

St. Stephen's, Olean

What are some significant moments in the history of your church that have shaped its identity today?

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, was incorporated on February 22, 1830 and the current building was completed and consecrated in 1890. Just as our predecessors overcame adversity with faith and determination, we continue to build upon their legacy as we approach our bicentennial, ensuring St. Stephen's remains thriving for generations.

St. Margaret's Chapter, an organization of the women of the Church began it's work in the community in early 1902, when through their efforts the first hospital was opened in Olean.

In 1908, a new organ was purchased for the Church, which remained until 1941, when it was replaced by the organ currently in use. It is one of the largest pipe organs in Western New York. Here are some key details about this impressive instrument:

The organ was built by the renowned organ manufacturer, M.P. Möller.

It features over 3,000 pipes, making it one of the largest in the region. The church is willing to offer tours of the organ, allowing visitors to learn more about its history and mechanics.

A Homelessness Task Force was formed in 1993 and St. Stephens purchased a house to be utilized as a shelter for the homeless. In 1994, Genesis House Homeless Shelter was founded and is still running strong.



What makes your church unique in the region and the diocese?

We have several outreach ministries that are unique. The Watson Ministry Center is home to the Miriam Center for Hope and Healing and Victim Services Division of Connecting Communities Action, as well as a space for Cattaraugus Allegany BOCES to teach High School equivalency classes. The Center has three full-time therapists, four part-time therapists, The center offers a welcoming environment for emotional, mental, and spiritual healing and growth.

Our covenant agreement with Bethany Lutheran Church makes us quite unique. We maintain individual worship services for Sunday morning and opportunities for joint worship between the two congregations. We come together for special services during major holidays and community events, fostering fellowship and mutual understanding between our congregations. When we share our resources and combine ministries, it builds our connections and strengthens relationship with our covenant church, Bethany Lutheran.

What are the most vibrant ministries or strengths of your parish today?

Our weekly bible study consistently receives strong attendance from members of both congregations. Open discussion ensues on topics chosen and attendees share a

meal together.

Our monthly Children's Church School Program serves children between the ages of 3 to 8 years and is open to both congregations.

On the second Thursday every month volunteers meet to pack food to be distributed for St. Stephens and Bethany Lutherans Pet Food Pantry. Pet Food is distributed on the second Friday of every month.

Describe a moment in your community's life when you felt the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among you. What made that moment possible?

Church members can each describe a time when they felt the spirit moving - feeding lonely or poor persons on Thanksgiving.....seeing homeless people smile and wave to us from the Shelter next door.... singing together ... "...Oh Lord, have loved me first"

After working through countless setbacks to renovate the Watson Ministry Center, Sunday September 7th sure felt like the Spirit of God had our hearts and our backs when we cut the ribbon to open our counseling center for the community !!

Community Thanksgiving Dinner is a collaboration with Greater Olean Association of Churches, Bethany Lutheran Church and the community. St. Stephen's has been hosting its community Thanksgiving dinner for over 40 years. This annual event aims to provide a warm meal and fellowship to those in need, reflecting the church's commitment to community service and outreach. There's no greater feeling than receiving repeated thanks, hugs and blessings from recipients who are profoundly grateful for a meal on Thanksgiving Day.



How does your church engage with the local neighborhood, the civic life of your community, or diocesan and/or Episcopal Church-wide initiatives?

St. Stephens is known in the area as the community church. We provide meeting space for local organizations. The American Red Cross hosts blood drives in our parish hall. We provide free meals annually to the volunteers at the Remote Area Medical (RAM) organization. Space is provided free of charge for GED classes. Weekly during summer, we host a table of popcorn and baked goods for community band concerts across the street from the Church. We engage with the Western New York Diocese through the website, newsletter and in person. Many congregates attend conventions, trainings and workshops.

What are the hopes and dreams of your congregation for its next chapter?

Looking ahead, our congregation holds hopes for building on our shared work and deepening our ministries. We are eager to develop ways to engage with new members and support congregation growth, staying grounded in our mission statement: "We're Here to Be Christ in the World."

As we prepare to welcome a new pastor, we seek someone who will partner with us in community engagement and bring fresh enthusiasm to continue to our ministries and mission. We remain committed to ensuring everything we do reflects our core value of being Christ in the world. We aim to foster unity, inspire action, and ensure our vision remains at the heart of everything we do.