



OCTOBER 2024

The Epistle

A newsletter for the community of
St. Paul's United Methodist Church



*For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—
not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
as God in Christ has forgiven you.*

—Ephesians 2:8-9, 4:32, NRSV

One day my first car, my beloved blue Geo Metro, died. It was a weekday morning near the end of the 2000 summer break, just before my final year of Seminary began. I was scheduled to go to another town the next day to transport my girlfriend to have her wisdom teeth removed. I was driving north from my little farm community to the larger nearby town for the some supplies when: Bang! The car bucked and smoke poured out from under the hood, now dented from within, as the car ground to a halt. The engine had "thrown" a spark plug.

These were still early days of cell phones; before I had one. Literally just weeks later; as a result of the day's events, my soon-to-be fiance would encourage me to get one before I resumed the weekly roundtrip north to Evanston. That day, I walked to a nearby farmhouse, knocked on the door, and used their phone to call a tow truck. The car made its way to town – I did not – and I received a call later that day that it was not financially feasible to fix it. (It was a Geo Metro, after all; a fishbowl on wheels with a hamster wheel engine.)

Word got around the two small churches I served as a Student Local Pastor. I had a call that evening asking if I needed to borrow a vehicle to take Lynn to her surgery; the family loaning me their truck for several days. Before I left town to chauffeur Lynn to her surgery and stay the night as a guest in her parsonage, a church leader hand-

ed me an envelope. The members of these two small churches that I had served for two years had taken up a special collection to give me the funds for a down payment, and referred me to a couple dealerships in the Champaign Urbana area.

Two days later a still-groggy Lynn, her mouth stuffed with cotton, accompanied me to test-drive cars, including a Saturn sedan and the white Toyota Corolla that I purchased. Thanks to the grace extended to me by the congregation, I had a new car.

This story isn't really about the car, though.

That summer, I was also cat sitting Lynn's cat Tabitha for a month while she was home in Florida, before she returned to take on at the part-time pastoral appointment and chaplaincy outside Champaign-Urbana. I enjoyed having a cat in the parsonage with me. Tabitha would join me for church meetings, entertaining guests as we gathered around the table or in my front room to talk about the church's ministries. The parsonage felt a bit empty when she went home to live with Lynn.

Within about a week of the incident with the Metro, there was a knock at the door. My church treasurer was there with a kitten. She shared that the small fireball had shown up at her porch, apparently abandoned. Her cat couldn't handle being near it, and the vet had told her that if she couldn't find a home for the kitten it would have to be put down. Could I take it in for a few weeks while she found it a forever home?

Of course, you can imagine the rest! That day Gracie joined our family, and she was with me for the next decade, first as we lived alone in that farmhouse parsonage, then when we moved in with Lynn and Tabitha after the wedding. She was with us when we took in a third cat (Madison), and when both Will and Kate were born Gracie cuddled up inside their empty cribs.

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(Pastor's Page, concluded)

I named her Grace because of the events that immediately preceded her coming into my home. The members of the church had shown me such great grace: free, unearned gifts that led me to know freedom and joy. And over the years to come, Gracie would herself be an agent of grace, helping me grasp other aspects about the depth of God's love for each of us. (But that's another story.)

I hope you have glimpses of the amazing grace of God in your life, be it through the agency of others in your church, through God's divine activity in your life, or maybe in the unconditional love of a beloved pet. I pray you experience unmerited gifts, unearned support, and unexpected wonder, coming to know how blessed and loved you are as a child of God.

See you in Church!



What's Coming In Worship

World Communion Sunday (October 6 - 9:30am)

World Communion Sunday reminds us that we gather together with Christians around the world, joining together at a common table of grace set by our Lord Jesus Christ. This year, in celebration of this special Sunday, we are inviting all who call St. Paul's United Methodist Church their home church to come together in a single, celebrative worship service.

As we join together for meaningful worship and shared communion at the Lord's Table, we will also mark the beginning of a season of celebration. St. Paul's UMC will celebrate its 65th anniversary in February, 2025. Between World Communion Sunday (10/6/24) and our Anniversary Sunday (2/16/25) we will periodically celebrate the history and impact of our local church with anniversary moments in worship and special events, culminating in another combined worship in February.



For our World Communion Sunday we will be celebrating quite a bit about our community. Current plans include a baptism, presentation of Bibles to our 3rd graders, and the reception of new members!

In commemoration of World Communion Sunday, United Methodist Churches around the world collect a special offering to support scholarships. You can learn more about this by visiting www.umc.org.



You can help us celebrate our history as a congregation! Beginning in October we hope to integrate into each week's worship service remembrances and worship elements from each decade of the church's life. If you want to share about being part of St. Paul's UMC in one of these decades ('65-74, '75-84, '85-94, '95-04, '05-14, '15-24), or have a fond memory of a worship element from one of those time periods, please contact the office!

What's Coming In Worship (continued)

Do Unto Others

(Worship Series, Oct. 13 – Nov. 10)

It's an understatement to point out that there is some tension amongst the people of our nation as we move into the late Fall. Campaign season is often fraught with conflict and disagreement, often culminating in public displays of anger and outrage. As we've been reflecting, though, as Christians we are called to something different than the norms of the "empire" in which we find ourselves. We are called to something higher, something holier, after the example of Jesus Christ.

As we move into the month of October, we are going to join with other churches that have participated, or will participate, in a worship series designed and shared by others within our broader United Methodist Church. "Do Unto Others" will walk us through the lessons of Jesus, inviting us to a new way of living together even in the midst of diversity and disagreement.

From Marcia McFee, who partnered with Rev. Adam Hamilton and the Church of the Resurrection to develop this campaign and worship series: *"There is no more important time to be talking about the 'doing unto others' in ways that we hope will foster kindness, compassion, humility, respect, and love in the world than right now. With divisiveness—and anxiety about that divisiveness—at an all-time high, how does our faith equip us to survive, and perhaps even thrive spiritually, in this moment?"*

Oct. 13: **Blue and Red Make Purple**
(Kindness)

Oct. 20: **The Polarization Within**
(Compassion)

Oct. 27: **Listen More, Speak Less** (Humility)

Nov. 03: **Living Together on Uncommon Ground** (Respect)

Nov. 10: **With Malice Toward None** (Love)

You can learn more about this series and the related "Campaign for Kindness" by visiting:
<https://campaignforkindness.com/>.



The anchor image for this series was developed by the communications team at Church of the Resurrection. The two upper lobes of the heart are red and blue, and where they cross they create a "purple space." This purple space represents the space we seek to create as a community; a space where together we learn to cultivate compassion, respect, humility, kindness, and love for one another, no matter what our other differences may be on the outside.

Over the course of five weeks, beginning on Sunday, October 13, we will reflect on these five values we seek to learn and live as followers of Jesus Christ. Worship, our Children's Sunday School, youth group, and perhaps our adult Sunday School groups will spend time reflecting on how we can live in these ways after Jesus' example, as we join with United Methodist Christians around the nation in this "campaign for kindness."

We even invite you to share about this campaign for kindness! We ordered a limited number of yard signs that you can choose to display in your home's yard. In place of declaring our support for one partisan ideology over another, may we join together in demonstrating support of a greater good for all.

Worship Volunteers

In the next couple of months, you will start to see announcements regarding worship volunteers. Please be thinking of ways that you can help out on Sunday mornings, ranging from passing out bulletins and collecting offering to reading scripture to helping run the tech to welcoming the congregation on their way into the church (and maybe even bringing back coffee fellowship!!) Sunday mornings run better when we all pitch in to help!

Giving Statements

Thank you for your patience as the office works to make sure that the statements are correct while transitioning to the new church management system. You should be seeing your 2024 statements in the next few weeks or so for the first 3 quarters of 2024, along with information about Stewardship 2025. If you are willing to have your statement emailed to you, you can use the QR code on the back of this Epistle to fill out a form that lets us know.

Other news

No Halloweendaze / Trunk or Treat This Year

Some of you have asked if St. Paul's is planning a "Halloweendaze" event this October. Our Church Council decided not to pursue this event this year. We did not have adequate leadership and support to plan, and our leaders have chosen to invest efforts toward a different community event in November.



Holiday Musical Revue

Mark your Calendars Now for our special community event: a Holiday Musical Revue, Friday, November 22, at 6:00PM. Featuring a variety of performers from our church and community, this festive evening will help get us prepared for the season of holidays beginning with Thanksgiving all the way through the New Year.



Shared Youth Ministry Launch – September Recap

Before we dive into our exciting plans for the upcoming months, I would like to share some highlights from the events we had in September. Our **Shared Youth Ministry**—a collaboration between Christ Church UMC, Desert Skies UMC, and St. Paul’s UMC—launched in September with energy, joy, and a strong sense of community. Together, we are focused on our core values of Belonging, Faith Formation, and Service, and we are already seeing how these values are shaping the experiences of our youth.

September 8th: Kickoff Event:

We began the ministry on September 8th at St. Paul’s UMC, where youth from all three churches came together for fun icebreakers, team-building activities, and creative projects. The joy and laughter in the room were contagious as both new and returning faces connected, setting the tone for a season of friendship and spiritual growth. This event was a great start for building a supportive community, and we look forward to seeing these connections grow.



Team-Building & Connection:

The following week, on September 15th, we focused on deepening connections through activities like Tic Tac Toe, the “Minefield” challenge, and “Walking over Volcano Lava.” Each game helped the youth work on teamwork, communication, and creativity. The youth also spent time in fellowship, sharing their hopes, dreams, and ideas for the future of the Shared Youth Ministry. It was an empowering experience, with each participant contributing their thoughts on how to make this ministry their own.

September 22nd: Mystery Trip to Fox in a Box

For our next event, the youth took a mystery trip to Fox in a Box Tucson Escape Room, where they worked together to solve puzzles in themed escape rooms. They faced challenges like stopping a zombie outbreak, pulling off a bank heist, and saving a Wild West town. Their teamwork and problem-solving really stood out, and everyone succeeded in escaping their rooms on time, making it a fun and exciting experience that strengthened their sense of belonging.



A Journey of Growth: What's Next for Our Shared Youth Ministry

As we look ahead, the exciting ideas generated through our **brainstorming sessions with youth, leaders, and volunteers** guide our plans for the coming months. October, November, and December will include service projects, faith formation activities, and fun events promoting belonging and cultural awareness. Some ideas we hope to materialize as we develop relationships and partnerships include service projects with local organizations such as **Interfaith Community Services and Border Community Alliance**, Bible studies on cross-cultural encounters, **projects like caroling, a youth-led service, and a Christmas party** or holiday fundraisers. For Sunday's youth group, we will continue exploring and looking for fun activities like **hiking trips, movie nights**, and cultural experiences like a potential ***Día de los Muertos* mystery trip** at the beginning of November.

Since this is a new shared youth ministry, we expect many plans to change or adapt as we receive feedback and build stronger connections. Our focus remains on fostering trust and partnership with local churches and organizations while providing **opportunities for youth to grow spiritually, serve the community, and build meaningful relationships**. The foundation we've established in September will guide us forward, and we are excited to see where the journey takes us as we continue rebuilding and creating new opportunities for everyone involved. We invite all youth (6th to 12th grades), parents, and volunteers to join us on this journey as we build a ministry where everyone truly belongs and grows in faith.

Blessings,
Luis Ortíz
New Shared Youth Ministry Director



Financial Update

Our church leaders wanted to share with you the good news / bad news of our current financial situation. We are pleased to share that we are currently running in the black, with a surplus of income over expenses of \$21,340. Unfortunately, this is partly due to the fact that we have not yet filled the open staff position of Director of Family Ministries; were we currently fully staffed, we would be running a deficit. This is a challenge to us as we look toward the next year, as we are faced with continued increases in personnel costs and facility maintenance.

We will be sending out giving statements along with an encouragement to plan for your 2025 pledge/giving in mid-October. We thank you for your faithful financial stewardship, and remind you that your support is foundational to the health of our church and its ministries.

YTD Income: \$497,389

YTD Expenses: \$476,049

Holiday Food Boxes

We are getting into the holiday season which means it is almost time to sign up to sponsor a holiday food box. Every year, for more than 20 years, we have been providing food boxes for Thanksgiving and Christmas (or whichever winter holiday a family might celebrate), complete with main dish, sides, dessert, etc. You can sponsor a box as an individual or get together with your friends or Sunday School class, Scout troop, Booster Club, etc. Let's give these families the best holidays that we can! Sign up will come later in October or you can contact Genita Salvagio, Cheryl Smith, or the church office for more information.



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Have anything you would like to share in the Epistle? Next due date is Oct 18 for the November/December/January Epistle. You can send information to Megan in the office