
Murray Presbyterian Messenger



November, 2022



Murray Presbyterian Church

P.O. Box 196, Main Street Murray, NE 68409

www.murraypresbyterian.org Tel: (402)235-2754

Featured This Month: Nicaragua Sunday



November 13, 2022 During Fellowship Hour After Worship (11:15 am) Nicaraguan Style Meal

(Street Taco Bar, Tropical Fruit Salad, Tres Leche Cake)
FREE WILL OFFERING FOR THE SCHOOL UNIFORM PROJECT
SEE PAGE 6 FOR DETAILS

Upcoming Events

Nov. 9 Womens Bible Study 1 pm

Nov. 13 Nicaragua Day

Nov. 19: Work Day, 7:30 am

Nov. 20: Stewardship Sunday

Nov. 26: Hanging of the Greens

Nov. 27: Advent 1, Guest Preacher

Thank you for your ongoing financial support of Murray Presbyterian! Contributions may be deposited in the offering plates during worship services, mailed to the church at P. O. Box 196, Murray NE 68409 or made online at www.murraypresbyterian.org. Click on the "Give Now" button at the bottom of the homepage.

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Early in my ministry career, a Presbyterian elder named Kathy Patterson shared a valuable perspective that has stuck with me over the years. I don't recall the exact context, but I know it was at a session meeting. We were presumably discussing a discouraging trend in church participation. Inevitably, there would be session members expressing annoyance and frustration with folks who were not as committed as they should be. Kathy had a different take. She said: "I just feel sorry for the people who are missing out on all the exciting things that are happening here."

That's an attitude I've tried to adopt over the years. It's something I've remembered as our attendance declined in the wake of the pandemic. And it's how I try to respond to reports like the one that came out this fall. Once again, there was a survey—this time from the Pew Research Center—showing that the proportion of Americans self-identifying as Christian has fallen to the lowest level ever, and we are on track to be a minority of the population within the next several decades.

Our initial inclination might be to feel badly for churches that will be adversely affected by this trend. And that's entirely appropriate. It's sad when congregations are no longer strong enough to have a viable ministry. It's sad when beautiful church buildings that are architecturally and historically significant are shuttered or turned into bars and offices.

But as sad as we might be over those trends, what should really make us sad is what this all means for the growing number of unchurched neighbors, for our communities, and for our nation. Rather than feeling resentful, I genuinely feel sorry for the growing number of people who don't have a community of faith to guide them in their spiritual quest and provide support. I feel sorry for young people who will grow up without the kind of extended church family my children have had—including older members of the congregation who have mentored them and celebrated their milestones in life.

I feel sorry, as well, for communities that won't have the outreach ministries churches have often provided. In the decades prior to my tenure serving a church in Ohio, the mainline Protestant churches in that city had been instrumental in starting an assisted living facility, a care center, a homeless shelter, a thrift shop (that uses the proceeds to help needy people), and a crisis pregnancy center. And although those churches are still involved in supporting these ministries, a lot of them are struggling just to keep their own doors open. I'm sure that scenario is playing out all over our country—and the affected communities are the losers.

Upcoming Worship Opportunities

Fall Sermon Series "David: A Life Lived Large"



During the month of November, our fall sermon series looking at highlights from the life of David concludes and we begin the celebration of the Advent season.

- Sept. 11:** David & Samuel: Calling
(1 Samuel 16:1-13)
- Sept. 18:** David & Goliath: Valor
(1 Samuel 17)
- Sept. 25:** David & Jonathan: Friendship
(1 Samuel 18, 20)
- Oct. 2:** David & Saul: Magnanimity
(1 Samuel 26)
- Oct. 9:** David & Israel: Reconciliation
(2 Samuel 3)
- Oct. 16:** **Rev. Janice Desterhaff**
- Oct. 23:** David & Mephibosheth: Grace
(2 Samuel 9)
- Oct. 30:** David & Bathsheba: Failure
(2 Samuel 11)
- Nov. 6:** David & Absalom: Heartbreak
(2 Samuel 15-16)
- Nov. 13:** David & Joab: Counterpart
(2 Samuel 19)
- Nov. 20:** David & Solomon: Legacy
(1 Chronicles 28-29)
- Nov. 27:** **First Sunday of Advent**, with guest preacher, the **Rev. Dr. Robert Keefer**.

Finally, I feel sorry for our nation as a whole, if the church's public witness is diminished or lost. It is entirely true that institutional churches and individual Christians have often supported things that were very wrong. Recently, my fellow evangelical Protestants have brought tremendous shame and disgrace to the cause of Christ through their embrace of deplorable political figures and their vitriolic rhetoric. But at its best, the church has been a moral compass for our society, often taking the lead in standing up for those who are most vulnerable, curbing the worst excesses of our economic system, promoting civil rights, working for peace, and preserving moral values. Without that kind of witness, our society will be impoverished. And, sadly, the vacuum will often be filled by political cults and extremist ideologies.

If the church were merely a "business" or even an organization with its own self-serving agenda, we would evaluate its success on the basis of its numerical strength and influence. But the church has a different mission altogether. Our "success" is measured in terms of how faithful we are in serving Christ and bearing witness to the gospel. If the current trends continue and we find ourselves in the minority, I can only hope that we will be like that faithful remnant of believers that Philip Yancey encountered in Britain a couple of decades ago. Following a book tour that took him around the world, he shared a series of observations, beginning with the following: "*Christians in Great Britain seem more serious about their faith than their counterparts in the U.S.* In a nation where only 6 percent of the population attends church, there is no overlay of cultural Christianity and no social advantage to church affiliation. As I have noticed in other countries, when Christians constitute a tiny minority, they are more likely to work together, too. With their impressive infrastructure, American churches tend to do things on their own or work within a denomination. One more difference: British audiences still hunger for content, whereas in America content goes over best when enwrapped in entertainment."

Come what may in terms of statistical trends, let's always strive to be faithful to carrying out our mission to be a witness for Christ in Eastern Cass County, Nebraska.

Thank You

Thank you very much for the generous Pastor Appreciation gift that was presented to me at the beginning of worship on October 30. It was certainly a surprise, even though, in a variety of ways, you have always affirmed my ministry here. This is a congregation that doesn't just confine pastor appreciation to one month of the year. With your words of encouragement and expressions of support, you display appreciation regularly, and I appreciate all of you.

With love in Christ,

Bill

Leadership

Session

Moderator

Rev. William McConnell

Clerk of Session

Debra South

Class of 2022

Linnea Hill

Michael Stahl

Class of 2023

Denise Ayers

Melanie Honaker

Class of 2024

Kenny Drake

Dave Friedli

Deacons

Class of 2022

Kari Drake (Treasurer)

Sherrill Konfrst

Class of 2023

Delaney Deterding

Dana Stahl (Moderator)

Ann Wieringa (Secretary)

Guest Preacher



November 27—the first week of Advent—is one Sunday you definitely won't want to miss! Not only will the sanctuary be beautifully adorned for the Advent season, we are honored to have the **Rev. Dr. Robert Keefer** preaching and leading worship that day.

One of the most remarkably gifted preachers in our presbytery, Bob retired this past May after nine years serving Presbyterian Church of the Master in Omaha. Prior to that pastorate, Bob served congregations in Arizona; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Clarinda, Iowa. He's been stated clerk of three presbyteries (including our own), an adjunct professor at Northwest Missouri State University, and part of our presbytery's mission team to visit our partner churches in LaConcepcion, Nicaragua (a trip that included our own Ann Wieringa). And on top of all these ministry roles, Bob has also appeared in a number of community theater productions. He says his favorite role was that of Jesus in a production of *Godspell!* We are thrilled that Bob is coming to minister the Word to us on this special Sunday in the church year and trust that he will receive an enthusiastic welcome here.

Hanging of the Greens



This traditional time of decorating our church building for the celebration of Advent and Christmas takes place this year on **Saturday, November 26, from 9 am to noon**. Whether it's putting ornaments on a tree, stringing lights, or hanging greenery, there's a part for everyone to play in this activity!

Advent Dinner

This year's Advent dinner, featuring turkey with all the trimmings, takes place immediately following worship on **Sunday, December 4**. There is a sheet to sign-up for side dishes on the back table in the sanctuary. We are glad to be able to resume this tradition (after a hiatus during the pandemic) and hope everyone will come out that Sunday and celebrate with us!



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Leadership Teams

Worship and Family Life

Linnea Hill, Team Leader
Amanda Anderson
Jeff Anderson
Adam Gillaspie
Rebecca Gillaspie
Sherrill Konfrst
Laraine Young

Mission and Outreach

Melanie Honaker, Team Leader
George Collins
Sydney Honaker
John McConnell
Stacey McConnell
Deanne Slaffer
Dana Stahl
Ann Wieringa

Christian Education

Denise Ayers, Team Leader.
Sharlyn Deterding
Kathy Friedli
Julie Nickels
Linnea Hill

Properties and Finance

Kenny Drake, Team Leader
Dave Friedli, *Session Rep.*
Michael Stahl, *Session Rep.*
Sharlyn Deterding
Norm Koester
Gary Reike
Jerry Slaffer

Looking Back

Community Fall Festival (Oct. 30)



Our last free community event of the year was a Fall festival, featuring soup and chili, pumpkin decorating, guessing jars, and a fire pit. We have made lots of new friends from our area!

Beaver Lake Trunk or Treat (Oct. 23)



Trick or treaters stop at Murray Presbyterian's station, where they received treats, an encouragement to "Fall in Love with Jesus," and a reminder that "Everyone is welcome at Murray Presbyterian Church."

Litter Clean-Up (October 29)



Here's the Murray Presbyterian crew that did litter clean-up along the 2.5 mile stretch of Hwy 1 our congregation has adopted. They even hauled away an old door! Thank you to everyone helping to preserve the beauty of God's creation!



Mission and Outreach (cont'd)

Certificate of Appreciation



Murray Presbyterian's efforts in the areas of conservation and highway beautification were recognized with a "Certificate of Appreciation" at Keep Cass County Beautiful's annual banquet on October 19. Thank you to **Dana Stahl** for making the presentation and for spearheading these projects in our church.

Reverse Advent Calendar

During the Advent season, our church is partnering with the **Conestoga Backpack Program** to donate one food item each day. There is a sheet to sign up for specific items on the back table. Please bring your items to the church building by December 11, for delivery before Christmas.

Keep Filling the SENCA cart



Thank you to everyone who continues to fill the grocery cart with non-perishable food items for the SENCA food pantry in Plattsmouth. This month, as we look ahead to up-coming holiday celebrations, you're invited to consider a donation of **holiday meal** food items.

Nicaragua Sunday (Nov. 13)



Stay after worship on **November 13** (or come at 11:15 if you are not in worship) for a very special **fellowship hour!** Enjoy a sumptuous Nicaraguan-style meal, featuring a street taco bar, beef & chicken, gallo pinto (beans and rice), guacamole, salsa fresca, fruit salad, tres leche cake, and Nicaraguan coffee. **PLUS**, help send a Nicaraguan child to school.

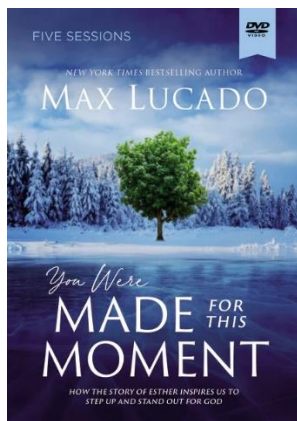
Free will offerings collected at the meal will benefit the **Missouri River Valley Presbytery's school uniform project.**

For the past 12 years, the Nicaraguan Partnership Committee (on which our own **Ann Wieringa** serves) has reached out to churches in our presbytery to help fund school uniform packets for children from some of the most needy families in La Concha, Nicaragua. An important part of this partnership is the Sewing Collective run by local women who get paid a fair wage for their work while learning a valuable skill.

This year, a complete school packet will cost **\$110**. This includes a custom fitted uniform, a pair of shoes, and a backpack full of supplies. The Presbytery's goal is to fund 100 packets. As we have in the past, our Murray congregation is committed to supporting this project and the ministry of our partner congregations.

During worship on November 13, there will be a Minute for Missions with a video presentation showing scenes from La Concepcion and the work of the sewing collective.

Adult Education



Max Lucado's "Made for this Moment," the current video-based study being used by the Sunday morning adult class came out of a hard season—the world-wide pandemic that shut down so many things and upended our lives. So, it looks at the book of Esther, a book of the Bible that was written to be read in hard seasons. As the promo for this series puts it, "It was crafted for those who feel outnumbered by foes, outmaneuvered by fate, and outdone by fear." Into that situation, Esther

brings the message "God is present, and he will act." You're invited to join this group **Sunday mornings at 9:00 am** in the downstairs youth room.

Property & Finance Kenny Drake, team leader

Work Day

Anyone who would like to participate in the process of straightening up the downstairs room used for storage (former pastor's study) is invited to come to the church building on **Saturday, November 19**, anytime after **7:30 am**. Items no longer needed will be discarded. Remaining items will be put onto new shelving units.

Stewardship Campaign



All members and friends of Murray Presbyterian should have received a letter about the annual stewardship campaign, along with a Plan of Giving card to return. (There are extras on the back table.) Please return your card on or before **Sunday, November 20**. As we return thanks for the Lord's blessings in our lives on that Sunday before Thanksgiving, we will also be dedicating our commitment cards in worship. Your card can be mailed to the church (using the return envelope included with the mailing) or brought to a worship service. Thank you for your ongoing support of Murray Presbyterian Church and its ministries!

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A Thanksgiving Prayer

O God, our Provider, you open your hand and lavish good gifts upon us. So we give you thanks. You create the beauty of the earth and stock it with abundance to sustain human life. You give us friends who share the journey of our lives; family who make us laugh with joy and dry our tears of sorrow; strangers who minister to our needs with generous kindness. You knit us into your larger family called church to encourage us in your Way. You have blessed us with the freedoms of a great nation. "Thank you" seems insufficient for all your blessings, yet we say it with all we are as an offering of gratitude for our many blessings that we name before you. {Enumerate all you're thankful for; count your blessings}. Though we may have seen our fortunes fall this year, we praise you for hiding our treasure in Jesus Christ our Lord, whom not even death can destroy. Though we miss those whose places sit empty at this year's table, we give you thanks for lending them to us for what time we had. For all your providence with the feast of life that you set before us, we give ourselves to you with all we are in thanks and praise. Amen.

(Presbyterian Church, Office of Theology and Worship)

Stewardship Stories

People support the ministry of Murray Presbyterian Church in any number of ways—with their time, talents, prayers, tithes and offerings, and in-kind gifts of services. The folks featured here are not in any way unique. They are and were simply ordinary, faithful members of our congregation who found creative ways to financially support Murray Presbyterian, often realizing a tax advantage in the process. These stories are shared, not to draw attention to specific people, but to make us all aware of potential giving strategies. To explore which strategies might be right (or beneficial) for you, check out the literature that's available at the church building, speak with your tax or financial advisor, or consult with a financial organization that specializes in charitable giving (such as the Presbyterian Foundation or Thrivent).

During the years they spent farming a parcel of land west of our village, **Edward and Carline Howard** were known for their kindness to neighbors and generosity toward our church. (Among other things, they are said to have donated the light fixtures in the sanctuary.) And they continue to financially support our church, every single year. That, in and of itself, is not remarkable. Lots of people give each year. What makes these annual gifts from the Howards so unusual is that Ed joined the church *100 years ago*! He and Carline moved from Murray back in 1984. And in the years that followed, both of them were called home to be with the Lord. But before they moved, they set up a **perpetual endowment fund** to benefit the church. Now administered by Hastings College, the Howard Endowment has been generating a modest stream of income for our church for *forty years now*, longer than the Howards worshipped here as a married couple! Similar funds can be set up with organizations like the Presbyterian Foundation.



LaVerne Ebner and her husband, Harold, joined Murray Presbyterian Church in 1996, after moving to Beaver Lake.

And for the next 25 years, LaVerne was a faithful member. Whether it was by working in the kitchen, serving on the deacons, or coordinating our prayer chain, LaVerne showed how much she cared about this congregation. And it was in that same spirit of caring for our congregation that, during her lifetime, she set up a **life insurance contract** with Thrivent Financial, naming Murray Presbyterian Church as the beneficiary. After she was called home to be with the Lord last October, the church received a very generous payout. The session is currently considering various options for using this special gift. But however it is used, it will be an ongoing testimony to LaVerne's devotion to her church family.



Given how active they remain, **Norm and Barb Koester** don't appear to be over 70 ½ years of age. But in fact, they are! And that means that, like anyone their age bracket who has retirement savings in an IRA account, they are required to take a minimum distribution every year. A couple of years ago, their tax advisor alerted them to a strategy for using at least some of that distribution to support the church, while potentially realizing a tax savings. Through a technique called a **Qualified Charitable Distribution**, funds are transferred directly from the IRA administrator to the church. And the amount contributed is excluded from income. So even people who don't itemize can make charitable contributions that are deducted from taxable income. Since finding out about it, Norm has been sharing this idea with lots of people in our congregation who might be in a similar situation. So, he and Barb agreed to sharing their story through the newsletter to let even more people know about this method of giving.