



St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Odessa  
*Reaching Up Reaching In Reaching Out*  
Pastor Linda Ray, 406 Main Street, Odessa, DE 302-378-2420  
[www.stpaulsodessa.org](http://www.stpaulsodessa.org), CCLI 11305346 and Streaming Lic. 21184487

## Third Sunday in Advent

December 17, 2023, 8:30 AM Service, ASL & Livestreaming  
WE ENTER GOD'S GATES WITH PRAISE

WELCOME WITH MUSIC AND IMAGES

### GATHERING MUSIC AND PHOTOS:

Duane Dillard Music Ministry, Mark Holden - Photographer & Curator

### \*LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH:

Liturgist – Brian McNelis

One: We light the third candle on the Advent wreath as a bright light that reminds us of the guidance we have in God's word and in Jesus Christ, the word made flesh. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a highway prepared by God, the way of holiness.

**Many: Holy Child of Bethlehem, be born in us today. You were born to redeem us. Through faith in your name we walk in the way of holiness.**

One: We light these candles as signs of our shocking hope, just peace, and fierce joy. May our lives shine with the joy of the Light who lives in our hearts as we wait and work for the coming of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

**Many: We wait as people who experience hardship and pain, yet we are called to witness to the persistent joy that sustains our life as God's people.**

**All Singing: O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell. O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.**

### PRAISE AND WORSHIP:

*O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing*

Red Hymnal 57

\*OPENING PRAYER: (all praying): **God of dreams, you have done great things for your people. From times of old, you awaken the faithful to the dawn of your glory. Fill our mouths with laughter. Loose our tongues with shouts of joy. Anoint us with the oil of gladness and make it known among all people that we will live as oaks of righteousness, the plantings of the Lord. Amen**

### CHILDREN'S TIME:

*Peace for the Children*

Green Hymnal 3125

Brian McNelis shares a blessing with our children!

### PASS THE PEACE:

*There's a Spirit of Love in This Place*

Green Hymnal 3148

### FIRST LESSON: *Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11* (CEB)

The LORD God's spirit is upon me,  
because the LORD has anointed me.

He has sent me

to bring good news to the poor,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim release for captives,  
and liberation for prisoners,

<sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor  
and a day of vindication for our God,

to comfort all who mourn,

<sup>3</sup> to provide for Zion's mourners,

to give them a crown in place of ashes,  
oil of joy in place of mourning,  
a mantle of praise in place of discouragement.  
They will be called Oaks of Righteousness,  
planted by the LORD to glorify himself.

<sup>4</sup>They will rebuild the ancient ruins;  
they will restore formerly deserted places;  
they will renew ruined cities,  
places deserted in generations past.

I, the LORD, love justice;  
I hate robbery and dishonesty.<sup>[a]</sup>

I will faithfully give them their wage,  
and make with them an enduring covenant.

<sup>9</sup>Their offspring will be known among the nations,  
and their descendants among the peoples.

All who see them will recognize  
that they are a people blessed by the LORD.

<sup>10</sup>I surely rejoice in the LORD;  
my heart is joyful because of my God,  
because he has clothed me with clothes of victory,  
wrapped me in a robe of righteousness  
like a bridegroom in a priestly crown,  
and like a bride adorned in jewelry.

<sup>11</sup>As the earth puts out its growth,  
and as a garden grows its seeds,  
so the LORD God will grow righteousness and praise before all the nations.

\*GOSPEL LESSON: *John 1:6-8, 19-28* (CEB)

A man named John was sent from God. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. <sup>8</sup>He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

This is John's testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Who are you?" <sup>20</sup>John confessed (he didn't deny but confessed), "I'm not the Christ." <sup>21</sup>They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" John said, "I'm not." "Are you the prophet?" John answered, "No."

<sup>22</sup>They asked, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" <sup>23</sup>John replied,

*"I am a voice crying out in the wilderness,  
Make the Lord's path straight,<sup>[a]</sup>  
just as the prophet Isaiah said."*

<sup>24</sup>Those sent by the Pharisees <sup>25</sup>asked, "Why do you baptize if you aren't the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?" <sup>26</sup>John answered, "I baptize with water. Someone greater stands among you, whom you don't recognize. <sup>27</sup>He comes after me, but I'm not worthy to untie his sandal straps." <sup>28</sup>This encounter took place across the Jordan in Bethany where John was baptizing.

One: May this story inspire us all. **ALL: To walk in the way that leads to life.**

HYMN OF PREPARATION: *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*

Red Hymnal 196

THE MESSAGE: "Be Born In Us Today: Bringing Guidance"

Pastor Linda Ray

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE (*You may speak aloud your joys and concerns.*)

## WE GIVE THANKS

### OFFERTORY REMINDERS

Today's **Yellow Hat** mission offering support to **Love Thy Neighbor Fund (Carole Harmon)**.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION (all praying):** Almighty God, you have given us the way to follow, our Savior Jesus Christ. You have given us your Word to teach us the Way of salvation and to guide us in lives of service to you. We confess that we often turn away from that guidance and follow our own sinful, selfish ways. We listen to the temptations of the world instead of keeping your Word. Have mercy on us and forgive us. Amen

### INVITATION TO COMMUNION:

Pastor Linda Ray  
Officiant Server – Brian McNelis

**Reader 2 (singing) :**The Lord be with you.

**ALL: And also with you.**

**Reader 2:** Lift up your hearts.

**ALL: We lift them up to the Lord.**

**Reader 2:** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**ALL: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

**Reader 1:** It is right to give you thanks and praise, Great God of the Coming Dawn, for in each new day you surprise the earth with splendor. Your Spirit moves across the face of the waters and brings forth life. At the dawn of all things in a garden you worked the earth. Made from the earth, made by your hand, we forgot who we were, we forgot who you were and we tried to remake ourselves. We rejected your love and fell into sin and death. Yet even in our darkness you continue to speak light and life. And so we who live on the edge of this land look across the waters to the horizon. We come to live on the edge of your new and promised day. And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

*Communion Setting 2257-b*

**ALL: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest!**

**Reader 2:**Blessed are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, whose coming was announced by wilderness prophets and who arrived to the song of angels in the choir stall of a manger. In Jesus you not only took our name but our flesh. He was the One promised. He announced the new day and the acceptable year when blind folks would see and poor folks would rejoice, when captives would be set free and the oppressed would once more walk upright in liberty. In stories he spoke of waiting bridesmaids and prodigal sons. With tears and compassion, he brought a dead man to life and gave a woman at a well the living water she sought. With anger he overturned tables and challenged the powerful. On the cross he revealed the power of weakness and in the emptiness of the tomb he gave us a glimpse of your tomorrow that does not end in death.

(Lifting the bread) On the night in which he gave himself up for us he took bread, gave God thanks, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

**Reader 1:** (Lifting the cup) When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to God, gave it to his disciples, and said "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

*Communion Setting 2257-c*

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**ALL: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest!**

*Communion Setting 2257-d*

**Reader 2:** So we await your new day. So we call on you to send your Holy Spirit on us once more and on this parched and thirsty land, and on these elements of bread and cup. Let them be for us once more Christ's body and let us be for you once more Christ's body redeemed by his blood. Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes again, and we feast at his table. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

**ALL: Amen. Amen. Amen. Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest! Hosanna in the highest!**

**Reader 2:** Let us join our hearts and voices in the prayer that God continues to teach us:

**Our Father, which 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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory Forever. AMEN.**

COMMUNION SONG: *Change My Heart, O God* Black Hymnal 2152

*(The congregation will come forward to partake of the bread and cup.)*

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINISTRY AND SERVICE

CLOSING MUSIC: *Shout to the Lord* Black Hymnal 2074

**SERVING IN WORSHIP TODAY**

Liturgist: Brian McNelis

Audio/Video: Charlii Miller & John Littell & John Cate & Carlotta Cline

Communion Officiant/Server: Brian McNelis

Duane Dillard, Music Ministry

**Flowers this week were donated by Linda Botsford in loving memory of her late husband Doug Botsford.**

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Rev. Linda Driver Ray, Pastor	<a href="mailto:lindaray@vaumc.org">lindaray@vaumc.org</a>	(540) 207-1787
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Duane Dillard, Minister of Music	<a href="mailto:duanedillard@gmail.com">duanedillard@gmail.com</a>	(443) 593-2470
Thomas Maloney, Director of Music	<a href="mailto:thomaseamaloney@gmail.com">thomaseamaloney@gmail.com</a>	
Jin Kyung Seo, Organist/Accompanist	<a href="mailto:jinksblue@gmail.com">jinksblue@gmail.com</a>	

**ANNOUNCEMENTS - THIS WEEK AT ST. PAUL'S:**

<b>Sunday 12/17</b>	<b>Worship Services 8:30AM ASL &amp; Livestreaming and 11AM, Adult &amp; Children's Bible Study/School 9:45AM.</b>
<b>Monday 12/18</b>	<b>BSA Mtg 7PM</b>
<b>Tuesday 12/19</b>	<b>ODB, Cub Scouts 6PM, Blue Christmas Service, 7 p..m.</b>
<b>Wednesday 12/20</b>	<b>TOPS Mtg 6PM, Bell 6PM &amp; Choir 7PM Rehearsals</b>
<b>Thursday 12/21</b>	<b>10AM Prayer and Praise Group, Pflag 6:30PM</b>
<b>Friday 12/22</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Saturday 12/23</b>	<b>AA Mtg 7PM</b>

**FINANCE:** Stewardship 2023 for 2024 Budget, **62 Pledges = \$182,046. AMAZING NEWS!** This represents approximately 3/4 of our congregation who are pledging their support of St. Paul's with their financial gifts.

**BIRTHDAYS:** December 17 \_ Vickie Spence; December 19 – Frank Fitzwater

**ANNIVERSARIES:** December 22 – Cheryl and Jeffrey Martin

**PRAYER REQUEST BOX** is available in the Narthex along with the prayer request cards. Just complete the form, fold, and drop in the box on the corner shelf located at the second set of doors into Fellowship Hall.

**PRAYERS FOR:** Noel Lukens, Sue Holden's sister, Betsey Snipes, David Dudgeon, Dorothy Dudgeon, Carolyn Akin, Jonathan Brooks, Ginny Lewis, Mary Ingram's friend Maureen, John Guy, Maria Gregors, Levi Schrum and family, Matthew Smith, Marilyn Hendershot, Allison, Dennis Downes, Ty Somersshield – cousin to Don Mueller, Jeffrey & Cheryl Martin, Nancy- sister of Alice Rizzo, Nancy Judd, Doris Uhde, Liz Ravilious – Carl Ravilious' step-mother, Ethan Porter, Janet Miller, Ann Newswanger, Louise Sommer, George, Louise Sommers on the death of her brother, Beth O'Grady's brother-in-law, Robert O'Grady, who recently passed away: please pray for his wife Kristin and Tom O'Grady, his brother, and family, Dylan Green.

### **Upcoming Yellow Hat Schedule for December 2023**

**12/03/23 El Ayudante Child, Yesprin**

**12/10/23 Neighborhood House**

**12/17/23 Love thy Neighbor Fund (Carole Harmon)**

**12/24/23 St Paul's General Fund**

**12/31/23 Neighborhood House**

*Please make sure ALL checks are made payable to St. Paul's UMC, including checks for the Yellow Hat missions, writing the organization's name on the memo line.*

*All donations are collected, recorded, entered in the system, and deposited into the Church's operating account on a weekly basis. Also, on a weekly basis, a check is mailed to the specified yellow hat organization for the total amount collected.*

*It is very important that donations be placed in the offering plate, yellow hat or mailed to St. Paul's UMC. You are also welcome to drop off donations in the grey box just inside the side door to the Church, making sure it is secured in an envelope with your name on the front. This is to guarantee acknowledgement of your donations when the yearly contribution statement is sent for tax purposes.*

*Thank you all for your continued support for St. Paul's as we are growing in our faith through generosity.*

*Alice Mullins, Treasurer*



## **St. Paul's Mission Statement**

### **Reaching Up to praise God in vibrant worship**

God calls us to live out our discipleship grounded in Christ's awakening us to the glory and majesty of God in all creation, and we respond together by worshiping God with our gratitude and praise. Standing or lifting our hands high are both ancient postures of worship, and so our dance of discipleship involves reaching up with our hearts, souls, and bodies, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.*

*For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*

*Psalms 100:4-5 (NRSV)*

### **Reaching In to deepen our spiritual walk with Christ**

Christ accepts us as we are, and then calls us to follow him and learn from him, growing in our spiritual walk-through practices the church calls spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, meditation, studying God's Word, individually and with others. As we grow in the knowledge of God, we discover more about the extraordinary plans God has for our lives.

*“If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”*  
*John 8:31-32 (NRSV)*

## **Reaching Out with acts of love and compassion**

Here’s where it all comes together! Assured of God’s eternal love, strengthened by the grace and knowledge of Christ, we are ready for the Holy Spirit to kindle a fire in our lives, gifting us for the labor of love God has prepared for us to accomplish. Having fallen in love with God, we love and serve our neighbors.

*“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”*  
*Matthew 25:40 (NRSV)*

## **MISSIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

### **WEEKLY GATHERINGS – CHURCH BUILDING**

OFFICE HOURS Tuesday -Thursday, 9 AM-2 PM

- Boy Scouts –Mondays 7-8:30 PM
- Cub Scouts –Tuesdays 6-8 PM
- TOPS Meeting – Wednesdays 6 PM.
- St. Paul’s Prayer and Praise Group Ministry – Thursdays 10 AM @Carole Harmon’s Home
- St. Paul’s Handbell Rehearsal – Wednesdays 6 PM
- St. Paul’s Choir Rehearsal – Wednesdays 7 PM
- AA Meeting – Saturdays 7 PM

### **MONTHLY GATHERINGS**

- Finance Meeting – 2nd Monday 6:30 PM
- Trustees Meeting – 1<sup>st</sup> Monday 6:30 PM
- SPRC Meeting – 4th Thursday 6:30 PM
- Leadership Meeting – 3rd Tuesday 6:30 PM
- PFLAG Meeting – 3rd Thursday 6:30 PM
- Reconciling Ministries – TBD

**Adult Bible Study** will resume Sunday, September 17, 2023 at 9:45AM.

**Children’s Sunday School** will resume Sunday, September 17, 2023 at 9:45AM.

### **Flowers for Worship**

If you are interested in honoring a loved one with flowers at the altar on a particular Sunday, we are asking you to contact Alicia Blackwell, from Wildflowers by Alicia to place your order. Alicia can be reached at (302) 593-9884. Also, please email the church office so we make sure the information is added in the bulletin.

### **Compassionate Card Ministry**

The Compassionate Card Ministry is made up of 20 dedicated members of our congregation who create hand-made cards and encouraging messages to those in our directory, within our congregation, those on our prayer lists and others who are brought to our attention. Our purpose is to spread kindness and love to others through uplifting and personalized sentiments on hand-made cards. If you are not in our directory and would like to be added to our list, or if you know someone who would benefit from the blessing of a card, please contact Nancee Bleistine, [nbleistine@yahoo.com](mailto:nbleistine@yahoo.com) or 609-217-1924.

### **Prayer and Praise Group Ministry**

Carole Harmon hosts a prayer circle, currently Thursday mornings at 10 AM - in person. Please contact Carole if you are interested in joining the group or have a special prayer request. You can also find prayer request cards and box on the corner shelf in the Narthex.

## **VANCO: Manage Your Giving Online**

Giving online is easy and allows you to set up automatic recurring contributions and view your complete online giving history from anywhere you have access to the Internet. Simply follow these easy steps:

- 1) Visit the church website at [www.stpaulsodessa.org](http://www.stpaulsodessa.org) and click on the VANCO Online Giving button to the left of the screen.
- 3) Click on the Link to Online Giving thru VANCO button, then
- 4) Follow the onscreen instructions to create an online profile and to schedule your RECURRING CONTRIBUTIONS.

## **Love Thy Neighbor Fund**

Our "Love Thy Neighbor Fund" was created to help those in need in the MOT community. This fund may support a time in someone's life when he/she may need a little kindness and generosity to help endure and survive a challenging situation. If you can donate, please make checks payable to St. Paul's UMC and then write in the memo area it is for "Love Thy Neighbor Fund." Please note, this fund is SEPARATE from the Yellow Hat. Thank you, Love Thy Neighbor Committee

## **Deep Roots**

Nadine Johnson & Karen Ellis continue to work with the "Deep Roots" mission. This group works with families who are disconnected through homelessness and provides transitional shelter and other services to families in need. They need your help as they continue to contact members of the church to help with making meals once a month feeding approximately 50+ individuals. Here's hoping you will be able to help us with this very important and necessary mission. Thanks so much! Contact Karen Ellis at [iluvbrmuda@gmail.com](mailto:iluvbrmuda@gmail.com) and Nadine Johnson at [nadine.faye.johnson@gmail.com](mailto:nadine.faye.johnson@gmail.com)

## **Our Daily Bread Food Donations**

214 N Broad St, Middletown, DE 19709

Volunteers Needed – day and evening hours and different areas of need, filling bags, handing out meals, etc.

Volunteer Opportunities can be found at <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10COE4FAEA82CA3F5CF8-volunteer>. Contact Sue Holden, Missions Co-Chair, at 802-324-6167, [susieq2951@aol.com](mailto:susieq2951@aol.com), with any questions. Also, find information and volunteer sign-up forms on the website,

<https://www.ourdailybreadmot.com>. **On-line Training Coming Soon!**

ODB is most thankful to all who donate either monetarily or in kind. Your generosity helps ODB feed those in our community who are facing food insecurity. Listed below are the items needed to stuff our side bags and other items that are needed on a regular basis. Donations can be dropped off on Tuesday from 9:15 to 11:30AM

- Individual bottles of water
- Individual bags of salty snacks
- Individual packets of sweet snacks
- Individual fruit cups and/or applesauce
- Fresh fruit (apples, bananas, oranges)
- Boxes of breakfast cereal
- Boxes of mashed potatoes
- White bread
- Baked beans (large cans)
- Gallon size zip-loc bags
- Lg black garbage bags
- Cans of soup

Thank you for any and all kindness!

## **Neighborhood House**

Neighborhood House really appreciates St. Paul's ongoing support in so many ways. At this point, we are low on some items in the food pantry. These items are especially needed right now in our food pantry, though all donations are gladly accepted with the inventory being low now.

**Currently we are really low on personal hygiene products as well as some food items:**

1. **Bottled water**
2. **Toilet paper, Toothpaste, Soap, Shampoo & conditioner**
3. **Peanut butter & jelly (medium size)**
4. **Pasta sauce**
5. **Tuna/Tuna Helper**
6. **Hamburger Helper**

**These non-perishables are needed to keep our pantry stocked:**

Chef Boyardee, beef stew, Spam ,pancake mix/syrup, snacks - cookies, crackers etc.

**ADDITIONALLY, THERE IS ALWAYS A NEED FOR ADULT SIZED DISPOSABLE DIAPERS AS WELL AS FOR BABIES/CHILDREN IN SIZES 4, 5, AND 6, AND WIPES. WE HAVE NUMEROUS MOMS WITH BABIES AND TODDLERS WHO TAKE THEIR MONEY FOR FOOD AND BILLS TO BUY THEM.**

Donations can be left inside the Church. We look forward to another great year working together to feed the hungry. Thanks to all, Marilyn Hendershot, Family Services Specialist, Neighborhood House, Inc.

#### **PFLAG Meeting**

Meetings are held at 6:30 PM on the 3rd Thursday of each month, presently via Zoom. Please join us if you would like to be supported or offer support and please spread the word to all corners of our communities. We are currently working on a system which will help youth who have been rejected by their parents, find families who will help them. Please contact Mark Holden, ([Mark@maholden.com](mailto:Mark@maholden.com)) or call 802-279-8100.

**JOYS & CONCERNS:** If you know someone, you'd like to add to our prayer list, please email the church office or visit the church website ([www.stpaulsodessa.org](http://www.stpaulsodessa.org)) to complete a prayer request. **There is also a Prayer Box in the Narthex in which you can drop your completed request.** Please email the office when someone can be taken OFF the list. If you or a loved one needs a pastoral visit, please call or email the church office to schedule.