

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2026

Season of Creation: Forest Sunday

Welcome to St. Paul's Lutheran Church!

During the Season of Creation, we join with millions around the world to celebrate in prayer and action our Gospel calling to protect the Earth that God has entrusted to our care. This Sunday we worship God with our siblings and partners in creation, the forest, reorienting ourselves with humility and joy. In our setting that still has old growth oaks as well newly planted saplings we celebrate among living trees and forest life.

*Words printed in **bold** are spoken by all. Visitors are invited to sign the guest registry in the Narthex or fill out a pew card and place it in the offering plate.*

THIS SERVICE IS LIVE STREAMED. TELL YOUR FRIENDS!

GATHERING

WELCOME

PRELUDE

Allemande from French Suite IV in Eb major

J.S. Bach

The assembly is invited to stand.

CALL TO WORSHIP

P: In the name of the Creator, the fountain of life, in the name of Christ ✠, the pulse of life, and in the name of the Spirit, the breath of life.

All: Amen. Holy! Holy! Holy! Earth is filled with God's presence.

P: Christ, we come into your presence today to worship in this sanctuary called Earth,

All: a planet filled with your presence: majestic in the forests, potent in the land, steadfast through the wilderness, resplendent with the rivers.

P: God, reveal yourself to us in this place, and show us your face in all creation.

All: Holy! Holy! Holy! Earth is filled with God's presence.

P: We invite the forests to worship the Creator of all with us:

All: giant oaks and hidden mushrooms, swaying ferns and cushions of moss!

P: We invite tall trees to celebrate life:

All: to lift green needles in the breeze and sing their oxygen into the air.

P: We call to the forest to sing in the night:

All: tree frogs and cicada choruses, screech owls and swirling bats!

P: We join with the fauna of the forest in praising God:

All: hawks and hummingbirds, creeping things and butterflies.

P: We celebrate the song of the forest!

All: Sing, forest, sing!

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✠, one God, who so loves the world and all who live in it. Amen. Let us confess our sin in the presence of God, Creation, and one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

P: Reconciling God,

All: we expect nature to serve our needs, and we have damaged it in the process. We trample every wild place and pollute your waters. We abuse your good Earth until it cries out in pain. Forgive us, loving God. Remind us of the covenant you made with the whole Earth. Nourish us so we can restore your awe-inspiring Creation. Amen.

P: Christ, the one who was buried into the heart of the Earth and then raised up to new life, forgives you all your sins. Freed from your burdens, be led by the Spirit to do God's healing work in the world. Amen.

All: Shalom! Shalom! Within us and all creation, shalom! in God's love.

GATHERING HYMN

Light Dawns on a Weary World

ELW 726

GREETING

P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy spirit be with you all.

All: And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

A: Let us pray.

Creating God, your name is written on every leaf, every bird, every river, every stone, every living being. We praise and worship you for the magnificence of your creation. Make us attentive to the wounds of the earth and willing to work for the healing of the whole creation, through Jesus Christ, Renewer, Redeemer and Lord.

All: Amen.

The assembly is invited to be seated.

WORD

FIRST READING: Genesis 2:4b-22

A reading from the Book of Genesis.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no vegetation of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground, ⁶but a stream would rise from the earth and water the whole face of the ground—⁷then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. ⁸And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

⁹Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil. ¹⁰ A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold, ¹² and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." ¹⁹ So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of the air and to every animal of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Word of God. Word of Life.

All: Thanks be to God.

PSALM 96:1-13 [Read responsively; congregation in bold]

¹Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.

**²Sing to the Lord, bless the name of the Lord;
proclaim God's salvation from day to day.**

³Declare God's glory among the nations
and God's wonders among all peoples.

**⁴For great is the Lord and greatly to be praised,
more to be feared than all gods.**

⁵As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols;
but you, O Lord, have made the heavens.

**⁶Majesty and magnificence are in your presence;
power and splendor are in your sanctuary.**

⁷Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples,
ascribe to the Lord honor and power.

**⁸Ascribe to the Lord the honor due the holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts of the Lord.**

⁹Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness;
tremble before the Lord, all the earth.

**¹⁰Tell it out among the nations: "The Lord is king!
The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved will judge the peoples
with equity."**

¹¹Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that is therein.

**¹²Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your coming, O Lord,
for you come to judge the earth.**

¹³You will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with your truth.

SECOND READING: Acts 17:22-28a

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷ God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'^[a] As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Word of God. Word of Life.

All: Thanks be to God.

The assembly is invited to stand for the reading of the Gospel.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia,
al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.
Repeat alleluia
Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of e - ter - nal life.

GOSPEL: John 3:1-16

The Holy Gospel according to John.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very

truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, O Christ.

Please be seated.

SERMON

Pr. Peg Otte

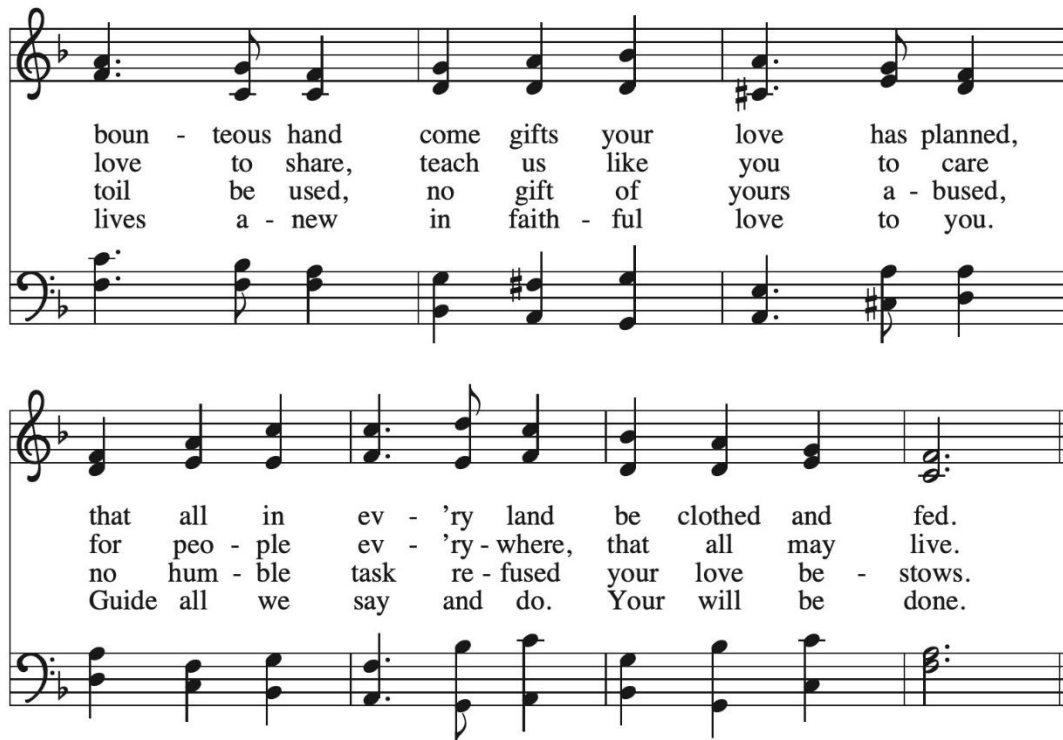
Please stand as you are able

HYMN OF THE DAY

God of the Fertile Fields

1 God of the fer - tile fields, sha - per of
 2 We would be stew - ards true, hold - ing in
 3 As grows the hid - den seed to fruit that
 4 God of the coun - try - side, dear to the

earth that yields our dai - ly bread: forth from your
 trust from you all that you give; help us in
 serves our need, so your reign grows. Let all our
 Christ who died to make us one: we pledge our



AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

A: Let us affirm our faith together:

All: We believe that God creates all things, renews all things and celebrates all things.

We believe Earth is a sanctuary, a sacred planet filled with God's presence, a home for us to share with our kin.

We believe that God became flesh and blood, became a part of Earth, a human being called Jesus the Christ, who lived and breathed and spoke among us, suffered and died on a cross, for all human beings and for all creation.

We believe that the risen Jesus is the Christ at the core of creation, reconciling all things to God, renewing all creation and filling the universe.

We believe the Spirit renews life in creation, groans in empathy with a suffering creation, and waits with us for the rebirth of creation.

We believe that with Christ we will rise, and with Christ we will celebrate a new creation

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

A: Blessed God, whose love calls the whole creation into covenant with you, and who puts in our hands responsibility for the care of the earth and its creatures: we pray for all to whom you have given life and being.

A period of silence is kept

A: For the well-being of the earth; for its resources of water, air, light, and soil, that they may be tended for the good of all creatures, we pray, Merciful God,

All: Keep your planet and people in peace.

PM: For all who shape public policies affecting the planet and its creatures, that they may consider wisely the well-being of all who come after us, we pray, Merciful God,

All: keep your planet and people in peace.

A: For all those engaged in conservation, in agriculture and ranching, in aquaculture and fishing, in mining and industry, and in forestry and timber-harvesting, that the health, fruitfulness, and beauty of the natural world may be sustained alongside human activity, we pray, Merciful God,

All: keep your planet and people in peace.

PM: For the creatures and the human beings of your world who are ill, or in danger, pain or special need, bringing before you this day those we name silently or aloud (*pause*), and for all who suffer from the unjust, violent, or wasteful use of the earth's resources or their devastation by war, that all may one day live in communities of justice and peace, we pray, Merciful God,

All: keep your planet and people in peace.

A: For the creatures and the people of the earth whose lives have contributed to the fruitful abundance of this planet, we pray Merciful God,

All: keep your planet and people in peace.

PM: Assured by your promise to hear us, we lay our prayers into the deep wellspring of your grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

PEACE

PM: Peace with yourself. Peace with Creation. Peace with one another. The peace of Christ be always with you.

All: And also with you.

The assembly is invited to be seated.

MEAL

THE OFFERING *An offering is gathered and the Table is set.*

MUSICAL OFFERING

May This Church Be like a Tree

Pablo D. Sosa

Rachel Blaustein, soprano; MacKenzie Minguillo, alto

arr. Kurt Westerberg

Please stand as you are able.

OFFERING PRAYER

A: Let us pray.

Loving God, we offer at your table the gifts of our hearts. Help us take heart in you and share freely of your love, so that all creation can taste your abundance. We ask this in the name of Jesus, through the Spirit abiding with us now and forever.

All: Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

P: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

P: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them to the Lord.

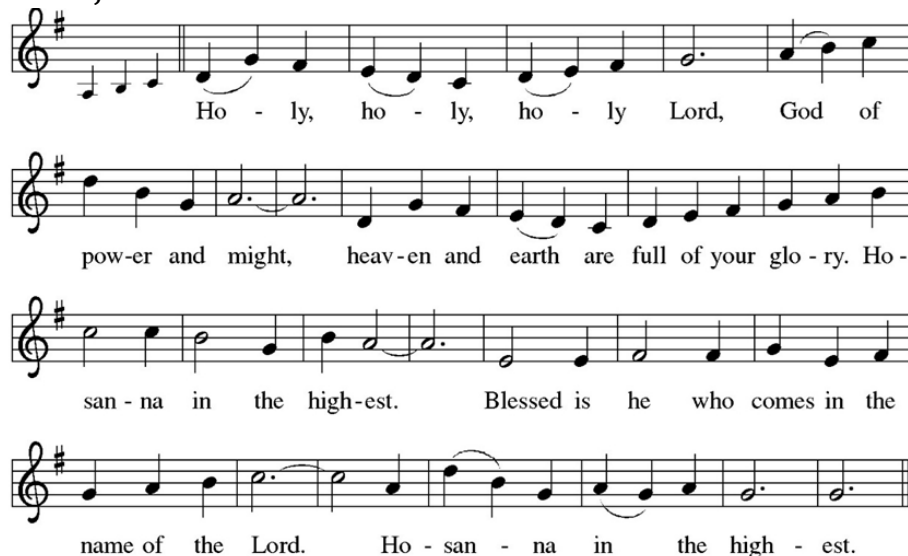
P: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

P: It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through your eternal Word, the Wisdom from on high by whom you created all things: our Savior, Jesus Christ. You laid the foundations of the world and enclosed the sea when it burst out of the womb. You brought forth all creatures of the earth and gave breath to humankind.

Wondrous are you, Holy One of Blessing; all you create is a sign of hope for our journey. And so as the morning stars sing your praises, with the heavenly beings and all creation, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY



EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

P: O God, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Over the eons your merciful might evolved our home, a fragile tree of life. Here by your wisdom are both life and death, growth and decay, the nest and the hunt, sunshine and storm, darkness and light. Sustained by these wonders, we creatures of dust join in the ancient song: The earth is full of your glory.

All: The earth is full of your glory.

P: O God, you took on our flesh in Jesus our healer. In Christ you bring life from death; we remember his cross, we laud his resurrection. Broken like bread, he enlivens our body. Outpoured like wine, he fills the earth with goodness. Receiving this mystery, we mortals sing our song: The earth is full of your glory.

All: The earth is full of your glory.

P: We praise you for the heart of Jesus, so filled with your love for this earth. In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Gathered around this table, we your children unite in this song: The earth is full of your glory.

All: The earth is full of your glory.

P: O God triune, you create the worlds, you uphold the living, you embrace the dead. Send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth. Strengthen us for our journey with this meal, the body and blood of Christ. Give us a future that trusts in you and cares for your earth. Empowered by your promises, we rise from our deaths to praise you again:
The earth is full of your glory.

All: The earth is full of your glory.

P: Amen, and amen.
All: Amen, and amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

P: Together as one body, we pray the prayer Jesus taught us.
All: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

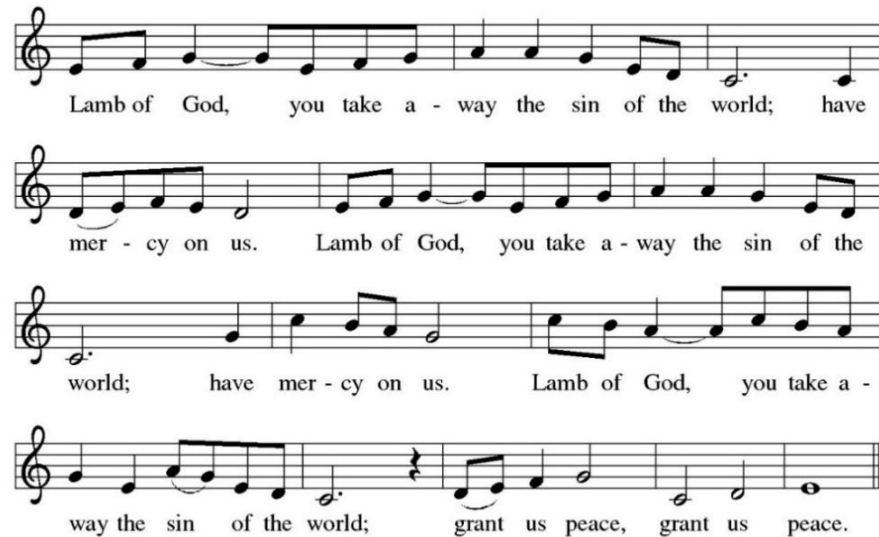
INVITATION TO COMMUNE

P: The gifts of creation for God's beloved creatures. Come and share.

	<u>DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION</u> <i>We will commune one side of the church at a time. Please come forward to receive the bread first. Gluten free wafers are available.</i> <i>You may choose a cup of red wine or white grape juice.</i> <i>Move to the side eat and drink.</i> <i>Place your empty cup in the tray provided.</i>
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All are welcome at Christ's Table. We believe Jesus is the host and the gifts of God are for everyone. Child-ren will be offered communion unless otherwise indicated by parents. The wine is red and grape juice is white.

LAMB OF GOD



COMMUNION HYMN

Tree of Life

ELW 334

Please stand as you are able.

TABLE BLESSING

P: Now may the power of Christ's body and blood reach deep into your heart, your mind, and your body to heal your wounds and, through your healing to all the earth. In Jesus' name,

All: Amen.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

A: Let us pray.

God of our salvation, we give you thanks for this meal that restores our souls, reconciles us to you, and strengthens us for the journey. Through the body and blood of your Son, may we become Christ's body in the world, bearing witness to your love for all creation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

All: Amen.

SENDING

Please be seated for the announcements.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The assembly is invited to stand.

SENDING BLESSING

P: God of the galaxies, God of the starburst and sunlit morning, God of the forest and ocean, God of the blooming desert and rolling grasslands, shine on us today and bless us ☩ with your presence.

All: Amen.

SENDING HYMN

Let All things Now Living

ELW 881

DISMISSAL

A: Go in peace. Flourish with creation.

All: Thanks be to God.

POST-WORSHIP SPEAKER

Mike Dombeck, former Director of the Federal Forest Service under President Bill Clinton, will speak after worship. Mike instigated the Forest Service's move from its primary focus of the supplier of timber and grazing land for the country to an open, public resource for recreation and renewal. Mike is currently the national point person to keep in effect the *Roadless Act*, which works to protect habitats and wilderness. Hear the story of how it came to be, what makes it vulnerable, what can be done now to protect our forests and how we can help.

GOD'S WORK OUR HANDS – Select one or more activities from below:

- Weeding of the gardens and landscape.
- Dusting and oiling of main doors, interior wood and altar.
- Hanging of 125th Anniversary Banners.
- Evanston Community Pantry Cleaning/Stocking. Off site.
- Lydia Home Volunteer (last year helped with Arts & Crafts).
- Lutheran Campus Ministry (heavy duty cleaning)
- Quilting at Immanuel (12:30 start, enter through courtyard doors & go downstairs).

WHEN I AM AMONG THE TREES

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.
Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

THANK YOU

To our musicians, Ann Yi, piano (substituting for Kurt); Rachel Blaustein and Mackenzie Minguillo, sopranos.

To Melissa Gauger for donating flowers to the Glory of God to beautify our sanctuary.

To Melissa Foster for hosting coffee fellowship.

PRAYER REQUESTS

For Joan Brandt.

For Jan Rock, as she recovers from stenoses.

For Bill Kastilahn, recovering from eye interaction with medication.

For Joe Berube, husband of Sue Murphy (director of Interfaith Action), on his cancer diagnosis.

For Deborah Green, friend of LuAnne Origer, as she recovers from brain surgery.



To donate via Zelle, aim your device's camera at the code on the left, click on the link and follow the instructions. Or you can go to your bank's website, go to Zelle payments and look for "office@stpaulsevanston.org."



**WELCOME BACK
PASTOR PEG OTTE**

PASTORAL FELLOW: PEG OTTE

We are thrilled to have Pastor Peg return a second time to St. Paul's this year as Pastoral Fellow. She will lead us through the Season of Creation (some new twists this year!) and be with us from September 13 through October 11.

Pr. Peg is well-known and greatly loved at St. Paul's, having led us as pastoral fellow multiple times over the years. Most recently, she led us through the Epiphany season. She has previously led us as fellow for Lent-Easter (2025), Eastertide (2024), and for Season of Creation (2023). Prior to that, she served as our interim pastor during 2019 after Pr. Tim McKenzie moved to North Carolina.

Pr. Peg and her husband Randy are long-time Evanston residents who raised their three now-adult children here. Pr. Peg previously served at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Prospect Heights and St. John's Lutheran Church in Wilmette, has served as an interim minister in this synod, and for many years, served during winter at Shepherd by the Sea. She is delighted to return to St. Paul's this year for the beloved Season of Creation.