St. Stephen Listening Sessions — October 24 and 25, 2026

Around 145 parishioners gathered at St. Stephen to share their feelings about the church's closing and sale and discuss what would help bring the Christ the King and St. Stephen worship communities together. The comments reflected a desire to preserve relationships, honor St. Stephen's history and traditions, and ensure that everyone feels equally valued in the combined parish.

In his opening remarks Fr. Paulson acknowledged the pain surrounding the closure. One participant echoed this but connected that pain to past failures while recognizing that proceeds from the sale would help Catholics harmed by abuse to heal. These feelings deserve continued attention alongside the practical work of bringing the communities together.

1. For St. Stephen regulars: When you come to Christ the King, what will make you feel more at home?

Participants emphasized personal welcome, familiar faces, and opportunities to build relationships. Specific suggestions included:

- Have attentive, welcoming greeters and ushers; encourage parishioners to introduce themselves before Mass and be willing to sit in different pews to meet others.
- Hold a welcome celebration at CTK and gatherings at both campuses during the transition.
- Offer coffee and donuts indoors, with tables and chairs so people, especially seniors, can sit and visit.
- Organize soup suppers, progressive dinners, and activities for seniors.
- Include St. Stephen lectors, Eucharistic ministers, ushers, and other volunteers in CTK ministry schedules, with training as needed.
- Ensure parish office staff are aware of and attentive to St. Stephen parishioners during the transition.

Familiar religious objects were also important. Suggestions included bringing St. Stephen's crucifix, Stations of the Cross, organ, peace pole, outdoor statue of Mary, and icons—including those of St. Stephen and St. Peter Chanel—to CTK. Participants also mentioned preserving engraved bricks and finding a place for St. Stephen's Nativity scene and images of Mary and Joseph.

Other ideas included a dedicated St. Stephen altar or chapel area, more flowers and color, and the use of wood to bring additional warmth to CTK's interior. Finding a space at CTK for providing access to free books like St. Stephens was also suggested.

2. For Christ the King regulars: When you come to St. Stephen, what aspects would you like to see in our combined parish?

Participants highlighted their appreciation for St. Stephen's smaller, more intimate congregation, hospitality, and sense of family. Participants wanted to carry these qualities into the larger parish through regular social gatherings and opportunities to form smaller circles of friendship.

Specific suggestions included:

- Bring St. Stephen's tradition of hospitality to CTK, particularly seated fellowship after Mass.
- Ask the liturgy committee to give special attention to incorporating St. Stephen traditions during the transition.
- Share the history of both churches, including St. Stephen's origins in Christ the King, through articles and meaningful artifacts.
- Create opportunities for cultural sharing among parish communities, including the Tongan and Filipino communities.
- Include a Tongan representative on the Parish Council.
- Improve the quality and consistency of music, with some comments suggesting professional musicians.

Participants encouraged language and activities that affirm everyone's equal place in one parish family while honoring the identity and contributions of each community.

3. What concerns do you have about combining churches?

A central concern was losing the close relationships and intimacy experienced at St. Stephen. Some participants worried about feeling lost in CTK's larger congregation or whether existing ministries would welcome their participation. Others described CTK as welcoming, offering a foundation on which to build.

Comments also expressed concern about a misperception that St. Stephen was a failing parish being subsidized by CTK. Participants urged avoiding "us versus them" attitudes and recognizing the history, gifts, and contributions of both communities.

Practical concerns and suggested responses included:

- **Mass schedules:** Consider retaining options comparable to St. Stephen's Saturday 5 p.m. and Sunday 9:30 a.m. Masses, with additional Masses if needed.
- **Accessible parking and seating:** Increase handicap accessible parking and ensure adequate seating and access for parishioners with limited mobility.
- **Transportation:** Help arrange rides so older parishioners and those who cannot drive can continue attending Mass and see familiar members of their community.
- **Communion access:** Consider a roaming Eucharistic minister to serve those who have difficulty approaching the altar.
- **Continued connection:** Plan gatherings that help St. Stephen parishioners remain connected while developing relationships with CTK parishioners.