

October 4, 2026

"With fear, enthusiasm and trust"

Proverbs 3:1-12

St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Elgin

Fresh off the excitement and success of yesterday's Heritage Fest German Dinner, we gather to worship this morning with the opportunity to celebrate a major timeline event in our life together – 2009 – the church's physical move from downtown Elgin to Plank Road, and the construction of this building, our church home today.

For those of you who remember the move, I'm sure it feels like yesterday. And for those of us who never knew the building, for those of us who's St. Paul's identity is rooted here on Plank Road, we are grateful to you. Much like we are ALL grateful for our founding members who knew a building at Center Street that none of us knew.

We are lucky enough to have a note from the first pastor of St. Paul's Rev. Katerndahl. He wrote about those founding members and that first building, "Without fear and with enthusiasm they proceeded with the work of laying the cornerstone." I appreciate Pastor Katerndahl's positive and complimentary recollection, but the truth is...if we're really honest about the gravity of such a decision, the magnitude of the responsibility those founding members took on, then fear was most certainly part of the experience.

You don't need to have been part of the move from Division Street to Plank Road to understand the fear of a move – the unknown, the financial weight, the sentimental grief, the magnitude of responsibility; moves are part of life - moving out of your parents' house, moving into your first home, a next home, moving to a new city, downsizing and moving from a home you've lived in for decades. Moving is the end of something as much as it is beginning.

Fear is a normal and healthy response to the experience: of selling and moving and building. And faith and fear are not opposites. Faithfulness does not shame fear. Faithfulness does not require us to be fearless. Faithfulness is how we do hard, important things anyway. Like Bryan Sirchio sings, "Sometimes we just do it afraid... When the fear won't go away, we just do it anyway... We offer up a prayer, for a way to be brave, and just do it afraid."

We can be afraid and brave at the same time because our trust is in God. That is the lesson in Proverbs 3:1-12 that we read today. The good life is one dedicated to a trusting relationship with God. A good life is grounded in the belief that God has created and sustains all that we can see, hear, feel, and know. No matter what life throws our

way, we have the assurance that we are not alone—God watches over and keeps us. When we adhere to God's teachings, God gives us what we need to thrive. When we put our full faith in God, we can handle whatever happens. We can do hard things – even with anxiety or fear - because nothing happens outside of God's love and care.

That was the mindset of those who committed to the move in 2009. And that is the mindset we are called to in our life together today. How did the members of St. Paul's make the move to Plank Road? With some fear, much enthusiasm and trust in God; they made the move with a desire to love God and one another – neighbors known and yet unknown.

Making the move was scary, said Sandy Volkening, not knowing if we were going to pull off paying everything we owed. But I was excited, too. I remember everyone pitching in to help in any way they could.

Dale Volkening said the experience was rejuvenating. He was full of pride that our congregation could do this - raise enough money to build AND pay off the building. Dale's favorite memories were also Dan Heinrich and Chuck Smith's - moving the dangerously heavy church bell down from the old church steeple tower and painting the new church.

Dan remembers the anxiety of lowering that bell, loading it on a trailer and traveling with it to their farm shop to store. The journey of The Good Shepherd statute was memorable, too: Jesus traveling down the road on a flatbed from church to the farm shop to Fox Valley Fire & Safety to here on Plank Road.

Chuck Smith smiles when he remembers the painting. He explains, When we told the construction company that we wanted to paint the church ourselves, they had concerns about the job getting done on time by a group of volunteers. The St. Paul's congregation came through and surprised them. Over two long weekends volunteers primed and painted the entire interior of our new church home. Chuck says, one of my fondest memories was hearing a scream echo through the building from Dale when he stepped off a ladder into a 5 gallon bucket of paint.

Anne Heinrich says about the move, I felt excitement, nervousness and wonder throughout our moving journey. Every time I drove by our church as it was being built, my heart filled with love and wonder. This journey truly helped our congregation grow closer as friends and servants of God. From painting, staining, moving stored items into the new building, and decorating the sanctuary for the first time for Advent/Christmas, there were many hands there to help. The best moment was welcoming the new pastor Jill to mark the new chapter of our St Paul's journey!

Dave Thompson felt that same love and wonder. He recalls, It felt great being part of the move to our new home. It was also sad that we lost some members in the move. Our old church building was getting too expensive to maintain and took away from our mission of serving God. I hoped the new building would allow us to grow and expand our services to the community. The congregation was amazing. We had a 5 year capital campaign and raised more money from our small congregation than I thought possible. The congregation really stepped up and we were able to payoff over a million dollars in loans in 6 years. Also Karen Smith, Karen Westermen and Anne Heinrich worked very hard to make the Capital Campaign a success. The Building Committee also stepped up finding an interim home at Fox Valley Fire & Safety (Thank you Ken Volkening) while the new home was being built, plus the Building Committee was very diligent in keeping costs to a minimum while still meeting our needs and keeping the future growth in mind.

Karen Smith remembers that The sadness of closing the doors at 220 Division Street didn't disappear overnight. But, she says, as I became involved with the Capital Campaign, visiting with members in their homes I found new connections and relationships with people I had known for years. Together, we had a shared vision of faith, generosity and commitment to our future. We had bold faith and together we shifted our mindset from what we had to looking ahead and stepping into what was next for us. That first service in this building is a core memory for many members who were part of the move – Karen Smith says of that first service, It was one of those moments where everything, the hard work, uncertainty and hope comes all together at once. As we opened the doors that Sunday morning, it was almost hard to believe that the vision we prayed over, planned, and labored for was done. Having our children dressed as angels, shepherds and kings for their first Christmas pageant at Plank Road was the ultimate 'We're here, We made it' moment.

Polly Russell recalls, Once there was a 100% vote to move, the realization of our commitment was before us. The core group of congregants worked very long and hard. I think we definitely became very close, believing and relying on our faith and each other. We prayed, held meetings, visitations, never gave up that we could do this. God was the center of our strength and together we made it. Our love and belief never faltered. We looked forward to the future and what we could build, unlike those who left the church believing we would never succeed. So, WOW, I thank you, God!

Yes, Polly. Wow! We join you in giving thanks and praise to God and we also give thanks for the 2009 members who sit with us today. Thank you for your faithfulness and example. Together may we all continue to move into our future trusting in God and loving one another. Amen.