The Messenger



Monthly publication of St. Paul Lutheran Church
& Early Childhood Learning Center

DECEMBER 2026

Greetings St. Paul Lutheran Church!
I read this post on Facebook recently and absolutely loved it. To me it tells the Christmas story but in a different way. Remember Christmas is about God showing up in our world in the form of Jesus. How then are we as followers of Jesus called to follow God's example to go into the world. The article is long but so important to read.

"OK…LISTEN UP, LUTHERANS.
I think we need to have a serious conversation about why the church exists. Because if we actually believe what we say we believe about grace, then we might need to rethink just about everything we've been taught about the importance of going to church.

Here's what I mean.

As Lutherans, we proclaim that we are saved by grace through faith, apart from works. God's love isn't something we earn. Salvation isn't a prize for good behavior. Eternal life isn't a reward for perfect attendance, generous giving, or serving on enough church committees. Grace is a gift. Period. You cannot earn it. You cannot purchase it. You cannot make God love you more by showing up on Sunday morning. And, perhaps most importantly, you cannot make God love you less by staying home.

So, here's the question I've been wrestling with: If we don't go to church to earn God's love, secure our salvation, or guarantee our place in heaven… then why do we go? Seriously. Why church?

I think the answer is both simpler and far more radical than we've allowed ourselves to imagine. Because we need each other. Because God's love was never intended to remain some abstract theological concept that we discuss in Bible studies and recite in creeds. God's love is meant to take on flesh. [Christmas celebrates God taking on flesh and living among us in Jesus.]

[God's love taking on flesh] looks like someone sitting beside you when your world is falling apart. [God's love taking on flesh] looks like a meal delivered when grief has made cooking impossible.

[God's love taking on flesh] looks like a child walking into a room and discovering a whole community of adults who know their name and are genuinely delighted that they exist.

[God's love taking on flesh] looks like someone who has spent their life being told they don't belong finally finding a table where nobody questions whether there's room for them.

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Council Highlights

Marty Hylton, from Architecture Sarasota, and Pr. Ashley continue meeting regarding our property. A formal agreement will be drafted on how the project will move forward. There will eventually be a project manager, and 3 members of St Paul, Architecture Sarasota, and the Arlington Park Neighborhood for oversight of this project. No money is expected from St. Paul.

In accordance with our bylaws, inactive members were removed from the roles.

A Capital Campaign, during Stewardship 2027, will include replacement of the projectors in the sanctuary and an air conditioner in the Fellowship Hall.

St. Paul will host the Mid Gulf Conference gathering next year – October 16, 2027, 12:00-3:30p.

Ash Wednesday services were approved for Feb 10, 2027, at 7pm. Ashes only in the Sanctuary at noon and in the Circle Drive from 12:30-1:00pm.

A Special Congregational Meeting will be held Dec 13, following worship, to elect the new Council and approve the 2027 spending plan.

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held following worship on February 28, 2027.

The congregation will be receiving a donated Kawai grand piano. Moving expenses will be coming from undesignated Memorial funds in the restricted account.

St Paul is participating in Arlington Park's first Friday, Dec 4th.

Message from the Church Office

Pastor Ashley and the Parish Administrator will never email or text you asking for donations of money or gift cards.

Please ignore these scammers. You should always contact the church office if you are not sure.

The Messenger is the newsletter of St. Paul Lutheran Church.

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St. Paul Lutheran Church is a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Florida-Bahamas Synod, ELCA.

Pastor: Rev. Ashley Nicolls

Pastor Emeritus: Rev. Donald J. Hillerich

Executive Committee

JoAnn Jordan, President
Judy Roberts, Vice President
Bob Lariviere, Secretary
George Hutfilz, Treasurer

Congregation Council

Irene Felicetti, George Hutfilz, JoAnn Jordan, Bob Lariviere, Nancy Parmakian, Judy Roberts, Mike Scherr, Esther Smith, Pastor Ashley Nicolls

Ministry Team Leaders and Council Liaison

Cornerstone - Foundational Resources for Ministry
Coordinator - Sue Scherr; **Council Liaison** - Mike Scherr
Early Childhood Learning Center
Coordinator - Sue Scherr; **Council Liaison** - Esther Smith
Invitation & Connection
Coordinator - Bob Lariviere; **Council Liaison** - Bob Lariviere
Mission & Inspiration
Coordinator- TBD; **Council Liaison** - Judy Roberts
Worship & Music
Coordinator - Earleen Ashbrook; **Council Liaison** - Nancy Parmakian
Parish Administrator – Tracy Bateman
Director of Music Tambry Schoolcraft

The Messenger is published monthly and distributed without charge to St. Paul Lutheran congregation members and friends.

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MISSION STATEMENT As a Holy Spirit-led family of God, we are called through Baptism to proclaim and bear witness to God's reconciling grace in Jesus Christ to all; so that by joyfully sharing God's Word and encouraging each other to service for the sake of others, our lives together make a difference for Christ and His kingdom.

Prayer Ministry

St. Paul offers many ways to pray with and for loved ones, the community, and the world!

Online Prayer Chain - an email goes out weekly with prayer requests. Please let PrAshley know if you want to be a pray-er.

Prayer Crosses - Located in the Fellowship Hall, the Sanctuary, and outside for prayers to be placed either in or on. Any prayer request put on the cross in the FH or Sanctuary will be put on the outside Hope Cross.



Prayer Zoom - Talking with God (see below) facilitated by Deacon Kim Heindl meets every Thursday at 4:00p.









Hope Seeds

Hope Seeds met on Monday, November 16, with 15 volunteers packing 4,500 mustard green seed packets to be sent worldwide to help families grow their own food and become self sustaining. There will be no meeting of Hope Seeds in December. We hope you can join us instead on January 18 at 1:00p to continue this important ministry. Come when you can, and leave when you must.

Sue Goddard-Barry

Talking with God

As people of faith it is quite natural that we talk to God. In quiet moments, in moments of uncertainty or challenge, and in times of joy. It is part of our worship and helps us grow personally and communally in our relationship with Jesus. I would like to invite you to join a group of us that gather every Thursday at 4p via Zoom*. We talk, share our lives, joys, concerns, and we pray. No stress and easy to be part of! Follow the link below (it is the same every week) or email Kimberly Heindl for an invitation: kaheindl@comcast.net.

Join Zoom Meeting: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81662784525pwd=QSt4TGNSR2F3L0ovUDJ3SVdWbjRYUT09

Meeting ID: 816 6278 4525

Passcode: 628552

[God's love taking on flesh] looks like feeding hungry neighbors, caring for the lonely, standing alongside the marginalized, and refusing to accept that suffering and injustice are simply the way things have to be.
THAT is church.

And before someone says, "Well, I can find community and kindness outside of church," let me say something else: You're absolutely right. The church does not have a monopoly on goodness. There are people who have never set foot inside a sanctuary who embody the love of God more faithfully than some people who have occupied the same pew for fifty years. And maybe we Christians need to be humble enough to admit that.

But here's what makes the church different. We gather around a particular story. [A story that insists that the world is worthy for God to enter into.] A story that insists death does not get the final word. That suffering is not the end of the story. A story about a God who enters into human suffering rather than remaining distant from it. A story about resurrection. A story about a love so scandalously abundant that it cannot be earned, controlled, rationed, or reserved for the people we think deserve it.

And we gather around that story week after week because, quite frankly, we are really good at forgetting it. We forget that we're loved. We forget that our neighbors are loved. We forget that there's enough. We forget that forgiveness is possible. We forget that resurrection is real. So we come together. We hear the Word. We confess our brokenness. We receive forgiveness. We gather around a table where Christ gives himself freely to people who have done absolutely nothing to deserve it. And then we're sent back into the world to live as though all of that is actually true. That's the rhythm of the Christian life. Gathered by grace [and love]. Nourished by grace [and love]. Sent to embody grace [and love].

And here's where I think this gets uncomfortable for those of us who love the church. We've spent an awful lot of time asking how we can get more people into our buildings. How do we increase worship attendance? How do we attract young families? How do we grow membership? How do we balance the budget? How do we keep the institution alive? Those aren't necessarily bad questions. But I wonder whether we've allowed them to distract us from the most important question of all: What difference does our existence make in the lives of the people around us?

If a congregation has thirty people in worship but feeds a hundred hungry neighbors, offers companionship to the lonely, provides a safe and loving place for children, and becomes a refuge for people who have been rejected elsewhere…Is that a failing church? Or is that a church doing precisely what the church was called to do?

What if we stopped measuring the vitality of our congregations primarily by how many people come through our doors and started asking how much love goes out of them? What if we stopped treating the community as a potential source of new members and started treating our neighbors as people God already loves? What if we stopped asking, "How do we get these families to come to church?" and started asking, "How can we be the church for these families?" Not as a recruitment strategy. Not with an ulterior motive. But because loving our neighbors is the point. Luther understood something extraordinary about Christian freedom. Because we don't have to spend our lives trying to earn God's favor, we are finally free to spend our lives loving and serving our neighbors, proclaimed but practiced.

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We don't love people so that God will love us. We love people because God already does. And I think that changes everything. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." Not just life after death. Life. Right here. Right now. A life of belonging. A life of dignity. A life of compassion. A life where nobody has to suffer alone. A life where grace [and love] is not merely proclaimed but practiced.

Of course, the church will never do this perfectly. We're Lutherans. We know a thing or two about being saints and sinners at the same time. But perhaps the church is meant to be a foretaste of God's promised future. A place where, even for a moment, the world looks a little more like the world God intends it to become. And perhaps that's why we need Word and Sacrament. Not because God withholds grace [or love] until we show up, but because we need to hear that promise, taste that promise, and be formed by that promise together.
The church doesn't exist to get people into heaven. The church exists to bear witness to God's kingdom breaking into the world right now. And that brings me back to where I started.
Why church?

Not because God is keeping attendance. Not because our salvation depends on maintaining an institution. Not because we owe God an hour of our Sunday morning. But because the world is lonely. Because people are hurting. Because injustice is real. Because hope can be hard to find. Because we all need to be reminded that we belong to something bigger than ourselves. Because sometimes we need someone to carry us when we cannot carry ourselves. And sometimes we're called to do the carrying.

Maybe the church isn't something we do for God. Maybe the church is one of the gifts God gives us for one another. And if that's true, then the future of the church won't ultimately be found in better marketing, flashier worship, or more elaborate programs. It will be found wherever the love of God becomes visible, tangible, and impossible to ignore.

So, fellow Lutherans, maybe it's time to stop asking how we can save the church. And start asking how the church can participate in God's work of loving, healing, and liberating the world. Because the church was never meant to be an institution desperately trying to keep itself alive. It was meant to be a community proclaiming, practicing, and sharing the abundant life we have already been given in Christ. That's why church. And that's a church worth being part of."

May God bless your Advent and Christmas!
-PrAshley

Upcoming Events



Visit with Santa – Dec 5 1-3p

Christmas Caroling – Dec 7, Aravilla: 11a Memory Care, 11:45 Assisted Living, then lunch at Olive Garden, and at 3:45p at Harbor Chase. Dec 13 1p Alderman Oaks.



Special Congregational Meeting – Dec 13 after worship. Voting on Council members and the 2027 spending plan.

Longest Night Worship - Dec. 21 at 7p

Christmas Eve worship - Dec. 24 at 7p

Epiphany Sunday Worship - Jan. 3 Get your Star Word for the year. Bring in your Nativity (creche) for during coffee hour.

ECLC News






In the month of November our VPK students counted out pom poms and “stuffed the turkey” using tweezers. This taught them how to count and use fine motor skills when handling the tweezers.







Room 3 was practicing fine motor skills and hand/eye coordination by making paper plate turkeys. They also learned how to follow directions and how to be creative in the process.



Our Food Pantry Hard at Work!

At the last Food Pantry Distribution in November our Food Pantry staff helped distribute over a thousand pounds of food, with over 100 turkeys, to over 100 families. Thanks to all of our volunteers for helping to feed the hungry of our community.

















FOOD PANTRY



The Good Gifts ornaments will be displayed on the Christmas tree in the Fellowship Hall beginning Sunday, December 6th. You can choose one or more ornaments to donate to the ELCA World Hunger Good Gifts program. And this year, as happened last year, your donation will be matched dollar for dollar up to $1000.00 by an anonymous donor. What a great way to help our brothers and sisters around the world!

Each ornament will have a gift you can purchase with prices that range from $10 - $500. Here is a sample of what the ornaments will include:

- Barnyard animals (cow, sheep, goats, chicks, piglets)
- Honey bees
- Water jugs
- Mosquito nets
- Vaccinations
- And more….

For the more expensive animals, such as a cow or sheep, please consider purchasing as a family or a group of friends to help offset the cost.



We will be in the Fellowship Hall after the worship service for assistance on Sunday, December 6th, 13th, and 20th. Call Cindy Paxton at 941-586-0192 or email cindypaxton12@outlook.com with any questions. Please make checks payable to St. Paul Lutheran Church and note Good Gifts on the check. No IOUs – there will be plenty of ornaments to purchase on these three Sundays.

Thank you for sharing and for helping to make this Christmas a little brighter for others! For more information about the Good Gifts program, go to www.ELCA.org/goodgifts

Celebrating God's Family

Rooted in Christ!



12-11	Judy Roberts
12-14	Sandy Choquette
12-15	Tyler Riley
12-18	Robyn Wood
12-22	Janice Kruse
12-23	Kevin Salvatore
12-30	Earleen Ashbrook



12-06	Tim & Adriana Miller
12-21	Barry & Brenda Smith

TREE NO MORE!

The large tree in the quad closest to our sanctuary was cut down this past November as it was a deemed in danger of damaging our sanctuary. This was the tree that lost a large branch this past summer that nearly missed a car in the parking lot.



Architecture Sarasota on Campus



The gathering was so large they had to have a parking attendant!

On November 13-14 Architecture Sarasota held a large gathering on our campus. Students from the school of architecture had on display in the Fellowship Hall possible ideas for use of our campus. This is the earliest stage of ideas that will help St. Paul financially in the future.





CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Dec. 1 Tuesday
9:30a ECLC Chapel
1:00p Invitation & Connection Meeting
5:30p Community Meal

Dec. 2 Wednesday
8:00a Property Team Meeting
5:30p Bell Choir Practice
6:30p Choir Practice

Dec. 3 Thursday
9:30a Food Pantry Prep
4:00p Prayer Team Meeting Zoom

Dec. 5 Saturday
9:00a Food Pantry Distribution
1:30p Visit with Santa

Dec. 6 Sunday
9:30a Worship Service

Dec. 8 Tuesday
Ministry Reports Due
9:30a ECLC Chapel
4:15p Music & Worship Zoom Meeting
5:30p Community Meal

Dec. 9 Wednesday
8:00a Property Team Meeting
9:15a ECLC Meeting
5:30p Bell Choir Practice
6:30p Choir Practice

Dec. 10 Thursday
9:30a Food Pantry Prep
12:00p Finance Meeting Zoom
1:00p Executive Team Meeting
4:00p Prayer Team Meeeting Zoom

Dec. 12 Saturday
9:00a Food Pantry Distribution
1:00p Visit with Santa Face Autism

Dec. 13 Sunday
9:30a Worship Service
10:30a Special Congregational Meeting

Dec. 15 Tuesday
Messenger Deadline
9:30a ECLC Chapel
12:00 ECLC Picnic
5:30p Community Meal

Dec. 16 Wednesday
8:00a Property Team Meeting
5:30p Bell Choir Practice
6:30p Choir Practice

Dec. 17 Thursday
9:30a Food Pantry Prep
4:00p Prayer Team Meeting Zoom
6:30p Council Meeting

Dec. 19 Saturday
9:00a Food Pantry Distribution
2:00p Guitar Sarasota

Dec. 20 Sunday
9:30a Worship Service

Dec. 21 Monday
7:00p Longest Night Service

Dec. 22 Tuesday
5:30p Community Meal

Dec. 23 Wednesday
8:00a Property Team Meeting
5:30p Bell Choir Practice
6:30p Choir Practice

Dec. 24 Thursday
9:30a Food Pantry Prep
7:00p Christmas Eve Service

Dec. 25 Friday
Merry Christmas!



Dec 26 Saturday
9:00a Food Pantry Distribution

Dec. 27 Sunday
9:30a Worship Service

Dec. 28 Monday
5:30p Wedding Service

Dec. 29 Tuesday
5:30p Community Meal

Dec. 30 Wednesday
8:00a Property Team Meeting
5:30p Bell Choir Practice
6:30p Choir Practice

Dec. 31 Thursday
9:30a Food Pantry Prep
4:00p Prayer Team Meeting Zoom

Prayer Request

•For all those serving in the U.S. Military, especially Gage Fournier. •The homeless in our neighborhood, our city, our nation and the world. •The Florida Bahamas Synod Office of the Bishop Staff: Bishop Pedro, Assistant to the Bishop Pastors Carlos, Derek, Nicole and Rob, Specialists Kim, Bill & Brittney, Support Staff Jordan, Yuliet, & Ileana. •SURE - Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity. •Community Meal & Food Pantry Guests. •Prayers upon the HOPE Community Prayer Cross. •The Arlington Park neighborhood.

Members
Manny Acevedo
Dottie Albright
Earleen Ashbrook
Beetle/Hildreth/Miller Family
Dorothy Boller
Susan Burmaster
Missy Craig
Irene Felicetti
Sue Fisher
Joann & Michael Flanigan
Bob Fong
Ethel Hamilton
Marilyn Hutfilz
Kasthuri Jayaraj
James Milliken
Valerie Nicolls
Nancy Parmakian
James Paulsson
Cindy Paxton
Colleen Ryan
Frank Sciani
Betty Smowton
Karin Zukowski

Homebound Members
Evelyn Gulliksen
Lindy Lindemann
Michael Reiter
Doris Schlotterback
Carole Wilson

Friends and Family
Alice - *JoAnn Jordan's friend*
Brad - *Cincy Paxton's brother*
Corbin - *Cindy Paxton's nephew*
Ed - *Sandy Choquette's friend*
Jim - *Nancy Parmakian's son*
Mark - *Hillerich's friend*
MJ - *Ron Zimmerman's friend*
Patty - *Cindy Paxton's sister*
Sharon - *Jane Schubert's friend*
Zev Maeson - *Cindy Paxton's friend*
Sandi Acevedo - *Acevedos sister-in-law*
Jesus & Reyna Alegria - *Sandy Tull's nieces-in-law*
Kareem Ali - *Fred Melton's friend*
Clinton Allen - *Jim Paulsson's friend*
Laura Anderson - *Robert's niece*
Billie Jean Athey = *C Mele's friend*
Lavinia Brown - *Helen Puckhaber's friend*
Buete & Pearson family - *Brian McCulley's family*
Caroline Burmaster - *Susan Burmaster's sister-in-law*
Cheryl Bydo - *Robert's friend*
Wayne Cobb - *Carolyn Jacobson's friend*
Todd Couch - *Sandy Choquette's son*
John & Joy Emanuelli - *Robert's friends*
Gladys Faraone - *Roibert's' friend*
Tony Felicetti - *Irene Felicetti's brother*
Niklaus Heisler - *Irene Felicetti's great-grandson*
Katy Hernandev - *M. Acevedo's niece*
Pr.John Hilficker - *Conrad Helwege's*
Sandy Holloway - *Helen Puckhaber's friend*
Judy Hugus - *Roberts' cousin*
Nicole Ketler - *Susan Burmaster's friend*
Darla Kim - *Robert's friend*
Kate Kretschmann - *Lindy Linderman's friend*
Karen Kugler - *Marty Hillerich's friend*
Jesse Lugo - *Jose Lugo's brother*
David McCall - *Judy Roberts' brother*
Marsha McKinney - *former member*
Fran McCracken - *K. Snyder's friend*
Linda Munkelwitz - *Judy Carnals' friend*
Becky Nobles - *Lindy Lindermann's friend*
Linda Norris - *Doris Scholotterback's family*
Karen Paulsson - *Jim Paulsson's* sister
Gary Perkins - *Judy Carnal's friend*
Hannah Puckhaber - *former attender*
Manny Ribas - *Cindy Schlotterback's friend*
Anita Rose - *Irene Felicetti's friend*
Claude Russell - *Tracy Bateman's uncle*
Brian & Kenny Schlotterback - *Doris Schlotterback's sons*
Hailey Schlotterback - *Doris Schlotterback's granddaughter-in-law*
Bill Schroeder - *Conrad Hellwege's friend*
Bethany Smith - *Smiths' daughter*
Joyce Swartzbaugh - *former member*
Natalie Smowton Boxx - *Betty Smowton's great-granddaughter*
Noel Scott Studenwalt - *Smiths' nephew*
Bill Sweeney - *Hutfliz's grandson*
Michael Taylor - *Addy Miller's friend*
Dan Torrence - *Kathy Snyder's friend*
David Van Ness - *Missy Craig's brother*
Mark Vanderweight - *Jim Paulsson's friends*
Andrea Waltje - *Irene Felicetti's friend*
Curtis Weckwerth - *Rick Weckwerth's cousin*
John & Janet Welther - *Ethel Hamilton's family*
JoAnn White - Jan Kruse's friend

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble, with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." 2Corinthians 1:3-4

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2256 Bahia Vista Street, Sarasota, FL 34239

941-955-6479 Preschool 941-955-6480
940 -955-8600
www.StPaulSarasota.org

Rev. Ashley Nicolls, Pastor
Rev. Don Hillerich, Pastor Emeritus

Sunday Schedule
9:30a Service of Worship In-person
9:30a Service of Worship on Facebook Live



St. Paul Mission Prayer

God of grace and love, you created us as your children and have brought us to St. Paul Lutheran Church. We are not perfect people, but this church is the perfect place for imperfect people. Thank you for your grace through Christ given to us. You call us to proclaim to everyone we meet that your grace is for them too. As a Holy Spirit-led family of God, we ask you to help us joyfully share your word and serve your people, so that together our lives make a difference in your kingdom here on earth. Strengthen us in our mission together; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.