
Murray Presbyterian Messenger



December 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: *Christmas Services*



Sunday, December 14: Advent Dinner

Wednesday, December 24 (5:30 pm):

Christmas Eve Service

Sunday, December 28: Service with carols

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 can't reconstruct the exact thought process that went into a sermon series I preached for the 2015 Advent season—ten years ago this month. But I do know how I go about planning my preaching calendar. My series are generally correlated with seasons of the church year. And often, as I'm formulating a theme, I think about what is happening in the world at large, in the congregation I'm serving, and even in my own personal life.

And that's probably what was going on in my mind as I approached the Advent season a decade ago. Stacey and I knew the time had come for us to look for a new call. And (in our mind) there was a narrow window of opportunity in which that should happen. We were not inclined to make a move before our daughter graduated from high school in 2013. Now, John was approaching his high school years, and we wanted to be settled somewhere before that phase in life began.

So, midway through 2015, I filed the paperwork to begin the search process. Then, the waiting game began. On the two prior occasions when I was seeking a call, I had been mentally prepared for the possibility that it might take a long while to find the place God was calling me to. But as it turned out, in both instances, the first Pastor Nominating Committee that made contact with me moved very quickly and invited me to candidate right away. If anything, the process felt rushed.

In 2015, it was the complete opposite. Throughout the latter half of the year, I was in touch with several churches engaged in a search. But, for one reason or another, those conversations didn't move beyond a preliminary stage. The process seemed to be floundering. And I was growing impatient!

In the midst of that frustration, I came up with an idea for my Advent preaching series. Although the congregation didn't know it at the time, I assumed—even with the slow pace of progress—that this would be our last Christmas in Ohio. So I thought it might be good for them and for me to focus on the way God orchestrated the coming of Jesus into our world. The first Christmas came after a protracted period of waiting. It involved hardship, upheaval, an unlikely cast of characters, and an arduous trek to a distant locale. And yet, regardless of perceptions at the time, it all turned out to be the perfect timing, the perfect people, and the perfect place. That's what I needed to hear that year—and they were lessons the congregation would hopefully remember as they faced change and uncertainty.

Upcoming Worship Opportunities: Advent Sermon Series



Not having a "perfect Christmas"? The original Christmas might not have seemed all that perfect either—not in its timing, the people involved, or the setting. Yet, all the details were actually orchestrated to produce the perfect outcome. And maybe that's a picture of how God is working in the midst of our imperfect lives as well.

December 7: "The Perfect Time"
(Daniel 9:20-27)

December 14: "The Perfect People"
(Matthew 1:1-17)

December 21: "The Perfect Place"
(Micah 5: 2-4, Luke 2:1-7)

December 28: "Good Tidings for the Lowly" Carol Service led by the McConnell Family

As providence would have it, the Christmas season—and that series of messages—had no sooner ended when there was a sudden spike in contacts from interested Pastor Nominating Committees. (I think some of them had put their search on hold during the end-of-the-year holidays.) There was a series of back-to-back online interviews in January, and three of them resulted in invitations to come and interview in person. One of those invitations was from a church in a village I had never heard of before: Murray, Nebraska.

As it turned out, God's timing had been perfect! The delay enabled Stacey to finish her college degree program and then devote several months to packing and preparing our house to be sold. It enabled John to change schools over the summer.

Was it the perfect place and people? Well, in all honesty, I never envisioned myself ending up in a church next to a cornfield in the middle of Nebraska! But it turned out to be the right place for our family at this stage in life. It was the right place for Stacey to begin her career in the medical records field. It was the right place for John to spend his high school years.

And it was the right place for me, as well. First and foremost, it was the right place for me if my ministry has had any beneficial impact here. As pastors, we have to be willing to go wherever our ministry gifts are needed. But it's been a place that has worked out well in a variety of respects. Over the past decade, I've watched as churches all over the country have been torn apart by divisive politics, denominational turmoil, and conflicts over pandemic responses. Murray, Nebraska has been a shelter in the time of storm. Being here has given me the latitude to pursue my ministry vision and follow my convictions with a minimal degree of friction.

In the course of preparing this article, I actually checked in on some of those churches where I was under consideration a decade ago—and discovered that most of them haven't fared very well in the intervening years. Virtually none of them are still served by the pastor they called at the time, and they've often reverted to a temporary supply preacher. The first church that interviewed me seemed like a dream ministry opportunity at the time: a large and lively evangelical PCUSA church with what appeared to be vibrant ministries. I found out it went defunct three years ago! Who knows what my life (or that of my family) would have been like had I been called to one of those other congregations, or had I been serving a church that imploded right at the time John was finishing high school.

As this Advent season rolls around, we are all on the threshold of another time of transition. So, I thought it would be good to once again revisit those themes from my 2015 series of messages. Christmas gives us a little picture of how God invariably works: accomplishing his perfect will through circumstances that often seem rather imperfect. I hope you will have a meaningful Christmas and that you will join us in worship as we consider the perfect outcome that first Christmas brought about.

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

College Care Packages



Lily (l) and Ryleigh (r) are just two of the college students who received care packages last month, reminding them that our Murray Presbyterian Church family is thinking of them.

Property & Finance

Tanner Miner, team lead



A lot of us probably wouldn't know where to find the HVAC equipment that services our building. But we sure would notice if it ceased to work properly! So, the project currently underway to replace all the furnaces in our church plant, along with the a/c condensers, is a major capital improvement. The existing units, installed in conjunction with the new addition in 1999, had reached the end of their usefulness. Thank you to everyone who continues to support our congregation financially. Your generosity enabled the church to build up surplus reserves that are being used to fund this project. And a big word of thanks to **Kenny Drake**, who arranged to acquire these units on very favorable terms and is handling the installation.



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

Hanging of the Greens Service (November 30)



Christmas Services



The **Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols** takes place **December 24 at 5:30 pm**. As always, the story of Jesus' birth will be told through Scripture, carols, and reflections, leading up to the singing of "Silent Night" by candlelight. Please plan to make this special and meaningful time of worship a centerpiece of your Christmas celebration this year!

Glad Tidings for the Lowly will be the theme of worship on the First Sunday of Christmastide (**December 28 at 10:00 am**). The service will revolve around carols, interspersed with meditations reflecting on the meaning of the lyrics.

Advent Dinner



You don't want to miss the annual Advent Dinner (turkey, stuffing, and all the fixings) taking place immediately following worship **on Sunday, December 14**. Please bring a favorite side dish or dessert and join us if you are able!

Farewell and God Bless, Dana and Michael!



School Uniform Fund-Raiser



We'll probably never see them this side of eternity. But a few children in an impoverished Central American community will have the chance to attend school thanks to **\$300 in donations** received at our November 9 fellowship hour. Those students will be given the required uniform and a backpack full of supplies. And women in their community will have income-producing opportunities through the sewing co-op that makes the uniforms. This project is a key component in the mission partnership between our presbytery and a network of churches in this community. Thank you to **Ann Wierenga** and her team of helpers for preparing the Central American cuisine we dined on that day. And thank you to everyone who stayed and participated.

Salvation Army Bell-Ringing

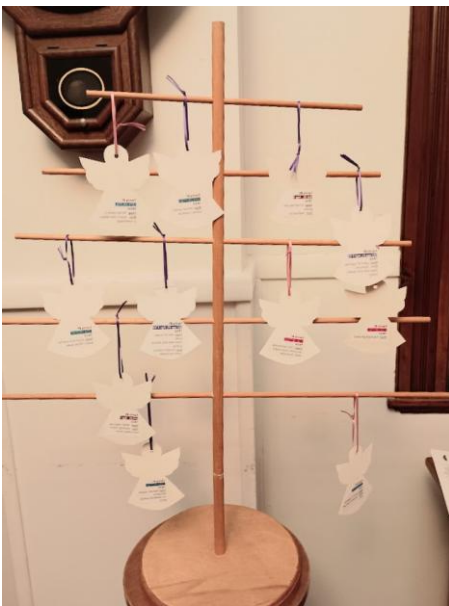


Once again, we will be providing volunteers to staff the Salvation Army kettle at the Plattsmouth Hy-Vee store and ring the bells. Shifts will be available at various time slots throughout the day on **Saturday, December 13**. There will be a sign-up sheet on the back table. Ninety percent of all donations received through the kettle stay here in Cass County and are distributed to families in need through SENCA.

Board of Deacons

Stacey McConnell, Moderator

Angel Tree



Thank you to everyone who signed up to contribute one or more gifts for our Angel Tree families. All the tags have now been taken and the tree is bare! All gifts should be brought to the church by Sunday, December 14 unwrapped with the tag attached.