

Vestry & Diocesan Convention Delegate Nominations 2017

In the Episcopal Church authority is balanced on every level of church life. On the local, diocesan, and national levels there are roles and responsibilities given to ordained leaders and other duties given to lay leaders in our church laws. Clergy are responsible for the spiritual care of congregations. Vestries or mission councils (or bishop's committees, in the case of congregations which are not financially self-sufficient) are elected lay leaders who are responsible for the temporal affairs of the congregation.

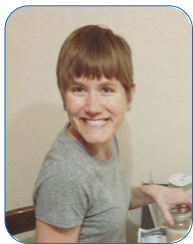
The Nominating Committee is pleased to present this slate of four candidates who, after prayerful consideration, have agreed to stand for the upcoming vestry election. We ask that you hold these people and the parish in your prayers as we move forward to voting during the Annual Meeting on January 22, 2017.

The work of the Vestry is to:

- Partner with the clergy to fulfill the mission of the parish, creating a common vision
- Raise and disburse the financial gifts to God for the work of the Church
- Maintain the church's facilities in trust for the Diocese
- Call the rector

The parish community will select four new Vestry members from the four mentioned in this booklet.





Megan Brannan

I'm a lifelong Episcopalian, raised in Bartlesville, OK. My parents were actively involved in the church I grew up in, which translated into me being actively involved also. I spent many Sunday mornings serving as both acolyte and crucifer and many Sunday afternoons with my EYC group.

I started coming to St. Stephen's in October 2013 and became involved quickly. Since coming to St. Stephen's, I've been involved in various ways such as the 20s and 30s group, Word and Table, Foyer's dinners, the Inquiry Journey Class that led to my reaffirmation in December 2014, the pre-marital retreat and counseling, and getting married to my husband, Chris, last year surrounded by many of the St. Stephen's family. My most frequent activities within St. Stephen's involve being in the acolyte ministry and in Education for Ministry. Since joining the acolyte ministry, I've worn all three hats as acolyte, crucifer, and thurifer and I now co-lead the ministry with Sarah Beauchamp Gamboa. Serving as an acolyte is both comforting and rewarding as I have the privilege to serve alongside our incredible clergy. As for EfM, I'm entering my third year with an amazing group of classmates. During the EfM year, we gather on Wednesdays to deepen our understanding of the bible, faith, and Church history through theological reflection. It's a time I've come to cherish.

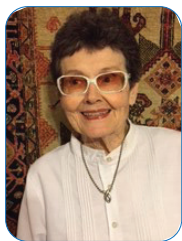
Outside of St. Stephen's, I'm a wife, a dog mom to Pickles, a psychologist, an avid reader, and a runner.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the Church today?

While I think St. Stephen's has an active and healthy congregation, I know other congregations face declining membership. While a broad generalization, younger generations seem to fall into the "spiritual but not religious" camp or seem to want more contemporary and modern approaches to worship. In general, I think the Episcopal Church has struggled to bridge the gap between the traditional ways of worshipping with a more contemporary approach without compromising some of the sacred aspects so many Episcopalians hold near and dear. And yet, change is inevitable and how we respond to our ever changing community and world is crucial. I think St. Stephen's sets a good example of trying to bridge the gap and is continually thinking of how to respond to a changing world. My hope is that other congregations can learn to navigate change so that the Episcopal Church can see growth rather than decline.

Why do you want to serve on the Vestry of St. Stephen's?

I've experienced St. Stephen's as home since I first started attending in October 2013. I feel blessed to have found such a wonderful church home that is filled with such vibrancy and openness. St. Stephen's is a healthy congregation and serving on the vestry would allow me to be an advocate for continuing the health and growth of our St. Stephen's community. I feel passionate about contributing toward and maintaining the health of St. Stephen's and I think being a member of the vestry would allow me to channel that committed passion in a way that helps move St. Stephen's forward.



Fran Flanagan

I was born in Galveston and grew up in Texas City and Louisiana. I was baptized in St. George's Church as an infant by Bishop Quinn. I have made several ecumenical side trips since then.

I have six adult children and when the youngest started school I completed my degree in special education at the University of Houston. My large family has been a challenge and a huge blessing. I have had varied careers, being a teacher and a volunteer chairing other volunteers in the Greater Houston Red Cross for several years. I became a real estate broker in commercial and residential real estate. When called, I went to work for the YMCA indo-Chinese program as the first boat people began arriving - helping their relocation with sponsor families. I then became interested in and developed a retreat and conference center of 40 acres near Bellville - handling every aspect from publicity to cooking for workshop weekends. During the week I spent time in Houston giving A.A. Therapy and Family of Origin counseling. I have traveled extensively - once to a dig in South Africa for the early hominid man. My most gratifying time was being in the country near Bellville, using all of my various talents. The constant love and understanding of my children is also a great blessing.

When you live a long time you can accomplish a lot.

I came to St. Stephen's in 1999 and I felt at home and accepted right away - a place where I was really comfortable. I was in the vestry in 2001 and later was hospitality chair for about two years. I also worked with children in Sunday school. The children I worked with are young adults now. I feel privileged to see the history of the church unfolding. I am now a lay reader at the 8:30 a.m. Service.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the Church today?

In many communities being a Christian is equated with prejudice, being judgmental, ignorant and uptight. I hope that St. Stephen's will be available to our neighbors and community and to truly love our neighbors as ourselves.

It is important that we be in conversation with those we meet with different beliefs and to be aware of how we can serve those in our "island home" - speaking up for justice and to not be quiet or turn our heads away.

("island home" – from the book of common prayer, page 370, prayer c)

Why do you want to serve on the Vestry of St. Stephen's?

I hope that my life experiences will be helpful to our Vestry services - to be of service to those that have guided and helped me. I would like to learn more about St. Stephen's as it is today and support the building programs that we are facing.

It will be an exciting future for our church and I would be honored to be a part of that future - to help continue a healthy relationship between the church and the school. Serving on the Vestry gives us an opportunity to show appreciation to God.



William “Rich” White

I was born in Memphis, TN and christened at All Saints Episcopal church when I was two, which I think means I am a cradle Episcopalian. I spent most of my childhood and early years in Rockwall, TX (25 miles east of Dallas), then attended the University of the South in Sewanee, TN where I received a BA in History. I attained a master’s degree from the University of Illinois and have spent most of my career in Human Resources.

Throughout my high school years and early adulthood, my relationship with the church ebbed and flowed. However, in my 20s I attended St. Matthew’s Episcopal Cathedral in Dallas, where I served on their AIDS outreach team. It was there that I began to understand the concept of Grace and experienced God through other people.

After moving to Houston, I diligently shopped for an Episcopal church where I felt welcomed and affirmed. I found my spiritual home at St. Stephens. Since joining St. Stephens in 2009, I have been involved in numerous activities, which include, but are not limited to: Foyers, organizing with the The Metropolitan Organization, serving on the selection committee for an admin assistant (Kat), serving as co-chair of Homelessness sub-committee for SSEC Outreach, volunteer coordinator for Grace Place drop-in dinners, and Education for Ministry.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the church today?

Over the past few years, St. Stephen’s has experienced strong growth both in membership and in its spiritual life. The greatest challenges I foresee will emerge from outside the church. Difficult political, economic, and social situations are likely to negatively affect many parishioners, the vulnerable populations we serve, and much of what St. Stephen’s has historically stood for. Therefore, I think it is imperative that we continue to take a stand for the Gospel message and that our resources (time, talent, funds) are directed in ways that reflect who we are as a community.

Relevancy is another challenge facing St. Stephen’s and organized religion in general. The media paints Christians with a broad brush, and progressive Christians are silenced as a result. I believe St. Stephen’s and the Episcopal Church in general have much to offer, but I feel we collectively are remiss in sharing our vision of progressive Christianity.

Why do you want to serve on the Vestry of St. Stephen’s?

Serving on the vestry is something I have wanted to do for many years, but before raising my hand, I wanted to “pay my dues” and be involved in a few outreach efforts. It will be an honor to help St. Stephen’s remain a vital institution within the community and to put it on a sustainable path for the future. I think the next few years will be a difficult, yet rewarding time to serve on the vestry.



Dwight Wolf

Julia and I started attending the parish in 1994, became members in 1995 and were married here in 1996. Together we have five (5) children and three (3) grandchildren (with one on the way). During the 20 plus years, I served in a variety of roles: Altar Guild, Linen Guild, High School Christian Formation teacher, Chalice Bearer, Lay Reader, Vestry member, Senior Warden, member of the Building and Grounds Committee, and currently lead the Men's Spirituality Group.

Since graduating from University of Houston Clear Lake with a Master's in Marriage and Family Therapy in 1992, I have applied my clinical training in a variety of settings, including counseling homeless teens, creating and implementing clinical interventions for families with teenagers, directing a foster family agency, and supervising the Society of St. Vincent de Paul's housing program for homeless families. I retired in 2016 from Harris County after 11 years of service, leading the Grants Management Team for Affordable Housing.

Since retiring, I am developing my full-time clinical practice, primarily focused on men affected by substance and process addictions, male emotional and spiritual development, and counseling couples with the goal of increased levels of emotional attachment and marital satisfaction.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the Church today?

The biggest challenge to the Church today is whether or not it remains relevant in a changing world. The answer lays in the extent to which we, as the Body of Christ, are willing to accept the invitation to be transformed over and over again; thus, opening ourselves in service to the world.

Why do you want to serve on the Vestry of the St. Stephen's?

I would like to serve on the Vestry as a formal way to participate in the decisions that must be made in order for the parish to move forward. As a member of the Vestry I can add my voice to those who see this path as maintaining our physical presence for both church and school, creating space that is welcoming to all and functions in a manner that allows us to fulfill our mission.

Standing for Diocesan Council

One person will serve as Council Person, the other as an alternate.

The Diocesan Council is the elected body of lay and clergy members of the Diocese authorized by the Canons of the Diocese to administer the missionary, educational, and social service work of the Church.



Laura Thewalt

I am a self-professed church geek. I am a lifelong Episcopalian, both fed and sometimes frustrated by our peculiar middle way. I have served for nearly 30 years at parish, diocesan and national levels. Shortly after arriving at St. Stephen's, I became involved in 'all the things' including convening a younger adults group, serving on the worship committee, a term on Vestry, and as Diocesan Council Representative. I've also led Adult Formation sessions and have been on the leadership team of

Kadosh since its inception. I also am one of St. Stephen's Wedding Coordinators and have been proud to bear witness to St. Stephen's prophetic witness declaring covenanted love is open to all who wish to enter it.

Three years ago, I began my four years of intensive study and theological education in Education for Ministry, where I currently invest a good portion of my time and energy. Additionally, I work for our Diocese's Episcopal Health Foundation where my unique skills are helping the Foundation be a new voice for health in Texas.

Usually, you'll find me at the 10:30 service sitting on the left side, a couple rows behind the font, usually not misbehaving in church with my sister, Sondra.

My favorite things in no particular order are; good coffee, the contents of my DVR, University of Michigan football, The West Wing Weekly podcast and hanging out with Sondra. I used to run and cook; I expect to do those things again once my EfM studies are completed.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the Church today?

How the Church is structured and organizes itself should change and evolve as the world we live, and move, and have our being in changes and evolves. The Church needs strong church communities to work outside their for their neighbors. And the Church needs to support church communities in need of capacity building to be able to look and go out. The Diocese of Texas' focus is on it's churches being Missional Communities. Many Episcopalians, myself included, hear that call but perhaps don't know what it looks like or how to get there. Yet we know it is our call because we recognize it as the call Jesus laid out for us, to share the Good News of God's love for the world. Translating a Vision into action that makes sense for each congregation in the diocese, and properly stewarding the resources is The Diocese of Texas' challenge.

Why do you want to serve as a delegate to Council?

This past fall I saw "The Revolutionists" at Main Street Theatre about three women during the French Revolution, all killed via guillotine for their convictions and risk-taking. Coupled alongside the national events, I've felt a call to risk 'putting my neck' out in a place that means a great deal to me – The Episcopal Church. Historically, it has not always been a place of comfort to be from a progressive church in the Diocese, but risking in uncomfortable places is what brings about change. I want to give voice to our progressive stances at the Diocese, though it may be uncomfortable and risky.

Also, for me part of the call is standing for election as a member of St. Stephen's at the Diocesan level as a Deputy to General Convention. Being elected as a Council Representative from St. Stephen's will help my chance of being elected Deputy.



James Ozga

Born and raised Roman Catholic became Episcopalian sometime in the 70s. Moved to Houston from Chicago and had the good fortune to find St Stephen. In 1980-ish I walked through the doors and stayed.

In those years I have been ushering, lay pastor, element director of Pastoral Care , Foyers , Hospitality Sunday , special committees, etc. as well as Diocesan Council Alternate.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing the Church today?

I believe the biggest challenges facing the church today are facing our past and its mistakes while moving forward to not repeat them but creating a new reality that moves the Church and it's people forward in new creations.

Why do you want to serve as a delegate to Council?

The reason I would like to serve as a delegate is selfish, I want to be a part of this new creation and part of the young energy creating a new reality.

Annual Parish Meeting

January 22 | Noon | Pecore Hall

All welcome and encouraged to attend.



st. stephen's

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND SCHOOL

Contact Us 

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
tmorales@ststephenshouston.org
1805 W. Alabama
713.528.6665



/epichurch

ststephenshouston.org