

# St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Middlebury, VT

PARISHSCOPE JANUARY 15, 2020 SPECIAL EDITION  
CANDIDATES FOR THE 3 OPENINGS OF THREE-YEAR TERMS ON THE VESTRY

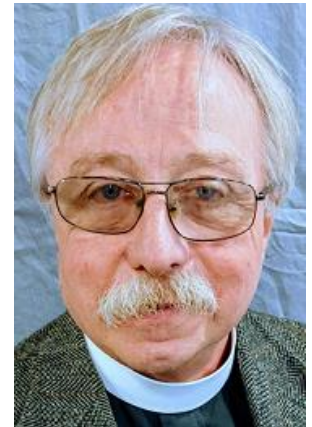
Editor – *Mike Davis* Associate Editor – *Kitty Davis* Editor Emerita - *Jennifer Nelson*

At the Annual meeting on January 26, we will vote to fill three three-year terms on the Vestry. The candidates for these positions are Irv Cummings, Andrew Demshuk and Rebecca Mitchell (running to share a seat), Carol Milkuhn, Michael Reeves, and Mary Jane Simpson. All other information about annual meeting elections can be found in the December 2019 issue of *The Parishscope*.

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## Irv Cummings - candidate for Three-Year Term on Vestry

I was born on a small dairy farm in Putnam, New York. At that time, my family lived in the ancestral home, the manor house, about a mile from where I currently live. When I was 8, my family moved up the road, a mile away, while it was being renovated. I graduated from Ticonderoga High school in 1969, and received the Latin prize upon graduation. I then attended Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York. After two years there, I took a year off from school and came back home to earn more money, which I did by picking apples at a local orchard. At the end of that fall, I returned to Oneonta and began work at a shoe store there. The next year, I transferred to Syracuse University and received my Bachelor's, cum laude, in 1974.



I worked for a time at International Paper in Ticonderoga, before enrolling in Harvard Divinity School where I remained for five years. I received my MDiv in 1981. In the next 8 years I worked as a Social Worker in Watertown, MA, followed by a year off at home, and then pastored the Salisbury Congregational Church for 5 years. I then returned to Cambridge, MA and began working as the pastor of Old Cambridge Baptist church, remaining there for the next twenty-one years. This was the first place I had worked where I was openly gay, and it was a wonderful experience which I will never forget. I have lived in the house next door to my parents, with my cat, until now. He is now fifteen and a half years of age and is my best friend.

I have been to Scotland several times, and made the acquaintance of the chief of my clan, Sir Alistair Gordon Cumming. On his estate, I took my godson to an historic chapel, Michael Fonteboa, and formally made him my godson. We remain very close.

I wish to serve on the Vestry because I have come to love St. Stephen's, its pastors and its people.

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St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

*A member of*

The Episcopal Church in Vermont



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## **Andrew Demshuk and Rebecca Mitchell - candidates for one Three-Year Term on Vestry**

Andrew Demshuk and Rebecca Mitchell met in the midst of their doctoral studies at the University of Illinois in February 2007, were best friends by April, and in love by November (and ever since). They were married in 2009. In 2016, they moved to Middlebury, where Rebecca Mitchell started in January as assistant professor of Russian history. That same year, Andrew Demshuk moved from the University of Alabama at Birmingham to American University in Washington, DC, where he is a professor of Central European history. Rebecca was raised in the United Church of Canada (where her mother, Rev. Karen Mitchell is a minister), and Andrew is Roman Catholic. In search of a common spiritual home, they have attended services at Episcopal churches in their various places of residence in Urbana, Illinois, Oxford, Ohio, Oberlin, Ohio, Birmingham, Alabama, and now Middlebury, Vermont.



They have also regularly attended services at the National Cathedral in Washington. Rebecca became a member of the Episcopal Church at St. Stephens in 2017, with Marjorie Lamberti serving as her church sponsor. A key moment in their relationship with the parish came with the baptism of Archie Ray at St. Stephens (presided over by Fr. Larry, with Rebecca's mother's participation) in October 2018. The welcoming environment, traditional liturgy, and classical musical tradition have all attracted Andrew and Rebecca to St. Stephens, and of particular importance to them are well researched and thoughtful homiletics. By sharing a position on the Vestry, they hope to help support the community in this period of transition, helping it to continue to develop as an open and questing spiritual community that balances thoughtful intellectual inquiry with community outreach.

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## **Carol Milkuhn - candidate for Three-Year Term on Vestry**

Dear Parishioners:

You know me as the driver of “the contingent,” the group from the Residence who attend Sunday services at St. Stephens. But my experience with our church begins earlier; it’s been four years since I first entered our doors, a stranger to both The Residence and Middlebury.

You welcomed me and so I stayed. As my connection with our church deepened, so did my relationships with the Episcopalians at The Residence. Eventually we decided to attend church together, finding the experience rewarding for many reasons. Yes, we all enjoy the music, the pageantry, and the liturgy that enhance our Sunday services—yes, we all are uplifted by the beauty of our church—and yes, we all find spiritual inspiration in the sermons. But we have found an unexpected blessing in going to church together; our Sunday “experience” binds us to each other and to the larger community of St. Stephens.



And fostering connection with the larger community is important. Because people often need comfort but find asking for comfort difficult, I asked Sandy Ketchum for help in beginning a “pocket prayer shawl” ministry. The ministry has been successful; Sandy and I are now knitting more shawls to refill the emptied baskets in our sanctuary.

Being a member of St. Stephens has brought me many blessings. I have found a religious sanctuary within the walls of this church, a place where I can think and pray. I have found an opportunity to use my knitting skills, hoping that crafting will foster healing. And I have made friends, both with my neighbors at The Residence and with members of our larger congregation. If elected to the Vestry, I will be focused on deepening these relationships, fostering the ties that bind us to a larger community, that of the congregation of St. Stephens and the town of Middlebury.

Peace and Blessings, *Carol Milkuhn*

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## Mary Jane Simpson - candidate for Three-Year Term on Vestry

### ***1. Describe your history with the Church and specifically with St. Stephen's.***

My history with the Church starts with my late grandmother: our faith connected us deeply. For as long as I can remember, my grandmother brought me to the United Methodist Church of Orlando with her. I did practically everything at that church from tagging along on my grandmother's Stephen Ministry visits as a child to leading the youth services as teenager.

I kept attending the Methodist church during college. Michael and I were married at Trinity United Methodist Church in our college town. At that church, we sang in the choir and helped lead the youth group.

After graduation, we moved to North Carolina for graduate school. We couldn't find a Methodist Church that suited us in North Carolina, but we found an American Baptist Church that we absolutely loved: Watts Street Baptist Church. Watts Street had a vibrant young adult community that worked, fellowshiped, and studied the Bible together. We hosted Bible study for the last couple of years. Our young adult group had a long-term service project in collaboration with a local Black sister church where we helped children with their homework and taught adults basic computer skills before the Wednesday night church service.

After graduate school, we moved to Tennessee for my two-year post-doctoral training. In highly conservative eastern Tennessee, we struggled to find a church. We visited many Baptist churches but none of them suited us. Around that time, the Methodist church was debating gay inclusivity and voted against it, so we decided we would absolutely not consider joining a Methodist church. Seeking an inclusive church and preferring the high church style, we started visiting Episcopal churches. After attending the Episcopal Church of the Ascension in West Knoxville for a year, we took a confirmation class, were confirmed, and had our son Jack baptized. While at the Church of the Ascension, we helped the church work through a highly controversial decision that finally resulted in the blessing of the marriage of two gay parishioners.

After my post-doc, we moved to Middlebury in 2016, and there was no question about what church we would attend: we were going to join St. Stephen's. I work with the fellowship committee and regularly host coffee hour. I also help plan parish weekends. Now that my children are getting older, I am ready to take on more responsibilities at St. Stephen's, and I am eager to join the Vestry.

### ***2. What skills and interests do you bring to serving on the Vestry?***

I believe the words of Romans 14:11, "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'" I am interested in serving on Vestry to ensure that when the people in our community need a Church, that the Church is here for them. This is not to say that I am interested in Vestry for the self-preservation of our church, but rather, I am interested in expanding our church to meet the changing needs of our community. In the future, I see our church as the spiritual heart of Middlebury, where all kinds of people come to worship and learn, where their needs are met, where there is true Christian community. I especially want to reach out to college students to allow them to maintain their connection with the Church despite the many changes in their lives.

If elected, I would bring to the Vestry my highly organized and task-oriented personality. I will help the Vestry to have efficient and productive meetings, which will be important given the many items coming up on the agenda in the next year. I am also agreeable and willing to compromise on group decisions. I hope to learn from the Vestry how the church is run, both locally and regionally. I am also interested in helping our future priest get established and oriented when he or she arrives.



## Michael Reeves – candidate for Three-Year Term on Vestry

When my wife Sarah and I first moved to Middlebury in 2016, the first thing I did was seek out a church. The Episcopal Church has always been an important part of my life. I am a lifelong Episcopalian. As a child I went to church with my parents. I was an acolyte and a member of the junior choir. I also followed in the family tradition of going to ECC – the Episcopal church camp - during the summer. As I grew into my teenage years, most of my friends were from camp or church. These are still my best friends today. I was blessed when ECC asked me to be a counselor which allowed me to have a leadership role in the church with young people.



I drifted away from the church during my twenties. I questioned why I needed God in my life. When my children were born, they were baptized in the Episcopal Church and I became more involved again. I trained acolytes and I was elected to the Vestry for three years. During that time, my church too went through a transition with rectors. I am keenly aware of the challenges and rewards of calling a new rector.

When my church decided to leave the Episcopate and join the Anglican Communion, I realized what the Episcopal Church meant to me. I had always felt accepted and welcomed for being me, but this difficult situation helped me realize that the core values of the Episcopal Church were my core values – acceptance and compassion for all, social justice, and advocacy for the vulnerable.

I believe God spoke to me when I was in my mid-thirties. It was then that I became a true believer in Jesus Christ. My rector encouraged me to read *Mere Christianity* by CS Lewis, which further solidified my belief in Jesus Christ and my need for Him in my life. I increased my involvement as a lector, youth group leader, and I was elected to the Bishop's Committee.

My family and I moved to Vermont for me to become the Social Work Program Director at Castleton University. We settled in Middlebury because of the vibrancy of the community. (The views aren't bad either!) I am so happy I found St. Stephens! I immediately felt welcomed and accepted. The church has become my second family. Since joining the parish, I have been a member of the choir, I have volunteered at the Peasant Market and at the auction, I co-led the children's choir this summer, and my wife and I have been part of two Foyer groups. I will be organizing the pancake supper this February. I have been happy contributing to the church this way and will continue such. It wasn't until another parishioner asked me to consider running for Vestry that I decided I could add to my contribution to the parish in this role.

I am running because I believe my church and professional experience will add to the existing strengths of the Vestry. I have experience in church and professional searches and leadership transitions that can help support the parish during its search, calling, and transition. I also have experience serving on Vestries through the everyday responsibilities. I want to be sure that whatever choice the church makes about its future, it is transparent, inclusive, and growth-oriented. I see St. Stephens as being an integral part of addressing the needs of the community. My doctoral dissertation focused on homelessness and I see myself as being knowledgeable in this area of increasing discussion in our church and town. I also want to work on strategies at St. Stephens to increase youth participation, whether that be the Middlebury College students, out teens, or our young children. My church was such an important part of my formative years and I want to help the young people in our community reconnect

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