



January 2026

# MESSENGER

St. Andrew Presbyterian Church | Connecting Hearts | Renewing Lives

St. Andrew Presbyterian Church | 140 Gathering Place Lane  
Iowa City, Iowa 52246 | [www.saintandrew-ic.org](http://www.saintandrew-ic.org)

# 2 STARTING 2026 WITH A DEEP DIVE INTO THE BOOK OF JONAH

New year, new primary Scripture for Sunday preaching—and this time, I'm going a little off script.

Instead of choosing one of the four readings from the Revised Common Lectionary, we're going to take a four-week journey (five, if you count a Sunday I'm not preaching) through the Book of Jonah. Each week we'll read an entire chapter, diving in together for divine inspiration.

I've used this approach in past preaching rhythms and have come to appreciate the sense of completion that comes with finishing an entire book of the Bible. There's something playful—and even a bit resolute—about committing to read a whole book together and seeing it through.

I know that as a regular lectionary preacher, there's always a temptation to pick and choose favorite passages. Reading full chapters helps ensure that nothing is skipped or glossed over. And don't worry—the lectionary psalms will still make regular appearances in the Call to Gathering. I'm excited for us to find ourselves in the story of Jonah.

Why Jonah? That's a great question. One simple answer has to do with the math of how many Sundays I preach between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday—there are only so many options. Beyond that, each chapter of Jonah is packed with action, giving us plenty to wrestle with as we explore the story's purpose and meaning. And finally, there's Jesus. In Matthew 12:39-40a, Jesus says, "The only sign you will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah. Jonah spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish..."

If Jesus goes there, it seems like a good place for us to go, too.

One more thing to put on your radar. In the past, I've followed a book-long series with a deep dive into a single passage. This year, that means that throughout Lent I'll be preaching from the same passage each week (Philippians 2:1-11), focusing on one verse at a time.

We'll explore that more as we get closer—but I wanted to plant the seed now.

Word,

*Pastor Carl*



Over the coming months, **Pastor Carl Anderson** will be preaching two sermon series: a chapter-by-chapter journey through the Book of Jonah, followed by a verse-by-verse exploration of Philippians 2:1-11, the hymn of Christ's humility. In dialogue with the Jonah series, St. Andrew member **Lucy Charis-Carlson** is providing original artwork for the bulletin and worship slides.



**The Rev. Dr. Carl Anderson**

*Transitional Pastor*

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# A NEW TIME AND SEASON FOR CHILDREN'S AND FAMILY MINISTRY<sub>3</sub>

Normally, at the beginning of my writings to you all, I have some clever quip—a movie quote or a joke—but at the moment of writing this, I don't seem to have one! I considered quoting Frodo at the end of *Lord of the Rings*, or the Cat in the Hat as he leaves, or some wise words from Obi-Wan Kenobi or Yoda, but none of them seemed quite right. So instead, I'll quote Ecclesiastes 3:1: *"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."*

In that spirit of timing, I'm writing to share that as of July 1, 2026, I will step down from my role as director of Children's and Family Ministries. It has been so much fun to serve in this role, but it is time for this season to come to an end.

Let me be clear: Lauren and I are not going anywhere. We love St. Andrew, and we are fully invested in this community that has become our extended family and home. This decision is a personal one for us as a family.

Lauren and I like to joke that she has never known me with fewer than three jobs. In fact, when we first started dating, I think I had five! So it's time for me to try something different—to see what it's like to be a husband, teacher, and coach *only*. Here are a few reasons why this feels like the right time.

First, while St. Andrew has been a huge part of my story—and a big reason I stayed in Iowa City—the bond I share with my youngest cousin was the original reason I stayed. I wanted to watch him grow up and compete, and this coming summer I'll get to fulfill a longtime dream: coaching him in baseball.

Second, teaching is my profession and something I love deeply. The future may include grad school, a principal position, or other paths within education—a field that has meant a great deal to me and my parents. It's also time for me to be more fully present and available as a husband each evening after school. While I've loved the work we've done at St. Andrew, it is time-consuming, and it's time for me to step back. For my own faith, it also feels important to experience worship more as a congregational member and less as a job.

Finally, this change allows greater flexibility to spend time with my family. My parents are from Fort Dodge but spend a lot of time camping in the Iowa City area. While I value and prioritize church on Sunday mornings, it has been hard to say no—every Sunday—to breakfast cookouts or a round of golf when they're in town. My high school biology teacher used to say, "Pick your parents wisely," and I truly believe I couldn't have picked better. Spending time with them matters deeply to me.

Again, Lauren and I are not going anywhere! I'll still be the goofy guy in the pews—just not speaking up front. I'll still say hi and make silly faces at the kids, even if Lauren rolls her eyes. I'm looking forward to this new season at St. Andrew: worshiping as a member, continuing to participate in Flipping Tables, and finding new ways to involve our family in the life of the church.

St. Andrew is in great hands, and I look forward to the direction Session, Personnel, and Staff choose for Children's and Family Ministry. I'll gladly be around as a resource for new staff and offer help whenever asked—but it's time for someone else, ideally with fewer jobs, to take the reins!

I have truly enjoyed this role and am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve this congregation and its children. I'm excited to see what life at St. Andrew holds next for Lauren and me. You'll definitely continue to see us on Sundays and Thursdays—I just might be making silly faces from a different spot in the building.

*Thomas*



After nearly four years serving as St. Andrew's Director of Children's and Family Ministries, **Thomas Hartley** will step down from church staff in July 2026. He and his wife, **Lauren**, plan to remain active, energetic, joy-filled members of the congregation.



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**CONNECTING HEARTS**

## 4 HOW GOD EQUIPS EACH OF US FOR LIVES OF LOVE AND SERVICE

St. Andrew's annual **Women's Retreat** is coming soon (Jan. 30-31), and you are warmly invited to set aside time for renewal, connection, and encouragement. Rooted in the life of our community and shaped by faithful conversation, this retreat has been a space centered on women's voices and experiences—while *welcoming participants of every gender who feel drawn to this gathering*. If you are seeking rest, reflection, and meaningful connection, this weekend is for you.

This year's theme, "**Gifted to Serve**," invites us to explore how God equips each of us—through our stories, strengths, questions, and quirks—for lives of love and service in the world. Together, we will reflect on how our gifts take shape in everyday life: at home, at work, in the community, and within the church.

We are delighted to welcome **the Rev. Sarah Goetsch**, a longtime friend of St. Andrew, as our retreat leader.

Through teaching, guided reflection, and honest conversation, Pastor Sarah will help us consider what it means to "serve one another humbly in love" (Galatians 5:13). Whether you are feeling energized or exhausted, grounded or searching, this retreat offers room to breathe and be renewed.

As part of our time together, we will share in a group service project by collecting feminine hygiene products for St. Andrew's **February Food Market**. Participants are invited to bring items of their choosing to donate.

Our retreat begins Friday evening with a light meal and desserts, followed by fellowship and an opening session led by Pastor Sarah. On Saturday, we will gather for breakfast at 8:30 a.m., continue with teaching and small-group conversations, and conclude with a final time of reflection before sharing lunch together.

Register at [tinyurl.com/womens-retreat-2026](https://tinyurl.com/womens-retreat-2026). We hope you will join us.

*Nichole*

### Women's Retreat | "Gifted to Serve"

*with the Rev. Sarah Goetsch*

*"Serve one another humbly in love." (Galatians 5:13)*



**6-9 p.m. | Friday January 30, 2026**

**8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. | Saturday January 31, 2026**

*Contact Nichole Hoffman or Amy Schmidt-Rundell with questions*



To Register



The Rev. Sarah Goetsch



**Nichole Hoffman**

*Family Ministry Outreach Coordinator*

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What does it mean to trust God when the horizon is uncertain, the winds are shifting, and the way forward is not entirely clear?

This in-house men's retreat invites participants into a morning of storytelling, Scripture, reflection, and conversation centered on how God shapes us through journeys—both literal and spiritual. Through the lens of sailing around the world, we'll explore how faith is formed through risk, trust, community, and attentiveness to God's quiet call.

Our speaker, **Russ Owen**, is a St. Andrew member, retired aerospace and IT engineer, and lifelong sailor. Along with his wife Laurie, Russ has sailed extensively, including international voyages that brought him into partnership with Christian communities around the world, most notably in Vanuatu. Russ brings a grounded, thoughtful witness to how God works through preparation and uncertainty, solitude and community, adventure and faithfulness.

## Retreat Flow

**Opening Session: The Voyage Within** | A story-rich presentation drawing from Russ's global sailing experiences, focusing on moments when trust, discernment, and dependence on God became essential rather than optional.

**Breakout Conversation 1: Trusting God in Uncertain Waters** | Small-group reflection grounded in Scripture, exploring how faith takes shape in challenging situations, transitions, and seasons of risk.

**Global Church Witness: The Vanuatu Story** | A reflection on building relationships in Vanuatu—what mutual mission teaches us about resilience, faithfulness, and the strength of Christian community across distance and difference.

**Breakout Conversation 2: Listening for God's Direction** | Guided sharing around how God has offered direction—clearly or quietly—over a lifetime, and how we might become more receptive to God's leading.

This retreat is designed for men of all ages and stages of faith—*while also welcoming participants of every gender who feel drawn to this gathering*. Whether your journey feels steady, stalled, or still unfolding, come ready to listen, reflect, and share honestly, trusting that God is present in the journey itself.



Russ and Laurie Owen aboard their sailboat Nexus. Lifelong sailors and longtime members of St. Andrew, Russ and Laurie have spent years navigating open water together—experiences that shaped their faith, deepened their trust in God, and connected them with Christian communities around the world. Russ will share stories from these journeys as part of St. Andrew's Men's Retreat, *The Voyage Within*, on Saturday March 7, 2026.

# WITH A NEW YEAR, OUR PASTOR SEARCH ENTERS A NEW PHASE

Seven months ago, St. Andrew's **Pastor Nominating Committee** was formed and entrusted with a sacred task: listening for where God may be leading the congregation next. Since then, the committee has been deeply engaged in prayerful discernment—honoring the candidates, the congregation, and the Spirit's guidance.

To date, the committee has reviewed the materials of 54 pastoral candidates. From that pool, six were invited into first-round interviews, followed by three second-round conversations. Through continued prayer and discussion, the committee has discerned that two candidates merit deeper exploration.

January marks an important step in the process. One candidate will be with us each of the middle two weeks, signaling a more focused phase of the search. While much of this work necessarily happens behind the scenes to preserve confidentiality and fairness, we wanted to share this moment of progress with the congregation.

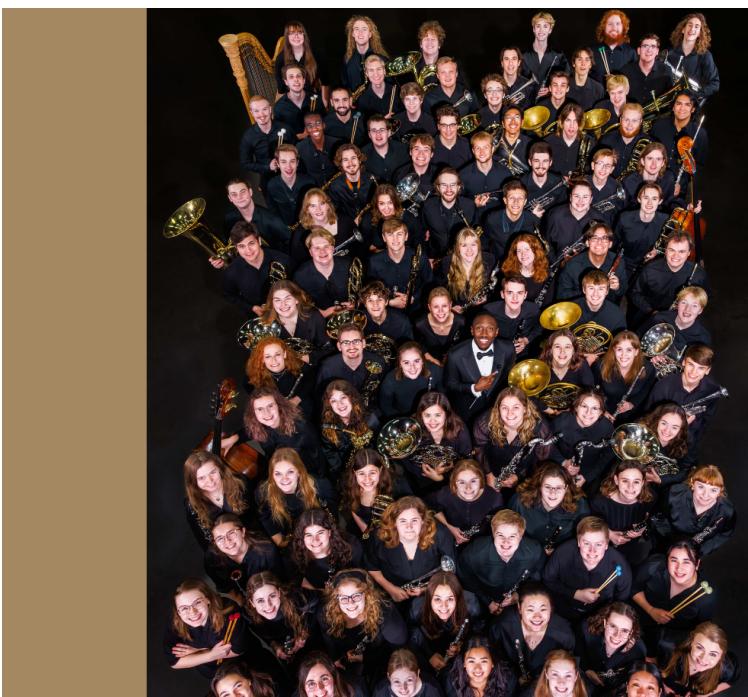
The committee is working carefully and efficiently, mindful of the time and calling of everyone involved. We are committed to not leaving candidates—or the congregation—waiting longer than necessary. At the same time, there is no rigid timeline. Faithful discernment cannot be rushed, and the committee continues to work closely with our Presbytery's Commission on Ministry & Vitality as part of this shared process.

We will continue to provide updates as soon as we are able. In the meantime, please keep praying—for the candidates, for the committee, for our Presbytery partners, and for St. Andrew. We trust that the God who has guided us thus far is still at work, leading us forward with patience, courage, and hope.

— St. Andrew's Pastor Nominating Committee



St. Andrew's **Pastor Nominating Committee** includes (back row) Paul Penn, Kathy Duys, Twila Finkelstein, Jason Schuchert; and (front row) Allison Bernard, Ted Potter, and Peggy Hausler. Once the committee agrees on a finalist, they will ask Session to schedule a Congregational Meeting on a Sunday that the finalist is available to preach a candidate sermon. Once a meeting is called, information will be sent out for how members of the congregational can participate in-person and remotely.



 ST. OLAF BAND

7:30 p.m.  
Friday Feb. 6, 2026

- \$10 Adults/Seniors
- *FREE* for Students and Educators
- [stolaf.edu/tickets](http://stolaf.edu/tickets)

St. Andrew Presbyterian Church  
140 Gathering Place Lane, Iowa City  
[www.saintandrew-ic.org](http://www.saintandrew-ic.org)

# A NEW SEMESTER OF STRETCHING FAITH BEYOND EASY ANSWERS

At St. Andrew, we understand ourselves to be a learning congregation, one that trusts God enough to ask honest questions, to listen deeply, and to let our faith be stretched and renewed.

The Learning Academy classes scheduled for the Winter/Spring 2026 semester engage Scripture, theology, lived experience, and the pressing questions of our world, trusting that the Spirit continues to teach, surprise, and shape us. Most classes are video recorded, edited, and shared afterward on St. Andrew's YouTube channel (<https://tinyurl.com/sapc-youtube>) making it possible to participate live or to join the conversation later as part of our ongoing life of learning together.

**Jan. 4: Biblical Literacy** | Russ Owen introduces tools and perspectives for reading Scripture more confidently, thoughtfully, and in context.

**Jan. 11 & 18: Open and Relational Theology** | Aaron Shileny and Jeff Charis-Carlson explore a vision of God defined by uncontroling love, an open future, and real relationship, culminating in a live Zoom conversation with theologian Thomas Jay Oord.

**Jan. 25: Prepping for Our New Pastor** | Pastor Carl Anderson leads a practical, hopeful conversation about how St. Andrew can prepare spiritually and organizationally for a healthy pastoral transition.

**Feb. 1: Bible Translations** | Matt Moore examines why Bible translations differ, how language choices shape meaning, and what those differences reveal about Scripture and interpretation.

**Feb. 15: One Land, Two Peoples** | Robert Traer offers historical, ethical, and theological frameworks for understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its human and moral complexity.

**Feb. 22, March 1 & March 8: Contemplative Practices and Indigenous Spirituality** | Colette Soult and Bobby Outterson-Murphy invite participants into meditative practices that place Christian contemplative traditions in dialogue with Native American spiritual wisdom.

**March 15, 22 & 29: Passion Plays: Music and the Mystery of Faith** | David Timmer explores how music and art inspired by the Passion narratives deepen theological understanding and spiritual imagination.

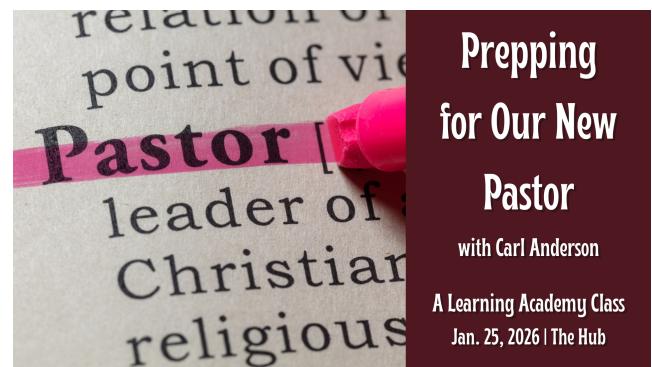
**April 12: The Stories Behind Our Mission: Food Ministry** | Leaders share how St. Andrew's food ministries embody compassion, justice, and care for neighbors near and far.

**April 19: The Stories Behind Our Mission: Guatemala & Impacto Ministries** | Participants reflect on partnership, mutuality, and faith through our ongoing relationship with communities in Guatemala.

**April 26: The Stories Behind Our Mission: Minds Matter** | This session highlights St. Andrew's mental-health initiatives and the church's growing commitment to healing, awareness, and support.

**May 3 & 10: The Anxious Generation: Parenting in Today's World** | Matt and Marissa Moore explore research on rising anxiety among youth and consider how faith, community, and intentional parenting practices foster resilience and hope.

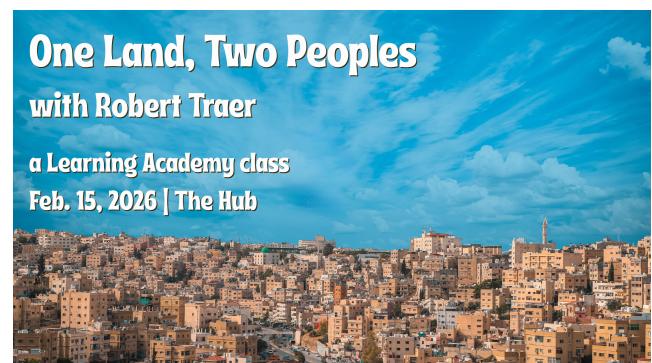
**May 17: Returning to the "Real" World** | Representatives from Inside/Out Ministries discuss reentry, restoration, and the challenges of rebuilding life after incarceration.



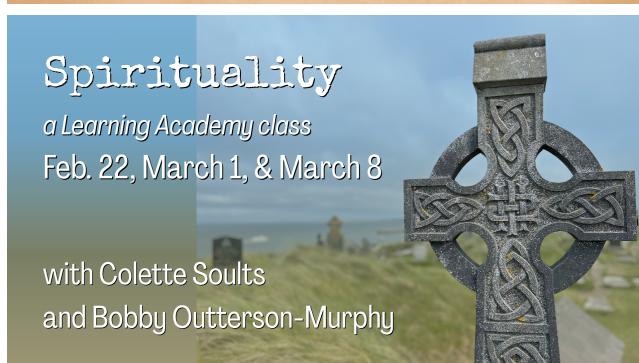
Prepping  
for Our New  
Pastor  
with Carl Anderson  
A Learning Academy Class  
Jan. 25, 2026 | The Hub



Bible Translations  
with Matt Moore  
a Learning Academy Class  
Feb. 1, 2026 | The Hub



One Land, Two Peoples  
with Robert Traer  
a Learning Academy class  
Feb. 15, 2026 | The Hub



CONNECTING

## 8 CAMP BEAR CREEK: A PLACE TO EXPERIENCE THE EXTRAORDINARY

I want to begin by telling you a little about **Camp Bear Creek**—formerly Camp Wyoming. While the name has changed, Camp Bear Creek is still the place where children and youth come each summer to find sanctuary, explore nature, and discover adventure in a true home away from home.

I've been at Camp Bear Creek for the past 13 years, and I'm often asked, "*What's your favorite part about camp?*" My answer is always the same. For the one week each summer that campers are with us, they step out of the ordinary and experience something completely extraordinary. Camp becomes a space of authenticity, faith formation, community, and imagination.

Camp is where kids lie in a meadow and stare at the Milky Way stretched across the night sky. It's where they cover themselves in mud in the creek, or hold a tiny caterpillar in their hands and wonder about how God made each of us so unique and so special.

Every year, I get to witness that transformation. I see campers' horizons expand and their imaginations grow. Some campers walk the prayer labyrinth with us. Others practice mindfulness as a way to focus their thoughts on God. They might learn a few Spanish phrases from a counselor from Mexico, or form friendships with campers from another state.

We hold dance services where we sing, move, and celebrate together, learning that God delights when we praise with our whole selves. Campers listen as their college-age counselors speak honestly about God's great love for them.

In today's world, experiences like these feel especially extraordinary. Camp is also a place where the everyday becomes sacred. Campers encourage one another. They learn teamwork on the challenge course. They come together to comfort a homesick camper in their group. They face fears by climbing the rock wall or stepping off the zip line.

One of the most meaningful gifts of camp (especially in a world shaped by screens and constant technology) is a full week to unplug. Campers have real, face-to-face conversations instead of communicating through instant messages or social media.

Older campers become role models for younger ones during all-camp games. Through those moments, they learn to listen well, grow in confidence, and discover their own independence. They learn they can say, "*I can do this,*" even without a parent standing right beside them.

At camp, they experience a living community of faith and learn alongside other believers from Eastern Iowa, the Midwest, and around the world. All of this offers a beautiful and needed break from ordinary life.

Looking ahead, we have big hopes for the future of Camp Bear Creek. We're excited about the strategic plan that has been developed, and we believe camp will continue to inspire and shape generations of believers.

As our world becomes more virtual and more digitally connected, places like Camp Bear Creek will only grow more important. We need spaces where people can dig their toes into the dirt, walk among the trees, laugh together, sing together, and reconnect with the God who created this world and calls us into community.

This is a ministry worth doing. A ministry worth investing in. A ministry worth sending your children and grandchildren to ... and a ministry worth supporting. That support might look like helping on a work day, bringing a retreat to camp, sending a camper, or giving financially to support our shared vision.

Whatever form that support takes, Camp Bear Creek remains a place that helps reconnect us with God and with one another.

— Stacie Hoppman



Stacie Hoppman, camp director at **Camp Bear Creek**, speaks at St. Andrew on January 11, 2026, sharing the camp's ministry and partnership with the PC(USA). Camp Bear Creek invites families to note the **Early Bird registration deadline of March 15** and the **Volunteer Work Day on May 9**, and reminds families that scholarships are available. For information, visit <https://bearcreek.camp>.

BEAR  CREEK



# WHAT IS BEING COLLECTED IN THOSE BINS ALONG THE BLUE WALL?

Have you ever hung up your coat on a Sunday morning, glanced at the “Church in Action” display on the big blue wall, and wondered, “What’s being collected?”

The answer is: it depends!

The mission bins along the wall change throughout the year as different needs arise. Here’s a quick guide to what you might see right now.

## Food Pantry Bin

This bin is always available. It collects food and household items for local food pantries. A designated deacon delivers these donations throughout the month. Please note: items placed here are not for the St. Andrew Food Market.

## Souls4Souls Bin

We collect gently used shoes of all styles, sizes, and types—anything with some “life” left in it. No holes, mold, or heavy wear. A good rule of thumb: if you’d still wear them, we can use them!

## Food Market Bin

This bin supports our Food Market with non-food items, including clean grocery bags, plastic carryout utensils, reusable plastic tablecloths, and travel-size toiletries (toothbrushes, floss, shampoo, conditioner, etc.).

## Medicine Bottle Collection

Please wash empty prescription bottles with warm, soapy water and remove the labels. Act Justly members collect these bottles and send them overseas for the safe distribution of medications.

Throughout the year, you may also see collections for:

- Clothing for the **Inside Out Reentry Community**.
- School supplies and Trunk-or-Treat candy for **Children’s and Family Ministries**.
- Other **Back-to-School** donations for local students.
- And donations for the local **Toy Redistribution** through the **Lena Project** and **Antelope Lending Library**.

If you have questions about any of the collection bins—or if you would like to use one temporarily for your ministry needs—contact me anytime.

*Amy*



In 2025, St. Andrew’s Interiors and Mission, Outreach & Service teams worked together to install a “Church in Action” display above the collection bins off the Atrium.



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Mission & Outreach Coordinator  
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## 10 HOW 'CONCURRENT WORSHIP' HAS EVOLVED AT ST. ANDREW

For the past five years, St. Andrew has been tracking in-person and online attendance for Sunday worship, At the Table services, concerts, funerals, weddings, and other special events.

These numbers tell a story not only about attendance, but also about how the congregation's worship model has changed over time. Before the pandemic, St. Andrew worshiped almost entirely **in person**. When COVID arrived, our worship shifted to **online-only**, with the livestream becoming our primary gathering place. As conditions improved, we moved into a **hybrid** pattern, working hard to support two experiences (those in the Sanctuary and those joining from home) at the same time.

Our approach has evolved into what we can now call **concurrent worship**: Our Sunday services are rooted in the Sanctuary—filled with singing, prayer, Scripture, sacraments, and shared presence—but we also offer a real-time option so members and friends who cannot be physically present can still participate.

Since 2023, the estimated real-time worshiping community on a typical Sunday (*in person plus concurrent devices*) usually falls between 280 and 340, with regular spikes to 350-400 or more on major Sundays. That overall size has remained remarkably steady.

Most Sundays draw 200-260 people in the Sanctuary, with higher numbers on holidays and music-rich services. Online participation has softened from its pandemic peak, but it remains a consistent second congregation each week.

Recorded services continue to be used beyond Sunday morning, especially for special services, concerts, and pageants, extending worship into the week. Seasonal patterns and weather still affect in-person attendance, but online participation helps smooth those fluctuations, keeping the overall worshiping community strong even on low-attendance Sundays.

Finally, funerals, concerts, and special events often show strong engagement both in the room and online, functioning as a wider front door for people who may not be present most Sundays.

Over time, **concurrent worship** at St. Andrew has shifted from "emergency solution" to "normal infrastructure." It's an expression of the Reformed conviction that worship is embodied, communal, and sacramental, while also recognizing the realities of distance, health, travel, or life-circumstances. When technical difficulties arise, the service in the Sanctuary continues—because our primary commitment is to gather in person—but we continue striving to serve remote participants with clarity and inclusion through livestream, online bulletins, and hospitality.

In short, concurrent worship lives out St. Andrew's identity as the Body of Christ: one people, many places, united in Word, faith, and love.

*Jeff*



In this Nov. 23 photo of the monitor display in the Sanctuary's Tech Booth, **Pastor Carl Anderson** welcomes **Leah Rosine** and **Kim Kipp** back into membership at St. Andrew. That week's worship service was attended by 219 people in-person, with more than two dozen devices concurrently logged into the livestream. That adds up to an estimated "real time congregation" of 269, with additional views throughout the week.



**Jeff Charis-Carlson**

Director of Communications  
and Media Ministries

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# SHARING THE NEWS OF JESUS' BIRTH THROUGH STORY AND SONG 11



The children of the St. Andrew community tell the story of the Jesus' birth during the Dec. 15, 2025, Sunday worship service.  
Photos by Nichole Hoffman

CONNECTING HEARTS ...

# MESSENGER

January 2026

## St. Andrew Presbyterian Church

140 Gathering Place Lane  
Iowa City, IA 52246

**Website:** [www.saintandrew-ic.org](http://www.saintandrew-ic.org)

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**Email:** [office@saintandrew-ic.org](mailto:office@saintandrew-ic.org)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/saintandrewic.org](http://www.facebook.com/saintandrewic.org)

**Phone:** 319-338-7523

### Worship Schedule:

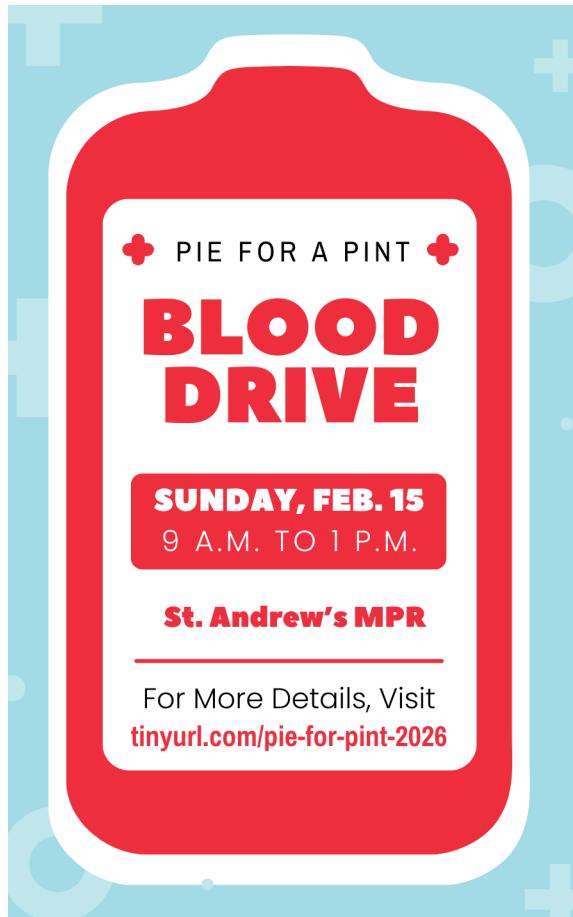
- **Weekly Worship** | 9:30 a.m. Sundays
- **At the Table** | 7 p.m. First Thursdays

## Connecting Hearts | Renewing Lives

If you would like to start/stop receiving the Messenger electronically, please email [office@saintandrew-ic.org](mailto:office@saintandrew-ic.org)

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Address Service Requested



## Pastoral, Ministry, and Administrative Staff

### Pastors

**The Rev. Dr. Carl Anderson**, Transitional Pastor  
**The Rev. Colette Soultz**, Pastoral Care Associate  
**The Rev. Mark Wilson Martin**, Pastor Emeritus

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**Jeff Charis-Carlson**, Director of Communications and Media Ministries  
**Amy Schmidt-Rundell**, Mission & Outreach Coordinator

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### Children, Family & Student Ministries

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**Thomas Hartley**, Director of Children's & Family Ministries  
**Nichole Hoffman**, Family Ministries Outreach Coordinator  
**Sara Penn**, Family Ministries Activities Coordinator

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### Music Ministries

**Austen Wilson**, Director of Music Ministries  
**Julia Van Den Top**, Organist & Accompanist  
**Laura Kastens**, Assist. Director of Handbell Ministries  
**Vacant**, Assist. Director of Instrumental Ministries

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