

MONTHLY NEWS OF SAINT PAUL BENSON

Inspiration

December 2020

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

“Christmas is where the heart is, and Advent is the path we take...”

“Advent creates people, new people,” Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you,” Mother Teresa

Advent has always been my favorite of the church seasons. The scriptures describe paths through the wilderness of life and faith, and we search the skies for stars and angels as we rehearse the stories of our lives and the Christian faith that lead us along with shepherds and Magi to the Christ child. This year is different, and yet follows a familiar Advent path – we are journeying through the wilderness of a pandemic, learning new ways of staying in touch and yet we are carried forward in faith by the rich and timeless scriptures, the music of the season, and so many opportunities to be a living witness to the faith which has never abandoned us. I believe that Advent truly creates new people, each time we step out into the wilderness of faith and take the risk of loving more, giving more, sharing more of God’s love in the world.

This season at Saint Paul we will continue to worship from home, yet stay connected in love and care. Inside this newsletter you will find a new opportunity to share love – a Reverse Advent calendar. You can still have an old-school chocolate Advent calendar this season, but what about adding a new tradition of giving a gift of love each day of Advent? We will gather our donations in early January to give to Together to share our love with our neighbors in one of the coldest months of the year – a way we can continue to express our love past the Christmas season.

I want you to know how much I appreciate the strength and resilience of Saint Paul Benson; we have continued to persevere in our faith journey in times that we could not have imagined a year ago, and your generosity of spirit continues to shine. This Advent will be different – and yet the path of faith is familiar, and we are accompanied by a host of Saints who have gone before us, the beautiful scriptures of the season – and one another. I give thanks for your faithfulness, for God’s abiding presence, and for the gift of the Christ Child that we celebrate together.

With thanksgiving,
Rev Stephanie Ahlschwede

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December Church Calendar

Special Communal Offering for Ministerial Education Fund

Sundays

8:00 am Pianoside Worship Available on YouTube
10:00 am Worship Livestream on Facebook
11:00 am Dyno Kids on Zoom
12:15 pm Kirundi/Kiswahili Worship Livestream

Sunday, December 6

1:00-3:00 pm Pick up Advent Drive-up orders of cookie dough, book, gift items, tshirts

Sunday, December 13

2:00 pm Children's Christmas Pageant on Zoom
4:00 pm Children's Christmas Pageant on Zoom

Mondays through Fridays

6:30 am-5:30 pm Child Development Center open
9:00 am-5:00 pm Church Office Open (sometimes closes at 3:00 pm, please call ahead)

Mondays

10:00 am Clergy Meeting

Mondays, November 30, December 7, 14, 21

10:00 am Advent Book Study on Zoom
5:00 pm Advent Book Study on Zoom

Tuesdays

9:00 am Lectio Divina Prayer Group

Tuesday, December 1

4:15 pm Serving Dinner at Siena/Francis House; call the church office if you are interested in serving

Tuesdays

3:00 pm Pianoside Taping

Tuesdays, December 1, 8, 15, 22

6:00 pm Bell Choir Rehearsal
7:00 pm Choir Rehearsal

Wednesdays

11:00 am. Staff Check-in

Wednesday, December 23

7:00 pm Christmas Pianoside service available on YouTube

Thursday, December 24

7:00 pm Christmas Eve Service Livestream on Facebook
Building closed for Christmas Holiday

Friday, December 25

10:00 am Christmas Service with Bishop Saenz preaching; available on YouTube

Friday, December 25

Building Closed for Christmas Holiday

Saturday, December 12

8:30 am Book Club Meeting on Zoom
5:00 pm Youth set up luminaries for the Countryside Neighborhood event

Norman Vincent Peale, the 20th century minister and positive thinker, said, “Christmas waves a magic wand over this world, and behold, everything is softer and more beautiful.” If we ever needed a magic wand to be waved, it is this year! How will we make the season merry and bright? Well, one way is to deck the halls for the Advent season in a new, “camera ready” way! Although most of you won’t worship in person, the celebration continues. The first weekend, **November 29**, focuses on staying awake; readying yourself for the hope of Christ’s birth in our hearts yet again. And in these days, hope is exactly what we need. Join The Choir and the Solid Brass Quartet as they socially distance themselves to bring the hope of the season to LiveStream worship at 10:00 a.m. The Sacrament of Holy Communion will be celebrated the second weekend, **December 06**, and you are invited to come prepared to partake of the holy meal wherever you may find yourself for PianoSide (8:00 a.m.) or LiveStream worship. Our family-friendly, Zoom presentation of the Children’s Pageant, with readings from the gospel accountings of Christ’s birth will be available for streaming **December 13**. More information on how you may participate or view this annual tradition offered in a safe way is elsewhere in this publication. We conclude the Advent season with a service of Lessons and Carols with The Choir, brass and organ as part of LiveStream worship on the fourth weekend, **December 20**.

The pandemic has left little unaffected, yet there are joys to be found. We are excited to say that **Christmas Eve 2020** will be celebrated with three consecutive evening services. You may worship at any or all beginning with a Christmas PianoSide service, Wednesday, **December 23** at 7:00 p.m.; LiveStream worship on Thursday, **December 24** at 7:00 p.m.; and a special service conducted by our Bishop, the Rev Reuben Saenz, Jr., on **Christmas Day** at 10:00 a.m. Even though keeping tradition while not in one another’s physical presence may be difficult, your clergy are diligently seeking ways to honor the customs and rituals associated with both Saint Paul, and the holy-days. Be assured you will find the opportunity to carol, commune and raise a candle; all in the safety of your sacred space. “Behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior, which is Christ the Lord...” And the world will be a softer and more beautiful place.

Clergy Corner—Rev. Marta Wheeler

We are excited to present the Children’s Christmas Pageant in a new form this year!

The video will be *premiering* on Zoom on December 13th at 2 and 4 pm!

The nativity story from the gospel of Luke will be told by our children and families. It’ll be a fun intergenerational time as we experience the birth story once again through the eyes of children, play a game, and share the warm feelings.

Please notify the church office and a zoom link will be sent out to you for the time requested. Let us know if you need help figuring this out, we’d love to see your faces!

The video will also appear on the Saint Paul Benson You-Tube channel on December 13th.

Each Sunday the Dyno Kids meet on zoom at 11 am for 30 minutes. We discuss a scripture, sing a song, and catch up on their lives. I would love to share the blessings I feel with others. If you miss seeing children in worship and would like to join me in teaching them, please let me know. Building relationships with youth and adults at church is an important part of their faith development. Plus, you never know what will come out of the mouths of babes, or the jokes that may be told! When the day comes that we are able to return to in-person worship, the children will be excited to see someone they are familiar with, who shared their faith and spent time with them.

Prayers for each of you, and for our church together, as we enter into the Season of Advent.

As we prepare our hearts, may we be open to new ways of experiencing the love of God in the birth of the Christ Child.

Advent Book Study

Please join us for an Advent book study via zoom with Revs. Ahlschwede and Wheeler. Each class is scheduled for one hour. We will study *God Is In the Manger* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and become more familiar with one of the most beloved theologians of the 20th century. Books are \$12 and will be available from the church office by mid-November. Extra copies are available for those who would like to read along but are unable to come to the group meetings. The book studies will be Mondays, at both 10am and 5pm, beginning Nov. 30th and Dec. 7, 14, 21. Sign up in the church office to reserve your copy of the book and receive the zoom link (specify morning or evening).

2020 "Angel Tree"

Giving to the Angel Tree will also look different this year, yet young people will still benefit from your generosity and caring. Instead of shopping for particular gifts, the Mercy and Justice Team is requesting \$25 gift cards from Target or Walmart, or checks in any amount. Please send to the church by December 10th. These will be distributed by Youth Emergency Services and Health and Human Services. Thank you very much for making Christmas brighter for these children and teens!

December Communal Offering—Ministerial Education Fund

The Ministerial Education Fund is the basic financial source for preparing and educating clergy leadership for The United Methodist Church.

Saint Paul's clergy have benefitted by scholarships given from this fund.

- 40% of the funds are reserved for theological schools based upon the number of United Methodists enrolled.
- 25% is distributed among the seminaries for basic support. Gender and ethnic inclusiveness of faculty, administrators, and students is considered.
- The rest is given to be used in programs of spiritual formation, continuing education, and other theological initiatives.
- 25% of the receipts remain in the annual conference to assist candidates for ministry, support continuing education for pastors, clergy recruitment, and financial aid for students.
- Since 1970, more than \$510 million has been raised to support clergy leadership.

Thank you for giving generously to help educate clergy leadership.

The Mercy and Justice Team

Hat & Mitten Tree

Although we aren't having in-person worship, we are still collecting warm clothing—hats, mittens, gloves and scarves—for children attending the elementary schools near Saint Paul Benson. The schools are always very grateful for our donations. You may drop off items at the church—just call before you come, please.

Health Protocols - Rev Ahlschwede

Throughout the Covid19 crisis, Saint Paul has been a leader in following current health protocols. As your lead pastor, I have appreciated the support of our District Superintendent and Bishop in this work, and enclosed you will find excerpts from a letter to all churches from the Bishop detailing his support of worshipping from home. Covid19 can be deadly, and in the church building a positive case has significant repercussions for our staff and CDC families. Therefore, we will continue to require that face coverings be worn in all areas of the building except when staff are alone in their office, including CDC kids. We also require distancing; staff meetings will be held via zoom indefinitely to reduce exposures. Staff who test positive must isolate at least ten days while those who experience a direct exposure must quarantine for 14. *The full text of the Bishops letter is available at www.greatplainsumc.org.*

The following are excerpts from a letter written to the United Methodist congregations of Nebraska and Kansas from our Bishop, Ruben Saenz Jr, on November 12th, 2020.



GREAT PLAINS ANNUAL CONFERENCE
of The United Methodist Church

REV. DR. RUBEN SAENZ JR., *Resident Bishop*

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November 12, 2020

Dear Clergy and Laity of the Great Plains Conference, Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Out of an abundance of caution I am strongly encouraging that in-person worship services for congregations located in counties identified as being in critical or dangerous statuses related to the COVID-19 pandemic be suspended until further notice. I fully recognize that this means worshipping physically apart from one another during the Thanksgiving and Advent seasons, including Christmas Eve, funerals, weddings, and other large group gatherings but I believe this is the most responsible action at this time to preserve the health and wellbeing of our laity and clergy.

We have, over the years, come to narrowly conceive worship as a gathering of a faith community in a church building. We do find in Scripture that the worship of God occurred in a tabernacle, the Temple, and synagogues. However, we also find numerous references to the worship of God that occurred in the wilderness, on mountain tops, in city streets, by rivers and, yes, in people's homes. Sometimes worship happened with a gathered community, and at other times, worship happened in solitude.

We are living in difficult and uncertain times. I am aware that many of our Thanksgiving tables will be fraught with uncertainties and absent of our loved ones for a variety of reasons. I am aware that this Christmas season will be difficult for individuals, families, and our communities. But we are a people of relentless hope in God in times of darkness, danger, and despair. Just because we can't gather for worship in our church buildings in this season of pandemic like we are accustomed, it does not in any way mean we cannot worship. In fact, our inability to gather as a community of faith to worship should compel us to find new ways to worship until we are able to gather again.

Know that you are always in my thoughts and prayers. Thank you for your loyalty to Christ, to The United Methodist Church you belong to and, as a disciple of Christ, your loyalty to and love of your neighbor. Agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11).

Ruben Saenz Jr.

Bishop, Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church

ANTICIPATING JOY & ACCUMULATING ACTS OF LOVE FOR TOGETHER OMAHA

Reverse Advent Calendar

Give the gift of caring - food, clothing or funds for utility assistance - to some of the Metro's most vulnerable people. Bring items to the Saint Paul Benson parking lot on Sat., Jan. 2 & Sun., Jan. 3 from 11am-1pm. Financial donations can be made via check (note "Together" on the memo line), online, or delivered on the January dates. *Thank you!*



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Grab a box or bag to collect your gifts!
Find more info at togetheromaha.org

1
Every Tuesday
STAY IN TOUCH:
Call a friend from church

2
SINGLE-WRAPPED ROLL OF TOILET PAPER

3
HOT CHOCOLATE MIX

4
JELLY
BONUS ITEM: WARM SOCKS

5
PEANUT BUTTER

6
GIVE YOURSELF THE GIFT OF *Worship* EACH SUNDAY

7
SINGLE-WRAPPED BAR OF SOAP

8
Every Tuesday
GENERATIONS:
Check in on a friend or family member of a different age group

9
CAN OF TOMATOES

10
CANNED BEANS
BONUS ITEM: KLEENEX

11
CAN OF GREEN BEANS

12
POP-TOP CAN OF RAVIOLI

13
TRY SOMETHING NEW
Livestream
10AM - FACEBOOK @SaintPaulBenson
Invite a Friend to Join Us!

14
MAC & CHEESE

15
Every Tuesday
REACH OUT:
Call someone you used to see each week to say "hello!"

16
BAG OF RICE
BONUS ITEM: MITTENS / GLOVES

17
BAG OF DRIED BEANS

18
SPAGHETTI SAUCE

19
BAG OF PASTA

20
ALSO POSTED ON OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL @SaintPaulBenson
New! Sermon by Phone (402) 210-2091

21
CAN OF SOUP

22
Every Tuesday
WRITE IT UP:
Send a note of thanks to someone you appreciate

23
CEREAL

24
TUNA
CHRISTMAS EVE FACEBOOK LIVESTREAM 7 PM

25
Merry Christmas

BONUS ITEM:
Count the light switches in your home; donate 10¢ each to Together's utility assistance fund

Notes & Updates

- **#GivingTuesday** Have you heard of Black Friday and Cyber Monday? A few years ago, a group of nonprofits embarked on a journey to follow these post-Thanksgiving shopping days with #GivingTuesday, which this year falls on December 1st. We encourage you to consider a gift to your favorite non-profit this day, and hope Saint Paul will be at the top of your list! To participate, use the donate button on our website, or send a check with the note GivingTuesday. #GivingTuesday gifts will be used to help with our annual UMC mission shares, which we intend to pay in full.
- **Shop with Ten Thousand Villages.** Shop online with our own Saint Paul Benson code and 10% of your purchases from the Ten Thousand Villages website from Nov 30-Dec 7 will come back to the church. More details will be posted on our social media sites, as we launch this fundraiser on "Cyber Monday."
- **New: Sermon by Phone.** Call any time of day or night for the weekly scripture and a short reflection that matches our weekly worship theme. 1-402-210-2091 We are pleased to provide this low-tech, 24 hour ministry to our members and friends, feel free to share!
- **Our online giving platform is moving back to Vanco** from Pushpay; a move that will save us close to \$500 a month as a congregation. Information about giving through Vanco is available on our new website, www.saintpaulbenson.org and the church office is also happy to help with this transition. We hope to have all online giving accounts moved by the first of the year, and appreciate your help making this change.
- **Enewsletter Update** The short version: If you have been receiving the Inspiration via email or the weekly eblast - or would like to start doing so, please help us move to a new enewsletter system by going to our website, www.saintpaulbenson.org and signing up for our enews.

The longer version: if you receive the Inspiration by mail, you will continue to do so. We are changing the method we use to email news to those who subscribe so that we can include photos, not lose our emails in spam filters, and better understand how many people are receiving our news. To accomplish this, we have started using a tool called MailChimp which is known for keeping user information secure. Because of the level of security, we are not allowed to add email addresses to the database ourselves; we need your help "populating" the email list by signing up. Thank you so much for your help on this, we think our email subscribers will appreciate the upgrade.

Learning, Serving, Praying, and Playing

This year youth ministry looks much different than how we previously did things. Instead of preparing and serving a soup supper on Thanksgiving Eve or decorating Christmas cookies, we are sometimes getting together online and helping in other ways. We will also be looking at the nativity scriptures from the Gospel of Luke in a different light.



The youth group used their gifts to assemble lunch boxes for homeless young people who are served by Youth Emergency Services. Each family brought food for the boxes and cash to purchase Subway sandwiches. It is their present protocol to accept only prepared food from restaurants at this time.

We also met on zoom for games, discussions, and prayer.

Youth have begun to help with Dyno Kids videos in a very energetic way and we are looking forward to involving a youth each month in the telling of the Bible story.

December 6th, Sunday, 1-3 pm-Assist with curbside pickup of Advent Drive-Up. (Spread a little cheer?)

Dec. 12th, Saturday, 5 pm-Set up luminaries and light them for the Countryside Neighborhood event. Hot cocoa and treats for helpers! Dress warm!!

Christmas Week-join us for online worship with your family on Dec. 23rd, 24th, and 25th.

Prayers are appreciated for the youth as they are doing school classes online, are missing their friends, and trying to figure out how to navigate a pandemic.


Rev. Marta Wheeler

SAINT PAUL *Benson*

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RECONCILING MINISTRIES NETWORK

SAINT PAUL *Benson*
PROUD TO BE A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

..—♥—..

With God's love as our foundation,
we celebrate friendship with all of God's people,
affirming all sexual orientations and gender
identities.

Together, we will seek justice for all and do good
in our community, nation and around the world
in the name of Jesus Christ.

inTouch

Hospitalizations

Cheryl Adamson

Memorials

For Roger Lantz—Gladys Lantz

For Shirley Higbee—Roger & Kathleen Richter,
Jeri Tinsley

Honorariums

For Jack & Claudia Griger—Jerry Brabec

Christian Sympathy

To Nancy & Jerry Gaines in the death of Jerry's
mother, Marcella Gaines.

To Cheryl & George Adamson in the death of
George's father, Carl Adamson

The family of the Rev. Dr. Vernon Goff, a former
associate pastor at Saint Paul Benson.

To Patsy Woodside and her family in the death
of Patsy's cousin.

To Jeanne & Ellis Roussel and family in the
death of Jeanne's mother, Sharon Vanbutsel.