

St. Paul Partners

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Sponsored by Marie Scronce in honor of nursing home residents and staff

IT LOOKS LIKE LENT

Dear St. Paul Family,

As March is upon us and we find ourselves well into the church season of Lent we are reminded it is a time we emphasize the importance of personal reflection and repentance. Elsewhere in this newsletter is an article from our NC Synod Bishop Tim Smith where he discusses the importance of striking a balance between this individual discipline of the journey coupled with a balance of service to the Lord as share the love of Jesus Christ.

As we reflect on our individual relationship with the Lord, our worship continues with emphasis on the “*Places of the Passion*” during the sermons where we follow the gospel of Matthew with an eye toward the places where Jesus, his disciples (and we) experience something significant as the Lord makes his way to the cross. Whether we are in church or experiencing the livestream at home or something pre-recorded on Facebook, or through the phone tree messages, we are receiving opportunities for personal faith growth. There are also several different printed devotional materials to help in this discipline as well. Please let me know if you need copies. The bulletin board in the hallway behind the sanctuary has also been recently updated to remind us of what Easter is and what it isn’t. If you are at the church, it is well worth a trip to see and reflect upon and Bishop Smith’s bible study on Isaiah is offered through the first two Thursdays of this month. I am also continuing to offer my study on Davey & Goliath on Sunday mornings though the end of this month.

Regarding opportunities of serving, there are two easels – one in the Fellowship Hall and one in the narthex that are creatively done to emphasize our Lenten Food drive and the importance of our

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giving to ECCCM to help them in their ministry of making every dollar stretch to feed and satisfy the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable in our community. Also, the other bulletin board in the hallway outside the office has recently been revamped with updated information. This includes not only recently received “thank you” notes to the church but also sign up sheets for sponsoring the newsletter and/or flowers/peace lilies for the church as well as a new sheet for signing up for specific duties to help during worship such as ushering and acolyting. The Handbell Choir will begin practicing on Wednesday evenings this month to prepare for playing Easter Sunday morning. This is open to any and all who would like to give handbells a try. Remember, if you can count to four, you can play the handbells. Opportunities also are ongoing for taking treat bags to and having a socially distanced visit with some of our homebound and semi-homebound members.

As we journey together during this Lenten season we are called to work toward striking that balance of personal spiritual growth and the spiritual growth that comes from serving God by serving others. As Jesus said to love your neighbor as you love yourself remember to be good to yourself and be Christ like to each other. Together we are partners in ministry as we put our mission into practice to **Witness, Welcome, Worship** and **Work** in the name of our Lord.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Ralph

WORSHIP ASSISTANT SIGN-UP SHEET

Share your time and talent during this Lenten and Easter seasons by signing up on the sheet posted on the Bulletin Board outside the Church Office. While we do have Altar Guild volunteers for the next 2 months, it sure would be so helpful to know who is willing to serve as Acolyte and/or Crucifer, Ushers or Lay Readers and when. And if you are not sure what to do when, we have experienced servants who would happily share the tips in serving that you may not see every week. But chances are you already know what to do just by being at Worship on Sundays so no excuses! C'mon! Sign up and share your God-given time and talent with your Church family!

SOME THINGS CHANGE AND SOME DON'T

In the past 11 months how many of your usual activities have changed or been eliminated? Dining out, attending Church, going to movies, work-out routines, children's schooling, etc., etc.?? As we approach Easter, some of our past traditions will also change. We will not be having our Healing Service on the Wednesday before Easter or the Foot Washing on Maundy Thursday, BUT we are planning on continuing to serve Holy Communion in the “Upper Room” on Maundy Thursday. And while we will not be sharing a breakfast meal with St. Paul Reformed Easter morning, we are still planning to celebrate the risen Christ as the sun rises Easter morning. Expect more information during the month via the Sunday Servant and Pastor Ralph's daily calls.

MARCH

Birthdays

March 2	Margaret Bowman Jonathan Jarrett
March 3	Sterling Jarrett
March 10	Patty Burris River Jarrett
March 13	Johnnie Fulbright Savannah Lail
March 14	Keith Frye
March 17	Edith Lerch
March 20	Noah Lindemann
March 22	Gail Blackburn
March 28	John Warren
March 29	Robin Fincannon

MARCH

Anniversaries

March 11	Harold & Brenda Detter
March 24	Brad & Barbara Arrowood
March 31	Doug & Nancy Brady

Did We Miss Your Birthday or Anniversary?

If so, please accept our apologies!
Let us know so we can make it right by calling
(828) 464-3853 or email
morgan@stpaulstartown.org



Church Council will meet Sunday March 14th in the Fellowship Hall immediately after worship. Please bring your Council packet with you which you should receive as email the Wednesday beforehand.

2021 OFFERING ENVELOPES are now in the narthex. Please pick yours up at your earliest convenience. If you would like yours mailed to you or would like to make an appointment to pick up please contact Morgan or Pastor Ralph

Dear St. Paul Family,
Thank you for your prayers, kindness and well wishes following my vehicle accident. I continue to heal and work on restoring my strength. Please continue to pray for Eric, Chapin, Diego and me as we work through the process of healing. God's peace and blessings to each of you.

Peace be with you,
Sharron Scronce





WELCA AT WORK

Well, last month St. Paul WELCA “played” a little bit, celebrating VP Donna Miller’s retirement. And now it’s back to reality, doing God’s work with our hands and we hope you’ll join us on March 8, 2021, from 6 -7 PM in the Fellowship Hall. We will be reviewing how we can be our Lord’s servants during this season of Lent. We also will be pack up our “Care” package so teams of “Food Items”, “Personal Care Items” and “Misc. Items”, be sure you have communicated who is bringing what that evening. Even though many NC WELCA events such as the Spring Gathering have been cancelled due to pandemic concerns and restrictions, our spirit is stronger than ever. Please come join us for an hour of faith, fellowship and joy.

2021 LENTEN FOOD FUND DRIVE

Eastern Catawba County Christian Ministries, better known as “ECCCM”, was founded in 1969 to serve the residents of the eastern part of our county during a crisis. AHHH..... but what constitutes a “crisis?” It could be unemployment, underemployment, unexpected major expenses such as medical emergencies or other unexpected situations. They help with emergency financial assistance to allow a family to remain in their home with utilities and heat, as well as providing emergency food and other programs to alleviate food insecurity. St. Paul has been a community partner for many, many years. Just because we are experiencing a pandemic and that so many of our outreach programs and activities have been cancelled or postponed, it does not mean that the needs of our neighbors has lessened. For many, it has only increased. Children who received breakfast and lunch at school five days a week are now being home-schooled without those meals. Many service related jobs have been eliminated, leaving families with little or no income. In past years we have donated and constructed towers of canned goods and non-perishable food during Lent. But, this year is different. However, we can still help our neighbors in different ways. In the coming weeks, you will see the details about how ECCCM can stretch a dollar as they serve approximately 500 families a month with food assistance. Please prayerfully consider giving to our Lenten Food Fund and look for more information in the Sunday Servant. Our drive will run through Easter.



LENTEN BIBLE STUDY WITH BISHOP SMITH Back by popular demand! Bishop Tim Smith continues to lead a synod-wide Bible Study on the book of Isaiah on Thursdays at 7:00PM until March 25. The class will be virtual via Zoom. There is no cost but you must register to receive an email with the Zoom link. If you miss a session, recordings will be available for watching at your convenience. All are welcome; spread the word! The link to register is: <http://bit.ly/Bishop-Lent-Study>.



EASTER LILY ORDERS

All Easter Lily orders are due by March 23rd. Each lily is \$10 and you can find an order form in your bulletin or you may call the church office to order your flowers. If writing a check, please note "Easter Lilies" in the memo line.

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME BEGINS!

That dreaded day when we lose an hour of sleep is upon us! Don't forget to set your clocks ahead one hour before heading to bed on March 13th or from St. Mattress you'll be worshipping!



COME JOIN THE HANDBELLS!

No experience is necessary to join this wonderful music ministry of St. Paul, all that's required is a willing spirit and a heart for learning. The bell choir meets in the sanctuary on Wednesdays at 6pm. See Barbara Sloop for more information.



Council Notes

The St. Paul Church Council met in person on Sunday, February 14, 2021 at 11:28am. Highlights from the meeting include:

- \$500 to be sent to the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation in Gaffney, SC for their Libera Fund relief.
- The Lenten Food drive will be a monetary drive this year, rather than a canned food drive. ECCCM is able to buy more food pound for pound with monies donated.
- Community Day in 2021 will not be held due to the pandemic.



“See, that’s your problem. You’ve turned this around and made it about you.” So, for no doubt many appropriate and accurate reasons, I’ve been reminded more than once recently about my “privilege talking.” Yep. Guilty. Let’s start there. And, as we know from our own Lutheran heritage, making it about me or “curving in on self” is the definition of sin.

On the other hand, presumably my privilege in specific and my sin in general have taken me a lifetime to construct, both consciously and subconsciously. There, I did it again. ME. But what other filter do I have, other than finally me, with which to perceive, interact, or yes, even attempt to control myself and/or the world around me? Which of course can be either for my sinful purposes or for justice and righteousness, or maybe I’m pursuing justice so that I’m good with God, which ultimately, once again, makes it about me! The last shall be first? Ooh, then let me be last! (So I can be first!) Does non-sinful motivation exist?

It’s the sort of dilemma, I’m imagining, that led St. Paul to blurt out, “Wretched man that I am!” And again, “Who will rescue me from this

life dominated by sin and death?” So...If getting too deep inside myself, making it about me, is the essence of my sin and the evidence of my privilege, then the solution is to focus outward. Be about justice for others, about the least of these, and in losing myself in and for them, I’ll find myself in living for neighbor. That’s very prophet-y. Very Jesus-y. Very 21st-century ELCA-y.

Maybe that’s why three out of four seminarians in their approval interviews for ordination, when I ask them, “What is the essence of the gospel?” answer, “It’s about reaching out to the poor and the oppressed and working for justice in the world.” With this grand therefore proclamation I cannot argue and will even ultimately resonate. But. But...the gospel is NOT the therefore. Not for Lutherans anyway. The gospel is the BECAUSE. The therefore always has I or you as the subject—what we do, must do.

The gospel, on the other hand, always has God (Christ, Holy Spirit) as subject—what God has done, is doing, will do. Otherwise, even my or your most noble justice efforts end up, ironically, all about ME. What WE do. The 16th-century Reformers labeled this works righteousness. Not gospel. In other words, from my (admittedly privileged) perspective, we are perilously close as both culture and church to making the essence of who we are the should and musts of our doing. Said another way, the WHY of our pursuit of justice matters, especially if it to be sustainable and not the church flavor of the decade, like the Social Gospel of the early 20th-century or political party platform or secular service organization.

And then Lent calls us to repentance. Sure, institutions, systems, need repentance; the call to turn around and go the other way. With repentance it's always so much easier for me to see the speck in your eye than the log in my own. I can tell you all kinds of reasons you need to repent! But I can't repent for you. At the end of the day, our call as Lutheran Gospel Christians is spiritual transformation. While that issues forth corporately and communally, such action finds its freedom and sustainability in personal transformation. Ironically, I'm telling you that even though my all about me is my sin, it's also where true repentance starts. In repentance terms, you and I DO have some all about me work to do.

Lent is intentionally a season of introspection which begins not with an announcement that "We are dust" but with the much more personal, "You are dust." To each individual. Communion distribution is intentionally not just, "The body of Christ for all y'all." It is to each individual. For you. Lent invites us into ourselves, and yes, in there we will find the truth of our selfish sinfulness, our all-about-me-ness, our mortality, and that judgment will drive us to the gospel of Christ who forgives sin and promises us resurrection and frees us from the need to justify ourselves through our work. This freedom empowers our very ability to serve! This is Lutheran Confessional theology, Lutheran Systematic Theology, Lutheran Practical Theology 101. It's even basic teenage confirmation curriculum—or should be.

How will my necessary repentance emerge? Only from the deep and ongoing

introspection, prayer, wrestling with, and surrender of me can I find a sustainable freedom and energy to serve, to do, even to BE for someone other than myself. And please, for all your good intentions, stop telling me that "You are enough." You know that I am not, nor are you. "We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves." Christ is enough. Period. Enough even to free me from ME. Luke Skywalker being trained as a Jedi on Dagobah has to go into the cave to face his own demons. Before it can be about The Force, he has to come to terms with his ultimate enemy being himself. Jesus faces wilderness temptation in all three synoptic Gospels and then regularly escapes the pressing and endlessly needy crowds to pray and be re-energized (see Mk. 1:35). You and I need to find the rhythm and balance of serving with justice and introspectively renewing spiritually. One day, one person, one me, one repentance at a time.

Walking with you,

Jim

NC Synod Bishop



NC Synod
ELCA

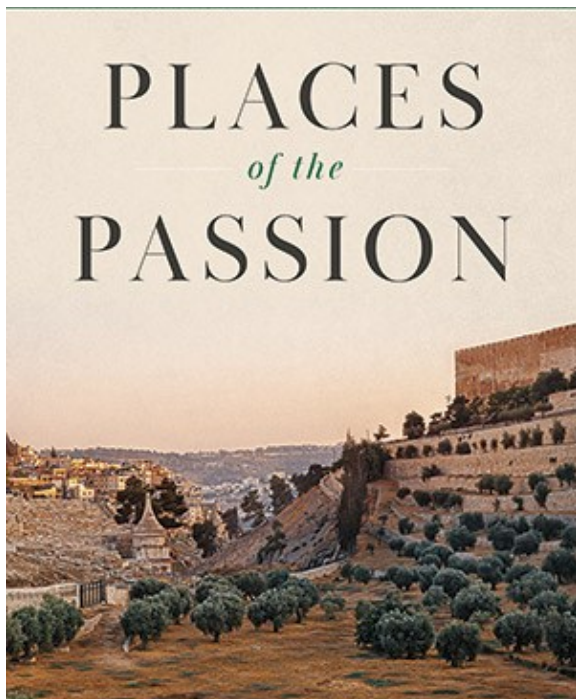
St. Paul Lutheran Church

3761 Startown Rd
Newton, NC 28658
Phone: (828) 464-3853
www.StPaulStartown.org

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HERE

<<Address Here>>

We the people of St. Paul are called and empowered by God- To **Witness** through Christ; To **Welcome** everyone through the Holy Spirit; To **Worship** with joy; and To **Work** with God to meet the needs of our community.



Our Lenten Theme: *"Places of the Passion"*

We go with Jesus on a journey each Sunday
10am to the places of the passion.

- Jerusalem • Bethany • Mount of Olives •
- Garden of Gethsemane • High Priest's Courtyard
- Pilate's Judgement Hall