



2025-26

**MID-YEAR
NEWSLETTER**



MISSION STATEMENT

*Saint Thomas' Episcopal School
forms honorable men and women
through a classical education
grounded in a Christ-centered
worldview.*



CORE VALUES

Christian Faith

Discipline

Excellence

Honor

Love

Respect



Dear STE Community,

As we reach the midpoint of the school year, I am grateful for the extraordinary momentum that has carried our community forward. When this school year began, we identified four major initiatives to guide our work: improving school culture, advancing academic excellence, recommitting to our sacred purpose, and strengthening communication. I am pleased to share that, thanks to the dedication of our faculty, staff, families, and students, we have made remarkable progress on each front.

First, we set out to strengthen and elevate our school culture.

This fall, we introduced a new Dean of Students to reinforce expectations, provide consistent support to students, and foster an environment characterized by courtesy, accountability, and joy. The results are already visible: improved decorum, heightened engagement through our House System, and an overall rise in the warmth and spirit that make STE such a distinctive place.

Second, we focused on advancing academics and extracurricular programs.

Our faculty have expanded the curriculum with new electives, reintroduced our orchestra program, and adopted MAP Growth assessments to measure student learning and guide instruction. These developments ensure that our classical program remains both rigorous and responsive to the needs of our students. We also engaged an external consultant to review our athletic program and help us design a plan for its next stage of development.

Third, we recommitted ourselves to our sacred purpose.

Worship remains at the heart of who we are. Daily chapel services, weekly Scripture memorization, and a culture grounded in faith continue to shape the minds and hearts of our students. This year, thanks to the leadership of the Rector and Chaplain, we have taken deliberate steps to deepen reverence, strengthen our liturgical life, and remind our students—and ourselves—of the sacred mission that animates this school.

Fourth, we prioritized communication and transparency.

From weekly updates to monthly focus groups to increased visibility across campus, we have been intentional about inviting our community into the life and future of the school. These efforts have strengthened trust and partnership, and we will continue to build on them in the months ahead. We hope this newsletter will become a biannual magazine showcasing the life of the school and fostering connection among our alumni.

Underlying all of this has been a surge of generosity and support. Together, we have raised a record amount of funding this year—resources that are already enhancing the student experience, upgrading facilities, and expanding professional development opportunities for our faculty. For example, we are sending five of our teachers to the prestigious summer institute at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, where they will study alongside some of the nation's finest educators. Your gift to the Saint Thomas' Fund makes that possible.

Looking ahead to early 2026, we eagerly anticipate sharing STE's new five-year strategic plan—one that will propel us toward greater mission faithfulness, programmatic excellence, financial sustainability, and an exciting capital campaign to improve our facilities. Even before reaching those lofty goals, we expect to revamp our lunch program over the summer and expand our teaching faculty by the start of the 2026–27 academic year, adding foreign language in Lower School and several new faculty and courses in Middle and Upper School.

As we enter the Christmas season, we remember the angel's proclamation: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). I am grateful for the dedication of our faculty, the enthusiasm of our students, and the steadfast support of our parents, grandparents, board, alumni, and friends. The work we are undertaking together is already bearing fruit, and I am confident that the months ahead will feature continued growth, joy, and achievement.

Thank you for your partnership. Wishing you and your loved ones a joyful Christmas and a blessed New Year.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Seraphim Danckaert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

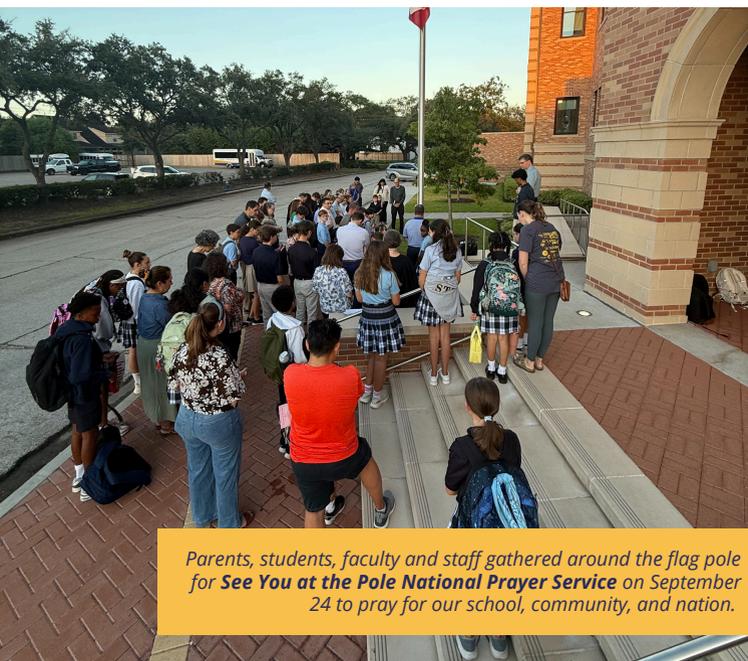
Seraphim Danckaert
Headmaster
Saint Thomas' Episcopal School



Alex Pavlovic '28 made STE history as the first student to win the prestigious Pipe Idol competition in Glasgow. We're incredibly proud of his achievement!



*On the **first day of school**, Mr. Danckaert greeted each student with a handshake and a popsicle to kick off the year!*



*Parents, students, faculty and staff gathered around the flag pole for **See You at the Pole National Prayer Service** on September 24 to pray for our school, community, and nation.*



*Thank you to our incredible community and generous donors—our **Spaghetti Supper**, held on September 13, welcomed 845 guests and raised **\$18,361** to support STE!*



*Our Saints Varsity Volleyball team played with passion and purpose at the annual **Pink Out** game on October 2, honoring **STE's breast cancer survivors** and celebrating their incredible strength and resilience.*



*This fall, universities including **New York University, Southern Methodist University, WashU in Saint Louis**, and others visited campus to connect with students over lunch and share information about their programs and opportunities.*



Our **Robotics** team is hard at work preparing for an exciting competition season ahead! This year, they'll host four on-campus meets, welcoming teams from across Houston to put their skills to the test. Eight students will travel to Arizona for an International STEM Conference in December.



STE Theatre delivered a captivating production of *Jane Eyre*, showcasing the incredible talent and dedication of our students. Congratulations to the cast and crew on an outstanding performance!



Thanks to an STE parent, Dr. Xi Chen, three of our seniors received a special invitation to attend a symposium on October 24 with five **Nobel Laureates** from MD Anderson, Harvard, MIT, and Stanford.



Our **Fall Fair** fun continued with classic games like the Duck Pond, where smiles, splashes, and prizes made every turn a win! Thanks to the support of our STE community, we raised **\$28,600** at Fall Fair!



Our STE community joined together for a schoolwide **Operation Christmas Child** initiative, packing boxes with gifts and notes for children around the world. This meaningful tradition spreads joy and God's love far beyond our campus.



CAMP OLYMPIA

6th Grade Trip

For the past three years, students start their Middle School experience with an overnight trip to promote fellowship and learning.



CAMP BUCKNER

9th Grade Retreat

This year, we started a new tradition where students begin their Upper School experience with a retreat focused on our core values.





NAVY VS. GOLD HIGHLAND GAMES

Our third annual Highland Games where 8th-12th graders compete for glory and house points through many competitions such as tug of war, capture the flag, and dodgeball.



Alex Pavlovic '28, Mihir Zambre '26, Nicholas Bowden '27, and Andrew Zhao '28 performed with the Alumni Pipe Band at the **World Pipe Band Championships** in Glasgow, Scotland, over the summer, marking a historic moment for STE at the highest level of competition.



Middle School Boys Cross Country team was 2025 GHAC District Runner-Up, with **Thomas Larsson '30** taking first place and earning First Team All-District Honors.



Congratulations to our National Merit Semifinalists, **Ethan Leger '26** and **Zohaib Randhawa '26**, and our National Merit Commended Students, **Mihir Zambre '26**, **Ashwin Naik '26**, **Runo Mukoro '26**, and **Ethan Wang '26**, for their outstanding academic achievement!



In July, the **STE Choir** completed its first international residency at **Wells Cathedral** in England, also performing in Amsterdam and exploring historic sites across the UK. It was an unforgettable time of music, travel, and enrichment for our students and singers.



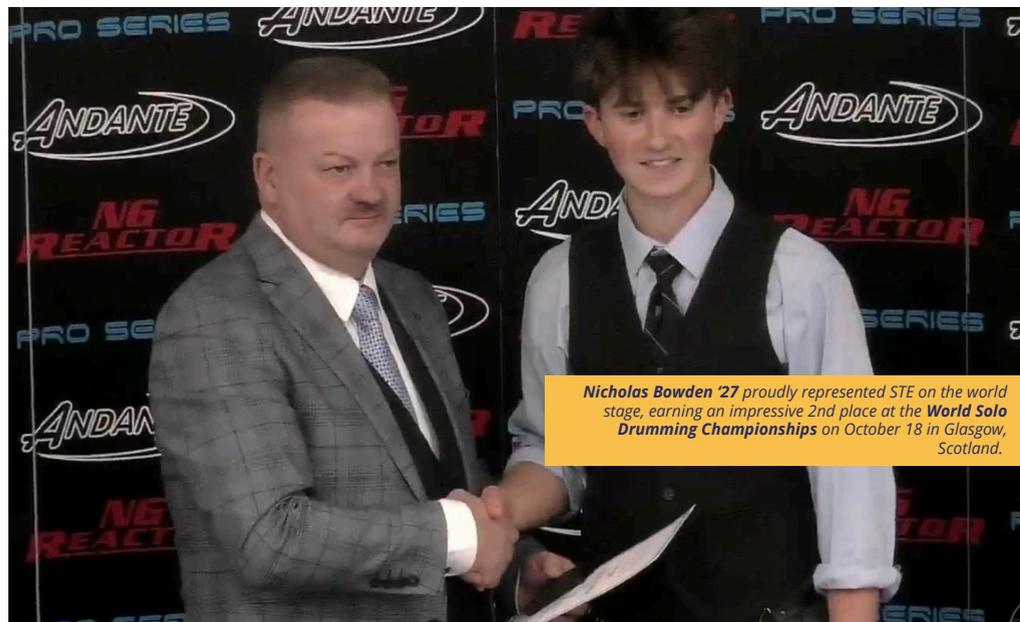
Varsity Cross Country raced at the TAPPS State Championships, with the Mens team placing 8th and Rhensler Hubbard '28 earning All-State Honors!



Varsity Volleyball advanced to the TAPPS 4A Bi-District Playoffs. We're proud of their hard work, growth, and teamwork this season!



Our **Varsity Basketball** season is underway, and we're aiming to keep our Final Four tradition alive!



Nicholas Bowden '27 proudly represented STE on the world stage, earning an impressive 2nd place at the **World Solo Drumming Championships** on October 18 in Glasgow, Scotland.



STE Highland Dancers brought home a total of over 75 medals and ribbons, plus twelve trophies at the **Salado Highland Games** on November 7-9.



We hosted around 250 grandparents for **Grandparents and Special Friends Day** on November 21, where they enjoyed breakfast, Chapel, Highland Dancing, Pipe Band, and vocal performances by our students.



Thank you to all our incredible **Fall Fair** volunteers! Your time, energy, and enthusiasm made this year's event a wonderful success—we couldn't have done it without you!



Each month, Mr. Danckaert hosts **focus groups** during lunch with student leaders in Middle and Upper School.



Huge thanks to our awesome faculty chaperones for making the **9th Grade Retreat** unforgettable! We're grateful for their guidance, energy, and care throughout the trip.



Our **Fall Fair** décor brought all the cozy vibes—colorful, creative, and the perfect backdrop for a fun-filled day!



This year, we proudly introduced our brand-new **STE Pom Team**—bringing energy, spirit, and spark to every STE event!



First Graders prepared a presentation and decorated a pumpkin inspired by their favorite book.



Third Graders stepped back in time on their field trip to **George Ranch**—learning, exploring, and experiencing Texas history firsthand!



Congratulations to our classes who reached 90% participation for the **Saint Thomas' Fund**. We celebrated with an ice cream sundae party on November 20!



The Tartan Society

The Tartan Society: Leadership Giving that Strengthens STE

The Tartan Society recognizes leadership-level donors to the Saint Thomas' Fund. With five levels of giving beginning at \$1,000, each tier offers meaningful benefits designed to honor and celebrate the generosity of our supporters. Now in its second year, the Tartan Society continues to gain remarkable momentum thanks to the exceptional engagement of our community.

This fall, we hosted six Tartan Society House Parties, warm, intimate gatherings that allowed STE families to connect more deeply with our vision for the 2025–2026 school year. These events have played a tremendous role in strengthening our culture of philanthropy and fostering a shared commitment to our mission.

To date, nearly 170 households have given or pledged close to \$500,000—a 59% increase in participating households and a 75% increase in total giving compared to last year. This level of support is extraordinary and speaks volumes about the confidence our community has in the future.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our gracious hosts:

Cettina & Thomas Halsey
Suzanne & Wayne Knupp

Ann & Tony Loayza
Katherine & Jon Palmer

Kelly & Jared Cmaidalka
Rob Scholl

Your hospitality and dedication have made this year's success possible. Thank you! Please contact Carla Elliott at elliott.carla@stes.org if you would like to participate.





It's been a lot of fun growing our Upper School Legacy Colors into a full K-12 House System. Every student has now been sorted into House Navy or House Gold, and they're competing as individuals, as homerooms, and as part of their larger house community. We're proud to share that students have already logged over 1,900 service hours, along with several campus competitions that have helped make the House System the lens through which our campus life shines.

Chris Horton

Dean of Students

Parent of Lyndon '33 and Barrett '35



Why do I give? I came to this school twelve years ago in a different financial position that I'm in now. I saw that the school thrived, in part, due to the generous donations of families who were here before me. My memories hold names and faces of people ahead of me that donated both their time and money to the school. I told myself that, when my time came, I would do my part. I give as a promise kept to the families who came before me. I give as an example to families who come behind me. I give because I love this school.

Tony Loayza

Saint Thomas' Fund Donor
Parent of Ben '29 and Ellie '32



This year, 46 Upper School students have stepped up to mentor and tutor young students after school each week. Students work together on homework, organization, and study skills. Families consistently praise the impact. This program is building confidence, strengthening skills, and connecting our students in powerful ways."

Elizabeth Schwartz

Director of the Center for Academic Excellence

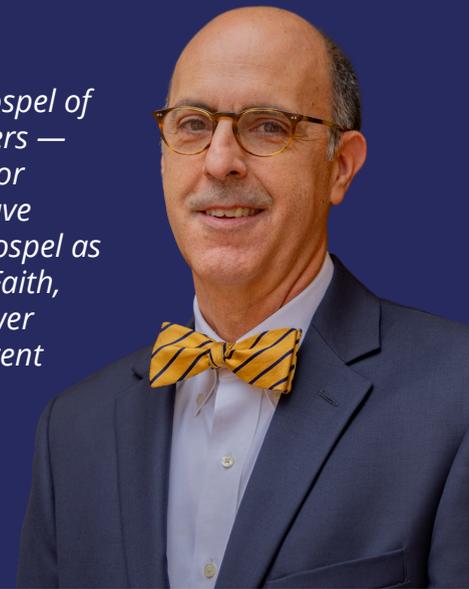
Parent of Olivia '17, Emily '19, and Kathryn '20





An excellent array of Senior readers have been taking us through the Gospel of Mark, and portions of Matthew, in Chapel this Fall. Guest Chapel speakers — including Brody Cooper of Blast & Cast Men's Ministries, Casey Garrett for Operation Christmas Child, and our Athletics Director, Chris Twine — have added their voices to the teaching and communication of hope in the Gospel as we endeavor to live with integrity by the values of the school: Christian Faith, Discipline, Honor, Love, Excellence, and Respect. Upper, Middle, and Lower School choristers have also enriched our daily worship by offering different settings of the canticles.

Geoff Simpson
School Chaplain,
Sacred Studies Teacher



My “why” for staying involved is simple: I want to help preserve the legacy of STE and ensure that current and future students benefit from the same transformative experience. I've never been more energized about the direction of the Alumni Association. More alumni are engaging in meaningful ways than ever, and the momentum is undeniable. From here, we can continue to grow and build a vibrant, connected community that honors our shared history and supports one another in the years ahead.

Anna Gryska '07
STE Alumni Board Vice President

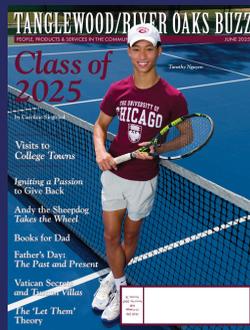


Volunteering at STE has been an important aspect of our family life since we became a part of the STE community over ten years ago. Being a parent volunteer gives me the opportunity to help curate the educational experience and school life that I want my children to have, while forming stronger bonds with other families within our community, and fostering a sense of duty towards service in my children. I love working with other STE parent volunteers to help support the school and give our children the unique, loving, and familial school experience we all want them to have.

Jennifer Fisher
Volunteer
Parent of Kieran '24, Sawyer '29, and Elizabeth '33



THE BUZZ MAGAZINES



This year, three of our students are serving as writers for The Buzz! Their creativity and talent help highlight the many great things happening in our community. Over the years, our school has also been featured on the cover multiple times — a wonderful reflection of the vibrant spirit at STE.

READY. SET. JET.



Upper School students have explored incredible destinations like Iceland, Greece, and Italy, gaining unforgettable cultural and educational experiences. Next summer, they'll continue their adventures with a trip through Western Europe!



Upcoming Events

January 8: Alumni College Panel

Recent graduates will return to campus to share advice on the transition to college with our Upper Schoolers.

February 14: Southern Soiree Gala & Auction

Don your best boots and bow ties and prepare for a rustically elegant night filled with grand cuisine, specialty cocktails, spirited bidding, and toe-tapping entertainment.



February 28: Saint Nicholas Concert

Students, church musicians, and professional artists will come together to perform Saint Nicholas, Op. 42—a dramatic and inspiring cantata by Benjamin Britten. Scored for choir, tenor soloist, strings, piano, organ, and percussion, this vivid retelling of the life of Saint Nicholas has captivated audiences since its 1948 premiere.

March 19: Sounds of Scotland

Join us for an unforgettable night as we celebrate our Scottish heritage in style. Sounds of Scotland is a one-night-only live performance of world-renowned bagpipers, drummers, and dancers. It's a celebration of Scottish music and dance unlike any outside of Scotland.



April 13-18: Eighth Grade Trip to Washington, DC

Our 8th graders are diving into American history and bringing their learning to life with an unforgettable trip to Washington, D.C. From monuments to museums, they're experiencing the stories they've studied firsthand!

April 24: Athletic Recognition and Awards Picnic

We're excited to come together for our Athletic Picnic as we celebrate and recognize our athletes for their outstanding seasons. Join us as we honor their hard work, dedication, and accomplishments!

April 25: STEam Fest

Mark your calendars and join us for our



STEam Fest

annual STEam Fest on Saturday, April 25—a day dedicated to exploring the wonders of Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics! Disconnect from devices and engage in interactive activities designed for all ages.

April 27: College Pennant Ceremony

A beloved STE tradition where seniors proudly line the halls with pennants representing all of the colleges and universities to which they've been accepted. Like last year, the Class of 2026 has applied to many prestigious universities.

May 6: Lower School Parents' Day Highland Dance Celebration

This time-honored tradition showcases the dance steps that our Kindergarten through Fourth Grade students have worked on this year.



May 25: European Trip

Upper School students and teachers will be traveling to London, Paris, the Alps, Munich, and Prague.



Senior student ambassador panel at our **Upper School Preview** program

Pictured from Left to Right: *Felicity Ramsey, Lanre Illuyomade, Sophia Jantzen, Pelayo Prado, Cameron Slagle, Mihir Zambre*



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