



AUG/SEPT 2026

The Epistle

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

A Word from Rev. Ron



It is good to be away.
It is good to be back.

Though perhaps seemingly disparate at first glance, these words both speak truth. As Walt Whitman once wrote: "Do I contradict myself? I Very well then I contradict myself, I (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

I am grateful for the opportunity to have taken advantage of one of the benefits offered to our United Methodist clergy: going on a three-month renewal leave. During the months of May, June, and July I stepped away from the pulpit, from the office, and from the daily work of ministry to renew my spirit and refresh my soul. I thank you all, and especially the church's staff and leaders, and the clergy we invited in, who stepped up to cover the responsibilities of oversight and preaching while I was away.

Over the three months I attended a week-long training that began a six month learning co-hort with "The Hearth," learning how to build community through storytelling. I attended my final course of my doctoral studies at Wesley Theological Seminary - an elective on "Contemplation and the Arts" that utilized T.S. Eliot's Nobel prize winning *Four Quartets* as an entry point into the intersection of Christian mystics and art. Lynn and I spent a week on the road, traveling together through New Orleans for the first time, before we spent three weeks in an apartment near Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, where each day I walked 10+ miles and read through some dozen books. I did step back in to church work for one week, serving as the third chaperone - or what I call the "auxiliary adult" - for our youth's service and learning trip to Honduras.

As I shared in worship my first Sunday back, my readings in the Christian mystics were a positive influence on me going in to the time of rest. These Christian contemplatives often emphasize the importance of living in the current moment, in echoes of Jesus' words not to worry about tomorrow. When asked before my leave what I was most looking forward to, I wisely chose a path that I stuck to through the months away: I was looking forward to whatever each day would bring me.

And the days brought much. I read a lot. I met, and at the food of, two celebrity chefs that I know from some of the cooking shows I watch; and recognized a third eating in the same restaurant as us. I was given the opportunity to review the library of a stranger's Methodist-pastor-father's library. I found and repeatedly returned to a local Scottish pub with an amazing vibe and some fun live music in the band "Jenny and the Weasels." Lynn and I spent some good, quality time together over four weeks; and I had two weeks in educational environments with short-term communities that were inspiring and meaningful.

I am grateful for the choice I made to take each day as it came, which meant that some were perhaps not great - getting a 10pm text about the car being wrecked comes to mind! - but overall every day had its own blessings. It all reminds me of something my youth director shared with us when I was in middle school, a writing from the Presbyterian author and theologian Frederick Buechner that I have come back to time and again: his definition of the word "Today" (see inset, next page). Today is both the culmination of all our yesterdays and the start of all our tomorrows. As the Rev. Dr. Bert Lewis used to say at Dayspring United Methodist Church: *"Today is the first day of the rest of your life!"*

I hope you can find a way to choose to embrace today, appreciating it for the wonder that it is. And I thank you, again, for the opportunity to embrace days of renewal and restoration over this summer past! See you in Church! -Ron

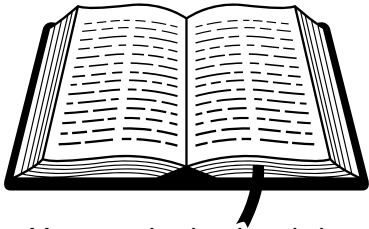
What's Coming In Worship

The Bible Tells the Story

Beginning in September our worship services will focus not around the Revised Common Lectionary but an alternative called "The Narrative Lectionary." Beginning with stories from the book of Genesis, this lectionary assigns readings to each Sunday of the school year that walk through the major narrative arc of Scripture. We'll journey with the ancestors through the books of the Old Testament, with a reading from the New Testament chosen that complements the week's focus. This journey culminates in the prophet's promise of a coming Messiah just as we shift to the birth of Jesus at Christmas. From there we'll spend months focusing upon Jesus' life and teaching from the Gospel of Matthew, until after Easter we shift and close the year out with an understanding of the life of the early church.

Though not the final sermon titles, here are the subjects and readings for the coming month of September:

- Creation by the Word: Genesis 1:1-2:4a (paired with John 1:1-5)
- Flood and Promise: Genesis 6:5-2; 8:6-12; 9:8-17 (paired with Matt. 8:24-27)
- Call of Abraham: Genesis 12:1-9 (paired with Matt. 28:19-20)
- Joseph in Prison: Genesis 39:1-23 (paired with Matt. 5:11-12)



Jonah and the Wailing (A Bible Study)

You are invited to join with Rev. Ron and others for a Bible Study unlike any you've been in before! Tentatively titled "Jonah and the Wailing" (because change always makes us want to wail!), this study will look at the narrative of the Book of Jonah as humorously illustrative of the work of adaptive change. "Adaptive" change refers to those challenges that are new and not easily resolvable with previous knowledge or skill, requiring us to learn and adapt. This study is an original work integrating the biblical narrative of Jonah with other Biblical stories and insights from change management, all wrapped up in the shared activity of communal storytelling. Join us to learn from Scripture and social science, and see in the stories of your life and the lives of your neighbors how it all comes together.

There will be two options offered, and you are invited to sign up for either one:

- Wednesday evenings (4 sessions, every two weeks), 6-8PM, Sept. 9 & 23 and Oct 7 & 21.
- Sunday morning Sunday School (8 weeks), 8:00am, Sundays Oct. 4, 11, 18, 25 and Nov. 1, 8, 15.

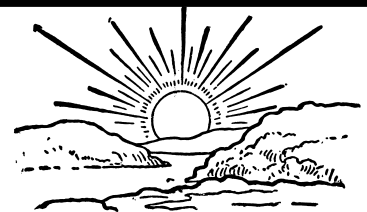
Interested in joining? Please RSVP so we have a sense of interest and to know how many materials to provide. Visit our website where you will find a tab, or go directly to the survey by visiting: www.stpaulsumctucson.org/JonahStudy.



Help Us Tell The Story!

The heart of Christianity is community, and this includes how we teach and learn. To that end, we are interested in bringing back the Christian practice of "witnessing," hearing stories from church members about how their faith and spiritual practices make an impact in your life. Watch for specific requests in coming weeks, and reach out to Rev. Ron if you have a story you would like to share in worship to bless others.

TODAY



It is a moment of light surrounded on all sides by darkness and oblivion. In the entire history of the universe, let alone in your own history, there has never been another just like it and there will never be another just like it again. It is the point to which all your yesterdays have been leading since the hour of your birth. It is the point from which all your tomorrows will proceed until the hour of your death. If you were aware of how precious it is, you could hardly live through it. Unless you are aware of how precious it is, you can hardly be said to be living at all.

"This is the day which the Lord has made," says the 188th Psalm. "Let us rejoice and be glad in it." Or weep and be sad in it for that matter. The point is to see it for what it is because it will be gone before you know it. If you waste it, it is your life that you're wasting. If you look the other way, it may be the moment you've been waiting for always that you're missing.

All other days have either disappeared into darkness and oblivion or not yet emerged from it. Today is the only day there is.

—Frederick Büchner, *Whistling in the Dark: An ABC Theologized*, 105-106.



This Fall, beginning Saturday, September 5th from 4:00 to 6 pm in Brummet Hall, St. Paul's will be introducing a new worship experience for all ages. Messy Church is a time of fellowship, activities, and celebration that welcomes all people in a less traditional setting - one more like how Jesus led.

Schedule:

- 4:00 - 5:00 - Activities
- 5:05 - 5:25 - Celebration
- 5:30 - 6:00 - Dinner

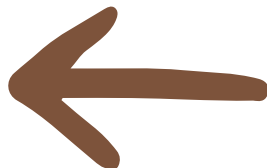
September theme: New Beginnings

October theme: Shine

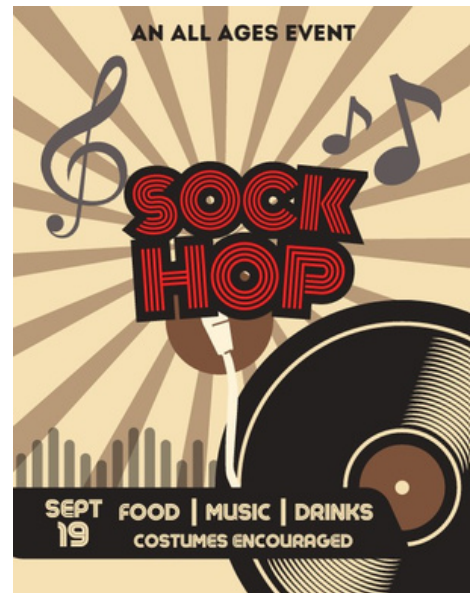
Sign up for Messy Church so we can have enough for dinner this first month!



Sock Hop Sign Up



A 1950s-Themed Sock Hop Benefiting Casa de los Niños



Grab your poodle skirts, cuff those jeans, slick back that hair, and get ready to twist, jive, and stroll the night away! Join us for a sock hop packed with classic 1950s (and 60's, 70's, 80's and today) fun, toe-tapping tunes, sweet treats, and plenty of retro charm.

Because it's a SOCK hop, bring new socks of any size. Your donations will benefit Casa de los Niños, a Tucson organization that has served the community for more than 50 years by helping prevent child abuse and neglect, supporting family stability, and promoting child well-being.

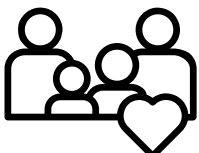
Time: 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Location: St. Paul's Life Center

Suggested Donation: a new package of socks (any size)

Dress Code: 1950s fabulous—poodle skirts, leather jackets, saddle shoes, rolled-up jeans, and cat-eye glasses encouraged!

Sign up here so we can make sure to have a big enough dance floor and plenty of food!



Contact Heather Stein for information on Children and Family Ministries or any events on this page. 520-296-6149 or FamilyMinistries@StPaulsUMCTucson.net



Shared Youth Ministry: *Belong - Believe - Serve*

Summer Trips 2026

Grand Canyon Trip: Our youth spent four days camping, hiking, serving at the Flagstaff Family Food Center, and learning about the night sky at the Grand Canyon Star Party. Living and working together helped students build stronger friendships, trust, fellowship, and teamwork. They also learned about nature, helping the group, and supporting each other during challenges and new experiences.

Honduras Service-Learning Trip: Our youth spent eight days in Honduras serving, learning, and building relationships. Their activities included serving with children and teens through local nonprofit organizations, learning about Mayan culture and local traditions, and learning about conservation and the scarlet macaw, Honduras' national bird. They also joined hundreds of local teens for a regional youth worship event and visited several community programs to learn how they serve families. Throughout the trip, students practiced Spanish, worked as a team, made new friendships, and learned more about faith, culture, and service.

Please ask us if you are curious about what else the students learned or experienced during either trip.



Upcoming Youth Group Gatherings

- **August 23: Sunday School Class + Brainstorming.** Students will continue using the Echo the Story curriculum for Bible learning and reflection, and they will also share ideas for future outings and activities
- **August 30: Youth-Led Games, Activities & Karaoke.** A fun night focused on fellowship, student leadership, and empowerment.
- **September 6: No Youth Group** for Labor Day weekend.
- **September 13: Sonoran District Splash Bash** at St. James UMC. A chance to connect with youth from other churches in our district.
- **September 20 or 27: Escape Room Field Trip:** An annual tradition, this is a fun team challenge and off-site outing. RSVP will be required.

Volunteer Opportunities: We are looking for volunteers who would like to help teach Sunday School about once every five weeks. Also, would you like to lead a one-time workshop and share a skill, hobby, or topic with our youth? We also welcome any suggestions or ideas. If you are interested or would like to learn more, please email [Luis at youthdirector@tucsonumcyouth.com](mailto:Luis@youthdirector@tucsonumcyouth.com).

Want to Travel with your Church Friends?

We have in the past had some opportunities for travel as a church body, most recently being the Wesley Tour of England. We had planned to do an Alaskan cruise next summer (2027) with two other churches, but spaces were filled before we were able to widely publicize and coordinate it with our St. Paul's members.

So now we are open to ideas! If you would be open to participating in a group travel experience with others from St. Paul's, we want to hear from you. If there is enough interest, we will gather together for a brainstorming meeting in mid-September. We still have time to plan a summer 2027 trip, or we may look at options for later.

Visit our website, where you will find a tab for this, or go directly to the survey by visiting:

www.stpaulsumctucson.net/ChurchTravel



Building Community for Seniors: Coffee and Conversation

We would like to launch a new ministry, at least monthly at St. Paul's United Methodist Church that our partners at Interfaith Community Services have successfully led at other locations. Called "Coffee & Conversation," this is an opportunity for local seniors to gather together for coffee and conversation with others. We have ample space to do so, but we are lacking the Human Resources. If you would be interested in working with us to coordinate this event – which would include helping to make coffee and provide refreshments, decorate, show hospitality, and clean up – please email Rev. Ron. If we have enough help we will have Coordination meeting on Thursday, September 17, at 10am and may be able to launch in October!



Church Conference Time!

Megan Swanson, Administrative Assistant

Every autumn, each local United Methodist Church holds an annual meeting for its members to discuss the business of the church. For those of us who have been in the church for a while, these meetings almost feel like a waste of time. Who really cares about the members who are being removed off the rolls or who is being tasked with leading the church on a committee or who will represent us at Annual Conference in June? Why are there so many conferences?!

I do not have enough space in this article to discuss the hierarchy of the United Methodist Church, so I highly recommend checking out UMC.org for more information on that. Here is a quick run down: St. Paul's UMC > Sonoran District > Desert Southwest Annual Conference > Western Jurisdiction > General Conference. Each of these levels have their own work to do each year. **Our church conference is scheduled for October 8, 2026 at 7:00 pm in the Sanctuary.** During this meeting, we will be able to vote on the pastor's compensation, the leadership for the upcoming year (also known as committee members), elect our representatives to Annual Conference next summer, and take a look at the membership rolls.

As Administrative Assistant, part of my job is to make sure that I keep our membership rolls up to date. Each year, I pull a list of who are in the records as full and active members and then I look to see if they have attended and or given financially to the church. Since we know that things happen, I go back 2 years and if there is no record of someone either attending or giving to the church, then I put them on what's called the First Reading list. Once someone has been on the First Reading list, they get moved to the Second Read list the following year and that is the list that gets voted on to remove their names from the rolls. I do my best to keep these rolls up to date and sometimes mistakes get made, though this list is also a big reason that I want people to log their attendance on a Sunday morning! One reason I work so hard to keep the rolls cleaned up and up to date is because membership is a small factor in our apportionment figure, weighted at 20%. The other factor, which is weighted at 80%, is our local church expenses.

The UMC is a connectional church and we benefit from that every single day and we support that through the apportionments we pay to our Annual Conference. If you have any questions regarding any of this, please do not hesitate to contact me in the office at 520-296-6149 or secretary@stpaulsumctucson.net

Happy Church Conference Season!



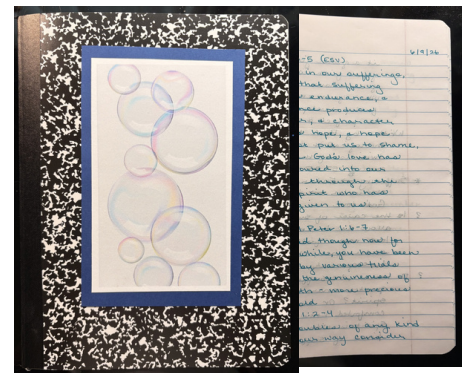
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Here is some of what we created
in the Creative Prayer class this
Summer with Heather:
(from top left) Methodist prayer
beads, Carole Kepler's prayer board,
SOAP journals, and Heather's
Bible jouralling.