).

—“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” (Hebrews 13:2)

—“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” (Matthew 25:40).

Inspired by this rich, sacred tradition, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church made hospitality one of its Core Values, the guiding principles that shape who we are as a church family.

*"We receive all fellow pilgrims as Christ. In a spirit of humility and love, we are called to service and reconciliation in our world. We value being together as a community and we often gather for fellowship and shared experience to deepen our relationships. We choose to welcome warmly every person and strive to inquire about and nurture their well-being."*

### **WHAT IS 'HOSPITALITY'?**

The Rev. Trent Moore, the rector at St. Stephen's, explains.

"Hospitality as a ministry is about welcoming others into God's presence. Many think it is about the food, the place settings, and the overall presentation. It is not about entertaining or perfection at all. It is about creating a space where others feel loved, welcomed and — most importantly — able to encounter God.



"The heart of hospitality at St. Stephen's is a warm invitation and a sense of welcome. It is about presence, and creating an environment where people feel at home, where they can take a deep breath and just be themselves.

"When we open our hearts to others, we are inviting them into a space where they can experience the love of God. I think about how God invites us to His table, how He prepares a place for us, even when we do not deserve it. Hospitality, at its core, reflects that divine invitation,

"We strive for our practice of welcome to be for EVERYONE as Jesus did not just welcome the rich or the popular. He had a heart for the outcasts, the poor, the lonely, the ones society overlooked. Luke 14:13-14 reminds us to 'invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,' knowing that they cannot repay us. When we reach out to those who are often forgotten, we are reflecting the heart of Christ. I pray that all that set foot on this campus feel like they are not just guests, but like they are family.

"And here is the ironic thing, when we offer hospitality to others, we are the ones who often end up blessed. I have found that God does something special in those moments. There is a connection that happens, a sense of community that we all crave. It is as if God uses those small moments to knit our hearts together."

Well said, Father Trent. Well said.



## CARING FOR OTHERS

Hospitality is about loving people and caring for them. Many churches have hospitality committees — some large, some small — providing comfort and refreshments to parishioners and visitors. May God smile on them all. But only St. Stephen's has Lina Marengo-Frank, Suzanne Delgado and an amazingly talented and fabulous team.

The team consists of Lina, Suzanne, Becky Walser, Sandra Fulton, June Barrett, John and Barbara Hallett, Kathy Buschow, Nora Rice and Deb Clarken, and, of course, its behind-the-scenes hero, sexton Benny Simms. Each member is an integral part of the hospitality team whose contributions are vital for the overall success of each event.

To all, sincere thanks for the awesome work you do.



Lina is the founder and chair of the SSEC Hospitality Committee; Suzanne is her right hand in hospitality. The purpose of the committee is to encourage fellowship within our congregation.

The committee began in 2022 as the church began reconnecting face-to-face with its congregation after being shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic. The newly revived Sunday Coffee Hour was intended to bring members together to socialize and get to know each other again.

When Father Trent arrived at St. Stephen's, and with the support of the Vestry, the Hospitality Committee was formally created, with Lina as its leader. Since then, the committee's role has expanded into organizing dinners



(Charles Dickens Dinner) and special events (high teas), and assisting with funeral receptions. The hospitality team's fingerprints are on many other events in the Peterkin Memorial Hall, also known by some as the Parish Hall.

Lina is a native of Seychelles, a tropical archipelago in the Indian Ocean. "The Garden of Eden," she says.

She moved to the United States in 1982.

Raised in a devout Christian home, Lina finds strength in daily Bible reading, singing (she's a dedicated member of the St. Stephen's choir) and praying.

For Suzanne, retirement and being closer to family brought her to Culpeper. She has been attending St. Stephen's since 2014.

Lina and Suzanne collaborated to answer some questions about the Hospitality Committee.

**Question:** Does the committee coordinate Sunday Coffee Hour food, setup and cleanup?

**L&S:** Yes, we do all the above. Some Sundays, food is provided by other church groups, and we are always appreciative of any donated dishes.



**Q:** Are any roles/tasks assigned to specific individuals?

**L&S:** Lina takes lead on the design for our events. She coordinates the colors used based on the church calendar. Suzanne coordinates the kitchen operation and discusses with the team the different needs, and they are all willing to pitch in and serve.

**Q:** Does anyone have a professional hospitality work background?

**L&S:** Lina has experience in fundraising and coordinating events. Suzanne's family had a restaurant, so she has experience in the service industry.



**Q:** If someone wants to volunteer their help, whom should they contact?

**L&S:** Lina or Suzanne can be found on Sunday during Coffee Hour. Interested individuals can also speak to any of our team members.

**Q:** When you learn of a funeral or special event at St. Stephen's, how does the Hospitality Committee get involved? The process ... initial contacts, work with outside contractors, caterers, musicians, flowers, table centerpieces, dinner setups, dinnerware and utensils, stemware?

**L&S:** When Father Trent is contacted about an event, he then shares the information with Lina. She, in turn, meets with the family to determine what they want for their occasion. The Hospitality Committee then coordinates all aspects from ordering, preparing and setting up the food/table service, flowers, music etc. We don't have outside contractors.

**Q:** Who cleans up after an event?

**L&S:** The hospitality team and the sextons do all the clean up.

**Q:** Do you need a one-day ABC license for wine service for each event?

**L&S:** Yes.

**Q:** Over the years, there must have been a few disasters. Do tell ...

**L&S:** We're happy to say, except for an equipment malfunction (dishwasher), there have been no disasters.

**Q:** Your favorite event of the year?

**L&S:** It's hard to name one, but the standouts would be the Dickens Dinner, Mary's Tea and the Fall High Tea.



**Q:** About the Dickens Dinner; there is no charge, so do contributions cover the cost? What happens to any unspent money?

**L&S:** We are fortunate to receive generous donations from those in attendance, which covers all costs for the dinner and allows any extra to be carried over and used to support additional Hospitality Events during the year.



**Q:** Do you have a budget? Do special receptions pay for their expenses?

**L&S:** We work on a budget that is based on the monies we receive through donations. We do not have a specific budget through the church. Events such as funerals are viewed on an individual basis and costs are determined by the church.

**Q:** Who can cook in the newly renovated Pat's Kitchen, named in honor of the late Pat Kerrick, "Miss Hospitality"?

**L&S:** Currently, only the Hospitality Committee and some church ministries.

There you have it. A world-class team of volunteers practicing hospitality across Culpeper. We are blessed.