



NOVEMBER 2024

The Epistle

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



The Purity of Prayer...

*Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.*

*Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.*

—Psalm 62:1-2, NIV

Miley Cyrus may lay claim to coming in "like a wrecking ball," but my first cat Grace came into my life like a jet engine. Within an hour after the treasurer of Woodland United Methodist Church, in rural Illinois, dropped this little kitten off at my house, Grace was wandering behind me in the home, purring so loudly that I could still hear her on the downstairs couch even after I went upstairs! Gracie and I took to one another almost immediately. She would curl up beside me on the couch, or settle on my lap, or jump up into my bed, and almost as soon as she was close she would begin that lovely purr: a sound that, until the laughter of my firstborn, laid claim to being my favorite in the world.

Gracie's purr rumbled out from her little chest, her entire body vibrating; a sign of her comfort, trust, and – dare I attribute this to a cat? – love. My little girl trusted me to be a source of strength that would always be there to protect her.

At some point in my devotional readings while Gracie was with me I stumbled on an image that, coupled with her purr, transformed my understanding of prayer. Praying through the Psalms, I read:

*I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul within me is like a weaned child.*

—Psalm 131:2, NRSV

The image struck me as a matter of contrast: whereas the nursing child leans in close to their mother's breast for love and nourishment, the weaned child no longer seeks food there. The image of Psalm 131 is of a small child who is still, calm, and quiet with their mother; a child not longing for anything. A child content in, and fully trusting of, the safety of their mother's arms. Is there any place more secure?

And it occurred to me, that when Gracie curled up with me, purring, she was expressing the same contentment, the same trust. She knew she was safe, that I would care for her when she needed something; but in those moments, she was simply content to be in my presence. Purring.

And that became for me an ongoing metaphor for what I perceive to be the pinnacle of prayer. I know that I can go to God with requests, with needs. But I believe there comes a time when the ultimate attitude of prayer is one that is not seeking anything but to simply rest in God's presence, content and expressing my trust in the One who watches over and cares for me. I learned that I want God to hear my prayer like I heard Gracie's purr.

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(Pastor's Page, concluded)

Sometimes we become anxious about our prayer lives. We worry that we don't know the right words, that we may not be praying correctly. The lesson I learned from Gracie is that ultimately prayer isn't about the words in our minds, but the thoughts of our hearts. And I found, I think, concurrence in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans, where he said of prayer:

*The Spirit helps us in our weakness,
for we do not know how to pray as we ought,
but that very Spirit intercedes
with groanings too deep for words.*

—Romans 8:26, NRSV

Gracie's purr came from deep within her, expressing her trust. May you experience God in a similar way, your prayer rumbling from within and bringing joy to our God.



I want God to hear my prayer like I heard Gracie's purr.

See you in Church!



What's Coming In Worship



“Do Unto Others” (November 3 & 10)

The first two Sundays of November we will conclude our *Campaign for Kindness* worship series “Do Unto Others”:

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

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

November 17

Rev. Ron will weave together life stories to share about “**Life with Grace,**” lessons on God and God’s grace from an unlikely source. (Hint: If you read your Epistle, you’ve read parts of this sermon already!)

Advent Begins December 1!

Watch for updates on our celebrations of Christ’s birth!

November 24

The final Sunday of the church year is known as “Reign of Christ” Sunday. Many of the Scriptures for the day illustrate the intersection of religion and politics, faith and power, spirituality and ideology; and what do we find? “**Jesus At the Corner.**” (Focus upon John 18:33-37.)



Help us celebrate our history as a congregation! We want 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 ('70-79, '80-89, '90-99, '00-09, '10-19, '20-25), or have a fond memory of a worship element from one of those time periods, please visit our website and share your memory:

<https://stpaulsumctucson.org/anniversary-memories>

or send your memory to us by email. Thanks for helping!

St. Paul's United Methodist Church is proud to present



with special guests
CHRISTINE VIVONA, NEAMEN LYLES, THE REZONATORS,
THE CAST OF IN THE CHRISTMAS MOOD

and featuring musical groups from St. Paul's
HARMONY, GRACE MULTIPLIED,
& THE ST. PAUL'S LADIES CHOIR

November 22, 2024

6:00 pm

St. Paul's United Methodist Church

A generous community following Jesus

The following are excerpts from our Church Council's reports to our annual Church Conference, held on Tuesday, October 29.

Reflections on the Last Year of Ministry

Impacts:

- About 200 attend worship each week, and we have over 1,000 people come on our campus each week for ministries and opportunities;
- Community engagement with the Food Bank continues to rise, with more families being served each year;
- We have strong support of our initiatives to care for families in three local schools through school supplies and holiday food boxes and for our peanut butter drive for ICS (Interfaith Community Services).

Revitalization Team: Our selected leaders met monthly with guidance from Rev. Rachel Gilmore to discern clarity on our Mission, Vision, and Values (MVV).

Staff Turnover: Changes in church staffing have been an ongoing challenge this year. We are especially grateful for the church members who provided leadership to our youth, children's, and family ministries while we have been going through lengthy hiring processes.

Relaunch of Youth Ministry: We have partnered with two other local United Methodist Churches to have a shared youth ministry with a full-time staff person. We hired Luis Ortiz Erazo, and he began work with our churches on August 8.

Finances: We are experiencing both stability and challenges: our income exceeds our expenses, but this is in part because we are not doing all the ministry, or funding all the positions, that we wish to be doing.

Our Church Council continues to evaluate our community engagement, missional effectiveness, and operational sustainability, all in our efforts to lead the church to be a vital ministry for Christ in our community.

Ministry Plan for the Year Ahead

Staff Development: We will continue with the ongoing processes of seeking, hiring, and onboarding new staff. We will continue to build a strong ministry team with a positive morale.

Anniversary Celebrations: As we celebrate the congregation's 65th anniversary in February, 2025, we have a variety of initiatives already underway or in planning stages, including a Holiday Musical Revue (Friday, November 22), Celebration Sunday (Sunday, February 16), and more.

Focusing on Priorities: Church Council will continue to evaluate the church's existing ministries, actual capacities, and desired outcomes. This work will guide the Council to discern priorities for the congregation as we pursue its Mission, Vision, and Values.

Discipleship: It is our hope to launch a confirmation experience for youth and a corresponding "re:Confirm" experience for adults. We also hope to follow through with plans to offer the "Mountain Pathways" discipleship group experience again this year.

Strategic Work: Our Church Council and ministry teams will continue to do strategic work rooted in

- Knowing and aligning to our **Identity** (mission, vision, values)
- Knowing our **Context** (learning and understanding our community)
- Living our **Values** (ensure our ministries demonstrate our core values)
- Identifying our **Priorities**
- Developing **Action Plans**

all with an aim toward long-term missional effectiveness and operational sustainability.

For the Good of the World

Annual Report from Gretta Moffat School, John Dean Town, Liberia

Each year Mr. Jerry Giah, principal of the Gretta Moffat School in John Dean Town, Liberia, shares an annual report with St. Paul's UMC. The school is named after a member of St. Paul's, and our congregation has a long history of supporting the ministry. Below are a few excerpts from the report, and the full report is available for download from our church website.



I. ADMINISTRATION:

The Administration consists of five teaching and Administrative Staff headed by your humble servant Mr. Jerry C. Giah. The St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Tucson, Arizona, provides salaries for these committee brothers on an annual basis. May God continue to bless them.

II. ENROLLMENT STATISTICS:

- Total beginning students: 151 (94 boys & 57 girls)
- Total dropped out: 15 (7 boys & 8 girls)
- Total ending enrollment: 136 (87 boys & 49 girls)

Most of our students dropped-out due to the distant they will have to walk on a daily basis to get to school. Our dormitory project started in 2015 at an estimated cost of US\$20,000.00. The cost has later reviewed in 2020 and reduce to US\$12,800. The total of 3,500.00 was raised and used for the foundation of the building. The amount of US\$9,300.00 is new needed for the completion of the building that will accommodate students.

Church Financial Update

Our year to date finances continue to reflect what was shared last month: income has exceeded expenses, but only because we have been under-staffed this past year. Figures are in the column to the right.

St. Paul's appreciates your faithful financial support; thank you for investing in our vision to see **communities transformed because people are.**

VII. NEEDS AND CONSTRAINTS:

Our school building and guest house are in total darkness during the night hours. The need of solar panels to provide electricity to these building is paramount concern. The availability of electricity to these buildings will enable students to study their lesson at night and thus improve in their performances. It will curtail the use of gasoline generator and reduce expenses, especially during the visitation of guests.

The community people, especially teachers, parents and students will benefit by charging phones and other electrical equipment for their personal use. Please see attached budget. The need of grass cutters, photocopy machines and computer still remains.

For more information about the Gretta Moffatt School, John Dean Town, or how you might be able to help, please contact Tommy Sanford.

\$564,521 – Income YTD
(\$544,489) – Expenses YTD
\$20,032 – Surplus YTD

\$188,040 – Reserves
\$235,843 – Mortgage Balance

Shared Youth Ministry Update – October Recap

Belong - Believe - Serve

In September, we officially launched this Shared Youth Ministry, bringing together youth *from Christ Church UM, Desert Skies UMC, and St. Paul's UMC*. Our efforts have focused on building community through our core values of *Belonging, Faith Formation, and Service*.

Sunday Evening Youth Group Events

Embracing Diversity and Unity Through Faith Series:

- September 29: Cultural Differences in God's Design
- October 6: Unity and Loyalty Across Cultures
- October 13: The Holy Spirit and God's Message for All

We discussed culture, diversity, and unity through faith in youth events from September 29 to October 13. We read Bible stories like the *Good Samaritan, the Tower of Babel, Peter and Cornelius, and the story of Pentecost*, showing how God loves diversity and wants us to accept and celebrate our differences. The events included fun icebreakers, group discussions, and a Kahoot quiz that wrapped up the series, testing them on all the topics we discussed. The youth enjoyed learning more about unity, kindness, and diversity.

We encouraged the youth to think about how they can use these lessons in their everyday lives, helping to create a caring and welcoming community inside and outside the church.



Empowering Change: Exploring Social Principles Through Creativity

Students explored important social issues at the October 20th youth event and shared ideas for positive change through creative projects. The event started with a "Privilege Walk" icebreaker to show how privilege affects different people's lives. In small groups, students worked on Canva art projects focused on topics like Voting Rights and Civic Engagement, Economic Equality, Racial Justice, Gender Equality, and Environmental Justice. These projects introduced the United Methodist Church's Social Principles and provided a practical way for students to apply the principles to real-world issues. Their creativity and ideas about these important topics were inspiring, especially as we think about the current election season. We will be posting short clips of their projects on social media to share their work with a wider audience.

A Journey of Growth: What's next for our Shared Youth Ministry

Upcoming events (subject to minor changes).

- **On October 27th**, we will partner with **Community Gardens of Tucson** for a hands-on community service workshop at the New Spirit Community Garden, where they will participate in garden maintenance tasks like weeding, composting, and organizing tools.
- **On November 3rd**, our youth will participate in the 35th All Souls Procession and Ceremony on Grande Avenue. This inclusive event honors the dead and celebrates the living, offering a chance to learn about diverse cultures and traditions, particularly those from Latin America.
- **On November 17th**, our Shared Youth Ministry will meet at **Christ Church, UM**, a great chance to strengthen partnerships. Everyone is welcome, and we invite more youth to join!
- **Nov. 24 or December 1st**: The youth group will gather at **Desert Skies UMC** for an outdoor activity, with volleyball as the primary focus.
- In November, we will survey parents' interest in having their teenagers participate in confirmation classes in 2025. We will finalize the details and curriculum in December, with plans to begin monthly confirmation events in January leading up to the Confirmation Ceremony in May 2025.
- In December, our primary focus will be Service and Belonging; we plan a Caroling and Adopt a Family service project and close the year with a Christmas Party for youth and parents.

As our new Shared Youth Ministry grows, we look forward to evolving plans and building strong connections. We focus on helping youth grow in **faith, service, and belonging**. We invite all youth (6th to 12th grades), parents, and volunteers to join us on this exciting journey.



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Have anything you would like to share in the Epistle? Next due date is Nov 14 for the December/January Epistle. You can send information to Megan in the office

Other news

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.



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.

