



# Saint John's FESTIVAL OF NEW BEGINNINGS

## Catalog of Classes and Groups

Updated August 25, 2025

*All are welcome - Invite your friends!*

### **BREAD & BELONGING: BIBLE STUDY TOGETHER (FULL 28-WEEKS)**

Thursdays 6:30 – 8:00pm

September 18 – April 30 (28 weeks)

In Person and Online

Led by Rev. Hilary Marchbanks, Shelley Walters, Laura Schwarcz, Javi Lopez-Shultz, and Midge Epstein

Gather with us weekly throughout the academic year for Bread & Belonging: Bible Study Together – a time of scripture study, fellowship, and prayer. Following the lectionary readings, we'll explore the Bible alongside reflections from a wide range of theologians and pastors, listening for wisdom from many voices. Together, we'll discover how scripture continues to shape us and how God is calling us to live with faith and love in community.

***You can sign up for the whole 28 weeks, or you can sign up for short sessions (dates listed below).  
Register for the full 28-weeks at [bit.ly/breadbible](http://bit.ly/breadbible)***

### **BREAD & BELONGING: BIBLE STUDY TOGETHER (SHORT SESSIONS)**

**Session 1:** September 18 - October 2: Taste & See (3 weeks) - [bit.ly/breadbible1](http://bit.ly/breadbible1)

**Session 2:** October 9 - November 20: Beloved Blueprints (7 weeks) - [bit.ly/breadbible2](http://bit.ly/breadbible2)

**Session 3:** December 4 – December 18: All the Earth Waits, Advent (3 weeks) - [bit.ly/breadbible3](http://bit.ly/breadbible3)

**Session 4:** January 8 - February 12: Epiphany (6 weeks) - [bit.ly/breadbible4](http://bit.ly/breadbible4)

**Session 5:** February 19 - March 26: Lent (5 weeks) - [bit.ly/breadbible5](http://bit.ly/breadbible5)

**Session 6:** April 9 - April 30: Easter (4 weeks) - [bit.ly/breadbible6](http://bit.ly/breadbible6)



### **THE TEARS OF THINGS - FINDING GOD IN LIFE'S FRACTURES**

Mondays 6:30-8:00 pm, September 8, 15, and 22 (3 weeks)

In Person and Online

Led by Ed Wilder, Bob Walker, and Midge Epstein

Where is God in a hurting world? What if our wounds aren't detours, but doorways?

Join us for a three-week study on Richard Rohr's *The Tears of Things*. This short, contemplative book invites us to explore how to find God not just in triumph, but in the "tears of things"—the brokenness, the imperfection, and the messiness of life. Through open discussion, this class explores how Christian hope is born in lament and how we are called to be both healed and healers in a hurting world.

Discover wisdom in the weeping and hope in the cracks.

*The Tears of Things* is available online and in bookstores. Please join us even if you have not read the book!

Register at [bit.ly/tearsofthings](http://bit.ly/tearsofthings)

## CONTEMPLATIVE RETREAT

Saturdays, September 13

9:00am – 1:00pm (Lunch included)

In Person

Leaders: Robert Culbertson, Eva Jordan, and Shelley Walters

Our half-day contemplative retreat focuses on establishing contemplative practices that generate energy for personal healing and growth. When we carry these practices into the larger world, we provide positive support for our families and society.

No experience needed.

Suggested lunch donation is \$10. Childcare available on request.

Register for September 13 at [bit.ly/sjcontemplativesept](https://bit.ly/sjcontemplativesept)

Save the date for our next retreat on December 13.



## ONLINE CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

Every other Wednesday starting September 17

12:00noon - 12:45pm

Online only

Leaders: Robert Culbertson, Shelley Walters, and Eva Jordan

Gather with us over Zoom midday, midweek to reinforce and deepen your contemplative practices with group meditations and sharing.

\*All participants are asked to complete an in-person retreat or a one-on-one session before attending the mid-week gatherings.

Contact [Shelley@stjohnsaustin.org](mailto:Shelley@stjohnsaustin.org) for more information.

## COMMON GROUND: HEALING OUR SOIL. FEEDING THE FUTURE

Mondays, September 29 and October 6

6:30 - 8:00 pm

In Person

Teachers: Saint John's Green Team

Join us for a class exploring the documentary Common Ground, which examines the ways farming practices shape the food we eat, the air we breathe, and the water we drink through the health of the soil. Together, we'll unpack what the film teaches us about the connections between agriculture, environment, and community, and consider how these insights might guide our own choices. For more information about the film, visit [commongroundfilm.com](https://commongroundfilm.com)

**Preparation before class:** Watch the documentary "Common Ground: Healing Our Soil, Feeding the Future" either on Amazon Prime or with the JOY group on Tuesday, September 23 at 12:00 noon at the church.

Register at [bit.ly/sjcommonground](https://bit.ly/sjcommonground)

## **INTERGENERATIONAL BOOK CLUB- FALL EDITION!** **WORDS ON FIRE BY JENNIFER A. NEILSEN**

Sunday, October 19

3:15 pm - 4:15 pm

In Person

Leaders: Ann Barlow and Kylee Schwarcz

After a meaningful and memorable summer gathering around the book *Refugee*, we're excited to invite youth and adults to come together once again for our Intergenerational Book Club!

This fall, we'll dive into *Words on Fire*, a gripping historical novel by Jennifer A. Nielsen. Set in 19th-century Lithuania during the Russian occupation, this powerful story follows a young girl named Audra who's swept into a secret book-smuggling network. She is forced to trust a boy named Lukas by circumstances, and they team up in heroic efforts and dangerous escapes.

With themes of courage, resistance, and the power of words, this story will spark reflection, conversation, and a deeper awareness of the importance of protecting knowledge, culture, and the right to speak and read freely.

Everyone reads the book ahead of time, then we'll gather on October 19 from 3:15 - 4:15 pm for snacks and thoughtful discussion. Whether you're 11 or 81, this is a space to connect across generations through the power of story.

Books available at local libraries, online, and a few are available in the church office.

Register at [bit.ly/sjwordsonfire](https://bit.ly/sjwordsonfire)

## **PUTTING ON THE MIND OF CHRIST: NEUROSCIENCE AND CONTEMPLATION**

Sundays, October 26 and November 2

1:30pm - 3:00pm

In Person and Online

Leaders: Robert Culbertson and Shelley Walters

This new, two-session short course will relate foundational neuropsychological research to the contemplative experience. We will take brief but substantive looks at Michael Gazzaniga's split-brain research and Jill Bolte Taylor's life-altering experiences following a stroke that shut down her left brain.

We'll ask: What is the "you" that perceives reality; that meditates? How might neuroscience help shape our understanding of "putting on the mind of Christ?"

Register at [bit.ly/sjmindofchrist](https://bit.ly/sjmindofchrist)



## CHURCHWIDE ADVENT SUNDAY SCHOOL

Four Sundays, November 30, December 7, 14, and 21

10:00 - 10:50 am

In Person

Teacher: Shelley Walters

Advent is a time to tune our hearts to the world's longing for redemption, salvation, and transformation, and to remember that all the earth is waiting for Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Together, we will reflect on the incarnation, talk honestly about the challenges and hopes of our world, and look toward the coming of God's kingdom on earth. Through scripture, art, and conversation, we will explore wonder, justice, truth, and the signs of hope breaking into our world.

This large class combines short, engaging reflections with small-group, round-table discussion time. Wherever you are on your journey, whether you're curious, searching, tired, or hopeful, you are welcome to join the conversation as we look towards signs of the light of Christ together.

## BREAD FOR OUR JOURNEY

Bread for Our Journey is an online approach to faith development you can do as an individual, in informal small groups – and it even includes activities for families.

This weekly collection of reflections is intended to deepen our understanding of scripture, to open our awareness of different voices and wisdom, and to broaden our spiritual practices that bring creativity and justice to our world.

Visit [stjohnsaustin.org/ministries/bread-for-our-journey](http://stjohnsaustin.org/ministries/bread-for-our-journey) to receive this resource weekly.

## STAYING GROUNDED IN THE WILDERNESS. WITH SPECIAL GUEST BETH RICHARDSON

Saturday, December 6

9:00am - 12:00noon

In Person

Leader: Rev. Beth Richardson



In a world that feels like a wilderness – uncertain and shifting – how do we stay grounded when the path ahead feels unclear?

Join Rev. Beth Richardson, Dean Emeritus of The Upper Room Chapel and former Director of Prayer and Worship Life, for a workshop on Staying Grounded in the Wilderness. An artist, writer, out gay woman, and retired elder in The United Methodist Church, Rev. Richardson has spent decades shaping the spiritual life of the church through her work as editor of *Alive Now* and *Weavings*, as worship leader for the Academy for Spiritual Formation, and as author of beloved books including *Walking in the Wilderness* and *The Uncluttered Heart*.

Through her long vocational journey – including years when she was barred from her call – she has embodied what it means to sit in discomfort, persist in hope, and courageously swim against the current.

Together, we'll explore how to remain rooted in faith and love, even in wilderness times.

Rev. Richardson will also preach and bless communion on the following Sunday.

## COFFEE WITH A PASTOR

First Sundays of Each Month

10:00 - 10:45am

In Person

Teacher: Rev. Hilary Marchbanks



New to Saint John's? Come meet Pastor Hilary over coffee! On the first Sunday of each month this fall, during the 10:00 hour in the Great Hall, "Coffee with a Pastor" is a relaxed space to ask questions, learn about Saint John's and United Methodism, and connect with our community. No registration required – just come join us!

## FAITHFULLY SERVING. A SELF-STUDY

Have you ever wondered why several of our committees have names like "Risk-Taking Missions and Service," "Radical Hospitality," and "Extravagant Generosity"? These superlative names originate from *The Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* by Bishop Robert Schnase. We encourage anyone curious about serving on a team at Saint John's to explore how these practices connect our faith with the intentional service of the church and help shape the vibrant life of our community. Books are available online or in the church office.

If you are interested in serving on a team, please contact [Hilary@stjohnsaustin.org](mailto:Hilary@stjohnsaustin.org).

## FAMILY CAMP

January 9 - 11, 2026

At Camp Allen in Navasota, TX

What do teenagers and senior adults have in common?

How about young children and middle-aged parents?

Single adults and couples?

They are all a part of our church family and we hope they will all consider joining us for our Family Camp Retreat! Please save the date: Family Camp will be held January 9-11, 2026 at the beautiful Camp Allen in Navasota, TX. Whether you love board games, disc golf, music, volleyball, canoeing, or crafts, there is something for you at family camp. Come spend tech-free time relaxing and getting to better know your SJUMC family.

Fill out an interest form to receive more information and be the first to know when registration opens at [bit.ly/familycamp26](https://bit.ly/familycamp26)

## LGBTQ+ ALLY TRAINING

Dates TBD

Online

Leaders: Members of our Rio Texas Reconciling Ministries Team

Join us for LGBTQ+ Ally Training, a single-session workshop designed to help us practice creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ+ people. Together we'll learn practical skills for becoming intentional allies – building understanding, comfort, and confidence in how we show up for others. If you are newer to the conversation, this session will introduce common language and terms as well as answer many of your questions; if you already have experience, it will deepen your awareness and practice.

This 1.5-hour training on Zoom uses the nationally recognized Safe Zone Project curriculum. This course is open to anyone in our conference, and all are welcome.

Dates are being finalized. Please email [Shelley@stjohnsaustin.org](mailto:Shelley@stjohnsaustin.org) for more information.

## UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH CIRCLES

Welcome to a sisterhood of Christian purpose, discipleship, and fun!

Our president until January 2026 is Cathy Barton and Vice-President is Julie Peckham.

Feel free to reach us at our emails with any questions you might have about our organization (catherineabarton2@gmail.com or jpeckham@hotmail.com).

### MIRIAM CIRCLE

This circle meets twice a month, once in the daytime and once in the evening. The co-chairpersons are Karen Ann Norris, Pat Tippie, and Carolyn Boyle. Carolyn Boyle and Karen Ann Norris send out our unit newsletter. The Miriam continues its circle outreach with the Lockhart Women's Prison, letters to those who are homebound, and involvement with Texas Impact, the legislative lobbyist group here in Texas for Women's and Children's health and education issues. If you would like to drop in on a meeting, please contact Frances Pierson, fapierson1949@gmail.com, Pat pbtip@netzero.com, and Carolyn Boyle at cboyleaust@aol.com

### HANNAH CIRCLE

This circle meets on the second Tuesday of each month from 10:30 to noon at the front room of 5906 Wynona. The co-chairpersons are Emma Lea Mayton and Carolyn Beaird. They also keep in regular email contact with newsletters and events. You may reach Emma Lea at emayton@gmail.com and Carolyn at carolyn@rbeaird.com.

### ANNA CIRCLE

This circle meets the second Tuesday evening of each month at seven p.m. at the Youth House on the corner of 5908 Wynona and with a topical program for working women and retired women. Co-chairs of this circle are Joanne Tata at jtata1959@gmail.com and Donna Dennis at omadkd@msn.com.

Each circle has its own unique gathering of talented women. We have quarterly service projects throughout the year to continue our mission to support women and children and need. We are glad you are seeking to know us better, and we will do our best to stay in touch with you.

## DAY OF DISCOVERY - HOSTED BY UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH

Saturday, November 8

The Day of Discovery features classes by enthusiastic teachers who have expertise to share. Join us on November 8 for morning and/or afternoon classes. There will be classes available for everyone 8 and over, as well as childcare and activities for little ones. A light lunch will be available. In addition to finding new talents and knowledge, you can enjoy fellowship and fun. This event is a fundraiser for the United Women in Faith, and all proceeds will support causes to benefit women and children locally, nationally, and internationally.

### Here are the classes you can choose from:

- Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain, led by Emma Lea Mayton
- Urban Sketching, led by Cathy Barton
- Bread Baking, led by Carolyn Beaird and Katie McKenna
- Gentle Exercise/Lifestyle Coaching, led by Rev. Lynn Barton
- Native Plants and Pollinators with a Mushroom Bonus, led by Jane Bost and Sheila Weekly
- Introduction to Crochet, led by Jennifer Collins
- Play the Ukelele, led by Shelly Bass
- Making Edible Gifts, led by Julie Peckham
- Tie Dye T-shirts, led by Julie Smith
- Calligraphy 101, led by Mitch Smith
- Sumi-E Japanese Brush Painting, led by Emma Lee Mayton



Registration coming soon.



## **MEN'S COVENANT GROUP**

Gather at Jim's at Burnet and 183 for breakfast, fellowship, prayer, study, and discussion. Every Friday at 7:00 - 8:00am.

Contact Paul Mollenhauer at [pcmollenhauer@gmail.com](mailto:pcmollenhauer@gmail.com) for more information.

## **VETERAN'S GROUP**

Veterans gather to share stories and connect with one another across different decades of service. We meet on the first Wednesday of each month at 6:00 pm at El Mercado on Burnet Road for supper and community.

Contact Al Lindsey at [alind88@gmail.com](mailto:alind88@gmail.com) for more information.

## **SISTERHOOD OF STORYTELLING**

The Saint John's Storytelling Sisterhood meets every Thursday at 10:00am at Susie Brown's home. We write our memories during the week and share with our group at the meeting. Our purpose is about fellowship, providing a safe space and listening with love. Please join us. Susie can be reached at 972-816-1372 for text or call or [brownsudan@att.net](mailto:brownsudan@att.net).

## **THREADERS**

The Saint John's Threaders are people who are passionate about knit and/or crochet, who share their enthusiasm for the various fiber arts, and who support church ministries such as Congregational Care by making prayer blankets and shawls or hats for the homeless.

Meets in the church library twice a month on:

Second Thursdays 6:30 – 8:00 pm

Fourth Thursdays 1:30 – 3:00 pm

## **30S & 40S WOMEN'S GATHERING**

Join us the first Thursday of each month – sometimes for lunch, sometimes for dinner – for a relaxed time of connection and conversation. This informal gathering is a great opportunity to connect and support one another.

Contact Hilary@[stjohnsaustin.org](http://stjohnsaustin.org) for details.

## **YOUNG ADULT DINNER & COOKING NIGHT**

If you're between 18 and 30, come join us for a fun, relaxed evening in the kitchen! We'll prepare dinner together with guidance from an experienced chef in a low-stress, hands-on way. No cooking experience required – just come ready to chop, stir, and enjoy. Afterward, we'll share the meal we've created and enjoy meaningful time together – a chance to connect, learn some new cooking skills, build friendships, and be part of community with peers.

Dates are in the works. Email [Shelley@stjohnsaustin.org](mailto:Shelley@stjohnsaustin.org) for info.

## **JOY SENIOR ADULT MINISTRIES**

In JOY, our senior adults enjoy fun, food, and fellowship together, gathering for regularly scheduled outings around town, Lunch Bunch meals, movie days, and more! Join us for all of the JOY activities or pick and choose based on what's most interesting to you!

Contact [katie@stjohnsaustin.org](mailto:katie@stjohnsaustin.org) for more information.

# **SUNDAY MORNING FOR ADULTS AT 10:00AM**

## **JOURNEY CLASS**

Our Young Adult and Journey Sunday School classes have combined to create something new. Gather together for community, study, and discussion.

Led by Rev. Randy Knighten.

During construction, this group meets in the Youth House across the street at 5908 Wynona,

## **OPEN CIRCLE SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS**

Open Circle is for adults who seek to grow spiritually in a loving, supportive small group. As its name states, Open Circle is OPEN to everyone. We have members of all ages and life stages, from 40s on up. We generally follow the Bread for Our Journey curriculum that expands on the themes from worship each Sunday and provides thoughtful and inclusive material for lively and engaging discussions. As the spirit moves among us, our discussions cover the challenges of life, mission and ministry in our world, and personal testimony about spiritual growth. No materials or preparation for class is needed. You can benefit just by attending, listening, and joining the discussion as you are comfortable. This class does not expect you to attend every week - just come when you can. We rejoice when periodic attendees and visitors are in our midst! Shari Holland.

During construction, this group meets in the Chapel downstairs in the main building.

## **PRIDE+**

Pride+ is a safe, affirming group for LGBTQ+ individuals, their families, and allies. Whether you're seeking meaningful friendships, spiritual growth, or a place to share joy and laughter, Pride+ is here for you. Come join us during the Sunday school hour for refreshments, meditation and sharing our stories. You will be welcomed, loved, and celebrated!

During construction, this group meets across the street at 5906 Wynona.

## **SEEKERS SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS**

This class primarily consists of adults aged 50 and above, including both single and married individuals, as well as people at various stages of their faith journey. Our goal is to provide a warm, casual environment where relationships can be developed and spirits can be nourished. All classes are available both in person and on Zoom. Our curriculum is based on the works of a variety of authors on a wide range of topics, including both biblical studies and current social issues. A rotation of volunteer class members leads lessons, which generally include a great deal of class discussion.

To build community, several social events are held each year. A weekly newsletter is provided to keep you up to date when you can't make it to class; a class directory is maintained to provide easy access to member contact information. The class supports various local, national, and international mission activities and also offers local volunteer service opportunities.

We meet in the Fellowship Hall downstairs in the main building,

## **WESLEY SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS**

The Wesley Class engages in Bible Study each Sunday. A book of the bible is selected for study in detail. Modern commentary sources are used to compile the lessons. We alternate between Old and New Testament books. The study of each book may take several weeks to complete. We have discussions after the lesson is presented regarding relevance to modern daily life.

Led by Roy Walker. During construction, this group meets in the Library - Room 211 upstairs in the main building and online.



## CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

Children are a vital part of our community! Our nursery (ages 0–3) is staffed by trained caregivers, and children of all ages are welcome in worship with activity kits, Children's Time, Communion, and more.

Kids can also take part in engaging programs: During a time in worship, our Second Story time expands on the worship lesson or theme of the day. During the 10:00 hour, children ages 4 through 3rd grade are invited to join us for engaging, faith-filled experiences. And the whole family can gather throughout the year for Family Breakfast and activities, building community as children grow in faith and friendship.

Our Agape (4th and 5th grades) for Bible learning on Sunday mornings at 10:00am and fun activities monthly on Sunday afternoons.

For our schedule and to receive our children's ministry newsletter, please visit [bit.ly/sjfamilynews](http://bit.ly/sjfamilynews) or contact [isabella@stjohnsaustin.org](mailto:isabella@stjohnsaustin.org) for more information.

## PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Parenting little ones can be joyful, exhausting, and everything in between – and it's better when we don't do it alone. Our Parents with Young Children group gathers to share life, laughter, and encouragement while building connections with others in the same stage of life. Come as you are, find support, and make space for friendships that grow alongside your family.

Contact Cathy and Lynn Barton at [lynnbarton1@gmail.com](mailto:lynnbarton1@gmail.com) for more information and dates of our next gathering.

## YOUTH MINISTRY

At Saint John's, our youth ministry is a place where students can grow in faith, build lasting friendships, and explore what it means to follow Christ together.

Nearly every Sunday afternoon, our youth gather in the Youth House for fun activities, games, special events, a brief reflection time together, and more. We'd love to have you join us!

Sign up at [bit.ly/sjyouthnews](http://bit.ly/sjyouthnews) to receive our newsletters for details. Contact [isabella@stjohnsaustin.org](mailto:isabella@stjohnsaustin.org) for more information.

## SAINT JOHN'S LIBRARY

Our Library is full of books to expand your understanding, to listen to new voices, and learn something new!

Come browse and check out books in Room 211 on Sunday mornings until 12:30pm or search our collection online at [stjohnsaustin.org](http://stjohnsaustin.org). The Library is under the Resources link.

Questions about the Library? please contact Jaci Walker at [jgwalker4@gmail.com](mailto:jgwalker4@gmail.com).

