



GRACE *and* ST. STEPHEN'S
+ EPISCOPAL CHURCH +



2026 Annual Report

**Grace and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Colorado Springs, Colorado
Parish Annual Meeting Agenda – Sunday, February 1, 2026**

The Rev. Dr. Robert Black, Rector, Presiding

Meeting is Called to Order

- Opening Prayer
- Appointment of Clerk for the Annual Meeting
- Approve 2025 Annual Meeting Minutes
- Parish Statistics Snapshot
- Parish Necrology
- Election of Vestry Members

Senior Warden's Report

Junior Warden's Report

Treasurer's Report

Children's Ministry Report

Youth Ministry Report

Music Ministry Report

Rector's Report

Voting Results

Questions and Responses

Adjournment

If you have additional questions for the Wardens, Treasurer, or Rector, they will be available after the 10:30 liturgy in Blaik Library.



Rector's Report

In my first sermon at Grace and St. Stephen's (September 14, 2025), I quoted from Second Corinthians and said, "It isn't that we are trying to control or rule over your faith, rather we work with you for your joy." These first four months of mutual ministry have, indeed, been full of joy.

As I was called to serve as your Rector, I had a sense it would be a good fit based on the Profile and our time here in July for the interview with the Vestry. Now that I have been here for about four and a half months, I am starting to get a better sense of why God drew us together. These gifts and experiences that I have been given will help me to lead Grace and St. Stephen's. And the opportunities and graces of this congregation will help me to grow further into the priest that God is calling me to be.

As I was coming on board to this incredible parish, I met with a Transition Committee who helped me plan for a good start. Together, we developed a plan that would take us through the Vestry retreat, which follows

the week after the Annual Meeting. This plan had three top priorities:

- 1) Learn the Story and People of Grace and St. Stephen's
- 2) Create a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- 3) Lay Groundwork for Growth

I am quite pleased with the progress we've made in these goals as we have begun joyfully embracing our future. While there are still many of our members that I have not had a chance to really get to know, I look forward to doing so this year. Having a personal connection with every member of this Parish is something I think is very important and look forward to getting to know you all further.

In January, we had three great opportunities to listen and discern together where God is calling us. We used the results from the Holy Cow survey to guide these conversations. The result is that I have a sense of what our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are. In communication theory, it is often said that when you re-state someone else's position, success is having the person say "Exactly!" That was the response I received as I reflect back on what I've noticed in my time here. This tells me that we are on the same page when it comes to assessing our current situation and how we hope to move forward.

I have described the growth that I hope for to be three-dimensional: having an outward, inward, and upward focus. Some of the groundwork for that growth is technical, and we have spent some time looking at policies and procedures, staffing needs, and our organizational structures. Further groundwork will focus on learning about the needs of

our community, attending to our buildings and grounds, and developing a comprehensive plan for stewardship.

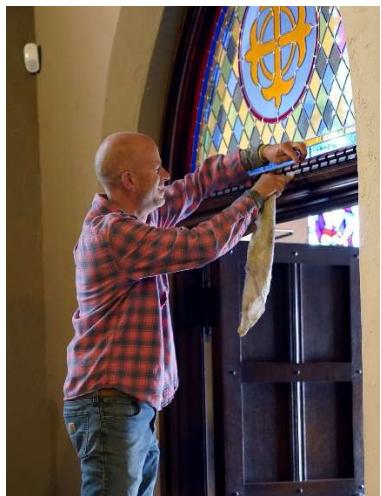
I have said this many times to many of you, but I want this to be a part of the official record of this Parish: thank you. Tyler, Eleanor, Rowen, and I so appreciate the warmth of your welcome and we very much feel at home at Grace and St. Stephen's and in Colorado Springs. We are so excited to be here and so grateful that God led us to share in life together.

One of the concluding passages of Scripture that we use at Morning and Evening Prayer is Ephesians 3:20 – “Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.” A year ago, I could have never imagined that we would be here. And I thank God that reality is not limited by my imagination. I am confident that God intends to use our mutual ministry at Grace and St. Stephen's for gracious and glorious purposes that we cannot yet begin to imagine. And I am incredibly excited to see God's dreams come to fruition in unimaginable ways.

Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Black +".

Father Robert Black



Senior Warden's Report

As I look back on the past year, I do so with a deep sense of gratitude and humility. Serving as your Senior Warden has been both an honor and a privilege, and I am continually thankful for the dedication, faithfulness, and generosity of this parish. Quite honestly, the last twelve months would not have been manageable without your support—so thank you. Grace & St. Stephen's is richly blessed with devoted lay leadership, supportive clergy, and an outstanding staff, and I have seen that blessing lived out again and again this year.

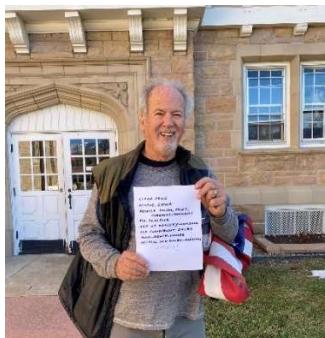
When 2025 began, we shared a single, clear focus: finding our next rector. The Parish Profile Committee poured their time and care into crafting a beautiful and comprehensive profile that truly captured the heart of Grace & St. Stephen's. From there, the Parish Search Committee took up the work with diligence and professionalism, guiding us through a thoughtful and thorough search. Finally, through prayerful conversation and individual discernment, the Vestry came to a shared conviction that Father Robert Black was called to be the next rector of Grace & St. Stephen's. Thank you for your prayers and patience throughout this process. It may have felt longer than expected at times, but as my grandfather used to say, anything worth doing is worth doing right.

Welcoming Father Robert and his family to Colorado Springs was certainly a highlight of our year. Yet it was far from the only sign of life and growth in our parish. As you will hear from our ministry leaders, many exciting things have been unfolding across Grace & St. Stephen's. We also completed a joyful and successful Annual Giving Campaign, continued to see a steady rise in average Sunday attendance, and welcomed new visitors and families into our community.

I would be remiss if I did not pause to offer heartfelt thanks to the Rev. Gordon Sandquist for his steady and inspiring leadership during our interim period. Pastor Gordy prepared us well for this next chapter, opening our hearts to what God had in store. He listened to us, challenged us, and worked faithfully toward healing during his time here. I am also deeply grateful for Joel Trekell and his service to this parish. He was a blessing to Grace & St. Stephen's, to the Taylor and St. Nicholas choirs, and to my own family. We wish him every blessing as he begins his next adventure.

As I look ahead to 2026 and beyond, I am filled with a profound sense of hope. God has exciting plans for Grace & St. Stephen's, and I am humbled and honored to be part of this remarkable community. Please continue to hold our lay leadership, clergy, and staff in your prayers as we step together into this next chapter of our shared life.

Chad Reynolds, Senior Warden



Junior Warden's Report

This past year marked the fourth and final year of my term as your Junior Warden, and in many ways it felt like a quiet but faithful chapter in the life of Grace & St. Stephen's. As with the previous years, our work focused less on headline-grabbing projects and more on the steady rhythm of care, repair, and maintenance that keeps an old and beloved building standing strong.

The most significant milestone of the year was the completion of repairs to the south-facing stained glass windows, along with the installation of new tempered protective glass. These windows, which have long shaped the light and beauty of our worship space, are now better protected for generations to come. Even more encouraging, we were awarded a second \$50,000 grant from the State Historical Fund to begin work on the north-facing windows. That next phase is scheduled to be completed in May or June of 2026, allowing this important preservation effort to continue.



Behind the scenes, several important transitions and improvements took place. Ron Hopkins retired from his role as our part-time sexton, and we welcomed Joseph Gilbert as our first full-time sexton. This was a major step forward for Grace & St. Stephen's, aligning us more closely with best practices for a parish of our size and ensuring more consistent care of our facilities. Around the same time, the lease for a private preschool operating in our building ended on June 30 and was not renewed by mutual agreement.

This change opens new possibilities for how we might use the education wing in the future.

Looking ahead, we also took a proactive step by contracting with Dominion Due Diligence to create a Capital Needs Assessment. This document will serve as a vital planning tool, helping us anticipate and prepare for major repairs and replacements—roofs, boilers, HVAC systems, electrical wiring—so we are less likely to be caught off guard by large and sudden expenses.

Some challenges remain ongoing. The issue of unhoused folks using our property to camp or store belongings continues, though it has lessened compared to previous years. The Life and Safety Committee, led by Phil Hensel and Andrew Perrani, has done an excellent job addressing this concern with both effectiveness and compassion, and I am grateful for their thoughtful leadership.

We also made improvements that many parishioners and visitors can see and hear. New audio equipment was installed in the nave, greatly enhancing both in-person sound quality and our livestream. We continued work on sanctuary lighting, including the addition of accent lighting on the columns, which has subtly but meaningfully improved the space. Meanwhile, we are still in active discussions with our insurance company regarding much-needed repairs to the slate roof. We are hopeful for a resolution by April—stay tuned.

Elsewhere on the property, the St. Francis Fountain received professional plumbing and electrical repairs, along with a fresh coat of marine-grade paint. Thanks to Frank Ohlin for his help with fountain maintenance! We repaired the worst potholes in our parking lots ourselves and worked with the city to address the most severe potholes in the alley. Exterior lighting was upgraded with programmable digital timers and the addition of a motion-sensor light at the Choir House, helping keep our grounds safe and welcoming.

There were also moments of generosity and community pride. Parishioner Toby Jaynes built a book library box in front of McWilliams House as his Eagle Scout project, a gift that reflects both service and imagination. New 5x8 flags were installed on the flagpoles, along with updated hardware, and thanks go to the Bradfords for managing the flags and faithfully observing proper protocols. A couple of cleanup and decluttering days brought fresh energy and new volunteers, and each time reminded me how good it feels when we care for this place together.

As I conclude my service as Junior Warden, I do so with gratitude. It has truly been a pleasure to serve, and I thank you for the trust and opportunity. Terry Hensel will be stepping into this role next, bringing relevant experience and a steady hand. Please be patient with him—Grace & St. Stephen's is 44,000 square feet of old building, and she requires a great deal of love and care. Blessings, and thank you all.

Mark Basenberg, Junior Warden



Treasurer's Report



The financial story of 2025 is one of steady faithfulness, careful stewardship, and a strong finish. Like many recent years, we began slowly, but as the year unfolded, generosity and good management carried us forward. By year's end, the church closed with an operating surplus of nearly \$18,000—a positive result that reflects more than just numbers on a page.

Behind that figure is a year of important decisions made with the future of our church in mind. Most notably, Vestry took action to restore the Memorial Columbarium Fund by transferring \$50,000 from the General Fund. This resolved a long-standing shortfall and ensured the fund is now whole. We also invested in a Capital Needs Assessment, supported the process of calling our new Rector, and prepared for a CPA audit next year. Thanks to strong giving, thoughtful leadership, and savings from clergy vacancies, the church's true financial position was even stronger—effectively showing a positive result of more than \$50,000.

Our income story is one of consistency and unexpected blessing. Pledge and plate giving closely matched what we had planned, showing the steady commitment of our parish. Trust income and interest returns exceeded expectations by almost \$50,000, giving us added flexibility. Just as importantly, we did not need to draw from Restricted Funds at the end of the year, allowing those funds to remain intact for future needs. On the expense side, careful management made a real difference. Overall expenses came in well under budget. Savings were largely due to clergy vacancies, which reduced salary costs significantly, while facility expenses and diocesan support stayed right on track. Because of this balance, we were also able to offer additional support to ministries when it mattered most.

The church's financial foundation remains strong. We ended the year with healthy cash reserves, much of it earning solid interest in a money market account. Our equity grew substantially, providing an important buffer for years when conditions may be less favorable. Restricted Funds also increased in value, thanks to both generous gifts and favorable markets. Even with major investments—such as work on our stained-glass windows—our Vestry-designated reserves now stand at \$662,000, serving as a vital “rainy day” fund for the life of the church. Looking ahead, the 2026 budget closely follows the path set in 2025. It reflects modest increases due to inflation, a hopeful rise in pledged income, and a 2% cost-of-living adjustment for salaries.

This year's financial story is ultimately one of trust—trust in God's provision, trust in one another, and trust built through careful stewardship. I am deeply grateful to the Vestry, the Finance Committee, Mary Roney, and Amily Beidelman-Almy for their partnership and support over the past three years. Together, we have helped ensure that our church is not only stable today, but well prepared for the years ahead.

Gus Gustafson, Treasurer

Outreach

Once again, 2025 confirmed what I have long believed: Grace & St. Stephen's is one of the most generous parishes I have ever known. When I look back on the year through the lens of Outreach, what stands out most is not just what we gave, but the faithful and joyful spirit with which this parish responds to the call to serve Christ in all persons and respect the dignity of every human being.

That spirit was evident in our homegrown ministries. Through the Little Pantries outside McWilliams House, our youth assembled nearly 48 personal care kits each month, offering food, clothing, and essential items to neighbors in need. This ministry continues through a blend of parish support, the Little Pantry Shoppe, and generous in-kind gifts from our community.

Our partnership with Columbia School remains a powerful expression of care. Each month, volunteers assembled and delivered 100 snack bags for students facing food insecurity, and coats were collected and shared with children in need. The gratitude of Columbia's staff speaks volumes about the impact of this ongoing commitment.

Joyful generosity also marked our Noisy Sundays, where coins and bills raised an average of \$270 each Sunday for local nonprofits. On the first Sunday of each month, Sandwich Sundays brought parishioners together to prepare 100 lunches for the Springs Rescue Mission—an effort deeply appreciated by those who receive them and those who serve.

Beyond these ministries, Grace & St. Stephen's supported a wide range of organizations, including Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Charities and Marian House, Salvation Army, Westside Cares, Food to Power, CrossFire Ministries, the Diocese of Jerusalem, Cathedral Ridge, and Locally Haiti.

One especially meaningful moment came when delayed SNAP payments left many families facing food insecurity. In response to a \$5,000 matching challenge for CrossFire Ministries, this parish came together to raise the full \$10,000 needed—thanks to parish generosity, Vestry's flexibility, and an anonymous donor.

Thank you for your faithfulness and compassion. As we look toward 2026, I invite you to consider joining the Outreach Committee, which meets on the second Monday of each month at 5:30 p.m. in Taft Hall. Your presence would be a gift.

Marti O'Dell, Outreach Committee Facilitator



Grace-Full Gardeners

The Grace and St. Stephen's volunteer gardening team is dedicated to keeping the GSS campus beautiful and flourishing.

We cheerfully toil amid the flowers, soil, and mulch surrounding the church building and the McWilliams Parish House. From early April through late October, the gardening team pulls weeds, trims plants, waters, and keeps an eye out for areas that need replanting, either with perennials, colorful annuals, and drought resistant plants. We are mindful of the need to educate ourselves on effective gardening practices at this altitude!



Early in 2025, we held a "Mulch Party" to refresh and replace the tired mulch areas surrounding the church building. On the church's west side, we added many new hosta plants for visual appeal. Colorful flowers were planted in the garden around the statue of St. Francis, to enhance its beauty – and to celebrate the fresh coat of paint in the fountain pool! Next to the steps going up to the Parish House, we placed two large pots full of flowers to enhance the entrance.

Our gardening team has discussed combining our efforts with the Grace Sowers, whose task is to plant vegetables and herbs. While that idea is by no means official, it is definitely something to work on as we approach the upcoming planting season!

Anne Trinajstich, Grace-Full Gardeners Chair

Community of Hope International

Community of Hope International (COHI) at Grace & St. Stephen's is a ministry grounded in presence, listening, and community. Rooted in Benedictine spirituality, COHI trains lay leaders to offer compassionate listening and spiritual care in everyday life, guided by the belief that *we encounter God in and through community*.

This commitment was joyfully reaffirmed on Sunday, October 19, 2025, when Fr. Robert re-commissioned the COHI lay pastoral caregivers during worship. COHI has served as the parish's pastoral care training and support community since 2015, forming caregivers who continue to grow together through an ongoing rhythm of life known as the Circle of Care.

Through monthly gatherings that include worship, study of *The Rule of St. Benedict*, continuing education, and reflection on pastoral encounters, members regularly ask, *What is God asking me to pay attention to?* In 2025, six COHI members shared 292 pastoral visits and encounters, offering quiet but faithful care throughout the parish.



They also met regularly with Fr. Robert to attend to pastoral needs and the church's prayer life.

From this ministry emerged the Sunday Prayer Team, which offers prayer in the St. Stephen Chapel and at the Tower door during communion. COHI also hosts quarterly prayer workshops for parishioners interested in praying with and for others; participation in the Prayer Team is open to all, whether or not they are COHI members.

Looking ahead, COHI hopes to offer the next 12-week training for Lay Pastoral Caregivers in 2026, continuing to nurture a community rooted in attentive presence and shared faith.

Cindy Page and Leigh MacHaffie, COHI Leaders

Children's Programs

Throughout 2025, our children's ministry joyfully continued its work of nurturing the hearts, minds, and souls of children and drawing them closer to God. We welcomed many new families and celebrated the baptisms of several children who have since become active participants in parish life.



In the spring, we gave thanks for Nicole Hensel's years of faithful service as Nursery Director and welcomed Clare Davis into the role. Clare quickly built a strong team of volunteers and, following the departure of First Class Preschool, helped reshape the nursery into a calmer, more peaceful space. By year's end, nearly twenty children were registered, with about half attending on a typical Sunday.

Faith formation for children in Pre-K through fifth grade remained strong, with about thirty children registered for Sunday School and twenty attending regularly. Led by a dedicated team of teachers, children completed a New Testament study using *Life with God for Children* and later explored the book of Joshua. Funds were also set aside to begin updating and beautifying children's classrooms.

Children's Chapel continued to be a meaningful monthly gathering, with more children involved in leadership and a refreshed bulletin that added color and consistency. The fourth- and fifth-grade group, JOLT, met monthly for fellowship, worship, and creative learning about the saints, and was prayerfully restructured to become a middle school youth group beginning in fall 2025.

Summer brought Vacation Bible School, where twenty-five children celebrated *God's Love Is a Reason to Celebrate!* through stories, music, art, games, and snacks, supported by an enthusiastic team of volunteers. Throughout the year, children also put faith into action through service projects including Food-to-Power gardening, caring for church grounds, and creating Thanksgiving placemats for Springs Rescue Mission.

Family connection remained central, with monthly Family Coffee Hours and well-attended events such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Trunk-or-Treat, Advent Festival, and Christmas Pageant. To support faith at home, we launched a weekly Home Connection e-newsletter and continued to provide seasonal resources for Advent and Lent.

As we look toward 2026, we hope to offer new opportunities for deeper formation and intergenerational connection. It has been an honor to serve the children and families of Grace & St. Stephen's this year.



Sr. Marcella Taylor, CMR, Minister of Children's Formation

Music Program



2025 was a year of remarkable growth, joyous music, and heartfelt worship for our parish's music program. United by a shared goal—to sing to the Lord and bless His name—the Taylor and St. Nicholas choirs offered spaces where singers could encounter God personally and in community, striving for excellence with openness, warmth, and joy. Serving alongside this community since June 2023 has been one of my greatest blessings, sharing some of my most cherished moments in our sacred spaces.

The Taylor Choir rehearses Thursday evenings and sings at the 10:30 a.m. service each Sunday.

In early October, they represented our diocese at the opening Eucharist of the 138th Annual Convention of the Episcopal Church in Colorado. Week after week, singers bring their talents to God's glory, supported by section leaders and choral scholars who nurture creativity and growth.

The St. Nicholas Choir meets Wednesday evenings and nurtures young choristers through worship and music education. This summer, twenty choristers gathered at Cathedral Ridge for Choir Camp, a week of rehearsal, worship, and s'mores. Their music lifted worship the following Sunday and set the tone for a strong season. We look forward to welcoming more young musicians to Choir Camp this July as part of the Multiage Creatives Camp, which offers tracks in choir, art, and robotics.



The Taylor Concert Series offered extraordinary performances from Dueling Pianos to Colorado Vocal Arts Ensemble, Plein Aire Chamber Ensemble, and special choral services

such as Compline, Evensong, and Advent Lessons and Carols. These concerts, generously supported by Alice Bemis Taylor, are offered free to the city of Colorado Springs.

Amid the celebrations, we also experienced transitions. Our beloved Director of Music and Organist, Joel Trekell, discerned a call to the Cathedral Basilica in Denver, playing his final service on Christmas Eve. Joel became not only a trusted colleague but a dear friend, and his departure was deeply felt. We are grateful for Susan Paulson, who stepped in as interim organist with grace and skill. As we search for the next Director of Music and Organist, we trust God will guide us to someone who will lead this community in song for years to come.



2025 reminded us of the power of music to lift hearts, connect generations, and draw people—inside and beyond our parish—into the presence of God. It was a year of voices raised, hands joined, and spirits strengthened, and we look ahead with hope and joy to the songs yet to come.

John Herman, Interim Director of Music

Jazz in the Garden

On warm summer evenings, the garden once again came alive with music, laughter, and community as Jazz in the Garden returned for another vibrant season. Across seven concerts, thousands of neighbors and friends filled the lawn, drawn by great music and the unmistakable spirit of welcome that defines this series.

One unforgettable highlight came on August 8, when USAFA Blue Delta drew a record-setting crowd of 755 guests—the largest audience the series has ever hosted. Throughout the summer, most of those who joined us were visitors from beyond our parish, a reminder that Jazz in the Garden continues to be a powerful bridge between Grace & St. Stephen's and the wider community.



As the music played, docents moved among the crowd, answering questions and offering glimpses into the history and life of the church. Many guests accepted the invitation to learn more, resulting in dozens of tours and countless meaningful conversations over the course of the season.

Behind the scenes, Jazz in the Garden was made possible by a faithful team of volunteers who greeted guests, served

beverages, offered tours, and supported the musicians. Their generosity of time and spirit, along with the support of sponsors and patrons, ensured that the heart of the series—sharing excellent music in a welcoming space—continued to thrive.

The Jazz Steering Board remains deeply grateful for the ongoing support that makes these summer evenings possible, and for the musicians, volunteers, and community members who together transform the Memorial garden into a place of joy, connection, and celebration. We would love to have you join us in 2026!

Chuck Theobald, Jazz in the Garden Chair

Youth Groups

Throughout the winter and spring of 2025, the Youth Group gathered monthly for meals, games, and spiritual reflection. One of the season's highlights was a ski trip to Ski Cooper, where three youth experienced skiing for the first time and joyfully conquered the mountain together.



Community and service shaped the year in meaningful ways. Our Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper, celebrated with a festive Mardi Gras theme, served nearly 80 guests and raised \$600 to support youth activities. On Youth Sunday, Emmett Brockaway offered a heartfelt sermon that deeply moved the congregation. Several youth also participated in diocesan-wide opportunities, including a service project at St. Clare's Mission in Denver in the spring and the Quest Retreat at Cathedral Ridge in the fall.

Spring concluded with a roller-skating party to welcome rising sixth graders and to celebrate the leadership and service of youth co-leader Lydia Schneider on her final day with the group. We then launched the 2025-2026 program year with a family pool party. With growing middle school participation, we adopted a new meeting format and began gathering twice a month. Youth in grades 6-12 now meet together for food and games before separating into middle school and high school groups for service projects or Reflections, our time of spiritual learning and discussion.

We are grateful to welcome Katherine Murphy as a new youth co-leader, along with permanent volunteers Sloane Fife and Nicole Hensel, who lead the middle school group. Fall and winter activities included bowling, laser tag, and a Christmas party.

Throughout the year, youth served in many ways—making blankets for Children's Hospital, cooking meals for the GSSE Meal Train, painting benches with Habitat for Humanity, creating cards for homebound parishioners, caring for church spaces, and assembling bags for children and neighbors in need.

Through fellowship, service, and spiritual growth, our youth continue to



deepen their faith and strengthen their connections within the church and the wider community.

Denise Gustafson and Katherine Murphy, Youth Group Leaders

AHAVA – Grace and Stephen’s LGBTQIA+ Ministry



Once again, Grace & St. Stephen’s had the privilege of bearing witness to Christ’s love in a very visible way through our presence at Pikes Peak Pride. Over the course of the two-day celebration—attended by an estimated 35,000 people—our booth became a place of welcome, conversation, and connection. More volunteers than ever before stepped forward, joyfully handing out swag and, more importantly, sharing a simple and powerful message: God’s love is for everyone.

This year also marked an exciting first for our parish. For the very first time, Grace & St. Stephen’s joined the Pikes Peak Pride parade. Though construction on Tejon required a change in the parade route, that did nothing to dampen the spirit of the moment. Ten parishioners marched together from America the Beautiful Park to Alamo Square, carrying our new banner and offering a visible sign of the radical, inclusive love of Christ.

As we look ahead, we are already preparing for the future. Our application to participate in Pikes Peak Pride 2026 has been submitted, and we eagerly anticipate another opportunity to show up for our neighbors and our city—especially in times when public expressions of love, welcome, and solidarity matter more than ever.

Thom Andreas, AHAVA Coordinator

Women’s Book Group

Each Tuesday morning, the Women’s Book Group gathers with open hearts and curious minds, drawn together by a shared love of thoughtful conversation and spiritual exploration. The group is a welcoming circle—one where women can speak honestly, listen deeply, and reflect on how faith takes shape in real life. Within this space, stories are shared, questions are welcomed, and life experiences are honored.

Throughout 2025, the group journeyed through a rich and varied collection of books, including *Faith: A Journey for All* by President Jimmy Carter, *The Amen Effect* by Rabbi Sharon Brous, *No Greater Love* by Mother Teresa, *Prayer in the Night* by Tish Harrison Warren, and *The Joy of the Trinity* by Tara-Leigh Cobble. Each book opened the door to meaningful dialogue and offered new perspectives on faith, love, prayer, and community.

Beyond the conversations, the Women’s Book Group has become a caring and prayerful community. Members hold one another in prayer—sharing concerns during difficult moments and offering gratitude for the blessings woven through everyday life.

This faithful gathering meets every Tuesday from 10-11 a.m. in Blaik Library, and all women who are seeking connection, reflection, and deeper conversation are warmly welcome.

Denise Gustafson, Women's Book Group

Prayer Shawl Ministry

The Prayer Shawl Ministry—affectionately known as *Graceful Hands*—is a ministry of care made visible. Through knitting and crocheting, members create prayer shawls for those in need of healing, strength, comfort, or spiritual sustenance. Each shawl is a tangible sign of God's love, wrapped in prayer and offered as a gentle embrace.

Like many ministries, Graceful Hands grew quiet during the COVID years. After prayerful discernment, the decision was made to renew and reimagine this work. Makers donated yarn and tools, and a thoughtful process was established for prayer, clergy blessing, packaging, and distribution. Resources were gathered to welcome both new and experienced makers, and the revived ministry was joyfully shared with the parish during the summer and at the fall Ministry Fair.

The steady rhythm of knitting and crocheting invites meditation and prayer, blessing both the maker and the recipient. Graceful Hands now gathers on the third Thursday of each month at 4:00 p.m. in the Blaik Library for prayer, conversation, and creative fellowship. Completed shawls are blessed by Fr. Robert on the first Sunday of each month before being given to those in need.

By year's end, nine prayer shawls had been recorded and distributed, with several more shared quietly along the way. A few shawls are available in the library for parishioners to offer to someone in need, with gifts recorded in the library notebook. Prayer shawls are never sold, though voluntary donations are gratefully accepted—each one freely given as a sign of love, prayer, and community.

Pat Cosimano Wallace, Prayer Shawl Ministry



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