



Pastor Joel's New Year Reflection

As the new year begins, I believe there is value in pausing for a moment—remembering who we are, where we have come from, and what has carried us this far. At the same time, we ask an important question: **Where is the Spirit leading us next?**

In February, I will celebrate my 3rd anniversary as your pastor. As I begin my 4th year among you, my overriding feeling is one of *great joy*. I feel fortunate to be here. You welcomed me warmly, and together we have grown in faith and ministry.

Serving St. Paul's and St. Peter's is a gift—and each church brings its own unique character. St. Paul's is clearly the more “town” church, while St. Peter's is the “country” sibling. Both congregations have seen seasons when pews were fuller. Both have deep roots in both the Reformed and Lutheran traditions. While Sunday attendance is similar at both places, there are more children at St. Peter's, and St. Paul's is especially strong in mission outreach. St. Paul's has its famous dart team; St. Peter's remembers a championship baseball team with pride. Quilting—past or present—has held both congregations together. And St. Paul's tradition of baking pies and making sandwiches is something to behold!

Woven through all these experiences—past and present—is our God who journeys with us, renews us, and invites us forward. St. Peter's is blessed by Ellen Erb, whose tireless work has shaped a very special music program. St. Paul's is equally fortunate to have Mindy Does who has grown a meaningful mission ministry. The blessings these women bring give us the strength to take on the challenges we face!

A common trait both congregations share is the presence of families who have been part of these churches for generations. Think of the baptisms, confirmations, meals, music, and celebrations hosted in these sacred spaces. So much life has passed through these doors.

Along with joy, there have also been hard seasons. Over the decades, people have experienced loss, hurt, and challenge. In times of personal and community tragedy, the churches have stood as places of strength and compassion. And now, shifting attendance patterns, financial pressures, and the uncertainties of our time rattle us.

Another commonality is the way people serve. Many have come early to unlock the doors or stayed late to wash the last dish. Many have prayed faithfully, loved generously, and offered their time, energy, and resources. Hundreds of people, across many decades, have kept our ministries alive.

So where do we go from here?

Churches change very slowly. Nothing happens overnight, so we need to be thinking 2, 3, 4, 10 years into the future. I believe the next few years will require courage and strength—perhaps more than we have ever had to exert. While I love serving here, have no desire to leave, and know you are glad for my presence, this wonderful match does not mean we can rest on our laurels.

I sense the Spirit calling us into an uncertain future. At times, the road ahead seems steep and shadowed. Do we have the energy to climb it? Will new families and children join us in carrying the load? Will we have the resources to maintain buildings that are aging and becoming more expensive to care for?

I believe both congregations are relatively healthy and stable, which makes *now* the right time to engage in difficult conversations about what comes next. Do we forge ahead as we are? Close one church and move into the second? Merge and rebuild? I served churches where the same conversation was repeated year after year with no action, and frustration grew. People leave over inaction as much as they leave because they feel the church went in the wrong direction. I pray that in 2026 we cultivate a spirit of kindness and generosity, especially when we disagree. Whatever direction we choose, we choose it *together*.

We need to commit to one another. We need to wrestle with difficult questions—not settling for simplistic answers or avoiding them altogether—while still maintaining a spirit of love and compassion. I pray we honor the histories and traditions that shaped us, even as we remain open to the fresh stirrings of the Spirit.

I'd be lying if I said all of this doesn't make me anxious. Philippians 4:13 is a favorite verse for many: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I believe it is even truer when we say, "**we** can do all things through Christ who strengthens **us**."

Even if these conversations about our future make me pause, I wholeheartedly believe God has called me here to walk with you—and to help lead us faithfully in conversations and decisions we might prefer to avoid.

Together, with the courage of the Holy Spirit and God's unending grace, we will move forward.

Blessings,

Pastor Joel Biggers



Women's lunch and Men's Breakfast

On Tuesday, January 27, we will have a women's lunch that includes women from both congregations. For this event, we will meet in St. Peter's fellowship hall at 12:00 Noon for lunch and a brief program provided by Pastor Joel. Feel free to bring a friend. This event is for us to enjoy each other's presence, break bread together, and grow as a faith community. If you are interested in helping me prepare, please let me know.

Keeping everything even, the men from both congregations will gather on Saturday, January 31, at 8:00AM, in the basement of St. Paul's. As above, there is no agenda other than community building and growing together. If anyone is interested in helping, please let me know.

I imagine both events will last about an hour and a half. Come as you are...bring a friend.

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## Mardi Gras Social

Join us after worship on **Sunday, February 15** for a Mardi Gras Social! All are welcome to enjoy some New Orleans inspired treats and *laissez les bon temps rouler* – let the good times roll!!

This event will also kick off the ticket sales for our 2026 Mystery Dinner Theater! You'll enter the world of the Big Easy in *The Spirit of New Orleans*, a brand-new live show where you can help unravel an eerie mystery while enjoying a delicious dinner including some classic Cajun and Creole flavors.

Because of popular demand, the Dinner Theater returns this year with three showings: April 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, and May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Our 2024 and 2025 shows both sold out, so make sure to get your tickets early!

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**The Mission Team is again sponsoring a fun
but serious project we can really get behind.**



We are collecting men's, women's and children's socks, underwear, pajamas and long johns. All donations must be new and in original packaging or with tags attached. Donated items will be tallied on Undie Sunday, March 8.

Since its inception, St. Paul's Undie Sunday drives have collected 1,384 pairs of underwear and 3,358 pairs of socks! That's just counting what was collected during the two months each year for Undie Sunday. As socks and underwear donations continue to come in year round, St Paul's has kept a lot of feet warm and dry!

MISSION TRIP

North Street Mission Wooster, Ohio

Volunteer Projects: We will begin each morning by serving breakfast to the homeless at our host location. Each day following breakfast, we will work with one of several community organizations such as People to People Ministries (local food pantry), Salvation Army, Boys and Girls Club, Habitat for Humanity, Community Gardens, Every Women's House (domestic violence shelter), Friendship Meals, and the Wilderness Center among other possibilities.

Educational Activities: We will become more aware of the challenges to the community faces through a variety of educational programs. Wooster is located in the heart of Ohio's Amish and Mennonite communities which we will explore while we are here.

Date: Sunday, June 21 – Saturday, June 27

If you are interested in attending, or for more information, please sign up at the Mission Table or contact Mindy Does at mindy.does@yahoo.com.



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## The Bakers Are Back!

The Bakers are returning **in February** to bake delicious homemade Shoofly pies! Sweet, scrumptious, and made with love, these pies are the perfect winter pick-me-up or a thoughtful treat to share.

The deadline for ordering is Sunday, February 8. Pick-up will be Saturday, February 14 between 11:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. at the church. Cost is \$7.00 each. Watch for the sign-up sheet.

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Ham & Cheese Sandwich Sale

The Women of St. Paul's are hosting a Ham & Cheese Sandwich Sale on **Wednesday, February 18!** Each delicious sandwich features thin-sliced ham and cheese on a fresh bakery Kaiser roll, with a mustard packet included for just \$4.00.



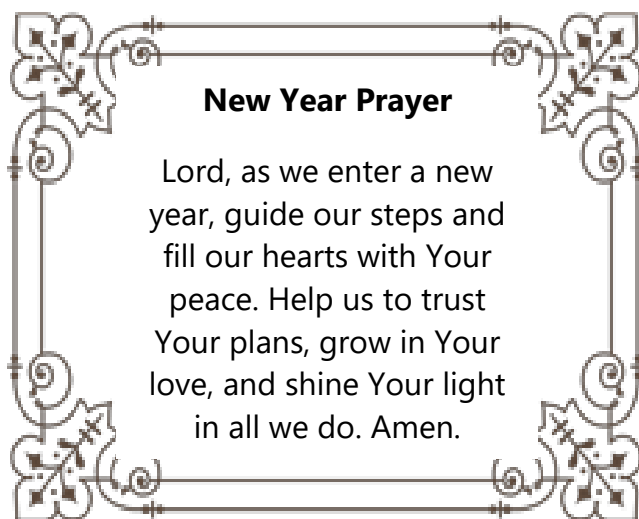
Pick up times are 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 pm and 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. Orders can be placed by signing up in the narthex or by calling 484-629-4233.

Enjoy a great lunch or dinner while supporting the Women of St. Paul's!

PRAY MORE
worry less

St. Paul's Prayer Partners help to provide hope, spiritual support and help to bring a deep sense of comfort to someone going through a difficult time. If you would like to become a prayer partner, or have prayer requests/updates, please contact Sally Jane by email @ sallyjane1717@ya*hoo.com

LET US REMEMBER IN PRAYER: Ann Snyder, Peggy Moser, Edith Knauss, Betty Stolz, John Stolz, Ronald Lobach, Keith Beil, Lynnel Groller, Peggy Kohler, Consistory, churches, nation and leaders, U.S. Military, many refugees, and persecuted Christians.



Give Hope!

Our local families in need benefit greatly from your donations to the Northampton Food Bank. **Items needed: canned soups, canned potatoes, mixed vegetables, canned meats (chicken, beef, stew, tuna), baked beans, rice, pasta, dried potatoes, peanut butter & jelly, cereal, crackers.** Non-perishable items and monetary donations can be dropped off at church or the church office. Thank you for caring and sharing!

Redner's Save-A-Tape Program

Shop at Redner's? St. Paul's receives 1% of the total receipts submitted. Whole receipts (cut off receipts are not accepted) can be dropped off in the Redner's receipt bag in the narthex or dropped off at the church office. Thank you for your participation!

Giant Gift Cards

If you shop at Giant, please consider participating in a great fundraising opportunity for St. Paul's through Giant's "Cash for Causes" program. **St. Paul's earns 5% of the face value of all the gift cards sold.** Gift cards are available in denominations of \$25, \$50 and \$100 and can be used like cash at any Giant location. If interested in purchasing gift cards, please contact Cindy Swankoski at 484-560-6542. Thank you for your participation!



01/04 – Open
01/11 – Tom Unger
01/18 – Open
01/25 – Open

02/01 – Open
02/08 – Open
02/15 – Open
02/22 – Open



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01/11 – Tom Unger
01/18 – Open
01/25 – Phyllis Bartholomew

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02/08 – Phyllis Bartholomew
02/15 – Open
02/22 – Open

Note: There are **two** spaces available to sign up on the altar flower chart in the narthex. You are encouraged to sign up for any date even if someone else already has.



2/03 – Kevin Zeiner
2/07 – Susan Maranki
2/08 – Jennifer Zeiner
Michelle Lapp
2/09 – Beth Fujita
2/15 – Bruce Balliet
2/21 – Donald Biggs
Jennifer Bogar
2/22 – Mattie Groller
2/24 – Glenn Spiece
Jason Biggs
David Farkas
2/26 – Debra Gable
2/28 – Drew Bauer
2/29 – Barbara Szerensits

HAPPY Anniversary

February:

2/06 – Marvin & Faye Kern

Thomas & Barbara Szerensits

January 2026

Jan. 1 – New Year's Day
Jan. 4 – 10:30 – Worship w/Communion
Jan. 5 – 7:00 – AA (parlor)
Jan. 7 – 7:00 – Scouts (FH)
Jan. 11 – 10:30 – Worship/Annual Reports Due
Jan. 12 – 7:00 – AA (Parlor)
Jan. 14 – Scouts (FH)
Jan. 18 – 10:30 – Worship
Jan. 19 – AA (Parlor)
Jan. 20 – 6:30 – Consistory (Annex)
Jan. 21 – 7:00 – Scouts (FH)
Jan. 24 – Mission Trip/Bethlehem Shelter Meal
Jan. 25 – 10:30 – Worship
Jan. 26 – 7:00 – AA (Parlor)
Jan. 27 – 12 - 2 pm – Women's Lunch @ St. Peter's
Jan. 28 – 7:00 – Scouts (FH)
Jan. 31 – 7:30-9:30 – Men's Breakfast @ St. Paul's



February 2026

Feb. 1 – 10:30 – Worship w/Communion
Feb. 2 – 7:00 – AA (parlor)
Feb. 4 – 7:00 – Scouts (FH)
Feb. 8 – 10:30 – Worship/Deadline for Shoofly Pie & Ham & Cheese Sandwich Orders -
Deadline for March Newsletter Articles
Feb. 9 – 7:00 – AA (Parlor)
Feb. 11 – Scouts (FH)
Feb. 14 – 11-5 pm – Pick Up Shoofly Pies (FH)
Feb. 15 – 10:30 – Worship/Mardi Gras Social
Feb. 16 – AA (Parlor)
Feb. 17 – 6:30 – Consistory (Annex)
Feb. 18 – 7:00 – Ash Wednesday Service
Feb. 22 – 10:30 – Worship/First Sunday in Lent
Feb. 23 – 7:00 – AA (Parlor)
Feb. 25 – 7:00 – Scouts (FH)





Pastor – Rev. Joel Biggers
Director of Christian Ed. – Melinda Does
Office Administrator – Christine Hostetter
Custodian – Shea Killeen
Church Office Phone – 610-261-2910
E-mail – stpaulsnorth@gmail.com
Website – www.stpaulsnorthamptonpa.org

Pastor's Office Hours: Thursday & Friday from 9:00-5:00 PM. Pastor Joel can be reached by email joelwbiggers@gmail.com or by calling 732-853-4809.

Church Office Hours: Mon., (8-12) Tues., Wed., Thurs. (8-3)

