

St. Paul United Church of Christ

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Like and follow our page St. Paul United Church of Christ – New Bremen, Ohio on Facebook

Rev. Becky Erb Strang-Senior Pastor 419-953-1152 Roland Dicke-Council President 419-629-3518

Welcome to St. Paul UCC, we are glad you are here!!

Whether you are worshipping online or in person, your presence increases our joy as we praise our loving Savior. May every blessing be yours.

January 23, 2022 Third Sunday After Epiphany Worship Leaders

Ministers
Rev. Becky Erb Strang
John Gilberg
Becky Quellhorst
Tracy Oldiges
Jim Strang
The Congregation
Senior Pastor
Liturgist
Organist
Sr. Deacon
Chancel Choir/Music Director

PRELUDE

LIGHTING OF CANDLES: You are invited to light a candle or candles at home in preparation for worship.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PLANTING SEEDS: SPLASH Each week in worship we will give an update of ministries and missions at St. Paul Church throughout the rest of the year. The theme of these moments focus on planting, growth and harvest—serving as a reminder that God plants seeds in our hearts, nurtures the growth and celebrates at the harvest. Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." 6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." ⁷ But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." (Jeremiah 1:4-8) Splash is St. Paul Church's youth group for fourth and fifth grade students. Splash meets each Wednesday at 5:30 and then stays for supper with the older youth groups. Splash offers our young people an opportunity to experience the biblical narrative in interactive ways. Splash focuses on Bible study, discussions, crafts, games and prayer. This year's Splash youth are onfire about the Bible—they ask great questions and always want to learn more. Splash offers our youth an opportunity to plant seed of faith and service that will anchor them for years to come.

No Matter



CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 19:7-10, <u>The Message</u> by Eugene Peterson) Leader: The revelation of God is whole and pulls our lives together.

People: The signposts of God are clear and point out the right road.

Leader: The life-maps of God are right, showing the way to joy.

People: The directions of God are plain and easy on the eyes.

Leader: God's reputation is twenty-four carat gold, with a lifetime guarantee.

People: God's Word is better than diamonds, better than a diamond set between emeralds.

Leader: You'll like it better than strawberries in the spring, better than red, ripe strawberries.

People: Let us worship God with joy!

TRUST & ASSURANCE

Blessed Assurance

426



CALL TO CONFESSION

Leader: We confess our sins before God and one another.

SILENT CONFESSION OF SIN (PAUSE 30-45 SECONDS)

Please join me in the *PRAYER OF CONFESSION (UNISON)

God, whose love knows no bounds, we confess today our tendency to see ourselves as the most valuable members of your family while we regard those unlike us as less important. Forgive us, we pray, and move us to be people of radical acceptance and hospitality of all your children. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Leader: Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

People: Thanks be to God!

HALLELUJAH!



TIME FOR THE CHILD WITHIN US

Today I want to talk about how awesome and amazing God's love is. I brought with me these tools used for measuring things. Maybe they can help us measure God's love.

Sometimes we measure ingredients. If I were baking cookies, I would need to measure flour and sugar and baking soda. Psalm 23 tells us that because of God's love, our cup overflows. If I were building something, I might need a ruler or a tape measure. Psalm 108 tells us that God's love is higher than the heavens.

If I were to measure time, I might need a clock. Some of you might even use your watches to see how long my sermons last! © Psalm 103 tells us God's love is from everlasting to everlasting.

In today's reading from the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus saying that God loves the world so much, he sent his Son to love the world—not to condemn it. In Ephesians 3:18-19 we hear, "That you may understand how wide, how long, how high and how deep God's love really is. May you experience it, though it is so great you will never fully understand it."

We cannot measure God's love. But we can thank God for that love every day for the rest of our lives. Amen.

PASTORAL JOYS AND CONCERNS OF THE PEOPLE

Joys: Epiphany's Light of Christ!

Concerns: We are continuing to pray for Carol Mohrman, Julia Paul, Greg Maurer, Bart Maurer, Jan Dammeyer, Scott Kuenning, Shannon Shupp, and Dee Schroer.

PASTORAL PRAYER, SILENT PRAYER, AND THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Leader: Let us pray. Today, O God, we lift up to you our world greatly in need of your love. We pray for our nation. We pray for our community. We pray for our neighbors. We pray for our congregation. SILENCE

Leader: We bring our doubts, our questions, our confusion before you, O God, knowing that nothing is foolish or unworthy of your time. Give us faith to trust your counsel and to learn from the messengers which you have sent throughout the ages. God of wisdom,

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, along with your whole creation. Open our eyes to the wonders of this world, and humble us to be taught by all of nature, that we might learn respect and responsibility. God of wisdom,

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: So often the darkness suits us better than the light, when we hide in the shame of our memories, our shortcomings, our misdeeds.

Bring us into the open where forgiveness is real and redemption is the cleansing our souls' desire. God of wisdom,

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Give us daily chances to be reborn in you. Bless our lives and our loved ones with your healing presence. May those who are sick, recuperating, lost and alone know your healing touch. God of wisdom,

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: We are by no means the first to question, to wonder or to misunderstand, O God. Generations have done so before us, and have found their peace in you. Join us with the saints of every age, in your eternal communion where light shines perpetually. God of wisdom,

People: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Come to us, Lord Jesus. Heal us. Speak to us. Challenge us. Comfort us. Remind us we belong to you. It is your prayer we pray together....Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

CHANCEL CHOIR ANTHEM

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON: John 3:1-21 (The Message)

There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, "Rabbi, we all know you're a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren't in on it."

³ Jesus said, "You're absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it's not possible to see what I'm pointing to—to God's kingdom."

⁴ "How can anyone," said Nicodemus, "be born who has already been born and grown up? You can't re-enter your mother's womb and be born again. What are you saying with this 'born-from-above' talk?"

⁵⁻⁶ Jesus said, "You're not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the 'wind-hovering-over-thewater' creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—

it's not possible to enter God's kingdom. When you look at a baby, it's just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can't see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

7-8 "So don't be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be 'born from above'—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it's headed next. That's the way it is with everyone 'born from above' by the wind of God, the Spirit of God."

⁹Nicodemus asked, "What do you mean by this? How does this happen?"

know these basics? Listen carefully. I'm speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don't believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can't see, the things of God?

One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person's failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

19-21 "This is the crisis we're in: God-light streamed into the world, but men and women everywhere ran for the darkness. They went for the darkness because they were not really interested in pleasing God. Everyone who makes a practice of doing evil, addicted to denial and illusion, hates God-light and won't come near it, fearing a painful exposure. But anyone working and living in truth and reality welcomes God-light so the work can be seen for the God-work it is."

RESPONSE

When I Behold the Son

When I Behold the Son

Word and Music by J. L. Salt(er)



Throughout these two thousand plus years of Christian history, Nicodemus has been given a fairly bad rap. He is best known in today's scripture reading from the Gospel of John (and is only found in the gospel of John—not in the synoptics: Matthew, Mark and Luke).

It is the story of the Jewish Pharisee Nicodemus who comes to Jesus in the dark of the night, asking about salvation. Jesus speaks plainly—saying one must be born again (some translations) or born from above (other translations). Nicodemus, an educated man, acts perplexed by these words. How could someone be born again? We surely cannot reenter our mothers' wombs can we?

Jesus tries again. He used imagery of the Holy Spirit as wind (a play on words in both Greek and Hebrew). He reminds Nicodemus that he is a respected Jewish leader. He makes it clear that his own ministry is to heal and build up rather than to condemn.

At this point, the story ends. We don't know (yet) if Nicodemus even heard a word of what Jesus said. And, if he heard it, did he take it to heart?

Truthfully, for the most part, scholars throughout the centuries have **not** been kind to Nicodemus. He has been portrayed as a shadowy figure who could not give up his prestigious day job in the synagogue.

Theologically, this shadowy portrayal of Nicodemus for centuries speaks to us today. Do we only follow Jesus when the road is easy? Are we willing to take deep risks for our faith and do as Jesus did: reaching out to the poor, the marginalized, the lost and the broken? Are we willing to follow Jesus all the way to the cross?

Christians who live under oppression in their home nations understand these questions. Just being a follower of Jesus is risky business. It could mean imprisonment or death. For those of us living in western society, being a Christian is often more cultural that religious. The story of Nicodemus reminds us that we MUST, absolutely must, come out of the darkness and shadows and follow Jesus in the daylight. Always.

But you need to know this. The scholarly tide is turning in favor of our friend, Nicodemus. Christian scholars are now looking at the whole story of Nicodemus as recorded in the Gospel of John. Yes. You heard that

correctly. Nicodemus shows up two more times in the gospel and yet we rarely talk about this.

If you were to turn in your Bible to John, Chapter 7, verses 45-52, we find Nicodemus caught in a heated discussion between the temple police, chief priests and the Pharisees. The Pharisees wanted Jesus arrested. The temple police were awed by what Jesus was saying. And it is Nicodemus who tried to calm the argument by saying, "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing does it? The temple leaders turned on Nicodemus saying basically: you aren't a follower of his are you?

Nicodemus, in this passage is defending Jesus and reminding his colleagues of the law. It could not have been easy for Nicodemus to speak up—especially if he guessed they would accuse him of being a follower. Yet he did speak up.

Then we hear of Nicodemus one final time in the Gospel of John. This time, chapter 19:38-42. Jesus is dead and Joseph of Arimathea, who was also a Jew who secretly followed Jesus, asked Pilate permission to bury Jesus. That part of the story we know. But we rarely notice his companion who joined him: Nicodemus who comes to bury Jesus laden with 100 Roman pounds (about 75 of our pounds) of myrrh and aloes to embalm the body. What is extraordinary about this quantity is that this amount of embalming items was generally only reserved for the burial of kings.

This story shows us that near the end of the Gospel of John, Nicodemus steps out of the shadows, purchases costly items and gives his Lord a burial fit for a king. Because that is exactly who Jesus is: Our King.

So what does the faith journey of Nicodemus tell us today? This I believe: Nicodemus was not a timid man. Yes, he came to Jesus in the dark of the night but that well could have been to avoid the crowds. According to today's translation, when he met with Jesus that night, he acknowledged Jesus as teacher straight from God.

An early believer, perhaps Nicodemus at first could not absorb all that Jesus was telling him. It is the same with us. There are parts of Jesus' teachings—particularly in the Sermons on the Mount and Plain that make us balk. We like church membership. We love the fellowship, but what

Jesus asks of us is tough stuff. Loving enemies? Welcoming immigrants? Feeding the hungry? It seems at times we would like to believe the words of Jesus we AGREE with and set aside his words that make us squirm.

And yet, like Nicodemus, when we follow Jesus even to tough places and spaces, we find ourselves becoming bolder in our faith. Like Nicodemus, we are more ready to speak up to our colleagues and friends. We are more willing to speak the truth in love—even when we know our words might not be accepted.

When have you stood up for Jesus? When have you stood up for someone who was poor or homeless or unemployed or spoke a different language or who is in prison? When was the last time you articulated your faith into words? When were you unafraid to say where you stand because of Jesus?

Truly, words are a very good place to begin our transformation as followers of Jesus. Do we use our words daily to hurt or to heal? Is our humor biting or inclusive? Do our words keep people at arm's length or do our words welcome people in?

In today's political climate of divisiveness, words are crucially important. How do you speak to your neighbors? How do you speak of strangers? How do you speak of your enemies? Immigants? The homeless? Jesus has something to say about **all** of this and we are challenged as Christians to follow his lead.

But words are only the starting point. We then need to put our words into action and that is exactly what Nicodemus did when he purchased the costly myrrh and aloe and helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus. Nicodemus stepped out of the darkness and fully into the light as he buried the man he admired and followed with his words. He put those words to work. He put his faith in Jesus out there for the whole world to see.

We are asked to do the same. We can pay lip service to our Christian journey, saying the right things but acting in ways that harm others, the earth and the heart of God. We follow Jesus not so we can be a member of a church, but so we can join his movement of bringing heaven on earth in this community and beyond. We follow Jesus not so we can worship on Sundays, but so we can follow Jesus by how we interact with others:

at work, the grocery store, the bowling alley. We follow Jesus not to be seen, but so that people can see Jesus in us.

In many ways, Nicodemus' journey is our journey. We might start our faith journey intrigued by this man who is unlike anyone we've ever known. Like Nicodemus, we come with questions, seeking answers. Then, as we grow in faith, we begin to put words to the thoughts on our hearts and minds. We test ourselves by testing our words with others. What will our friends think of our new faith? And then, we put those words into action. We feed the hungry. We house the homeless. We welcome the stranger. We love our enemies. We actively seek peace and justice for all of God's children, for all of creation.

As Christians, we are challenged to listen to Jesus, share Jesus' words and then act like Jesus in the world. We are challenged to be Nicodemus in this place and this time.

And Nicodemus has not been forgotten. The Eastern Orthodox Churches commemorate Nicodemus on the Sunday of Myrrhbearers—the second Sunday after Easter. Roman Catholics celebrate Nicodemus along with Joseph of Arimathea on August 31. I believe it is time for us to embrace the courage of Nicodemus and follow his lead by following Jesus. Amen.

WE RESPOND WITH OUR GIFTS

OFFERING INVITATION: What an abundance of gifts we have to offer: musical talent, the melody of laughter, the use of our hands in cooking and repairs, the use of our minds in problem solving. Curiosity, compassion, patience, urgency, spiritual reservoirs and financial resources. All these gifts and others which bear our personal marks, are symbolized in our offering for the work of St. Paul Church. Let us commit ourselves in service as we worship God with our offerings.

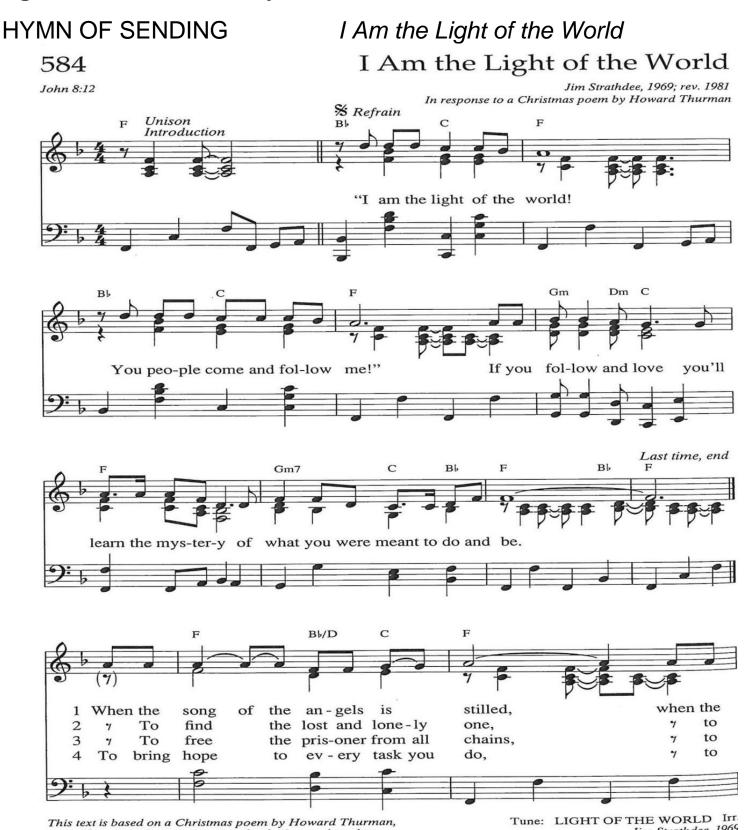
DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise him, all creatures here below; Praise him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

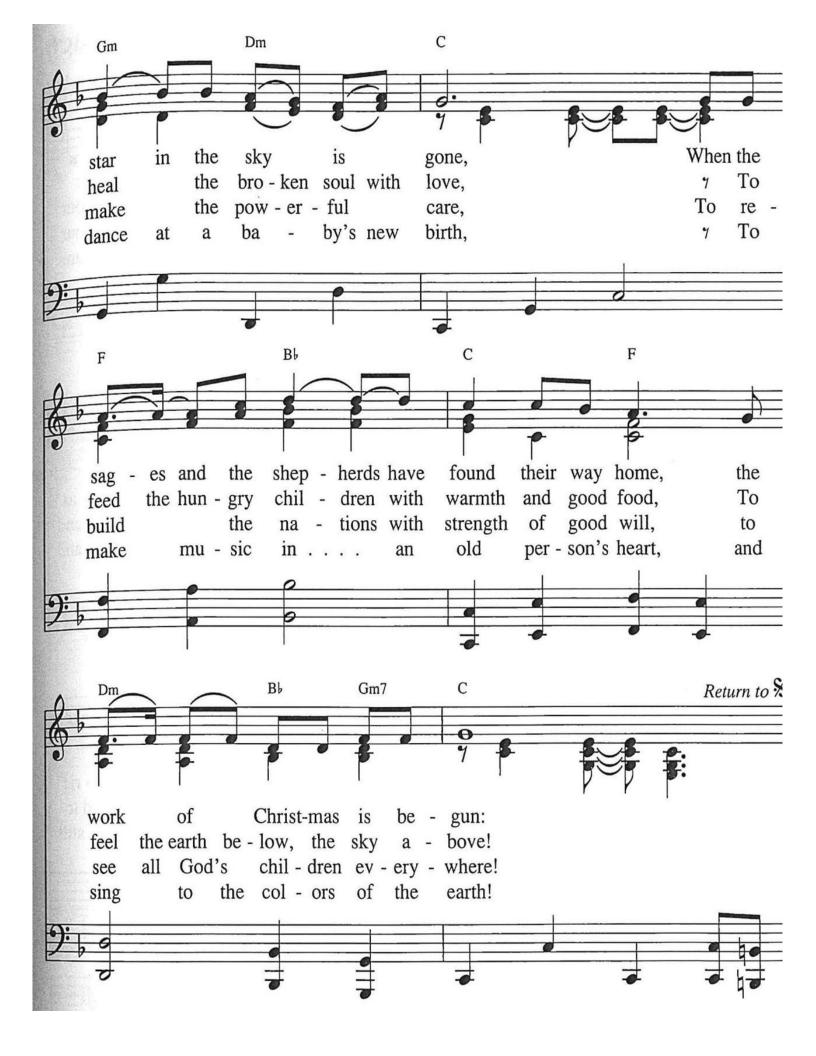
PRAYER OF DEDICATION (in unison)

a prolific twentieth-century writer, theologian, and teacher. The song grew out of Jim Strathdee's music ministry at an intercultural, bilingual congregation in Los Angeles.

We bring our offerings before you, O God, not to show how good or deserving we are, but to praise you and to care for those that have greater needs than we do. Steer us toward justice, righteousness and unity, for the sake of Jesus. Amen.



Jim Strathdee, 1969

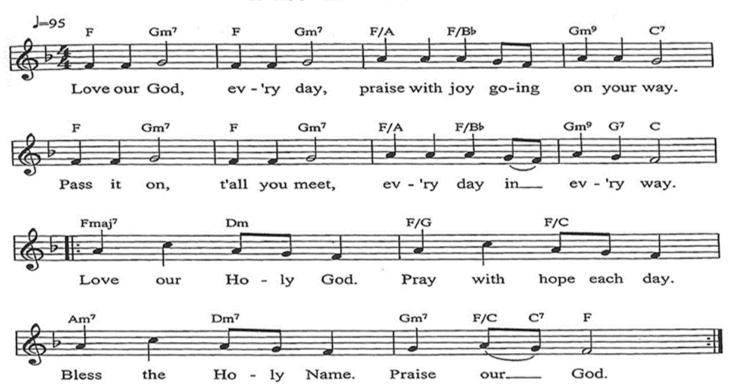


BENEDICTION: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of Jesus Christ and the blessing of God Almighty remain with you always. Amen.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE

Pass the Love

Pass the Love



PASSING THE PEACE OF CHRIST

POSTLUDE

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Attendance-Daily Devotions-144, January 9-Sunday Worship Online-435, In Person-52, Splash-3, Jr/Sr High-7, Confirmation-4, Leaders-8.

Sundays in January-Worship will be in person and via Facebook Live at 10:15am. **Sunday School** will be in person at 9:00am.

Daily Devotions-Please join us, Monday-Thursday at 11:30am, online via Facebook Live. These will air on our Facebook page: St. Paul United Church of Christ-New Bremen, OH.

2022 Altar Flower Chart has been posted in the Narthex. Please sign up for the date(s) you would like. Dates available-**January 30,** February 20, April 3, 24, May 8, 22, June 26, August 14, 28, October 30, November 20. You may also call the church office Monday-Friday to sign up. Thank you. Price is \$30.00.

Blessing Pantry-is accessible during these hours - Tuesdays 5:30pm-7:30pm, Wednesdays and Thursdays 1:00pm-3:00pm. The Pantry will be closed Mondays and Fridays. All Donations Welcome - Blessing Pantry Needs- Diapers (size 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6), Pull Ups (size 3-6), Baby Wipes, Diaper Cream, Toothpaste, Feminine Hygiene Products, Cotton Balls, Q-Tips, Manicure Items, Paper Plates, Garbage Bags, Toilet Paper and Paper Towels. Thank you! There is a container outside the East and North Educational Building doors for donations.

Monthly Mission-Church World Service Blankets (CWS)-Church World Service has been involved with disaster response for many years, in many ways, and in many places. One way CWS helps is by supplying blankets for people who have been involved in all kinds of tragedies-floods, hurricanes, fires and yes tornadoes. Two years ago tornadoes ripped through the poorest section of east Dayton. Many houses were damaged or destroyed and CWS supplied blankets to families and other assistance as well as clean up buckets. The blankets come in two different weights and can be used in various ways, not only to keep warm

but as make shift tents for protection from the elements. Thank you for your support. The Mission Team.

Bulletin Availability-weekly bulletins are available for download on our website **stpaulnb.org**. Just click the yellow **BULLETINS** box in the upper right hand corner.

January/February Upper Rooms-are available at the East entrance to the education building and on the round tables in the sanctuary. Or please call the church office if you would like one and we will gladly mail one to you.

Mailbox-There is a mailbox outside of the East Educational Building door for any correspondence you may have for the church and would like to drop off. Please lift the flap and drop through the slot on the top. Thank you!

Calendar-Week of January 23, 2022

Sunday	9:00am	Chancel Choir Rehearsal
	9:00am	Sunday School
	10:15am Worsh	ip in person & via Facebook Live
	11:30am	Worship Team
Monday	11:30am	Devotions via Facebook Live
	2:00pm-4:00pm	Coffee Shop-New Bremen
Tuesday	11:30am	Devotions via Facebook Live
	5:30pm-7:30pm	Blessing Pantry Open
Wednesday	11:30am	Devotions via Facebook Live
	1:00pm-3:00pm	Blessing Pantry Open
	5:30pm-6:30pm	Splash (4 th & 5 th grade)
	6:30pm	Youth Dinner
	7:00pm-8:00pm	Jr/Sr High Youth
	7:00pm-8:30pm	Confirmation w/Mentors
Thursday	11:30am	Devotions via Facebook Live
•	1:00pm-3:00pm	Blessing Pantry Open
Friday	Noon	Office Closed

E-Giving @ St. Paul

Online – Make a donation on our website: stpaulnb.org

Text – Make a donation to our Number: 833-308-0048

How To Give by Text (Example - my amount for the example is \$25

(minimum amount is \$5.00))

- > For general fund giving: Send 25 space gl (hit send)
- > For building & property fund giving: Send 25 space bp (hit send)
 - > For Blessing Pantry: Send 25 space pantry (hit send)
 - ➤ For project of the year giving: Send 25 space poy (hit send)

 Once a text amount is sent:

Registration Link- Sent via text the first time a donation is made. Thank you! Please visit (link) to register.

Donation Confirm- Sent via text each time a donation is made.