
Murray Presbyterian Messenger

February 2025

Murray Presbyterian Church

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

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

Featured This Month:

Lent 2025



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**Wednesday Evening Lenten Gatherings
(March 12-April 9) : p. 5**

Murray Presbyterian Church, Murray, NE
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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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Back in a former life (many eons ago), when I was teaching religion at various New Jersey colleges, I used to give a lecture in my intro courses on what is called “American Civil Religion.” Robert Bellah, the scholar who first

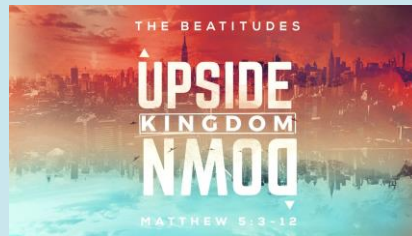
coined the concept, used John F. Kennedy's 1960 inauguration as an example of how it worked. Since I was teaching in the late 80's and early 90's, I “updated” the illustration, playing a recording of Ronald Reagan's 1981 inauguration. Students would invariably express surprise at how overtly religious the ceremony was. I remember one of them saying, “It sounds like a church service.” We would then talk a little bit about how, in virtually every culture, organized religion plays a role in legitimizing transfers of power and validating leaders. (Another prime example is the British coronation ceremony, where the monarch is crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury at a service held in Westminster Abbey.)

Religion was once again a centerpiece of the inauguration rituals a few weeks ago. The capitol rotunda ceremony included no fewer than five clerics invoking God's blessing on the new president. With the notable exception of Cardinal Dolan, none of them, in my estimation, acquitted themselves particularly well. We had the spectacle of a priest from Queens beseeching the long-deceased Fred and Mary Trump to extend their guidance and protection from the Great Beyond. A Detroit megachurch preacher ended up channeling Martin Luther King in his prayer and then tried to cash in on his new-found fame the next day by launching a meme coin.

Conspicuously absent from the official ceremony were mainline Protestants. But they got their moment the next day at a prayer service held in the so-called “National Cathedral.” (Our Episcopal friends seem to automatically assume that because Anglicanism is the established state church in England, they should be the unofficial “state religion” in the United States.) Dominated by clergy affiliated with mainline denominations, the service also included a veritable smorgasbord of religious traditions (Muslim, Jewish, Native American, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, Mormon). Notably excluded from this dazzling display of religious diversity were any representatives from the two largest blocs of religious believers in America: Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants (i.e., the very groups featured prominently the day before). This was, of course, the service at which the preacher seemed to “call out” the president for a lack of mercy.



Upcoming
 Worship Opportunities
 Sundays After Epiphany
 Sermon Series



Join us in the Sundays leading up to Lent as our preaching series on the Beatitudes continues.

- Feb. 2:** “Passion to Set Things Right” (“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” Matt. 5:6)
- Feb. 9:** “Generous Spirits Repaid” (“Blessed are the merciful,” Matt. 5:7)
- Feb. 16:** “Single-Minded Devotion” (“Blessed are the pure in heart,” Matt. 5:8)
- Feb. 23:** “Divine Imitators” (“Blessed are the peacemakers,” Matt. 5:9)
- Mar. 2:** “Kingdom of Martyrs” (“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,” Matt. 5:10-12)

Coming Up for the Lenten
 Season (Mar. 9-Apr. 13)



It's the greatest 'whodunit' of all times: *Who Killed Jesus?* Join us as we investigate the suspects—and come to a disturbing conclusion!

There, in a nutshell, was a snapshot of what religion in America has become in our fractured society. Mainline Protestants (at least at the leadership level) hop on every progressive bandwagon, fawn over liberal Democrats, and rebuke conservative Republicans. Meanwhile so-called “evangelicals” (or the religious entrepreneurs to whom that label is generally applied) uncritically embrace every element of a right-wing agenda and latch on to politicians in that camp, regardless of how morally compromised they may be. Isn't that the way it's always been?

In a word: NO! Historically, religious participants at civic affairs were not chosen to make a political statement. They generally offered innocuous prayers for the well-being of the nation and the incoming administration. In the case of presidents who actually attended church, they would often invite their own pastor to do the honors. We now know that Rev. Billy Graham was sometimes involved in behind-the-scenes political machinations. (For examples, see the PBS *American Experience* documentary on his life.) But—unlike his son—he had enough sense to project a *public image* of partisan neutrality. That's why he offered prayers at a whole string of presidential inaugurations for members of *both* political parties. (He also officiated at funerals for two presidents—one a Democrat, the other a Republican.)

But the growing ideological and cultural polarization in our society has created a situation in which our tribal affiliation becomes our primary identity marker and source of values. Religion then plays a merely ancillary role. Rather than shaping our values, it simply becomes a source of rhetorical ornamentation. When that happens, I believe we all lose out.

Faith communities should, when appropriate, act as a moral conscience in our society. But in exercising that role they should operate the way Chief Justice John Roberts told the Senate Judiciary Committee Supreme Court justices should act: as an umpire calling balls and strikes, rather than a player on one of the teams. Switching analogies, some of us remember a time when late-night comics poked fun at people across the political spectrum. I doubt anyone had the slightest idea who Johnny Carson or Jay Leno actually voted for. In a comparable way, if the church is playing a genuinely prophetic role, it needs to stay above the fray.

Faith communities and religious leaders forfeit their moral authority when they automatically and uncritically align themselves with secular ideological agendas. Christian faith is very much *political*, in the sense that it seeks the common good and is committed to a more just social order. But it should never allow itself to become *partisan*.

We live in unsettled times and will, no doubt, continue to face challenges and moral dilemmas in the future. As we do, may we carry on in the spirit of that classic hymn of our faith: “God of grace and God of glory. . . grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days, for the living of these days.”

Leadership

Session

Moderator

Rev. William McConnell

Clerk of Session

Debra South

Class of 2025

Sharlyn Deterding

Debra South

Class of 2026

Tanner Miner

Julie Nickels

Class of 2027

Melanie Honaker

Dana Stahl

Deacons

Class of 2025

Ryleigh Hill

Stacey McConnell

Karla Remmers

Class of 2024

Jocelyn Deterding

Kathy Friedli

Mike Honaker

Mission & Outreach

Winter Coat Drive



Some of the over two dozen items donated by our congregation's members and friends to the coat drive for Under His Wings Thrift Shop in Plattsmouth. Hopefully, we are helping to keep some neighbors warm this winter!

Board of Deacons

Stacey McConnell, Moderator

Souper Bowl



Members of our church family may have had varying reactions to the outcome of the Super Bowl. But we can all affirm the outcome of the Deacon's Souper Bowl project—hearty meals for those who took advantage of the opportunity to make a purchase and \$250 raised for mercy ministries to people in our community. Thank you to everyone who participated in any way!



Leadership Teams

Worship and Family Life

Sharlyn Deterding, *Team Leader*
Deb South, *Session Rep.*
Christina Dolvin
Linnea Hill
Julie Nickels
Sherrill Konfrst
Laraine Young

Mission and Outreach

Kyle Nickels, *Team Leader*
George Collins
Melanie 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
Linnea Hill
Norm Koester
Gary Reike
Michael Stahl

Lenten Opportunities



Ash Wednesday Service

Once again, we will be ushering in the Lenten season of renewal with a special worship service on **March 5 at 7:00 pm**. There will be music, a time for reflection and confession, and the opportunity (optional) to receive the sign of ashes. The message that evening will focus on the shifting tide of opinion regarding Jesus in the gospel narratives and will introduce the sermon series for the Lenten season.

Wednesday Evening Lenten Gatherings (March 12 – April 9)

6:30 pm: Light Meal of Soup and Bread (Dependent on Sign-Ups)

7:00 pm: Bible Study and Discussion



As we prepare to observe Holy Week and Easter, join us for five Wednesday evenings in Lent (March 12 – April 9) for a video-based series bringing the story of Jesus alive through scintillating Bible teaching and visits to key sites in the Holy Land. Led by Bible teacher and best-selling author, Ray Vander Laan, "The Path to the Cross" shows how Jesus' journey to the cross follows the pattern of Israel's Exodus out of Egypt and establishes a model for us to follow as well. At Qumran and Machaerus fortress,

we'll see how the Dead Sea Scrolls community and John the Baptist are linked to the desert experiences of Israel's past. We'll follow Jesus into the desert where he, like Israel, was tested and prepared for his mission to the world. Eventually we'll go to an Upper Room setting to reflect on the events of the Last Supper and then continue through the darkness into the Garden of Gethsemane. This series is sure to deepen our understanding of the gospel story and help us see its significance for our lives!



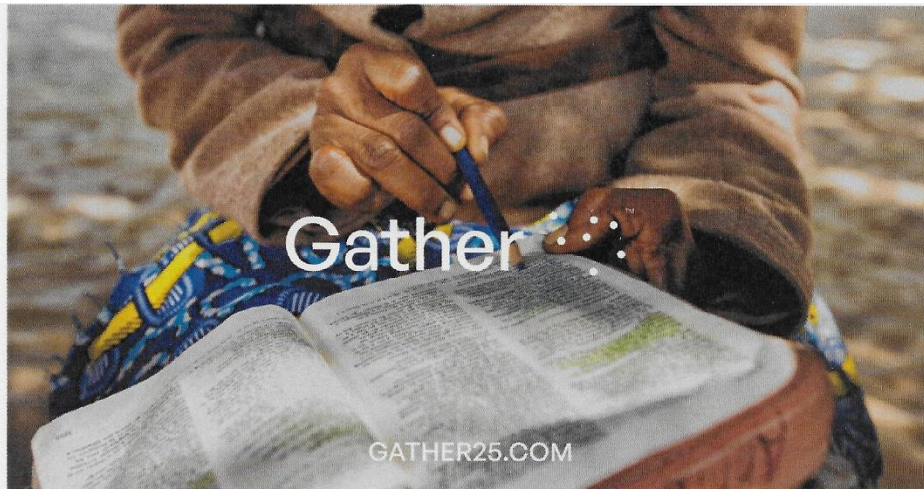
About The Teacher

Renowned for his ability to bring the Bible alive using fascinating insights from the fields of archeology, history, and cultural studies, **Ray Vander Laan** has led over 10,000 people on in-depth study tours to the Holy Land and Mediterranean regions. His preaching and teaching ministry is focused on understanding the Bible in light of its historical and cultural context so that its message for our lives today becomes more apparent. Ray's academic training includes a degree from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia as well as additional graduate-level work in the field of Jewish studies at institutions in the United States, Israel, Turkey, and Egypt. He's an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church and has taught Bible at Holland Christian Schools in Michigan for over 35 years. Beginning in 1992, That the World May Know Ministries has produced 18 video series tracing the story of the Bible and filmed on location around the Eastern Mediterranean.

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The local body gathering as the global Church. Join Us.

Murray Presbyterian Church

Friday February 28th

6:30 pm: Fellowship and Refreshments

7:00 – 11:00 pm: Livestream (Leave at your discretion)

Gather25 is an unprecedented 25-hour global broadcast event telling the inspiring stories of the global Church, by the global Church. But it won't be a gathering of the global Church without you.

Jesus followers in churches, campuses, arenas, and living rooms—from every continent and denomination—will join together across every time zone to watch the Gather25 broadcast that is free to everyone, everywhere.

For 25 hours, Gather25 is inviting believers across the world to pray, repent, worship, and discover how the love of Jesus is transforming the world through everyday people. Murray Presbyterian is excited to be hosting a simulcast of the North America session on Friday, February 28 from 7:00 – 11:00 pm.

This is our moment in history to come together, be inspired by the stories of how God is moving across the earth, and be excited to share Jesus everywhere.

Murray Presbyterian is trusting that God is up to something outrageously cool and you are invited!

(For more information, go to gather25.com)