
Murray Presbyterian Messenger

April 2024



Murray Presbyterian Church

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

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

Featured This Month: Easter Season



**Join us in this
Season of Hope and Renewal!**

Murray Presbyterian Church, Murray, NE
(402)235-2754
www.murraypresbyterian.org



Upcoming Events

Sundays

10:00 am: Morning Worship

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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Will Willimon, former dean of the chapel at Duke University and United Methodist bishop shares a profound insight about Easter faith in his Acts commentary: ***“The most eloquent testimony to the reality of the resurrection is not an empty tomb or a well-orchestrated pageant on Easter Sunday but rather a group of people whose life together is so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds a community, that there can be no explanation other than that something decisive has happened in history. . . The tough task of interpreting the reality of a truth like the resurrection is not so much the scientific or historical, ‘how could a thing like that happen?’ but the ecclesiastical and communal, ‘Why don’t you people look more resurrected?’”***

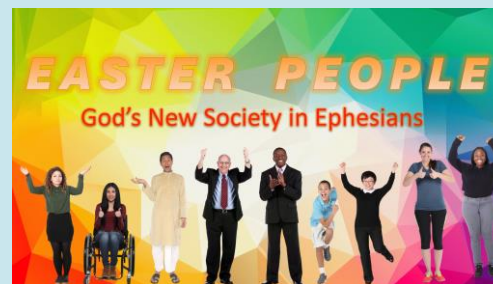
Certainly, a vivid illustration of Willimon’s point can be found in the example of the early church. One of the great enigmas in the history of late antiquity is how this obscure and persecuted sect of Jesus-followers could emerge from one of the Empire’s backwater provinces and, within a few centuries, come to dominate the Roman world. There were, to be sure, brilliant Christian apologists, like Origen and Justin Martyr, who mounted a vigorous intellectual defense of the faith, using the best in classical erudition.

But it was arguably the “radically different” way of life practiced by early Christian communities that enabled the Jesus movement to turn the world upside down. The late sociologist of religion Rodney Stark was a foremost authority on the rise of Christianity. He attributes this rapid ascendancy largely to social dynamics that stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing pagan culture. “To cities filled with the homeless and the impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.” That’s what a community based on resurrection hope looks like!

What were the beliefs undergirding this radical approach to community? The New Testament epistles provide a glimpse. And the writing we know as **Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians** is a prime case in point. Superlatives abound in descriptions of this letter. Samuel Taylor Coleridge called it “the divinest composition of man.” It’s been dubbed “the queen of the epistles” and F. F. Bruce said it represents “the quintessence of Paulinism.”

It’s also been called **“the most contemporary book in the Bible”** by John Mackay, mid-twentieth century president of Princeton Theological Seminary, who pointed to how it “promises community in a world of disunity, reconciliation in place of alienation and peace instead of war.” More recently, John R. W. Stott entitled his commentary (in The Bible Speaks Today series),

Upcoming
Worship Opportunities
Easter Sermon Series



The Easter season is a great time to think about what it means to be a community of people who embody the hope of the Resurrection. That’s what we’ll be doing this year as we consider some of the key qualities of the church—the universal body of Christ—that are described in the New Testament book of Ephesians.

What are the identifying marks of Easter people?

- Apr. 7** Easter People Are Chosen (Eph. 1:1-14)
- Apr. 14** Easter People Are Empowered (Eph. 1:15-23)
- Apr. 21** Easter People Are Raised Up (Eph. 2:1-10)
- Apr. 28** Easter People Are Unified (Eph. 2:11-22)
- May 5** Easter People Are Gifted (Eph. 4:7-16)
- May 12** Easter People Are Changed (Eph. 4:17-31)
- May 19 (Pentecost)** Easter People Are Spirit-Filled

God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians. The letter's "vision of a renewed human community," he writes, is a stirring one. **"For the sake of the glory of God and the evangelization of the world, nothing is more important than that the church be, and should be seen to be, God's new society. Toward the fulfillment of this vision Ephesians gives us a strong and steady stimulus."**

Hopefully, we'll be challenged and inspired as we spend the Easter season looking at how we can more fully embrace our calling to be "Easter People" using the book of Ephesians. The message of the resurrection, embodied in communities of hope, caring, and reconciliation, once turned the world upside down! It can happen again! God help us to strive towards that vision. And in response to Bishop Willimon's question, *may we increasingly look like a resurrected people!*

Introduction to Ephesians

As we delve into this book of the New Testament, a little background may be helpful. Who wrote it? To whom was it written? And when? The letter says (in the first verse) it was written by Paul the Apostle, and that claim was universally accepted by figures in the ancient church. In recent centuries, however, it has been called into question for various reasons. Some of them have to do with the fact that this letter seems to differ in style and vocabulary from other documents in the Pauline corpus.

Another strange feature of the book, if one assumes it was written by Paul to the church at Ephesus, is the fact that (unlike most of Paul's letters) there are no personal greetings and no allusions to specific conditions within the church. The writer seems only to have heard things about the recipients second-hand (1:15, 3:2-3). That flies in the face of the record in Acts, which describes a two-year stay by Paul in Ephesus (19:1-10) and recounts a tearful farewell to the Ephesian elders (20:17-38).

These considerations can't be taken lightly. But they do not by any means preclude the tradition of Pauline authorship. The stylistic and thematic differences have been addressed quite extensively by commentators (such as Markus Barth) who consider them to be a function of a different time and purpose. With regard to the recipients, it is important to know that the words "in Ephesus" (1:1) do not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts of this document. It is highly probable that this letter was not originally addressed just to the Christians at Ephesus. It was perhaps something like a circular letter to churches (and, more specifically, Gentile Christians) in whole area of Asia Minor.

F. F. Bruce sums up what is perhaps the lynchpin in the case for Pauline authorship: "The man who could write Ephesians must have been the apostle's equal, if not his superior, in mental stature and spiritual insight. . . Of such a second Paul early Christian history has no knowledge."

If we assume the letter was written by Paul, it most likely was done toward the end of his life (around 62 AD) while he was imprisoned (or under confinement) in Rome. What a magnificent capstone to his body of apostolic writings!

Leadership

Session

Moderator

Rev. William McConnell

Clerk of Session

Debra South

Class of 2024

Kenny Drake
Denise Ayers

Class of 2025

Sharlyn Deterding
Debra South

Class of 2026

Tanner Miner
Kyle Nickels

Deacons

Class of 2024

Kathy Friedli
Sherrill Konfrst
Julie Nickels

Class of 2025

Ryleigh Hill
Stacey McConnell
Karla Remmers

Study Leave

Dr. McConnell will be on study leave from **April 23-26** in order to attend the National Gathering of the Fellowship Community at the First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, TN. The Fellowship Community is a network of evangelical pastors and churches in the PCUSA who come together for mutual support, accountability and to be better equipped for ministry in our current context. Information is available at <https://www.fellowship.community/national-conference>

Compassion Sunday (April 28)



Join us on **April 28**, when we will be observing **Compassion Sunday**, lifting up the child-sponsorship work of Compassion International. The Mission and Outreach team will be hosting the fellowship hour, and information about child sponsorship opportunities will be available.

Highway Clean-up



Members of our congregation, joined by student volunteers from the Conestoga National Honor Society, collected litter along our adopted stretch of Highway 1 (just west of the village) on March 16. Two litter clean-ups that day collected 12 large bags of trash and many large pieces of refuse!

Keep Filling the SENCA Cart!



Thank you to everyone who donates non-perishable food items to the cart in the back of the sanctuary. The donation theme for April is "canned vegies." We are asking for items such as corn, green beans, carrots, and mixed vegetables. All items are taken to the SENCA food pantry in Plattsmouth, which serves all of Cass County.



Leadership Teams

Worship and Family Life

- Sharlyn Deterding, *Team Leader*
- Deb South, *Session Rep.*
- Linnea Hill
- Sherrill Konfrst
- Larcaine Young

Mission and Outreach

- Melanie Honaker, *Team Leader*
- George Collins
- Sydney Honaker
- John McConnell
- Stacey McConnell
- Dana Stahl
- Ann Wieringa

Christian Education

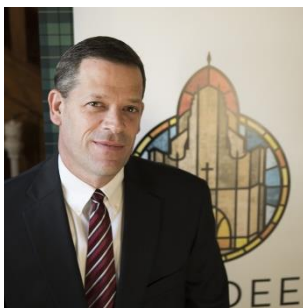
- Denise Ayers, *Team Leader.*
- Sharlyn Deterding
- Kathy Friedli
- Julie Nickels
- Linnea Hill

Properties and Finance

- Kenny Drake, *Team Leader*
- Sharlyn Deterding, *Session Rep.*
- Dave Friedli
- Norm Koester
- Gary Reike



Men's Retreat (May 17-18)



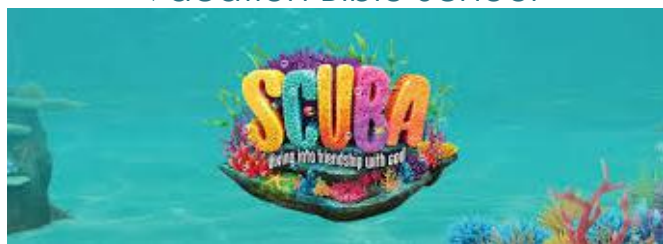
Join other men at the beautiful and restful Calvin Crest Camp Conference and Retreat Center (Fremont, NE) for an overnight event designed to bring you closer to God and refresh your spiritual life. Award-winning Christian music artist **Bob Bennett** (above left) will be the worship leader and will perform an acoustic coffee house concert on Friday evening. A product of the Jesus Movement, Bob has engaged in a music ministry spanning over four decades now, and one of his early releases was named "Album of the Year" by Contemporary Christian Music Magazine. Inspirational speaker will be the **Rev. J.D. Georlett** (above right), pastor of Dundee Presbyterian Church in Omaha. J. D. preaches and teaches with humor and passion, always with the Bible at the center of his ministry. Register online at www.calvincrest.org/men. Fees vary depending on the accommodations you choose.

New Members Preparation



If you have been worshipping with us and would like to explore membership in Murray Presbyterian Church, please speak with the pastor as soon as possible. A membership preparation process will take place during the Easter season and we hope to have people joining the church on Pentecost Sunday. Participation in these meetings is also open to anyone who would like to explore what it means to be a Christian, what the church is all about, and the distinctives of the Presbyterian Church.

Vacation Bible School



Save the dates of **July 15-18** for this year's Vacation Bible School with the theme *Scuba: Diving into Friendship with God*. Sessions will be held at the Murray Christian Church, with volunteer help from both congregations. More information will be coming out in future months.

Planned Giving Workshop

The **Presbyterian Foundation** will be facilitating a Legacy Planning Presentation on Saturday, **April 20th from 10am-noon** at **Presbyterian Church of the Master** (10710 Corby Circle in Omaha). Check-in will begin at 9:30am. From wills and bequests to life income plans, this presentation will introduce tools you can use to craft your faith legacy. We'll discuss how you can pass on your values, share your faith, and make an impact now and for years to come through Donor Advised Funds, Endowments, Charitable Trusts, and Retirement Accounts. You may attend in person or via livestream (link will be sent when you register at <https://www.pmr.org/legacy-planning/>)

Holy Week / Easter Events



Thank you to everyone who helped make this year's observance of Holy Week and Easter a meaningful and uplifting experience!