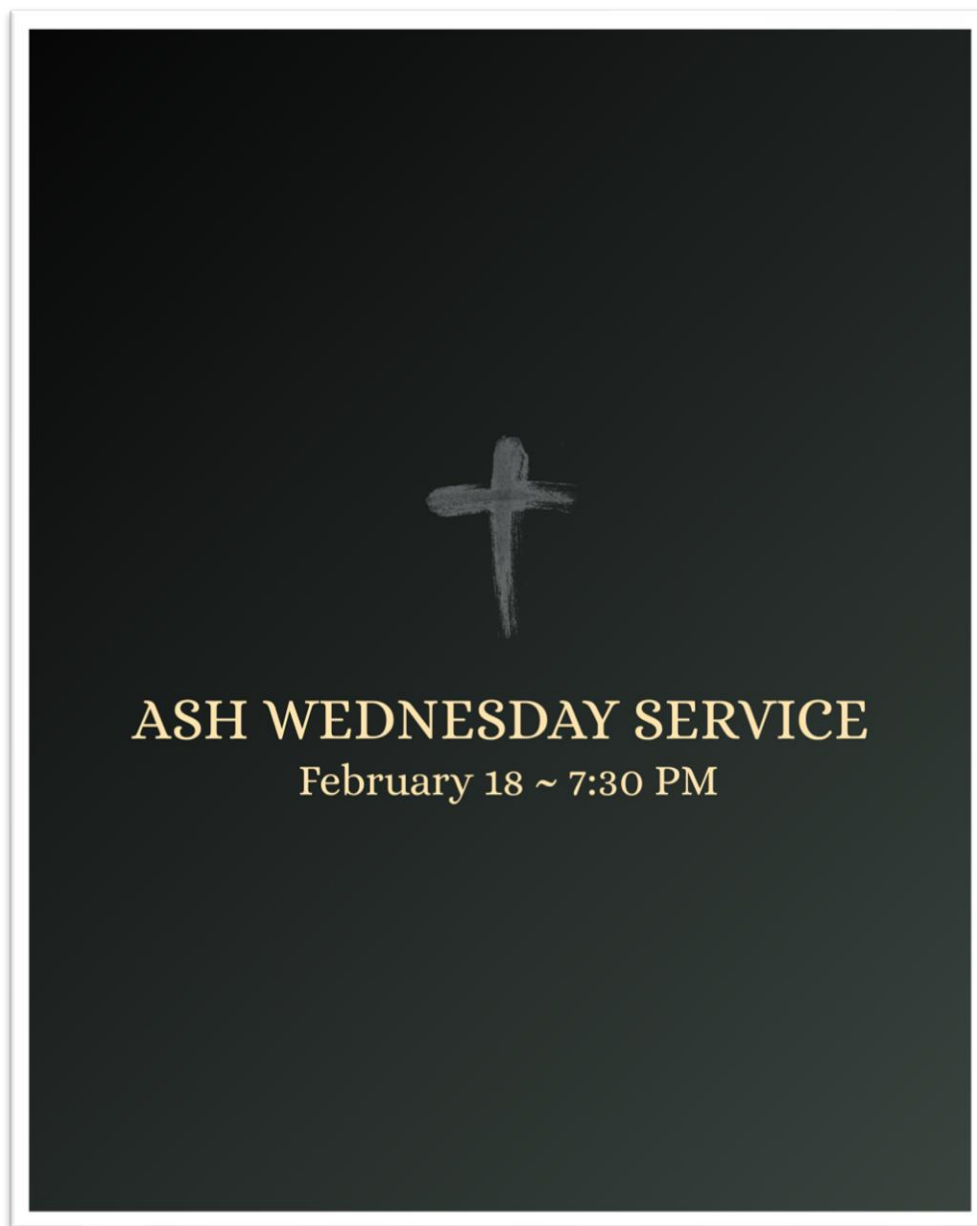


Welcome to
St. Paul's United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Wednesday, February 18, 2026



GOD IS STILL SPEAKING



*NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, OR WHERE YOU ARE ON
LIFE'S JOURNEY YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!*

Worship Leadership

Preacher: The Rev. John J. Ward-Diorio
The Rev. Allyssa A. Boyer
Lector: Jane Leister

Ministry of Music

Minister of Music: Eric R. Dundore
Assistant Music Director: Mark A. Dundore
Organist: Sarah A. Myers
Assistant Organist: Patrice G. Miller

Ministry of Audio and Video

Jeffrey A. Dundore

Ministry of Service

Lead Greeter: Becky Thompson
Greeters: Don Dupes, Jordan Young, Brian Strohecker

Pastor Emeritus

The Rev. Dr. Thomas E. Herrold

Ministers

The Entire Congregation

*Visit the church website, under the 'Sign Up' menu heading,
to help as a Sunday volunteer or Worship Participant.
We're grateful for your generosity.*

ST. PAUL'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

**626 Williams Grove Road
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
(717)766-7931**

saintpaulsucc-mech.org

Office: stpaulstaff@outlook.com

Rev. John: revjohnwd@outlook.com

Rev. Allyssa: allyssaboyer@outlook.com



ST. PAUL'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
SERVICE OF WORSHIP

ASH WEDNESDAY

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

*The livestream starts with the Announcements. If you'd prefer not to be on camera,
kindly choose a seat in the back three pews of the Sanctuary.*

**Those who are comfortable doing so, are invited to stand.*

THE RINGING OF THE CHIMES

THE WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE ORGAN PRELUDE "Sweet Hour of Prayer"

Greg Sewell

CALL TO WORSHIP (responsive)

One: Friends and neighbors, in the middle of our busy week, we pause to observe Ash Wednesday together as a faith community.

All: We come to remember that God made us from fragile, blessed dust and breathes into us the breath of life and love.

One: From dust we are created in God's image, and to God's good dust we shall return.

All: With dust and oil we claim the mark of God's beloved creatures.

One: On this night we begin our 40-day Lenten journey to again seek to discover who we are created to be as God's Beloved.

All: In daily practices of prayer and service we will embark upon this Lenten journey. We follow Jesus, God's Beloved Child, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, in whom we see God's image most clearly.

One: So come, let us pray for strength and imagination to follow Jesus wherever he will lead us this Lent.

*THE HYMN No. 188 "Give Me a Clean Heart"

PRAYER OF INVOCATION AND CONFESSION (Responsive)

One: Glorious God, Your thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are Your ways our ways. You look at the ugliest soul and see, still unstirred, the wings of an angel.

All: We scan the finest of our neighbors, anxious to find the flaw.

One: You view time in the context of eternity, and so find a place for waiting, for yearning, even for suffering, even for dying.

All: We demand instant results and look for tomorrow before savoring today.

One: You know that only one who suffers can ultimately save, that is why You walk the way of the cross.

All: We fear that vulnerability which defies our power; and so, we cry for crucifixion.

One: Your thoughts are not our thoughts, O God,

All: Neither are Your ways our ways.

One: And yet we know Your Way is life lived in community with all, while, left to our own

devices, we focus solely on ourselves. But we are here, not to have our worst confirmed, but to have our best liberated.

All: So we pray: Forgive us in what has gone wrong, repair in us what is wasted, reveal in us what is good.

One: And nourish us with better food than we could ever purchase: Your Word, Your Love, Your Inspiration, Your Daily Bread for our life's journey, in the company of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

All: Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE (Responsive)

One: As we lay down what is past, we sense God's Forgiveness; a forgiveness that is always there and there for all people.

**All: We lay down what is past and look to the future.
We take into our daily life signs of hope and healing.
We reach beyond ourselves and seek connection.
We seek to share our lives with others;
touching and reshaping the wider world so it more reflects God's Dream. Amen.**

If you are able, please rise and greet one another with signs of Peace.

*THE PASSING OF THE PEACE

THE ANTHEM "Come Home" Chancel Choir, Mark Dundore, soloist Courtney

THE RESPONSE:

One: God is Still Speaking.

All: Thanks be to God!

THE HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING

Isaiah 58:1-14

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

THE MEDIATION

*THE HYMN No. 490 "I Want Jesus to Go With Me"

THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES & THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

BLESSING THE ASHES (Unison)

May these ashes be blessed. May they be for us a symbol of our return to the earth. May we be blessed. May we be grounded in Your everlasting love, as forgiven and forgiving people. Amen.

THE INVITATION

THE COMMUNION PRAYER (Responsive)

One: God be with you.

All: And also with you.

One: Gracious God, we praise You and give You thanks.

All: It is good and right to give God our thanks and praise.

One: For the love we name Creative God, and all that is. For the one we name Jesus, and his message of peace, justice, and inclusiveness that is the Realm of God. For the renewing strength and freedom of the Spirit, always present in the breath of life;

All: We give thanks for God's presence in the midst of life.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

THE CELEBRATION

We remember the stories...

How Jesus gathered with friends and foes to tell them of a re-imagined way of living and being.

A way that did not conform to the standards of the Roman Empire or any other system of governance that suppressed people until starvation and deprivation resulted in death.

In this way, the issues of life and death, justice and injustice, conflict and peace, goodness and evil were talked through and made real to ordinary people.

So, in our time and in this place, with today's issues before us, let us continue the tradition: to break bread together.

We remember what that tradition says... At the end of a journey, among friends, gathered round a table...

Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it: 'This bread is broken, as my body will be.'

And he handed it to his friends, and invited them to eat:

'Remember all that I have been to you.'

We remember...

We recall how Jesus poured a cup of wine, offered thanks for it, and gave it to his friends:

'This wine is poured out as my life will be. As you drink, give thanks for all I have given.'

We give thanks...

Bread...the very stuff of life, in which is gathered up

warm sun, rich earth, gentle rain, human labor and knowledge and skill.

Wine...fruit of the vine, nurtured, tended, harvested, and pressed out for us to drink.

Real food and drink, reminding us we are asked to offer, to give our real lives.

These are the gifts of God; they are for the people of God. Come, for all is ready.

THE IMPOSITION OF ASHES & THE DISTRIBUTION OF ELEMENTS

All who wish to receive ashes, and Holy Communion will be invited to come forward by an usher. Please use the side aisles to come forward. The pastors will make the sign of the cross with ashes on your forehead or the back of your hand.

Once you have received ashes, proceed to the center, in front of the chancel, to receive a piece of bread, which may then be dipped into the chalice of red wine or white grape juice. After receiving the elements, please return to your seat using the center aisle.

For those who wish to remain seated, an usher will bring a tray of Holy Communion elements to you. If you would like to receive ashes, please let the usher know, and they will inform one of the pastors who will then bring ashes to you.

For those participating online, if you have something that is symbolic of ash, we invite you to make a sign of the cross on your forehead or the back of your hand, saying these words: "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." We invite you to place some bread and wine or juice before you and share in Holy Communion. We trust that God will extend God's blessings upon your ashes and Holy Communion elements regardless of where you are.

THE PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (Unison)

Gracious God, we thank You for Your Presence within us. Your Spirit is a source of healing, wisdom, and inspiration. During our Lenten journey, we pray Your Spirit may strengthen us when we feel weak, warm us when we are cold-hearted, bend us when we are stubborn, move us when we are uncaring, and guide us in the way of love. May Your Spirit shine in all we do. Amen.

*HYMN No. 223 "What Wonderful Love is This"

"Blessing the Dust" by Jan Richardson

All those days you felt like dust, like dirt, as if all you had to do was turn your face toward the wind and be scattered to the four corners or swept away by the smallest breath as insubstantial— did you not know what the Holy One can do with dust? This is the day we freely say	we are scorched. This is the hour we are marked by what has made it through the burning. This is the moment we ask for the blessing that lives within the ancient ashes, that makes its home inside the soil of this sacred earth. So let us be marked not for sorrow. And let us be marked not for shame.	Let us be marked not for false humility or for thinking we are less than we are but for claiming what God can do within the dust, within the dirt, within the stuff of which the world is made and the stars that blaze in our bones and the galaxies that spiral inside the smudge we bear.
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*THE BENEDICTION

Blessings, like God's love, are not one-way experiences. As you have been blessed with the mark of God's love, you are now called to go out from this place and bless others.

May the God who created you, create opportunities for serving others.

May the Christ who teaches you, teach you during Lent how to love all.

And may the Spirit of Gentleness be your companion along this Lenten journey. Amen.

The livestream ends after the Postlude. You're welcome to converse in the Narthex following the Benediction.

THE ORGAN POSTLUDE "But the Lord is Mindful of His Own"

Felix Mendelssohn

References:

Iona Community Wild Goose Worship Group, *Stages on the Way: Worship Resources for Lent, Holy Week, and Easter*, 2000, GIA Publications.

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Jones, Robert, "Holy Communion Liturgy," *Literacy & Liturgy Seminar*, Westar Institute.

Richardson, Jan, "Blessing the Dust," pp. 89-90, *Circle of Grace: A Book of Blessings for the Seasons*, 2015, Wanton Gospeller Press. Copyright Jan Richardson, janrichardson.com

Van de Laar, John, "The Wisdom of Ash," 2010, posted on sacredise.com. Copyright John van de Laar.

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The Wisdom of Ash by John van de Laar

There is a wisdom in ash,
that we need so much,
but seldom hear.

It's the wisdom of grief,
that reminds us of our mortality,
and that Life is more than this dust can contain.

It's the wisdom of confession,
that brings our darkness out of hiding,
and opens the windows to Light.

It's the wisdom of repentance,
that stops us in our tracks,
and charts the way to Love.

There's a wisdom in ash,
and we welcome it, Jesus,
thankful for the renewing gifts it brings.

Amen.

Racial Justice Learning: The Spiritual Royalties Initiative

Thursday, February 19, 6:00-8:00 PM — Influenced by African cultures, Christian scriptures, and the experiences of being held in bondage, Spirituals were developed by enslaved Black people as early as the 17th century. All are invited to a presentation by Eric Dundore about the history of Spirituals, our church's commitment to sing Spirituals with holy reverence, and our pledge to honor the enslaved people who composed them by paying royalties to local organizations dedicated to promoting the advancement of young Black artists and musicians. This racial justice learning event is sponsored by SPARCC (St. Paul's Against Racism, Creating Change). We hope you can join us!

Lenten Reading Groups

All are invited to join our reading groups every Monday in Lent (2/23, 3/2, 3/9, 3/16, 3/23, 3/30). The afternoon group will meet from 1:00-2:30 PM; the evening group will meet from 6:30-8:00 PM. This Lent, we will read "The Universal Christ" by Richard Rohr, an American Franciscan priest and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation. To sign-up and place an order for a book, please contact Rev. John or Rev. Allyssa, or use the sign-up sheets online or on the bulletin board in the Common. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact the pastors. We look forward to joining you in reading and reflecting together this Lent.

Congregational Conversation on All-Gender Restrooms: Sunday February 22

Please join us for a second Congregational Conversation on all-gender restrooms immediately following our worship service on Sunday, February 22. In a continued effort that began more than a year ago to live out our Open and Affirming Covenant, St. Paul's is working towards ensuring our spaces are as inclusive and accessible as possible, including our restrooms. All-gender restrooms provide an inclusive facility for gender-nonbinary and transgender people, as well as families with children and vulnerable adults who may need assistance. We will once again make available information sheets we have shared in the past. Recently some of our members have expressed concerns about implementing all-gender restrooms. We hope you can join us for continued conversations on how we can address those concerns and more fully realize our covenant to be an affirming church for transgender and gender-nonbinary people. Our discussions will include updates on the construction of a single-use fully accessible handicap restroom in Fellowship Hall, as well as the rehab of another single-use restroom there; what changes might help people feel greater privacy and more comfortable in the all-gender restrooms; how other groups using our Church building may be impacted and adjustments we may be able to make. Your participation in this discussion is crucial as we contemplate and plan next steps. Any questions, please contact Rev. John, Rev. Allyssa, or members of the Social Justice Committee.