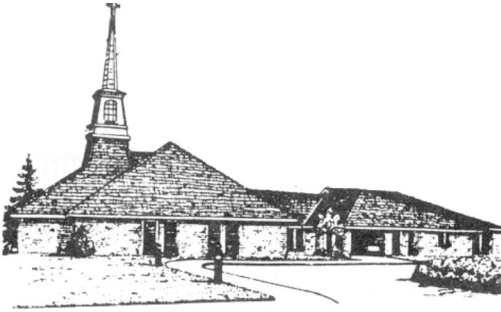




Summer Edition, 2023

St. Paul Lutheran Church

PO Box 200
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Pine Grove Mills, PA 16868

St. Paul Quarterly Letter

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It is my pleasure to present the newest incarnation of the St. Paul newsletter, this time as a volunteer. This publication will appear quarterly (January, April, July, and October) in your email, sent by Melissa Danser, our church's new administrative assistant (church secretary). There will be a few printed copies available at the church for folks who do not use email.

This issue includes a letter from Pastor Paul and a report from the Congregation Council, written by council president Jeff Muthler. In addition, some pertinent announcements have been included.

This is your newsletter. You are invited (urged) to send announcements, prayer requests, committee reports, family news, and photographs! Feel free to send edits, comments, additional items, and ideas for making this newsletter better. Without your contributions, St. Paul Quarterly Letter will not exist.

Future newsletters will begin, as the former monthly publication did, with a message from the pastor. This quarter his message starts on page 2.

Linda Rosensteel
lindarosensteel@comcast.net

A Crash Course on the Gospels

The four gospels were written by different people. What does this mean? Quite a lot! Each gospel has different goals, slightly (or very) different stories, and different theologies! Even though the gospels all agree that Jesus is God's Messiah, they don't always agree with each other on some of the details. Join Pastor Paul for a four-week crash course on the four gospels! Time and location TBD.

July 26: Mark

August 5: Matthew

August 12: Luke

August 19: John

Sign up in the narthex!

A Message from the Pastor

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?'" – Matthew 16:24-26 (NRSVUE [New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition])

"Just having money doesn't mean you're going to survive." "What good is money if you're going to die?"

The Allegheny Synod Assembly was held on Saturday June 17. It was a relatively sedate meeting: there were no memorials or resolutions to debate or vote on; the updates to our governing documents were mostly technical edits; and very few of the elections were contested. That being said, we did vote on the budget, meaning we voted on the staffing the Office of the Bishop, the synod staff. What made this noteworthy was that we had to decide if we would work with our neighbors to the east (the Upper Susquehanna Synod) to call a shared Director for Evangelical Mission. A Director for Evangelical Mission (also known as a DEM) helps establish new churches and guides congregations going through renewal and redevelopment. So, rather than decreasing our total synod staffing, this action would increase it.

The challenge was that, right now, we do not expect to have enough annual income to pay for this staffing change. If we, as a synod, want to do this, we probably need to draw on our financial reserves. This caused the assembly to ask, "Do we want to do that?" During the conversations, we found out that our synod has enough money to stay open for about sixteen years. And this could be done with the churches not providing *any* more money.

Many people came forward to give their opinions on the matter. Emotions were running high because we were talking about touching our safety net. But out of the many individuals who got up to speak, the one that haunts me is what one gentleman, a lay voting member, said. When he got up to talk, he started out by saying, "Just having money doesn't mean you're going to survive." He continued to explain that his congregation is in the process of closing sometime in November. Now, from what I gathered from his short speech, it sounds like even though they will be closing, they probably still have a decent amount of money that will need to be disbursed. He rhetorically asked us, "What good is money if you're going to die?" He then went on to talk about how important it was to focus on the mission and ministry rather than the bank account. He told us to remember Jesus's teaching to not store up treasures for ourselves on earth (Matthew 6:19). He reminded us about our Lord's command to not worry about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34). Then he finished by explaining how the least acceptable action in the Parable of the Talents was to invest the money with the bankers.

However, he explained, it would have been better to use that money to help others (Matthew 25:14-30).

In our world today, money provides the feeling of security. In fact, with money we can buy the necessities of life, like food and housing. You might even say that the accumulation of financial resources *saves* our lives. But this should start to ring the alarm bells in your mind. I started this article by quoting Jesus explaining what happens when we try to save our life as opposed to giving it up for the sake of our Lord. Now, I think many Christians are quite ready and willing to face death for Jesus. However, I think far fewer are ready to even *RISK* their money for Jesus. And when I say "Christians," I do not only mean individuals: I include churches of any size, even synods.

Just so there is no confusion: the prudent use of money *is* a holy thing. However, we must always ask ourselves, "Who, or what, are we fearing, loving, and trusting above all things?" If a church is paralyzed by the fear of running out of money, or if they are loving how full the coffers are, or if they are trusting in their wealth for their continued survival there is a problem. We are to fear whether we are living and acting in the ways God teaches. We are to love Jesus and his mission more than our own resources. We are to trust that *God*, not our money, is our life and our salvation.

One of our main goals, as a congregation, is to become more spiritual. This means that we want to be more prayerful, to hear and listen to Scripture more often, to do service in the community, and to support one another. But our pocketbooks are some of the most spiritual things we have. So, does our use of and attitude towards money align with what we want our spiritual life to look like? We can ask this question of both ourselves and the Church.

It is important for us to remember that when we lose our life for the sake of Jesus, we will find that we still have it. We can find this in different ways. One way it can happen is that after a church or individual puts their money to work for the sake of Christ it can lead to a return on that investment. A DEM planting new congregations *could* lead to more churches giving financially to the synod. If a congregation invests in Christ's mission, new individuals might join them and could, eventually, give financially to the congregation. But aside from these examples, the return is typically not financial. Instead, the return is often found in things that are truly priceless: holy friendships,

(MESSAGE continued on page 3)

We continue to pray for:HOMEBOUND

Liz Perez
Diane Kemmerer
Marilyn Niemann
Lois Corl
Helen Magnuson
Lois Folmar
Shirley Gilligan
Leroy Dreibelbis
Paul Anderson

OTHER MEMBERS

Eileen Butchkoski
Janice Olsen
Rich Olsen

FRIENDS/RELATIVES

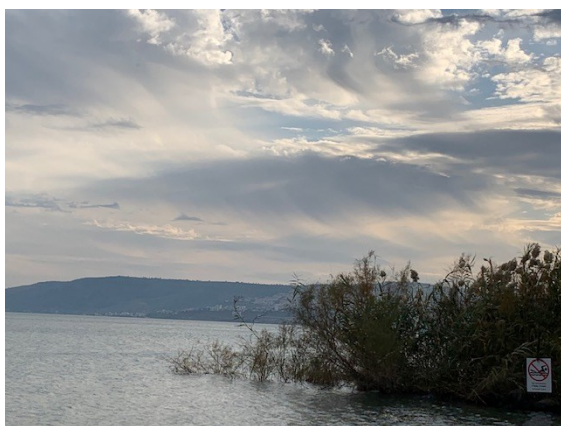
Pastor Kelley
Merle Eyer
Ramona Book
Marin Alexis Tomkiel
Nathan Williams
Fred Muthler
Barry Anderson
Cara & Holden
Ruth Tier
Sam Bernstine
Marlene Chamberlin
Sylvia Way
Joan & Tim Grove
Millie Harper
Joshua Potter

(MESSAGE continued from page 2)

eternal gratitude, and sacred moments. When these things are experienced, few people want to give them up for some extra cash.

In the afternoon of June 17, the Assembly voted on whether we would seek this partnership with Upper Susquehanna. Out of the 157 votes cast, only 12 voted "No." In other words, over 92% voted to take on the risk of making this investment. As one of the delegates, I will confess that I was surprised by how decisive the vote was. In fact, it was one of the moments I felt the Holy Spirit moving through the room. It displayed a bold faith and consequential spirituality that should inspire us. Our God and King, Jesus Christ, called us on an adventure. And this journey will involve taking risks. Let us, therefore, be bold.

Pastor Paul Tomkiel



Sea of Galilee, Israel. Taken February, 2020

BIRTHDAY RECOGNITION

100!

Long time congregation member Shirley Gilligan is turning 100 years old! Help us honor Shirley by participating in a card shower. Simply send her a birthday card prior to her birthday on July 27. Her address is available in your church directory (or any old church directory that you may have) or contact the church office for assistance. Address labels will also be available at the church in July. Let's help to put a smile on her face with lots of cards!

Ice Cream Social

Save the date of Thursday, August 10, for an Ice Cream Social! Come check out the Farmer's Market that evening and then join us for ice cream following the market close at 7:00 pm. This is the normal date/time for the August council meeting, so council members can enjoy a well-deserved month off as well as some delicious ice cream! If you are interested in helping to organize this event or need a ride please contact Linda Muthler. There will be a sign-up sheet in the narthex requesting various ice cream toppings.

SCHOOL KITS FOR KIDS

Please help WELCA assemble 12 Lutheran World Relief School Kits

Education is one of the strongest tools a community has for breaking the cycle of poverty. LWR School Kits contain essential supplies to help children continue learning in the face of serious obstacles. Learning leads to a better life for them, their families and their communities.

Each kit contains the following:

- One sturdy drawstring bag
- Four 70-sheet notebooks
- One box of 16 or 24 crayons
- One pencil sharpener
- One 30-centimeter ruler
- One pair of blunt scissors
- Five unsharpened No. 2 pencils with erasers
- Five black or blue ballpoint pens
- One 2 ½" eraser

Twelve drawstring bags have been donated. A collection box and a sign-up sheet will be located on the table in the narthex. We will also accept monetary donations. This summer will be a good time to take advantage of back-to-school sales. We would like to have the supplies collected by September 3rd.

Council President's Report

I am thrilled to be writing to you as part of the re-established St. Paul newsletter! You can expect to receive newsletters on a quarterly basis in your email inbox. Printed copies will also be available at the church. Many thanks to Linda Rosensteel for volunteering to give our newsletter a new birth!

I am happy to report that your congregational council has been working very efficiently to conduct church business in a timely manner, leaving time at the end of meetings to consider special topics. One particular item we have been developing is a plan for our future. Council members Eleanor Bird, Linda Govere, Sally Kolesar, Lauren Muthler, Jeff Muthler, Ann Reede, Bill Stout, and Pastor Paul identified five categories for focus, including these three high priority categories:

Increasing the spirituality of the congregation
Improving our internal processes and bonds with each other

Re-engaging with our inactive members

Increasing the spirituality of the congregation – Although we are very early in the 3-year LEAD Journey, it has already become apparent that a key component of a growing congregation is its level of spirituality. Having a deep, bold, consequential faith with a hopeful future is our goal. To help with this, we plan to offer a variety of learning and worship opportunities starting this summer. Learning opportunities will include religious study topics that will meet weekly for 4-6 weeks. We are fortunate that both Pastor Paul and Sally Kolesar are planning to lead alternating study groups – thank you both for your leadership! We are hopeful that by offering a variety of learning topics with short duration we can offer something of interest to everybody without a long-term commitment! Please consider participating in at least one of these opportunities this year.

Improving our internal processes and bonds with each other – Our St. Paul newsletter is a big step forward with improving our internal communication processes. The congregation can more easily be informed

about council activities, committees can learn what other committees are doing, and Pastor Paul now has a forum for providing a spiritual message directly to the congregation. We are also planning an ice cream social this summer – and who doesn't love ice cream!

Re-engaging with our inactive members – Our St. Paul newsletter is also a key part of re-engaging with our inactive members. If you have been inactive, I hope that you will read the newsletter and want to get involved with the congregation again. Even if you aren't sure about worship, come join us for the ice cream social. We'd love to see you!

In other news, we held a special congregational meeting on May 21 to discuss the solar energy conversion project and to explore replacement options for our failing copier. Regarding the solar energy conversion project, it was announced that our West Penn Power Sustainability Energy Fund (WPPSEF) grant request was awarded but not for the full amount. We received \$9000 specifically earmarked for an ASHRAE Level 1 energy audit. This will allow us to have an external auditor inspect our facility and identify energy efficiency improvements that should be made before converting to solar energy. Further, if we make any improvements resulting from this audit, we can receive rebates/discounts to defray the implementation cost. We will also be able to apply for an additional WPPSEF grant in 2024.

Regarding the copier, the congregation voted to purchase a new copier. Following the vote, Lloyd Niemann offered a generous \$500 gift to defray the cost of the copier. Thank you Lloyd! The copier has been ordered and should be up and running in July.

We are just getting started on many initiatives and there are many ways that anybody can participate. If you are not currently involved, please consider joining us!

OCTOBER NEWSLETTER DEADLINE IS SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10.