
Murray Presbyterian Messenger



September 2025



Murray Presbyterian Church

P.O. Box 196, 105 W. Main Street Murray, NE 68409

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

Featured This Month: MPC--165 Years Young!



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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I'll never forget the night when I suddenly realized I was pastoring the church from first century Corinth that was the recipient of letters from the Apostle Paul. Maybe there was a little hyperbole in that assessment—but not much!

It had just been half a year since I'd been installed in my position. Based on conversations with the interim pastor and executive presbyter, I knew it was a wonderful congregation, with many fine devoted Christians and great ministry potential. I also knew going in that it was very theologically divided. A distinct minority of members, some of them products of our church-related colleges, were of a decidedly liberal persuasion. They tended to connect most readily with the church's more liberal parish associate (an ordained minister who provides limited pastoral services within a congregation while primarily engaged in another vocation). There was another faction that had been deeply impacted by a PCUSA-related charismatic organization and Walk to Emmaus spiritual retreats. These folks all had close ties to my predecessor who, while not a charismatic himself, had introduced them to those outside ministries and cultivated their sense of group identity. At one point, they had become convinced the church building was demon-possessed, so they gathered to conduct exorcisms using the "spiritual warfare" techniques gleaned from their charismatic conferences. Somewhat overlapping with the charismatic faction, there were fundamentalists who insisted on implementing theological restrictions more stringent than our Presbyterian confessional standards or "the essential tenets of the Reformed faith." So even though our parish associate had been placed in that position by the previous pastor (his appointment technically had to be renewed when I came), members of this group told me they would leave the church if he was allowed to engage in any public ministry.

It all came to a head one evening when my family (Stacey and I along with our adolescent daughter and baby John) was invited to what we assumed would be a friendly get-together over dinner at the home of two church members. At some point after the invitation had been extended, they let it slip that a few others might be there. We arrived to find that it was a gathering of the most hardcore "charismatic" contingent. I took out my little pad, scrawled a note, and showed it to Stacey under the table: "We've been ambushed." For the next couple of hours, they poured out their grievances and delivered their ultimatums about leaving the church.

What came across (to me, at least) was the sense that they considered themselves to be, essentially, a spiritual elite within the congregation. They had been holding their own separate worship service on Sunday morning, not primarily (in my view) as an outreach vehicle, but because they did not think they would be able to rub shoulders with other members of the congregation who had not achieved their level of spiritual attainment.

As I was processing the experience with Stacey that night, it suddenly occurred to me that these were exactly the problems Paul was confronting in his Corinthian correspondence. That early church was similarly divided into various factions, each claiming a different outside spiritual leader (Paul, Peter, Apollos, and perhaps others). They, too, included within their ranks people who claimed to be more spiritually enlightened (the *pneumatikoi*, as Paul dubs them, in Greek) and who flaunted the superiority of their more showy spiritual gifts.

Upcoming Worship Opportunities: Linda Reffert to Return



Linda Reffert, good friend of our congregation whose ministry is always well-received here, will be returning on Sunday, **September 14** to preach and lead worship. Linda is a long-time Christian educator in our presbytery, having directed children and youth ministries at both Hope Presbyterian in Omaha and First Presbyterian Church in Bellevue. She recently graduated from the presbytery's Commissioned Pastor Academy and was commissioned to serve First Presbyterian Bellevue as interim pastor from Sept. 2024 – August 2025. Please come welcome Linda and be blessed with what she will have to share that day.

In the months following that encounter, I invited the parish associate and the Christian education director (who had his own 'power base' in the church) to join with me in leading a series of combined summer services focused on the great "one another" passages of the New Testament ("serve one another," "accept one another," "forgive one another," "love one another," etc.) In the fall, I kicked off an almost year-long series of messages going through the book of 1 Corinthians. Alas, I quickly came to realize the limitations of preaching—at least preaching that does not directly and overtly call people out. Never once (so far as I know) was there even the slightest flicker of recognition. Never once did anyone come to me after a service and say, "Wow! That sounds a little bit like our church." Instead, one-by-one, members of the disruptive factions, sensing I was not going to simply give in to their ultimatums, exited the church. The outcome was, in many ways, positive. The church I left behind a decade later was outwardly very unified. We were focused on mission and outreach to the community, a commitment that transcended theological differences. But we were also far fewer in numbers! (In addition to the theologically-driven defections, there were also a lot of deaths and relocations.) Sadly, in a few weeks, I will be helping to lead the final worship service in this church's old historic sanctuary building, as the congregation prepares to merge with a daughter church in another part of town.

Long-term, it may not have been a major game-changer. But how I wish things could have been different during that crucial early stage of my ministry there. How I wish my charismatic friends could have shared their gifts and spiritual enthusiasm without feeling the need to separate themselves or assert their superiority. How I wish my fundamentalist friends had been able to hold firmly to their convictions without trying to exclude from ministry people who affirmed the essential tenets of the Reformed faith but did not share their narrower interpretation of that faith.

The reason I share this background is because I once again feel the time is right to do a preaching series on 1 Corinthians. *But not because Murray Presbyterian is wracked by those kinds of divisions!* In fact, coming to this congregation has been refreshing. We have people within our congregation with strong charismatic tendencies. We have people who may be every bit as liberal or every bit as conservative as anyone in this prior congregation. But they all make a positive, constructive contribution to the life of our church. There's hardly ever been a trace of the toxic spirit described earlier.

So, partly, I'm doing this series as a way of saying, "Keep up the good work!" "These are the dangers to avoid." But 1 Corinthians does more than just correct errors. Above all else, it shows what a Christian community truly shaped by the gospel would look like. A key verse is 1 Corinthians 2:2: "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." The rest of the letter, then, is saying, here's how to live out that message in your life together. May God encourage and challenge us all as we embark on this study!

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 Bennett
Kathy Friedli
Mike Honaker

FRIDAY NIGHT BITES

When?

After all varsity home
Conestoga football games.

September 12th September 19th
October 3rd October 24th

Who?

All high school students are
welcome!

Where?

Murray Presbyterian
Church
105 W Main St,
Murray NE



Leadership Teams

Worship and Family Life

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

Mission and Outreach,

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

Christian Education

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

Properties and Finance

Tanner Miner, *Team Leader*
Sharlyn Deterding, *Session Rep.*
Dave Friedli
Linnea Hill
Norm Koester
Peg Lawton
Gary Reike
Michael Stahl

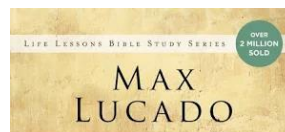
Sunday School



Youth Sunday School (pre-school through high school) meets Sunday mornings concurrent with morning worship. Students leave the service following the Scripture reading. As the new year kicks off, classes will be talking about "the fruit of the Spirit"—complete with an upbeat theme song. All youth are invited to join in when they are able!

Women's Bible Study

Life Lessons with Max Lucado brings the Bible to life in lessons filled with intriguing questions, inspirational stories, and poignant reflections to take you deeper into God's Word. You're invited to join the Women's Afternoon Bible Study this year as they make their way through a series of studies on the Psalms. The group meets the second Wednesday of the month at 1:00 pm in the church fellowship hall for time of study, discussion, prayer, and refreshments.



LIFE LESSONS from
PSALMS



Brent Vernon Concert & Ice Cream Social (July 20)



Worship on the Water (August 17)



Under beautiful bright blue skies, members, friends, and neighbors of our congregation gathered beside Beaver Lake for a special worship event celebrating our church's anniversary and underscoring the theme "You Can't Go It Alone." The service featured music, a biblical message, and powerful testimonies.

Open Door Mission



Volunteers from Murray Presbyterian serving the evening meal at Open Door Mission on July 27

Fire Department Meal



As a token of thanks to the dedicated men and women of our local Murray Volunteer Fire and Rescue Department, the church is providing a lasagna dinner for their monthly meeting on September 9. We appreciate the service of these dedicated volunteers!

Birthday Cake Supplies



We're celebrating Murray Presbyterian's 165th birthday by helping patrons of the SENCA Food Pantry create birthday memories for their family members. Sign up on the back table to donate items for birthday cake kits and then bring them to the church by September 29. (Cash donations are also welcome.)

Litter Clean-Up



The next litter clean-up along our church's adopted stretch of Highway 1 will take place on Sunday, **September 14**. Volunteers will meet at Conestoga Jr / Sr High School at 2:00 pm.