



## The Senior Pastor's Letter

*1 John 4:20-21*

*“Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”*

The words of 1 John 4:20-21 feel especially urgent today. We live in a world where division seems to multiply faster than compassion. Nations are navigating conflict, communities are wrestling with polarization, and families are feeling the strain of fear, uncertainty, and disagreement. Headlines remind us daily that humanity is struggling to remember its shared identity as God's beloved creation.

In this moment, Scripture speaks with clarity that is both comforting and convicting: love for God is inseparable from love for neighbor.

This is not a suggestion. It is not an optional spiritual practice. It is the commandment Jesus gave his disciples and the commandment the early church carried forward: if we claim to love God, we must love the people God has placed in front of us — especially when it is difficult.

As global tensions rise, many nations are preparing for major elections, and communities are feeling the weight of economic uncertainty and climate related challenges. These pressures often push people into camps, echo chambers, and hardened positions. Fear makes us suspicious. Anxiety makes us protective. And anger — stoked by rhetoric, algorithms, and exhaustion — tempts us to see enemies instead of siblings.

But the gospel calls us to a different way.

John reminds us that love is not an abstract feeling. It is a lived reality. It is the choice to see the image of God in the person across from us—whether that person is a refugee seeking safety, a neighbor with a different political sign in their yard, or a stranger whose story we do not yet know.

Every day is filled with global events that will shape the future—international gatherings, cultural milestones, and moments of national decision making. Christians have a sacred opportunity to witness to a love that does not depend on agreement, convenience, or comfort. We are called to embody a love that looks like Jesus: patient, courageous, boundary crossing, justice seeking, and self giving.

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## The Senior Pastor's Letter

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Loving our brothers and sisters does not mean ignoring injustice or avoiding hard conversations. It means entering those conversations with humility instead of hostility. It means advocating for peace while refusing to dehumanize. It means remembering that every person we encounter is someone Christ thought worth dying for.

In a world hungry for hope, the church's witness matters. When we love boldly, we proclaim a God who has not given up on humanity. When we love consistently, we become signs of the kingdom breaking into the present. When we love sacrificially, we reflect the One who first loved us.

As we move through this season of world-wide change, may we recommit ourselves to the commandment that defines our faith: to love God by loving one another. And may our love — imperfect but sincere — become a healing force in a world longing for grace.

~ Pastor Sheridan



## Welcoming Statement



We, the community of St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Kensington, welcome you in love. Jesus Christ accepts all, excluding none. So we welcome and affirm you who are gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer. We welcome you without regard to your sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, culture, race, ethnicity, ability, education, or age. We welcome you no matter your immigration, marital, or economic status. Wherever you are on your spiritual journey, we welcome and affirm you as one of God's children into our community of God's unbounded love. All are celebrated here and all are safe.

## SCAM Alert



**Scammers use public information (like the pastor's name) to create fake email addresses and pose as church leaders, asking for money or gift cards.**

**Contributions should only be made through [stpaulsk.org/giving](http://stpaulsk.org/giving) or sent to the church's physical address at 10401 Armory Avenue, Kensington MD 20895.**

## Contact Us

SENIOR PASTOR

Rev. Sheridan Allmond  
[sallmond@stpaulsk.org](mailto:sallmond@stpaulsk.org)  
301-933-7933 ext. 101

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& BOOKKEEPER

Ms. Tracey Furman  
[tfurman@stpaulsk.org](mailto:tfurman@stpaulsk.org)  
301-933-7933 ext. 106

Visit us online at  
[stpaulsk.org/community/  
meet-the-staff](http://stpaulsk.org/community/meet-the-staff)

## Office Hours

**Drop-in and Telephone Hours**  
**Monday - Thursday**  
**10:00 AM to 3:00 PM.**

To meet with specific clergy or staff, or for access to the building outside these hours, please make an appointment. Individual availability varies!

*St. Paul's is closed on federal holidays and the week between Christmas & New Year's.*

## Thoughts from Pastor Joey

Recently, I watched footage of clergy being led away in zip-ties by Capitol Police. It was an ecumenical and interfaith group. A whole parade of collars and crosses and stoles, sitting in the Hart Senate office building, refusing to move. They prayed and sang together. All of them chose, in that moment, that there are some things worth getting arrested for.

I've never been arrested, but I admire those who have that kind of courage. Watching those images reminded me of something essential about our faith that we sometimes are tempted to forget: the gospel has always been disruptive.

Jesus didn't get crucified for being nice.

He got crucified for turning over tables, for touching the untouchable, for saying that the last would be first and the mighty would be brought down from their thrones. The early church didn't grow because Christians were polite. They grew because they kept insisting, often at great cost, that there was a kingdom greater than Caesar's.

In Acts 5, when the religious authorities ordered the apostles to stop preaching about Jesus, Peter's response was simple and stunning: "We must obey God rather than any human authority." Not "we'll think about it." Not "let's form a committee." Just: there's a higher law, and we answer to that.

Now, I'm not suggesting we should all go get arrested (though if you feel called to that witness, I'll be glad to pray with you about it). But I am wondering: what would our faith look like if we took seriously the idea that following Jesus might actually cost us something? What if discipleship wasn't about being comfortable, but about being faithful?

The clergy in those Capitol office buildings weren't looking for personal attention. They were living out what they believe: when policies harm the vulnerable, when systems fail the powerless, when the arc of justice needs bending, faith can't stay silent. Sometimes faith has to show up. Sometimes it has to stand in the way. Sometimes it has to say, "Not on our watch."

And yet here's the beautiful thing: this kind of faith isn't about rage or despair. It's about hope. You don't risk arrest unless you believe things can change. You don't stand in a doorway unless you believe there's a door worth guarding.

So maybe the question isn't whether you're ready to get arrested. Maybe it's simpler: Where is God calling you to show up? What doorway is yours to stand in? As we prepare to enter Lent, these aren't abstract spiritual questions — they're invitations to practice. Because faith isn't just something we believe. It's something we do.

– Pastor Joey



Arrests at the Hart Building of the US Capitol, January 29, 2026. Photos from Instagram, L-R: United Church of Christ pastor Michael Neuroth, with UMC pastor Rachel Cornwell seated bottom left (photographer unknown); Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis, Presbyterian minister and co-chair of the Poor People's Campaign (photo by Gregg Brekke); Faith in Action clergy being told to disperse (photo by Bill Clark Photos).

## Worship Schedule and Lectionary Scripture

### Sunday, February 1

**St. Paul's closed due to winter weather**

*Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31*

Worship-at-Home available at [stpaulsk.org](http://stpaulsk.org)  
Rev. Sheridan Allmond, preaching

### Sunday, February 8 - Scouting Sunday

*Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-12*

9:00 AM Worship with Communion

10:30 AM Worship with Communion & Sanctuary Choir  
Rev. Joey Heath-Mason, preaching

### Sunday, February 15 - Transfiguration Sunday

*Scripture: Exodus 24:12-18*

9:00 AM Worship with Communion

10:30 AM Worship with Sanctuary Choir  
Rev. Sheridan Allmond, preaching

### Wednesday, February 18

#### Ash Wednesday

7:00 PM Worship at Concord-St. Andrews UMC  
5910 Goldsboro Road, Bethesda MD

### Sunday, February 22 - First Sunday in Lent

*Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11*

9:00 AM Worship with Communion

10:30 AM Worship with Sanctuary Choir  
Rev. Joey Heath-Mason, preaching

*Worship Livestream each Sunday at 10:30 AM*  
[stpaulsk.org/worship/worship-at-home](http://stpaulsk.org/worship/worship-at-home)

## Still Wednesday

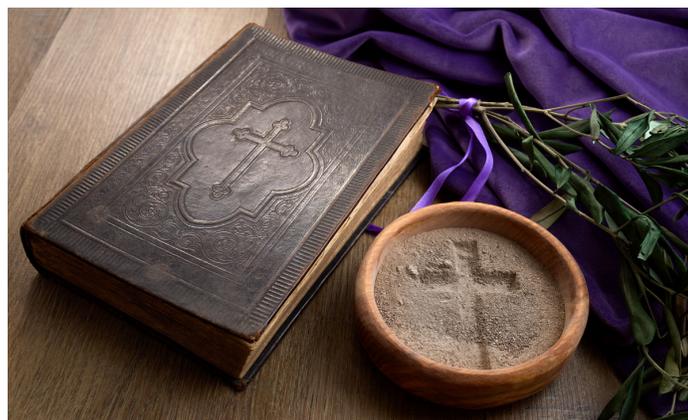
From Deanna Hodgson

I always look forward to Wednesdays. Still Wednesday, that is! Please come and check it out. We meet every Wednesday, 7:00-8:00 PM, in the Sanctuary or the Octagon.

The exact format changes as leaders rotate, but typically offers a guided time for poetry, scripture, music, or art with 20 minutes of silent prayer followed by journaling and optional sharing.

Come! Light a candle and welcome a quiet spirit.  
Questions? Contact Deanna Hodgson at [Deanna.hodgson@comcast.net](mailto:Deanna.hodgson@comcast.net)

## Ash Wednesday



### Drive-Up Ashes

Wednesday, Feb. 18

12:00-1:00 PM

Weather permitting, our pastors will offer the Imposition of Ashes curb-side at St. Paul's UMC, 12:00-1:00 PM in front of the church on Armory Avenue.

### Walk-In Ashes

Wednesday, Feb. 18

Walk-ins are welcome. Visit the office during regular office hours (10:00 AM to 3:00 PM) and the pastors will offer the imposition of ashes.

### Joint Worship Service

Wednesday, Feb. 18

7:00-8:00 PM

Join us as we begin the sacred season of Lent with an Ash Wednesday worship service. We will meet at Concord-St. Andrews UMC (5910 Goldsboro Road, Bethesda MD) for a joint service with our fellow Montgomery Southwest UMC Hub churches. This meaningful time of prayer, reflection, and the imposition of ashes with our local UMC community invites us to turn our hearts toward God and renew our spirits for the journey ahead. Come as you are, bring neighbors and friends.

## Lenten Study

As we enter the season of Lent, you are invited to deepen your experience by taking the Adult Ed class "UMC 101" with Pastor Joey (see page 8), or by following the Sanctified Art devotional, which will be available for pickup in the Narthex starting on Ash Wednesday.



## Sympathy

The St. Paul's community offers our deepest sympathies for those who have lost loved ones.



The family of  
**Angela Barr**

Mrs. Bette Eaton and family following the death of her husband

**Eric Eaton**

Mrs. Kim Longsworth and family following the death of her father

**Ronald Lee Lloyd**

Mr. Tom Pedersen and family following the death of his sister

**Karen DeYoung**

News regarding loss, sickness, or joy are all shared weekly in the Congregational Care list, available at the Welcome Desk each Sunday.

## Send a Card or Note

The following St. Paul's members are currently limited in their abilities to participate in the life of the church in-person, and appreciate your thoughts and expressions of care.

**Mr. & Mrs. John & Lyda Brookbank**  
Friends House  
17141 Friends House Rd.  
Sandy Spring, MD 20860

**Mrs. Helen Lidie**  
14809 Pennfield Circle  
#415  
Silver Spring MD 20906

**Mrs. Alicia Dandridge**  
9701 Veirs Dr.  
Rockville MD 20850

**Mrs. Erma McWilliams**  
Brookdale Olney Senior Living  
2611 Olney Sandy Spring Rd.  
#319  
Olney MD 20832

**Mrs. Edie Kirk**  
3616 Littledale Rd  
#109  
Kensington MD 20895

**Mr. Bob Neidecker**  
415 Russell Ave  
Apt. 418  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877

## Thank You, Thank You

We would like to thank everyone in the St. Paul's family for all the notes, cards, prayers, and well wishes that Mom has received. While she has not been able to attend church in person for quite some time, those note and cards have filled her heart and allowed her to feel connected with our church family. We are blessed to be part of such a caring community.

Blessings and thanks to all,  
– Donna Griffin and mother Helen Lidie

## Sanctuary Flowers

The flowers that brighten our Sanctuary on Sundays are sponsored by members and friends of St. Paul's. Flowers may be dedicated in honor or memory of a loved one, or in celebration. Use the flower chart in the office to reserve a date. Then, fill out a yellow form with the dedication info. The cost is \$45 and can be paid by check made out to St. Paul's UMC with "flowers" in the memo line, or pay by credit card using the Miscellaneous option at [stpaulsk.org/giving](http://stpaulsk.org/giving)



Paul & Sarah Beck  
welcome new baby  
grandson

**Russell  
Beck-Naylor**

son of  
Lauren Beck & James Naylor



## Marvin Mills in Recital at the National Cathedral

Sunday, February 22, 2026, 2:00 P.M.

Washington National Cathedral (3101 Wisconsin Ave NW, Washington, DC)

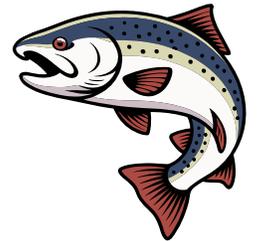
Washington National Cathedral presents Marvin Mills in recital. This will be the fourth time the Cathedral has hosted him since 1989, including 1995 and 2002. He has also appeared at the Cathedral as continuo artist for the Cathedral Choral Society and Howard University Choir's 1985 Bach/Scarlatti/Handel 300th Anniversary Concert and as music director/pianist of the National Spiritual Ensemble. The organ recital is free, open to the public, and will be live-streamed.

<https://cathedral.org/music/concerts-recitals/>

## Fish for Hunger Ministry

St. Paul's signature ministry currently serves 160 households in our ZIP code every month. We never ask our recipients about their employment, age, income, or family status. We simply welcome hungry neighbors and provide them with grocery resources.

**This month our donation focus is: tuna or salmon, in cans or pouches. These staple items have been hard to find lately through our bulk supply partners. Thank you for these donations, financial support, and for other non-perishables that go into the bins in the Narthex to help us feed our community!**



We rely on volunteers to unload, pack, bag, greet, carry, deliver...

Reach out to coordinator Mr. Pat Maloney at [hunger@stpaulsk.org](mailto:hunger@stpaulsk.org) to see the volunteer opportunities every month.

### Donations Needed Every Month

- peanut butter
- canned tuna or salmon
- canned chicken
- canned vegetables
- canned fruit or applesauce
- cooking oil
- boxed milk or oat milk

- cold cereal
- instant oatmeal
- soup
- rice
- beans
- pasta
- pasta sauce (plastic jars)

#### The "NO THANK YOU" Guide

- NO dirty or damaged containers
- NO items beyond their "best by" or "sell by" dates.
- NO glass. Glass breaks and creates a hazard (and a mess!) for volunteers and recipients.



## Community Pancake Breakfast

Saturday, Feb. 7, March 7, April 4, May 2, and June 6

Serving 8:00-10:30 AM

If you are suffering from "cabin fever" after being inside due to the winter weather, come be with friends at the St. Paul's community pancake breakfast, sponsored by the United Methodist Men. This month we'll have delicious buttermilk pancakes, fresh sage sausage, scrambled eggs, grits, fruit, coffee, tea, or hot chocolate, and a special treat of waffles with strawberries. Suggested donation at the door is \$8 per adult or \$20 for a family of 4.



## Silent Retreat

Sacred soil, where you are invited to deepen your relationship with God. No need to travel very far. Kenzie Raulin is leading a silent retreat, Friday, April 17 through Sunday, April 19 at Dayspring Silent Retreat Center in Germantown. If you are wondering what a silent retreat is like, check out <https://dayspringretreat.org/> You can also register for this event through the site. Dayspring also offers Quiet Days and Ember Days throughout the year. If you would like to ask any questions, text or give Kenzie a call at 301-237-1520 or email [kenzier@rcn.com](mailto:kenzier@rcn.com).



## Bible & Brews

5:00-6:00 PM

Schedule for 2026 (Subject to change)

- Sunday, February 22, 2026, 5:00-6:00 PM
- Sunday, March 8, 2026, 5:00-6:00 PM (New Date!)
- Saturday, April 18, 2026, 5:00-6:00 PM
- Saturday, May 16, 2026, 5:00-6:00 PM
- Saturday, June 13, 2026, 5:00-6:00 PM

All are welcome at this monthly gathering for interfaith conversations with Pastor Joey, Rabbi Adam, and friends from Temple Emanuel. Family-friendly meetings take place at a local Kensington small business, where you can purchase food or beverages as you like. Some of our regular meeting locations include Knowles Station Wine & Co., Stella Point Grille, and Babycat Brewery. Contact [joeyhm@stpaulsk.org](mailto:joeyhm@stpaulsk.org) to confirm this month's meeting location!



## Lydia Circle Sisters

Lydia Circle ladies typically meets at St. Paul's monthly for fellowship, service projects, and refreshments, usually on the first Wednesday of the month, 2:30-4:00 PM. All women interested are welcome! On special occasions, we may enjoy a holiday lunch or seasonal visit elsewhere. Please contact Susan Schwarz at [susan10748@aol.com](mailto:susan10748@aol.com) or 301-339-8242 for up-to-date information about Lydia Circle activities.



## Sanctuary Choir & Joyful Ringers

**Sanctuary Choir** – Most Sundays. Open to grade 7 and up and adult singers. We rehearse each week at 9:30 AM on Sundays in Room 211 and sing for the 10:30 service.

**Joyful Ringers** – Wednesdays, 7:00 PM. A handbell choir for adults that offers fun and fellowship! If you've never played bells, we can teach you! Contact Tom Pedersen: [tpedersen@stpaulsk.org](mailto:tpedersen@stpaulsk.org)



## Yarn Ministry

Mondays twice a month, 7:00-8:30 PM

Bring your crochet, knit, or other project and craft alongside friends in the Library at St. Paul's. The Yarn Ministry also sponsors the annual craft fair. Consider joining us! February 9 and 23; March 9 and 23; April 6 and 20; May 11 and 25. (No meetings June, July or August.) Contact Karen Codner for info: [KDC811@gmail.com](mailto:KDC811@gmail.com)

## Lenten Study: UMC 101

Sundays starting Feb. 22  
12:00-1:00 PM in Room 109

Pastor Joey will lead this 5-week adult study during Lent. This is the perfect class for new attenders, long-time members, and everyone interested in diving into what it means to be United Methodist. A light soup lunch will be served. Email Pastor Joey ([joeyhm@stpaulsk.org](mailto:joeyhm@stpaulsk.org)) to sign up.



## Taste & Sing

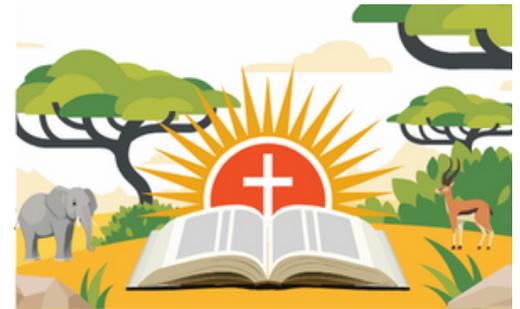
Tuesday, February 17  
12:00-1:30 PM in the Octagon

Come enjoy a casual time of food and song! With Tom Pedersen at the piano, we'll sing through some songs from the UM Hymnal - feel free to request your favorites. Then Erin Steele will guide us through a short program about a composer, lyricist, or theme, offering a deeper dive into the stories behind some of our worship songs. Our time together culminates with fellowship over a tasty lunch prepared by Ginny Hagberg. (\$5 donation)

## Sermon Safari

Wednesdays, 4:00-5:00 PM by Zoom

In this come-when-you-can, drop-in Zoom-based study, participants watch a video of a sermon and then discuss it together. Some of our sessions have featured sermons from such notable speakers as Diana Butler Bass, Senator Rev. Raphael Warnock, and Mariann Budde, Bishop of the National Cathedral. For more information or to receive the Zoom link, contact Dr. Meg Baker at [megbaker@verizon.net](mailto:megbaker@verizon.net).



## SPY

Check out [stpaulsk.org/community/youth](http://stpaulsk.org/community/youth) for the most up-to-date meeting schedule and activities for St. Paul's Youth in grades 6-12. St. Paul's Youth will join with youth from around the region for IGNITE, March 20-22, 2026 in Ocean City MD. IGNITE offers an exciting mix of worship, concerts, dynamic speakers, and youth-focused activities, including lots of games from Retreat & Camping Ministries and the Bishop's Q&A. Late registration is still available but don't delay! Contact Megan Montgomery for more info.

## Sunday School

Children attend worship with their families in the Sanctuary on the first Sunday of each month, and have Sunday School most other Sundays at 10:30 AM. Grades K-2 meet in Room 200 and Grades 3-5 meet in the Parlor. The Nursery is available for Pre-K and younger every Sunday. Parents and guardians should drop off at the classroom and pick up at the classroom immediately after worship. To join the teaching team, email Pastor Joey at [joeyhm@stpaulsk.org](mailto:joeyhm@stpaulsk.org).



## Lay Leader Reflections

*From Anne Dean, Lay Leader*

Star words are among my favorite times and traditions for us at St. Paul's. This year, I was blessed with Explore, very similar to a personal guiding principle of Exploration that I've had for years. The difference of Explore (verb) to Exploration (noun) is a nod from God, I have done the inquiry and can now act.

The Bible has insightful "Explore" references that one can bucket into these categories:

- Seeking God
- Nature & the Universe
- Faith-Based
- What to Avoid

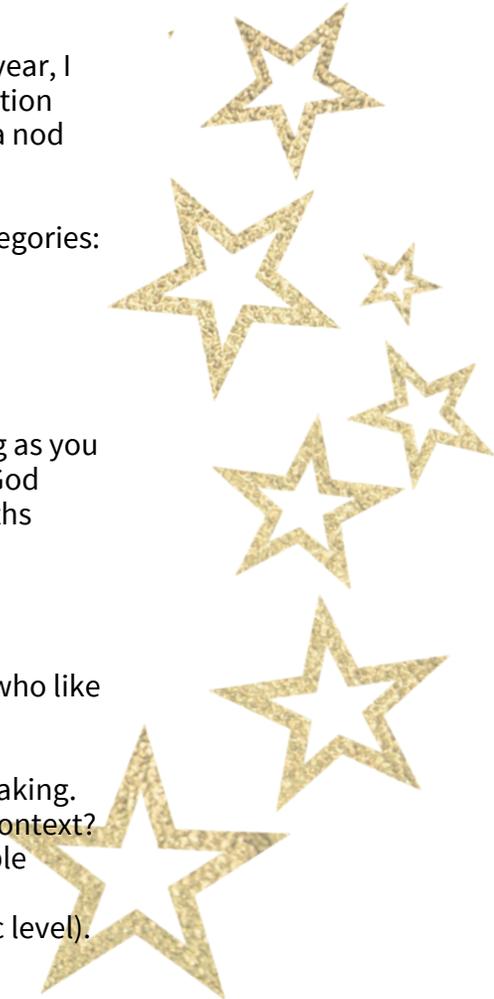
My favorites are in Proverbs. Proverbs 2 says to seek wisdom and understanding as you would hidden treasure, and there you will find God. Proverbs 3 says to lean on God with your whole heart and not your own understanding; God will make your paths straight.

What was your Star word? How are you engaging and wrestling with it?

Here are some initial ideas using scripture and theological reflection, for those who like study and prayer:

- **Scripture Search.** Look up where your word appears in the Bible (using a concordance, a site like biblegateway.com, or a Bible app). Note who is speaking. What is happening in the story? What does the word seem to mean in that context?
- **Multiple Translations.** Compare how the word is translated in different Bible versions. Does it shift meaning? What does that reveal?
- **Word Study.** Explore the original Hebrew or Greek meaning (even at a basic level). This can be especially rich for words like "peace," "grace," or "light."

More ideas will come next month!



## Bequest Plaque Dedications - Rescheduled

*From Mike Barnes, Trustees*

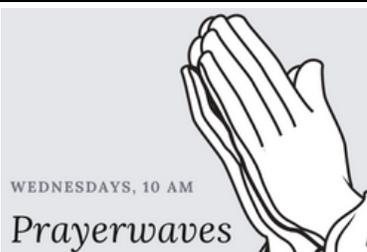
In recent years, St. Paul's has received bequests from the estates of seven members totalling about \$383,000. These bequests are designated to help our church upgrade accessibility, support our Hunger Ministry, fund education and Youth activities including mission work and scholarships, repair and replace the roof, and establish an emergency fund.

We will be installing plaques with the names of these donors, alongside the names of those who made bequests in previous years, on the northwest brick wall of the Sanctuary. We are grateful to be adding the names of Ida DeVierno, Jan Heins, Sarah & Jack Jenkins, Becky Little, Cliff Thompson, Margaret & Jeff Thurlow, and Margaret Wood.

Due to the snow and ice blanketing our region, we were unable to meet on our original date in January to dedicate the plaques and acknowledge the faithful donors. We have rescheduled the dedication for Sunday, February 22, 2026 during the 10:30 AM worship service.

## More Ways to Be Involved

Many groups meet regularly during the year, and there are many ways to get involved with ministries, outreach, and hospitality at St. Paul's. Here are some of the groups inviting you to join in ministry and fellowship.



*Wednesdays at 10:00 AM*

Prayerwaves meets each week by phone. We take turns lifting up the needs of the church, community, and the world. On Wednesday, dial 425-436-6326 a few minutes before 10:00 AM. Enter access code 774042 followed by the # sign. If you would like to receive the prayer list by email, please contact Erin Steele in the church office at [stpaulsunited@stpaulsk.org](mailto:stpaulsunited@stpaulsk.org).



This time for fellowship with drinks and snacks after worship occurs whenever a family, class, or groups offers to host. You might serve the ever-popular coffee and cookies... or it might be lemonade and cheese crackers, tea and tarts, cider and donuts, cocoa and candy canes... you decide! To host, simply add your name or group to the chart on the office bulletin board and take an instructions sheet (also available for download at [stpaulsk.org/community/calendar-events](http://stpaulsk.org/community/calendar-events)).



Would life feel better right now if you had someone to listen to your worries and cares? Stephen Ministers are there for you! Stephen Ministers have received special training to provide one-on-one Christian care to those who are experiencing challenging life events. To learn how you or someone you know can receive care – or how to become a Stephen Minister – contact Martha Lipscomb, Stephen Leader, at [mmlipscomb@verizon.net](mailto:mmlipscomb@verizon.net) or 301-518-1642.



Few things better demonstrate our hospitality than making sure all of our members and friends receive a warm welcome upon arrival at church, and that new Sunday morning visitors can get some simple questions answered! Please consider participating in St. Paul's Welcome Ministry. We are always looking for volunteers to cover the welcome table by the Sanctuary doors and guide people as they enter for worship. Families are invited to volunteer together!



St. Paul's makes every effort to reach out to those who are experiencing times of sickness, grief, change, or celebration by providing greeting cards each week. On typical Sundays, anyone can stop by the Welcome Desk to pick up a pre-addressed, pre-stamped card. You can write a personal note or simply sign the card and drop it in the mail. We know card recipients are truly thankful for the notes that come their way.

Want to send your own card later, or spend some time in prayer for our members and friends? Pick up a Congregational Care list at the welcome desk on Sunday mornings. Please note that the Congregational Care list is not exhaustive. For privacy reasons, St. Paul's only shares information if given permission to do so by the person(s) involved or an immediate family member. If you have information to share please contact Erin Steele in the church office at [stpaulsunited@stpaulsk.org](mailto:stpaulsunited@stpaulsk.org).



**SAM Leadership**

Church leaders at St. Paul's serve in a unified board known as the Simplified Accountability Model, or SAM. The SAM umbrella covers Ministry, Strategy, Accountability, and Leadership to guide such things as the church mission and ministry focus, finances, and personnel. SAM meets by Zoom and all meetings are open to the public. Contact the chairperson for 2026, Bill Stephens ([wtstephens@verizon.net](mailto:wtstephens@verizon.net)) for the meeting schedule and the Zoom link.

## Excerpt from the Bishops' Statement

“Our Social Principles are clear: *‘We reject governmental use of threats, extortion, unlawful detentions, extrajudicial killings, and other forms of coercion to silence political opponents and those objecting to unlawful or immoral government policies and practices.’* They further affirm that the church has both the right and the responsibility to educate and equip its members to be advocates for justice in the wider world (¶163D). This is a moment that calls for prayerful courage to speak against actions that are bringing harm to our neighbors.”

<https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/bishops-condemn-violence-in-minnesota-19590782>

## A Prayer in Troubled Times

By Rev. Joey Heath-Mason

Holy God, we come to you this day with many emotions and carrying heavy hearts. We are watching our neighbors torn from their homes and families. We are seeing journalists charged with crimes for bearing witness. We are witnessing children ripped from the only lives they've known. We are watching clergy arrested for acts of faith and justice. We have seen those sworn to protect instead bring harm, and we see no justice forthcoming. God, we dare to admit we are afraid. We don't know what comes next, and we don't know how to respond. So we turn to you, not because we have answers, but because we need strength for what's ahead.

God of the oppressed, we pray for our immigrant neighbors, for families torn apart, for children who don't understand why they can't go home. We pray for those living in fear of the knock on the door, those hiding, those already detained. Surround them with your presence. Send advocates and defenders. Raise up sanctuary and safety. Give them courage to face each day. God of the oppressed, hear our prayer.

God of justice, we pray for those who wield power in our nation. We pray that they would see the faces of those their policies harm. We pray that they would hear the cries of children separated from parents, the fear in communities under siege, the grief of families destroyed. Convict their hearts. Strip away their rationalizations. Give them no peace until they choose mercy over cruelty. And when they will not turn, raise up those who will resist them, who will stand in the way, who will say “no more.” God of justice, hear our prayer.

God of the prophets, we pray for your church. Give us courage to speak when silence would be easier. Give us creativity to shelter and protect. Give us resources to share with those in need. Give us bodies willing to stand in the gap. Forgive us when we choose comfort over faithfulness. Forgive us when we worship safety over justice. Make us the church that follows Jesus even when it costs us something. God of the prophets, hear our prayer.

God of endurance, we pray for ourselves. We confess we are tired before this fight has barely begun. We are tempted to look away, to protect ourselves from the weight of what we're witnessing. We wonder if our small acts matter against such large forces. Sustain us. Remind us that you have walked with your people through empire and exile before. Fill us with stubborn hope that refuses to believe cruelty gets the final word. Give us rest when we need it and fire when we falter. Help us find joy even in resistance, community even in struggle, and your presence especially in the wilderness. God of endurance, hear our prayer.

God of every moment, we also know that even amid crisis, ordinary life continues. Babies are being born and loved ones are dying. People are receiving diagnoses that terrify them and waiting for test results that will change everything. Relationships are fraying and healing. Jobs are lost and found. Anniversaries are celebrated and divorces finalized. God, hold space for all of it. Remind us that personal grief doesn't diminish because the world is breaking, and that tending to one another's intimate struggles is also holy work. Be present in hospital rooms and at kitchen tables, in moments of joy and in valleys of shadow. God of every moment, hear our prayer.

Holy God, we do not know what the coming days will bring, but we know we do not face them alone.

You are with the refugee and the resistor, with the truth-teller and the child torn from home, with all who cry out for justice. Move our hands and feet to be your hands and feet in this community. Give us voices that speak truth and hearts that choose love even when fear would be easier. Make us faithful. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.



# St. Paul's

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