

Murray Presbyterian Messenger



January 2026



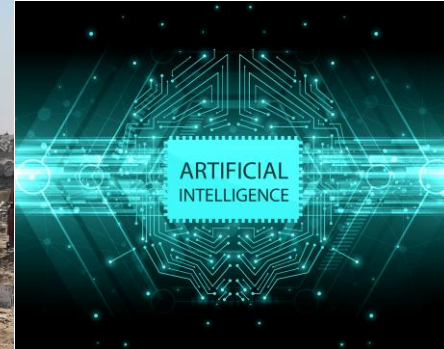
Murray Presbyterian Church

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

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

Featured This Month:

A New Year



"I wish it need not have happened in my time," said Frodo. "So do I," said Gandalf, "and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

J. R. R. Tolkein, *The Fellowship of the Ring*

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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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Having spent several years in a Congregational church, where matters were thoroughly hashed out at annual meetings, Stacey had an interesting reaction when she began attending the same kind of meeting in a Presbyterian Church: she said I sounded like an auctioneer rattling off the items on the agenda. As we sprint through those agenda items at this month's meeting, there's one particular motion

that might consume all of about 90 seconds. So it may seem rather perfunctory. But I'd like to spell out what it's about. You'll be voting to concur with my request to have our pastoral relationship dissolved. Why's this important?

First of all, it fulfills a technical requirement in our Presbyterian Book of Order and upholds an important principle having to do with the nature of the pastoral ministry. Church members sometimes consider their pastor to merely be an employee they have hired and can fire at will. Technically that's not really the case (and it's also a mindset that does not foster a healthy pastoral relationship!) Pastors hold an ordained office in the Presbyterian church. (Usually, they are Ministers of Word and Sacrament; sometimes they may be ruling elders). They are ultimately accountable to the presbytery. If a congregation extends a call to someone to serve as their pastor, that person must be examined and approved by the presbytery, which then installs them. So, only the presbytery can dissolve that pastoral relationship, a step that (with very rare exceptions) is taken either at the request of the pastor, that of the congregation, or (in the vast majority of cases) by the two of them acting in agreement. That is, technically, what you will be voting to do this month.

But the intricacies of our polity (important as they may be) are pretty boring to most people! So here's another way I've encouraged congregations to think about this vote. It's a way of affirming a pastor's sense of where God is leading them and sending them out with your blessing. Some congregation members may be relieved that a particular pastor is leaving; others may be sad. But one way or the other, when the congregation joins the pastor in making that request to the presbytery, it's a way of saying: "If this is the direction you feel the Lord is leading you in, we want to support you and send you into this next stage of life or ministry with our blessing."



Upcoming
Worship Opportunities:
Advent Sermon Series

GRACE CHANGES EVERYTHING



**Becoming a Gospel-Centered Community
(The Message of 1 Corinthians)**

In the coming weeks, we will be concluding a series of messages jumping through the New Testament book of 1 Corinthians and using it to see what it means to be a community of people shaped by the gospel.

January 4: "The Meal That Makes Us One"
(1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

January 11: "The Gifts That Differentiate Us"
(1 Corinthians 12:1-11)

January 18: "The Body That Joins Us Together"
(1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

January 25: "The Crowning Virtue"
(1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

Lastly, when you take this vote it's a way of signaling your willingness to relinquish one dimension of our relationship and to ultimately transfer your attachment to someone else. Some of us may continue to be friends, albeit from a distance. But once the dissolution of our pastoral relationship takes effect (on February 28), I can't act in that capacity for the good folks of Murray Presbyterian Church any longer. I can't give input on matters pertaining to the life of the church. I can't entertain criticisms of my successor or intrude into matters that the church is dealing with. I can't provide (even from a distance) any kind of pastoral care or ministry services. *In fact, it is highly unethical for any pastor (whether a former pastor or just another pastor in the area) to provide pastoral services to members of a congregation or become involved in ministry activities there without the invitation of that congregation's pastor.* Engaging in activities like that is a serious violation of ethical boundaries and norms of professional conduct. So, when you take the vote to concur with my request to dissolve the pastoral relationship, you are, in effect, agreeing to abide by those expectations (as I will endeavor to do).

Some of those restrictions may come across sounding negative. (That's the main reason I wanted to share these reflections in my *second to the last* newsletter article. I will try to offer something more positive next month!) But here's the upside: making a clean break in our relationship helps ensure the success of your next pastor. When that person is installed, you will take vows pledging to accept their ministry, to respect their decisions, to follow their guidance, and honor their authority. I have routinely attempted to make a connection with successors in congregations I've served and offered whatever support I can give. All of us will hope and pray that the Lord will use this new ministry to accomplish his ongoing purposes for Murray Presbyterian Church.

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

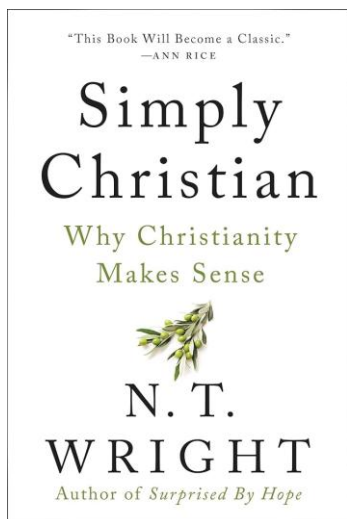
Thank You

This Christmas season has been such a bittersweet time for our family, mixing remembrances of Christmases past with anticipations of celebrations to come in some new setting. But in the midst of it all, you once again blessed us with a generous and thoughtful gift. Thank you for this renewed expression of affection. We will cherish whatever experiences it enables us to enjoy and remember the spirit in which it was given.

Love,

Bill, Stacey, and John

Simply Christian Study



Written by a renowned Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar, *Simply Christian* takes a fresh and scintillating look at the Christian faith. Our studies based on this book are held Sunday evenings at 6:30 pm and include a video presentation by Prof. Wright followed by lively discussion.

Here's the schedule:

January 4: Jesus (chapters 7-8)

January 11: The Holy Spirit (chapters 9-10)

January 18: Worship and Prayer (chapters 11-12)

January 25: Scripture (chapters 13-14)

February 1: Church & New Creation (15-16)

Annual Meeting (January 18)



Join us to celebrate what God has done in the life of our congregation in the past year and to make provision for what he intends to accomplish through us in the coming year. The meeting will include a short presentation by a representative of the presbytery's Commission on Ministry about the process for identifying the person God has called to be this church's next pastor. Here's the official call, with the items of business:

The Session has called the annual congregational meeting for Sunday, January 18, 2025, immediately following morning worship in the sanctuary. This meeting is called for the purposes of receiving reports from congregational boards and committees, reviewing the year-end financial report, receiving the budget adopted by the session, reviewing the pastor's terms of call, acting upon a motion to concur in the pastor's request to have the pastoral relationship dissolved, and receiving and acting upon the report of the Nominating Committee to elect officers for the coming year.



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

Angel Tree



Shown here are the Christmas gifts collected for just one local family through our annual Angel Tree drive. Thanks to the volume of cash contributions, we made provision for each family to enjoy an excursion to an Omaha attraction and gave them with a gift card to a nearby eatery. Thank you to everyone who supported this annual Christmas giving opportunity.

Baking Apprentices



Mission & Outreach

Melanie Honaker, team lead

Pray for Iran

As we process news about the uprising in Iran, we should remember to pray for our Christian brothers and sisters there and for the spread of the gospel. Here is an overview from a Gospel Coalition prayer guide.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 established a hard-line Islamic regime. Over the next two decades, Christians faced increasing opposition and persecution: all missionaries were kicked out, evangelism was outlawed, Bibles in Persian were banned and soon became scarce, and several pastors were killed. The church came under tremendous pressure, and many feared it would soon wither away and die. But the exact opposite has happened.

In the last 20 years, more Iranians have become Christians than in the previous 13 centuries—since Islam came to Iran. In 1979, there were an estimated 500 Christians from a Muslim background in Iran. Today, there are hundreds of thousands—some estimate more than 1 million. According to the research organization Operation World, **Iran has the fastest-growing evangelical movement in the world.** The second-fastest-growing church is in Afghanistan—where Afghans are being reached in large part by Iranians.

Ways to pray:

- Thanksgiving for the miraculous growth of Iranian Christians
- More trained leaders to serve as evangelists, church planters, and pastors in Iran
- Endurance and comfort for those being persecuted and suffering for their faith in Jesus

(Adopted from "40 Days of Prayer" found at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/fastest-growing-church-world/#:~:text=The%20Iranian%20Revolution%20of%201979,for%20their%20faith%20in%20Jesus>)