

Epistle

*A welcoming community
sharing Christ's love
in service
through relationships.
Welcome. Share. Serve.*

November 2020

REFLECTIONS FROM PASTOR AMY JO

Wow, what a year it has been! Amidst it all, Saint Paul's United Methodist Church continues with our mission to be a welcoming community sharing Christ's love in service through relationships. Many of you are asking how the different aspects of our congregation are functioning during the pandemic, so I am sending this Epistle with updates from the summer and fall, in many different areas. Thank you to all of our leadership teams, who have kept us on track during constantly changing circumstances, and especially the Central Leadership Team, who has taken on the difficult task of implementing our safety policy.

Video Worship. First, I want to thank all of you for your willingness to switch to worship by video in order to avoid large groups and slow the spread of COVID-19. The video worship services have been receiving between 150-200 views per week (during the first 24 hours that they are posted.) Please note that this is **nearly double the attendance** that we had at in-person worship services! Many of you are sharing the worship link with family and friends, and they appreciate it, view the services, and sometimes even give us a "thumbs up" or a note of appreciation. You have quickly figured out how to use

the new format for evangelism—way to go! I also want to thank you for your patience as all of the staff have scrambled to quickly learn about video editing; we are still learning and improving. Thank you for your words of encouragement as we learn as quickly as possible! (Hopefully, you are seeing an improvement over where we started in March.) You have also told us that you appreciate the convenience of being able to view the worship video at

any time on weeks when you have other commitments on Sunday morning. So, we have already purchased equipment that will allow us to continue posting video worship once we have all returned to in-person worship. It is also our hope to celebrate special days with worship services, as we did for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, All Saints' Day, and Veterans' Day.

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VIDEO WORSHIP

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The season of Advent begins on Sunday, November 29, and our worship services will focus on preparing for Christmas at that time. Our children will have children's chats that focus on the characters of the Christmas story and will be **building a manger scene together** as a group art project. Parents, look for art supplies to be arriving in the mail prior to November 29. **Grown-ups, if you like to be creative with paper art, please let us know in the church office and we will add you to the art supply mailing list!**



Advent Candles

We will also begin lighting the Advent Candles on November 29. If you want to join us in lighting Advent candles in your home, you will need five candles and holders: 3 purple (or blue), 1 pink, and 1 white. The white candle goes in the middle of the Advent wreath or in the middle of the line of candles. The other candles are arranged in this order: two purple on the first side of the white candle and a pink and purple on the other side of the white candle. The purple and pink candles are for each Sunday in the Advent season, representing the royalty of Christ as King with purple (or hope with blue) and joy with pink. The middle, white candle is the Christ candle, which we light on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day in celebration of the coming of Christ.

Worship Transcripts. For those who are not able to access the video worship services, Diane is creating and mailing a transcript of worship each week. Right now, we are aware of 23 people who wish to receive transcripts. If you are reading this Epistle and want to be added to the list, just call the office at (651) 452-5683 or e-mail Diane at info@stpaulsmn.org and leave a message with your name and address—we'll be happy to add you to the list! If you have a friend or family member who also wants to be added to the list, we are happy to do that too!

Connection and Caring Calls. Due to COVID restrictions, many of us are feeling unusually isolated. In response, we have had a number of people volunteer to make caring phone calls to connect with friends in our church family and pray together. We have organized a list of people whose usual small groups aren't meeting right now due to COVID (for

example, UMW and choir), and people who we are aware live alone. Our volunteers will be making phone calls to these people throughout the coming month. If you would like to be added to the list of people receiving caring phone calls from church friends, please let us know and we will add you to the list. Likewise, if you would like to be one of the people making caring phone calls on behalf of the church, please call or email the church office, and we will add you to the volunteers. (651) 452-5683 or info@stpaulsmn.org

Christian Education, Spiritual Growth, and Mission. Our ministries in Christian Education, Spiritual Growth, and Mission continue to be strong, and I will include a page of information on each of these areas! My thanks to Charles Duddingston and Lani Thompson who have been teaching steadily throughout the pandemic. My thanks to the whole Outreach Team and the many volunteers who have been leading us in serving others throughout the pandemic! Pages on Christian Education, Spiritual Growth, and Mission will follow the end of this note. I also want to say thank you to all those who participated in the all-church gifts, talents, and interests survey. This survey is helping us to connect people with the specific areas of the church in which they feel called to participate and serve. Thank you also to the small group who designed and sent out this helpful survey.

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Finally, I've received two more questions to which I want to respond. They are: 1) How is the church's financial state right now? And 2) What about Christmas?

Financial Information. Right now, the church's financial state is steady and our current bills are paid. We have paid apportionments through the first half of the year, with the second half still to come. A variety of factors have contributed to this financial picture:

- 1) Special gifts have been received for both St. Paul's UMC and to our partners in mission (Neighbors, Inc./Garlough School) in order to go the extra mile during this unusual time. Thank you to all of our special givers!
- 2) Many of our committed givers have been able to continue with their regular giving. Thank you to all of our faithful, committed givers!
- 3) We received a PPP (Payroll Protection Plan) loan through the Cares Act of the U.S. government to keep payroll steady during the beginning of the pandemic, and it is our understanding that this debt is being forgiven.
- 4) Our expenses are down somewhat due to temporarily ceasing custodial services, heating the building to a more moderate temperature, etc. All of this is good news; however, giving has been lower during the last 30 days, so it is important for us to stay committed to giving generously in order for this positive financial report to continue. We have continued to main-

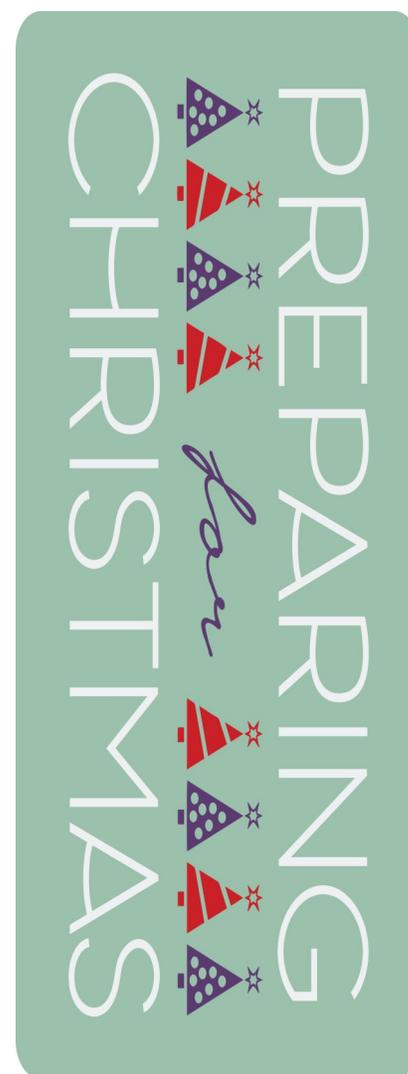
tain our staffing for: Pastor, Director of Children, Youth, and Mission, Administrative Assistant, and Director of Music. This staffing allows us to produce video worship and transcripts of worship, and to provide leadership in Christian Education, spiritual growth, and mission even during the pandemic. Your generous giving causes that to happen, and we thank you.

In other financial news, the Cares Act has some provisions related to charitable giving, and our Finance Chairperson, Kae Jewell, has written a full article on these provisions for our information.

Christmas. Christmas planning is underway. While we can't really gather for a pageant, our Kidz 2gether worship service in December will have some of the opportunities for children/youth participation that can be a joy! Regarding Christmas Eve, I am delighted to announce that **Don Irwin has just been in town to record part of our Christmas Eve music together with Lane!** This will be a great musical blessing for our video Christmas Eve worship! The special gift to music in our congregation will fund this addition to our Christmas Eve worship. We are also planning for a simple **outdoor Christmas Eve gathering.** More details will follow within the next month. As I am sure you understand, there are two factors beyond our control that will effect our outdoor gathering plans: COVID infection rates and the weather. I will have my eye on

both of these factors as we plan for celebrating Christmas in a way that is both faithful to our Christian tradition and our safety plan.

May God's peace be with you all as we celebrate Thanksgiving and begin the Advent Season! ☩



REACHING OUT

Living our faith
and connecting
with our neigh-
bors



Turkey Dinner St. Paul's UMW took the plunge with its first ever Take Out Turkey Dinner in this year of COVID-19 and raised more than \$1,700 for missions. It just didn't seem right not to bake up a storm in October as our church has been doing since 1922. Carol Rix took the lead in the kitchen, the circles brought forth the pies and volunteers and Voila!! it all happened. Special thanks to Catey Chastain for representing our youth as our runner in chief from the kitchen to the curb. Also special thanks to the dear people who ordered meals and paid in advance. It made a real difference in our UMW checkbook. We happily paid off our obligations to the District, and were able to make donations to Emma Norton, Neighbors, Garlough, Lewis House, etc. as per usual.

Neighbors, Inc. has continued to provide emergency services to those in need throughout the pandemic, and Saint Paul's UMC has sent a special offering of \$850 (above and beyond turkey dinner proceeds.) With unemployment and economic conditions fluctuating at this time, these gifts are especially needed in the lives of many.

Garlough Environmental Magnet School. We've continued to support our partner school with teacher appreciation in the form of meal gift cards delivered to our teachers, by serving as pen pals with the students, by receiving a special offering of \$780 for school supplies, by donating a tent and seating for outdoor classrooms, and by supporting week-end meals through Every Meal (formerly known as Sheridan

Story.) On many years we have been able to serve a year-end teacher appreciation meal to the teachers, but safety guidelines prevented us from doing so this year. The gift cards were a new way to show appreciation and were loved by the teachers. We received a STACK of hand written thank you notes in response to remembering them even during unusual circumstances. Take-home meals for children in need have continued even during distance learning, and donations to Every Meal are appreciated as we continue to fund this important ministry.

Bethesda Hospital Encouragement. During the summer and fall, the small groups in our church took turns providing encouragement, care packages, and prayers of blessing for the nurses at Bethesda Hospital. Neighbors and friends of the church also donated supplies and helped! This was one way that we could support the healthcare workers working to bring healing for COVID-19 patients. Thank you to all who contributed!

Rain Gardens. During the summer months, Saint Paul's UMC collaborated with the City of Mendota Heights and volunteer Master Gardeners from our neighborhood to install rain gardens on the church property. These gardens filter rain run-off, improving the overall water quality of the aquifer. We show good stewardship of God's gifts when we care for the earth. Thank you to the volunteers who patiently and diligently tended these plants during the first growing season while they got established!

FINANCE



AS ALWAYS, BE SURE TO CONSULT WITH YOUR TAX AND FINANCIAL ADVISERS FOR COMPLETE AND ACCURATE INFORMATION AND TO UNDERSTAND HOW THESE OPTIONS APPLY TO YOU.

YEAR-END GIVING

Let me begin by thanking everyone for their generous financial support this year which supports the mission of St. Paul's United Methodist Church. How we carry out our mission work has looked different this year but it is more important than ever. You and your gifts have been meaningful in our ability to share the message of our Lord and Savior in our community.

I think that we all agree that 2020 has been one of, if not the most, unusual years we have lived through. Who would have thought we would all know what "Zoom" means, wear masks every moment we stepped outside our doors, and experience a record number of hurricanes making landfall in the Gulf States? We are ready for 2020 to be over and to move on to 2021.

Before we say good bye to 2020, we all need to tie up the loose ends. One of the many things we each do at this time of year is review our financial status for the year. As we've already established, 2020 was a year like no other. But like no other year, we were given the gift of the CARES Act, the federal economic stimulus legislation. Parts of the act, like the Payroll Protection Program (PPP,) are very familiar to all of us. But there is another part of the act that is less familiar but still important to *all* of us.

The CARES Act encourages individuals and corporations to increase their charitable giving this year by increasing charitable deduction thresholds. As a federal taxpayer, you will be impacted by one of the three following changes. These changes are federal tax law changes only.

1. If you itemize your deductions, this year you will have a special deduction that will increase the charitable giving threshold and allow you to deduct up to 100% of your Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) in 2020. The special increase is only for charitable cash gifts.
2. Many taxpayers take the standard deduction on their personal tax return. This year in addition to the standard deduction, a \$300 cash gift can be made to the church (or other qualified non-profit organization). This is an above-the-line deduction and per tax return, not per person.
3. Finally, if you are a corporation the limit on deductible charitable gifts increases from 10% to 25% of the corporation's taxable income. Again, only for cash gifts.

A non-CARES Act related giving opportunity is a gift of appreciated stock to the church. Many individuals use a gift of appreciated stock as a tax advantage. You are able to take a charitable gift on your tax return equal to the value of the stock gift and if you have owned the stock for more than a year you will avoid capital gains taxes on the appreciated value. This is an easy transaction. Here is a link to the form and instructions or feel free to call me and I can assist in the transaction. <https://www.mnumf.org/forms>

Please consider a special gift to our church as you consider your year-end finances. Thank you for your generosity.

Sincerely and with the Grace of God,
Kae Jewell
Chair, Finance Team

SMALL GROUPS

United with purpose



Book Club. During the summer months, an in-person book group read and discussed Kendi's book *How to Be an Anti-Racist*. Pastor Amy Jo facilitated this small group, and would be happy to do another section of discussion on this book by videoconference if there is additional interest. Please contact Pastor Amy Jo if you are interested in a second group by videoconference.

Friendship Meditation Group is currently meeting on Fridays from 6:50-7:30 p.m. The group is using silent meditation and drawing our relationship with God as a way to deepen our friendships with Jesus and with each other. For more information or to join in, contact Jane Spaulding.

Upper Room Devotional Guides are one way to help us stay connected with God through prayer and searching the Scriptures. We may have to stay socially distanced from other people, but we can still stay spiritually close to Jesus! *The Upper Room* (regular and large print) is available to be picked up in a waterproof container just outside of the church office doors. If you would prefer to have yours mailed or a cheerful volunteer to deliver your copy, please let the office know and that can happen too!

Adult Christian Education by videoconference and taught by Charles Duddingston just completed for the year. Watch for more opportunities coming up.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Helping families nurture lifelong disciples of Christ



Youth/Children's Online Sunday School is available through the Deep Blue Sunday School app and with a link that is emailed each week along with video worship. Deep Blue Sunday School is the

curriculum that we were using in-person prior to March, and we have switched to the online version. Parents, please watch your e-mail for a survey to help us evaluate this resource.





Please pray for the following:

Joys:

Janice Frame is starting a new job at the Fish and Wildlife Service

Another successful Turkey Dinner - more than \$1,700 to benefit missions

Birth of Gage Vernon McCallum, grandson of Carol and David Rix, October 22

Birth of Emma Hamilton, born to James and Katie Hamilton, October 13, and discharged from hospital

Deaths:

Dedra Shaw, Nancy Grinager's sister-in-law, October 16

Health Concerns:

Gary Curtis, Dawn Everling's brother, healing from deep brain stimulation surgery for Parkinson's

John and Beth Schmidt's friends, Jerry, battling undiagnosed health issues, and Tom, recovering from a stroke

Tim and Andrea Larson's friend, Laura, diagnosed with a brain tumor after having 3rd child

Jim and Rhea Nyquist's neighbor, Robert, with lung cancer

Lane Skoglund-Anderson's dad, Herb, residing in long-term care with health risks

Curt Almberg's cousin, Loren, undergoing long-term cancer treatments

Chrisana Tripodi's husband, Greg, a high risk person for the virus, working in a hospital with COVID-19

Jo Reck's friends, Charlotte, healing after leg amputation and Angie, continued healing

Bob Mahoney, Corrine's brother, healing

Mike LaGuire's daughter, Cheryl, healing from breast cancer

All homebound with health problems

Additional:

For those affected by tropical storm Eta

For those affected by the Colorado wildfires

For those affected by Hurricane Delta

For an end to violence and racism in our communities

Those in recovery from addiction without in-person meetings

For healthcare professionals, including those affiliated with our congregation: Arin, Deanna, Greg, Heidi, Jade, Kevin, Mary, Nikki, Reed, and the nursing staff at Bethesda Hospital

For those who are unemployed

For those affected by the coronavirus and wisdom for our public health officials

Peace and safety in our communities

Please e-mail the office with joys and concerns at info@stpaulsmn.org or call Pastor Amy Jo at (507) 341-1760.



CENTRAL LEADERSHIP

CHAIR: Leslie Watkins

ST. PAUL'S STAFF:

Pastor: Rev. Amy Jo Bur,
pastor@stpaulsmn.org

Director of Children, Youth and Mission:
Lani Thompson,
lani.thompson@stpaulsmn.org

Director of Music Ministry:
Lane Skoglund-Anderson,
laneskoglundanderson@gmail.com

Administrative Assistant:
Diane Pelinka,
info@stpaulsmn.org



Heidelee Svava Hannigan
Daughter of
Mike and Heather Hannigan
September 30, 2020



Frederick Wilson
Son of
Luke and Melissa Wilson
March 15, 2020



Emma Hamilton
Daughter of
James and Katie Hamilton
October 13, 2020

New Addresses

Darrell Butterwick
8725 Promenade Lane
#134
Woodbury MN 55125

Mary Gaddy
949 Sibley Memorial Hwy.
#412
Mendota Heights MN 55118

Wendy Hall
1492 Charlton Ave. #205
West St. Paul MN 55118

Lani Thompson
22287 Cameo Ct.
Forest Lake MN 55025

Myrle Voynovich
6536 Chamberlain Rd.
Woodbury MN 55125

New Email

Priscilla Wiessner
Priscillawiessner@gmail.com



With Sympathy



Robert Momsen
March 20, 2020



Duane Devereaux
July 6, 2020



Thomas Frame
April 3, 2020



Marge Knowlton
July 21, 2020



William Gydesen
June 20, 2020



Mary Lou Good
August 9, 2020



Del Nicklaus
June 20, 2020



Jackie Swanson
September 1, 2020

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