



**St. Paul's United Church of Christ**  
**626 Williams Grove Road**  
**Mechanicsburg, PA 17055**  
**Phone: 717-766-7931**

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# JULY 2022

**AN OPEN AND AFFIRMING CONGREGATION OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST.**

## The Epistle

is a monthly publication of St. Paul's UCC.

***Comments, suggestions, and submissions are welcome!***

*Please wear a mask inside.*

*Live stream services on St. Paul's Facebook Page & YouTube Channel.*

### ST. PAUL'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST STAFF

Pastor.....The Rev. John J. Ward-Diorio  
Pastor/CE & Youth Director..... Allyssa A. Boyer  
Administrative Assistant.....Renee E. Durbin  
Director of Music.....Eric R. Dundore  
Chorister' Director.....Jonneke A. Dundore  
Assistant Music Director.....Mark A Dundore  
Organist.....Sarah A Myers  
Assistant Organist.....Patrice G. Miller  
Audio & Video.....Jeffrey A. Dundore  
Sexton.....Michael W. Hatz  
Consistory President.....Sherry Spencer  
Pastor Emeritus....The Rev. Dr. Thomas E. Herrold  
Ministers.....The Entire Congregation of St. Paul's

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## From the Pastor

I am writing to you on the summer solstice, the longest day of the year in the northern hemisphere. In Mechanicsburg, we see about 15 hours and 5 minutes of daylight on this first day of summer. That's a lot of time to do the work that God calls us to do. Our congregation continues to show love for our neighbors, for creation, and for children through numerous activities and ministries of the church.

When Church World Service, a cooperative ministry of over 35 Christian denominations providing humanitarian aid around the world, asked if we could help to walk with a family from Central America who were resettling in Harrisburg, members of our church jumped into action. Within days, they picked up the family of seven from the airport and provided a hot meal. Our volunteers secured furniture for an entire house, moved the family into their rental house, helped to shop for groceries and other necessities, and will continue to walk with this family throughout the coming months, all while navigating a language barrier. This is love of neighbor in action!

On June 19, our congregation dedicated our community garden to the memory of Lee Jackson, a beloved member of our congregation who died this spring, and one of the founders of our garden. Volunteers from our congregation have spent, and will continue to spend, countless hours planting, tending, weeding, watering, and harvesting produce from the Lee Jackson Memorial Garden, all of which will go to local food aid organizations. Not only does our garden provide fresh vegetables to those in need, it is also a sign of our deep commitment to caring for the earth and repairing our relationship with creation.

Dear Members and Friends of St. Paul's, I wanted to say thank you to everyone who attended our Congregational Conversation on Sunday June 5. I was grateful and impressed with how well we spoke with one another. We are not necessarily used to sharing our opinions when we know other people

During the first week of July, St. Paul's will hold Vacation Bible School. Our children will have the opportunity to learn that all people are beloved children of God, regardless of religion, language, ethnicity, or nationality. VBS is only possible with the help of many youth and adult volunteers who give their time, energy, creativity, and enthusiasm to help the children of our community grow in faith.

These are only three examples out of many different ministries that our congregation members are engaged in. But it's easy to see, with so many opportunities to serve, that the work can begin to feel overwhelming. I am reminded of the Gospel story of Jesus falling asleep on a cushion in the back of a boat while he and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. There is something deeply comforting in knowing that even Jesus needed a break, a rest from his ministry. So, as we begin this summer in earnest, let us continue the good work we're doing. But let us remember that it's good to take a break, too. Resting (on or by the water, if possible) is not only an important time of respite and restoration, it's Christlike too. May your summer be joyful, restful, safe, and fun!

Peace,  
Pastor Allyssa

### Please Note...

Pastor Allyssa will be on vacation from July 18 to July 31.

have differing ones, especially when these are people we know and love.

What we experienced and heard is that we do have different perspectives on whether the doors should be open during our Worship Services. People spoke honestly and passionately (not a bad thing) about why they felt they should be locked or should be open.

None of these perspectives are wrong. Hopefully what we all better understand is why this is an issue that we need to continue to carefully consider. We need to trust all viewpoints were heard and respected, and that will continue to be the case. Our conversations are not over. No clear compromise point emerged but good ideas did, and they will be implemented to help mediate some of the concerns that were raised. Whatever the decision, it will not entirely please everyone. When a decision is made, the hope is that we understand why, even if we do not fully agree with it, and that we all will be able to live with it.

We seek to live out God's calls to us as individuals and as a Congregation. We feel called to publicly demonstrate our understanding that God loves all people equally, and desires inclusive, accepting Communities both inside our walls and outside them.

In today's political environment, that puts us at odds with some people. This increases the chance of violence, be that verbal or physical. Living with fear is new to many of us. Is this what carrying our crosses might mean? We want to bravely seek to live out our calls and we want to try and do that as safely as possible, for ourselves, our loved ones and all who choose to be with us. This creates a tension when the two desires are in conflict. We seek to find our balance both in the present and as we move into the future. We continue to listen for what God is speaking to us. And we pray we will do that together, in our diversity and in our common calls.

Thank you for your willingness to engage in this walk with one another, as we seek to follow Jesus' words and way, helping each other to determine what that means today.

Peace, Rev. John



## GET TO KNOW ST. PAUL'S CONSISTORY!

In a continuing effort to get to know your Consistory, please let me introduce:

### Craig Martek

I found this church in 2008 online. We were looking for a church that not only preaches inclusivity of all people's lives, but also actively practices it.

Fun Fact about me: In my 40's I was an ultra-cyclist. In 2007 I took 1st place in the Adirondack 540, completing the 544.4 mile course in 45:45 with Jenn and my in-laws as my road crew. I was qualified to participate in Race Across America (RAAM), but wasn't able to get the crew/logistics/costs into a



manageable plan. Now I enjoy shorter, fun paced bike rides with Jenn and our dog Micky in tow.

Term Started: 2020

Term Ending: 2023

Committee Liaison to: Worship

I like working with the Worship committee. I find it very enlightening to see all of the work that goes on behind the scenes to plan our wonderful worship services.

"We were looking for a church that not only preaches inclusivity of all people's lives, but also actively practices it."



# Spotlight on Sacred Art

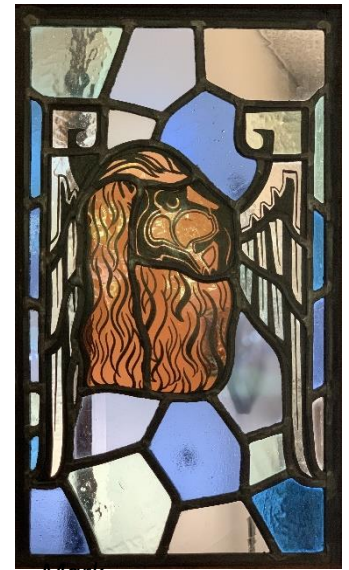
Welcome to a new feature in our monthly epistle. Here we'll highlight symbols, emblems, and other aspects of our church's art and architecture, explain their meaning, and reveal a little about their history. This month, our spotlight is on the **Gospel windows** in the doors to the sanctuary.

In the Christian tradition, the authors of the four Gospels are frequently represented by four distinct symbols in art. These symbols are displayed in the stained-glass windows set into the doors leading from our narthex into our sanctuary. The four symbols originate from the four "living creatures" that pull the throne-chariot of God (Ezekiel 1:10).

The association of the four living creatures with the four evangelists originated with Irenaeus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and was popularized by the 4<sup>th</sup>-century theologian and historian Jerome. The interpretation of each creature has varied through church history, but the most common interpretation states...



Matthew

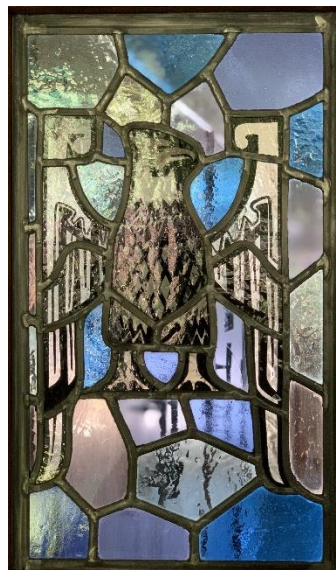


Mark

Luke



John



**Matthew's symbol is a winged man.** This is because Matthew's Gospel starts with Joseph's genealogy from Abraham (the first man), and it represents Jesus' Incarnation, and therefore Christ's human nature. The man symbolizes the virtue of reason. **Mark's symbol is a winged lion,** a figure of courage and kingship. The lion also represents Jesus's resurrection (because lions were believed to sleep with open eyes, a comparison with Christ in the tomb), and Christ as king. The lion symbolizes the virtue of courage. **Luke is represented by a winged ox or bull,** a creature of sacrifice, service, and strength. In Luke's gospel, Jesus advocates for leaders to be servants, and Jesus sacrifices himself in the crucifixion. The ox symbolizes the virtues of service and sacrifice. **John's symbol is an eagle.** John's Gospel starts with a cosmic overview of Jesus as *logos*, "Word" (John 1:1), as if zooming out and looking from a higher perspective than the other three (synoptic) gospels. It represents Christ's divine nature because eagles can fly heavenward. The eagle symbolizes holiness.

*Are you curious to learn more about a particular symbol, artwork, or other feature? Let us know by contacting Pastor Allyssa or Rev. Anna Thompson. We would love to hear from you!*



**THOSE IN NEED OF PRAYER:**

Addie (Stork-Whitson); Kevin & Karen Allison; Barb Bell; Joanne Bender; Cindy Bensel; Mary Bensel; Beverly (Hayden); Bill & Bob (Gabriel); George Bingaman; Barbara Blust; Melba Bomberger; Brendan and Family (Richey); Brian (Shearer); Missy Brouch (Myers/Mihmet); Jenny & Erica Budd (Lingenfelter); Denise Buggy; Anna & Dale Burns; Nancy Cabrera (Runkle); Cheryl (Freeman); Alyssa Claar (A. Thompson); Pat Cleland; Mary Clark Coleman (Riesmeyer); Heather Connelly (Bomberger); John & Sheri Conner (Layne); Rita Davidson (Plymette); Evelyn Diorio; Ethan Dixon & Family (Thompson); Dotty (Richey); Jim and Gail Dougherty (Ritter); Allen Dreibelbis ; Nancy Dreibelis; Richard Ecks (Plymette); Edison (A. Thompson); Harry Felton (Sponsler); Bob & Eve Fenner; David Fetterman (Aumiller); Dawn Fox; Fenton Fox & Rick Holtzapple; Diane Freeman; Ron Gabriel; Lenny Gardner (Shearer); Jack and Jean Gatesman (Richey); Bill Gladstone (Aumiller); Betty Goodfellow (Ritter); Floyd Gouse; Shirley Grammer; Roger Grice; Harriet & Mark Grimm; Dr. Mark Hagenbuch (Bomberger); Jane Hall; Noah Helwig (Trout); Jim and Leslie Hoehn; Brenda Hoffer (Stork-Whitson); Michele Hughes (Murphy); Ingrid (Richey); Jane Leader Janeczek (Aumiller); Janie (Jody Biss); Dan & Will Jones; Julia (Fox/Holtzapple); Elaine Kansy (Hoehn); Karen (Fox/Holtzapple); Martha & Gene Keith; Stephen Keith; Rev. Dr. Chris Kennedy (Ward-Diorio); Jesse King; Bob Kinkley (Fox); Dave Kirkwood; Glenn Kline; Sandy Kline; Kristine and Family (Ward-Diorio); Audra Kucharick (Aumiller); Jean & John Layne; Debbie Lever (A. Thompson); Larry Linder (Stork-Whitson/Williams); Lori (Murphy); Luca; Taran M. (Taylor); Manny (Sharp); Margueritte (Myers); Marie (Murphy); Craig Martek; Joe Mazzei (Mihmet/Myers); Brian Medkeff-Rose;

Michael & Ernie (Richey); Michelle & Family (Mihmet); Charles Miller (Lloyd and Matthew's dad); Jessica Miller (Chapman); Joanne Miller; Linda Miller; Melissa Miller (Bender); Sue & Dayne Miller; Tasha Misner (Trout); Ernie Moyer; Sue Mullin; Randy, Dar & Sarah Murphy; Beth Myers (Richey); Gene & Ruth Ellen Myers (Boyer); Nies (A. Thompson); Nyugen, Thu (P. Boyer); Ryan Onufer & family (Grice); Jim & Mary P. (Rhoads); Panker Family (Richey); Eric Potts (A. Boyer); Randy (Bender); Anne Rankin; Richard Reba (Richenbacher); Robert Reiner (Bender); Carol Rhoads; Jason & Rachelle Rhoads; Nancy, Tom & Dan Richey; Franklin, Andrew, Levi Roth; Tom Row (S. Miller); Rhoda & Ned Rupp; Betsy & Benny Rushong; Sam (Freeman); Jane & Tom Scott & Family; Scott & Tracey (Davinroy); John Shandra; Sharon and Family (Lingenfelter); Debbie Sharp and Family; Corky Short & Candy LaRue; Conner Snow & Family; James Sowell (Sandy Kline); Barbara Sterner; Dory Szeles (Sterner); Wendi Taylor; April Thomas (Bomberger); Cathy Thomas; Edward Thorn; Dale Thorpe; Tracy Thrush Family; Tiberius (A. Thompson); Kathy (Wolford Witmer) Toth; Shannon & Phoenix Trout; Betty Underwood & Family (Richey); Bill Utley (Boyer); Rosalie Utley (Boyer); Vickie (S. Miller); Evelyn Warfield; Billy Webber (Ward-Diorio); Suzy Weeks (Richey); Jean and David Weiss; Amy Wentz; Leita Wentz; Doris & Luke Williams; Geri Williams (A. Thompson); Ryan Wilson (Bomberger); Chelsey Wirth; Fran Wolford; Mitchell Worley (Jones); Suzanne Worley (Jones); Kevin Young (A. Thompson); Russell Young (Rushong)

**Thanks  
for Your  
Help!**

Do you have an update to the prayer list? Let us know in the church office.

## WORSHIP SERVICE LEADERS UPDATES

There are two updates being made in the next two months that pertain to the worship services.

The title of *Usher* is being replaced with the title of **Worship Welcome Team Member**. The Consistory Member who leads us each month in welcoming everyone to church will have the title of **Worship Welcome Team Leader**. These two titles will be listed in the weekly service bulletins and on the *Time to Sign Up* online program. This new title relates more closely to the main responsibilities of the duties.

The *Time to Sign Up* worship service pages of Acolyte, Altar Flower Delivery, Lector, Nursery Attendant and Welcome Team Members will be combined into one sign up sheet beginning with this month. This page is copied into our Epistle newsletter below.

### Worship Leaders - July 2022 TimeToSignUp.com - Online Sign Up Sheets

Sunday, July 3, 2022	Sunday, July 10, 2022	Sunday, July 17, 2022	Sunday, July 24, 2022	Sunday, July 31, 2022
Acolyte	Acolyte	Acolyte	Acolyte	Acolyte
Lector Dennis Plymette	Lector	Lector	Lector Nancy Richey	Lector Shirley Knox
Worship Welcome Team Member - Commons Table - Consistory Paula Boyer	Worship Welcome Team Member - Commons Table Corky Short	Worship Welcome Team Member - Commons Table Joan Moyer	Worship Welcome Team Member - Commons Table Corky Short	Worship Welcome Team Member - Commons Table
Worship Welcome Team Member Electronic Doors - Consistory	Worship Welcome Team Member - Electronic Doors	Worship Welcome Team Member - Electronic Doors Ernie Moyer	Worship Welcome Team Member - Electronic Doors	Worship Welcome Team Member - Electronic Doors
Worship Welcome Team -Sanctuary Exterior Doors - Consistory Rebecca Drazba	Worship Welcome Team Member - Sanctuary Exterior Doors Candy LaRue	Worship Welcome Team Member - Sanctuary Exterior Doors	Worship Welcome Team Member - Sanctuary Exterior Doors Candy LaRue	Worship Welcome Team Member - Sanctuary Exterior Doors
Worship Welcome Team Member - Consistory Wendy Hayden	Nursery Adult 1	Nursery Adult 1	Nursery Adult 1 Erin Anderson	Nursery Adult 1 Patty Scott
Worship Welcome Team Member-Consistory	Nursery Adult 2	Nursery Adult 2	Nursery Adult 2	Nursery Adult 2
Nursery Adult 1 Jonneke Dundore	Altar Flower Delivery Erin and Ben Anderson	Altar Flower Delivery Joan Moyer	Altar Flower Delivery Bonnie Plymette	Altar Flower Delivery Patty and Dave Scott
Nursery Adult 2 Bonnie Plymette				
Altar Flower Delivery Joanne Miller				



# thank you

To St. Paul's,  
I just wanted to thank everyone for their prayers and cards during my recovery from eye surgery. The altar flowers were a special surprise yesterday. They are beautiful! Being a member of St. Paul's for forty years has meant so much to me and I am so grateful for the kindness and friendships over the years. Thanks so much!  
From,  
Sue Mullin

Thank you to everyone at St. Paul's.  
We would like to thank everyone for the beautiful altar flowers that were delivered to us following our recent surgeries. We truly appreciate your caring and kindness and are so fortunate to be a part of St. Paul's.  
Many thanks,  
Dale Thorpe and Don Dupes

Dear St. Paul's,  
Thank you for taking the time to make us feel special by brining us treats! The wonderful notes were so appreciated by our staff. We are blessed to have a partnership with you all.  
Sincerely,  
The Broad Street Staff.

Dear Friends at St. Paul.  
Thank you for your prayers while I was in the hospital with pneumonia. After three days I came home and am feeling fine. The altar flowers were a pleasant surprise and much appreciated. To the Called to Care Team, thank you for your card and well wishes.  
Mike Hatz - Sexton

## JULY BIRTHDAYS

7/01 Susan Miller	7/14 Chelsey Wirth
7/02 Carol Freeman	7/16 Benjamin Knox
7/03 Hayden Miller	7/18 Kathryn Aumiller
7/06 Gloria Hoffman	7/21 Jeff Leister
Shawn Elliott	7/22 Shirley J. Knox
7/07 Saige Sufrin	7/23 Barbara Bell
Alan Richenbacher	7/24 Wendy Hayden
Clayton Pirtle	Madeline Sentman
7/08 Lawrence Schmick	Brandon Miller
7/10 Grace Simpson	7/25 Gwen Burns
7/11 Nathan Cawley	7/26 James Pirtle
Rebecca Lingenfelter	Elizabeth Pineo
7/12 Chris Cowan	7/27 Elsa Riesmeyer
Todd Garman	Melissa Gates
7/13 Evan Pineo	7/28 Michael Allison
	7/31 Brenda Kern

## JULY ANNIVERSARIES

7/06 David & Patricia Scott
7/07 Thomas & Betty Olsen
7/09 John Durham & Melanie Shaver-Durham
7/10 Michael & Kathryn Aumiller
7/13 Anthony & Michelle Howe
7/14 Gary & Carol Fleisher
7/17 Rebecca & Layne Thompson
7/21 Gregory & Carrie Dundore
7/23 Linda Miller & William Murray
7/28 Richard & Cynthia Bensel
7/30 Gregory & Patrice Miller

**Church Calendar** - The most up to date calendar is on the Church website. Help us keep it current by scheduling your events at the Church thru the Office at [stpaulstaff@outlook.com](mailto:stpaulstaff@outlook.com) or 717-766-7931. Thank you!

# Events & Announcements



## VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL July 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>, 2022

You're invited to our 2022 Vacation Bible School, "All God's Children!" In this VBS, kids will learn about how we are all God's children no matter who we are, where we come from, or what we believe. Students will have the opportunity to hear Bible stories about people who are different from one another, but are still able to learn from one another, help one another, or find beauty in their diversity. Kids will also have the chance to learn about different places, cultures, and faith traditions in Southern Asia.

VBS is Tuesday, July 5 – Friday, July 8; 6:00-8:15 PM. Open to all children age four through rising 5th graders. To register, please complete our registration form (forms are available in the common, and available to download from the 'Events' page on our website). Don't forget to sign the medical and photo release sections. Please return your completed form to St. Paul's UCC by June 30. If you have questions, or

if you would like to sign-up but you are unable to print the form, please contact Pastor Allyssa at [allyssaboyer@outlook.com](mailto:allyssaboyer@outlook.com).

COVID safety: All visitors (children and adults) are encouraged, but not required, to wear a face mask while participating in activities at St. Paul's UCC. Wearing a face mask is a reasonable precaution to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. Thank you for helping us to keep our community safe.

## SPOOF PICNIC AND HIKING August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Join SPOOF (St. Paul's On Our Feet) for a fun day in the outdoors on August 6th at Pine Grove Furnace State Park! We have reserved the Brickyard Pavilion, which is close to the beach and playground area at Fuller Lake. We have the pavilion reserved for the entire day; come as early as you want and hang out as long as you want. There are several trails in the park of varying lengths and difficulty; we will have maps and descriptions for folks to hike as they want. Cool off afterwards with a dip in the lake. Or just stay at the pavilion and enjoy the shade or some lawn games that will be set up. Hot dogs, drinks and paper products will be provided. The rest of the picnic will be potluck. We will set up starting at 10am, with cooking noon-2. Parking and restrooms are also very close to the pavilion. All are welcome; bring your friends along too! Sign up here: <https://www.timetosignup.com/stpaulsucc/sheet/1330669/>

## CAREGIVERS SUPPORT INFORMATION

The monthly Caregivers Support hybrid meeting on the second Tuesday of the month is not meeting for the months of June, July and August. All persons that



have been part of this group that may have any concern that may need an urgent conversation with either Chris Bowers or Chris Royer are welcome to call either of them for some support until we meet again in September.

## **FALL ADULT 1 & ADULT 2 DISCUSSION - PLEASE JOIN US!**

The book "What Is Christianity?" provides a fascinating overview of the world's largest religion, weaving history, theology, spirituality, denominational divisions, and global growth into a single compelling story. In his book, Dr. Douglas Jacobsen describes the religion inspired by Jesus as a living faith that is still changing and developing today. The author is Dr. Douglas Jacobsen, a member of St. Paul's and he and Rhonda Jacobsen will be joining us.

Reader-friendly chapters introduce the major traditions of Christianity (Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Pentecostalism), explaining their spiritual appeal and tracing their evolution over the centuries. Christianity's recent global expansion is highlighted, but Christianity has been a diverse and multicultural movement from the very beginning. Each chapter provides thought-provoking insights into the beliefs, values, practices, achievements, and failures of Christians as they tried to remain faithful to the message and meaning of Jesus in different times and places.

- Condenses a vast amount of information into a coherent narrative
- Explains how and why Christianity has become so incredibly diverse
- Describes what almost all Christians have always held in common
- Summarizes the current status of Christianity in each global region
- Discusses the challenges that Christians worldwide are facing today

We will be ordering copies of the book. Please contact Shirley Keith Knox at [skeithknox@comcast.net](mailto:skeithknox@comcast.net) or Herb Bomberger at [hlmrbomberger@comcast.net](mailto:hlmrbomberger@comcast.net).

## **CPR/AED/FIRST AID TRAINING**

Thanks to all who expressed an interest in our CPR/AED/First Aid training! The training will be held on Saturday, July 16th beginning at 9:00 AM. Please bring your payment (check made out to St. Paul's for \$55 or cash) with you that day.

If you have not signed up, it's not too late! Please let Renee in the church office know if you would like to attend. Light refreshments will be provided. Questions? Contact Mary Runkle at 717-805-1589 or [MaryRunkle0515@gmail.com](mailto:MaryRunkle0515@gmail.com).

## **NEW HOPE NEWS**

Thank you one and all who participated in the toiletry drive for New Hope Ministries on Pentecost Sunday. New Hope staff was very appreciative when we donated 113lbs. of toiletries! Heartfelt thanks for being so generous and helping our neighbors in need!

Karen and Kevin Allison



**Articles for the  
August Epistle are  
due to the Church  
Office by end of the  
day, Wednesday  
July 20<sup>th</sup>.**



**PRIDE FESTIVAL  
OF CENTRAL PA**

## **2022 CENTRAL PA PRIDE FESTIVAL**

### **2022 PRIDE INTERFAITH WORSHIP SERVICE**

The 2022 Central PA Pride Festival will be held on Saturday, July 30 from 11:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., at the Emergency Responders Park within the Capitol Complex, Harrisburg. The address of the park is 350 North Street and is located between the PA State Museum and Keystone Buildings. Parking will be available at the Seventh Street parking garage for a special event fee of \$10.00 for the day. On street

parking will be limited around the park. Please come out and visit the festival. Several St. Paul members will be working at several booths throughout the festival. Questions may be directed to Steve Roush at [scroush2@gmail.com](mailto:scroush2@gmail.com).

The Pride Interfaith Service will take place at MCC of the Spirit, 2973 Jefferson Street 17110 at 5pm on July 31st. St. Paul's is always well represented at the Interfaith Service so please join us. For more information contact Shirley Keith Knox at [skeithknox@comcast.net](mailto:skeithknox@comcast.net).

## THE NEGRO SPIRITUAL ROYALTIES INITIATIVE

Published in the UCCMA Journal – Winter 2022 edition

By Susan DeSelms, Minister of Music  
The United Parish in Brookline, Brookline, MA

*Negro spirituals.* Referring to the enormous body of folk songs created collectively by enslaved Africans in America and their descendants, "Negro spiritual" is a term that is likely very familiar to church musicians. In Black communities, it is the preferred term for this body of music. However, these works are more typically referred to as "African American spirituals" or simply "spirituals" in predominantly white communities. Other terms include "Jubilee Songs" (named after the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University) and "Sorrow Songs" (coined by W. E. B. Du Bois in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*). More recently, some are calling this body of work "Black Liturgical Music." Words matter, and while using the word "Negro" gives me, a white woman, discomfort, I can acknowledge that the discomfort is mine and comes from the shame I feel as a white person of unearned privilege. Welcoming these feelings of discomfort, which remind me that there is still work to be done, I will defer to the Black community's preferences in this article and respectfully use the term "Negro spiritual."

Unlike other hymns and worship music, Negro spirituals were not published until after the names of their creators were long forgotten if they were ever even known. They are both witnesses to the horrors

of slavery and racism and witness to a merciful, faithful, and just Christianity we still aspire to live into today. Even before the abolition of slavery, these songs had started making their way into the collective memory of all Americans. Since then, they have become the source of literally *countless* musical arrangements and compositions published and sold to churches, schools, community choruses, orchestras, bands, and all manner of musical organizations. The Negro spiritual is also the intellectual property of the enslaved Africans in America and their descendants.

Negro spirituals are undeniably brilliant, capturing over and over again the Holy Grail of music that happens when true artistry is matched by depth of feeling. The feelings they communicate are universal. Few of us will ever have to experience the level of suffering that enslaved Black people endured throughout their lives. Still, all of us have experienced grief, rage, love, gratitude, joy, bitterness, and compassion. The Negro spiritual reflects the totality of the human experience and the entire spectrum of human emotions. The result is that these songs are almost irresistible to the human spirit.

Experts estimate that at least 1,000, and possibly up to 6,000 Negro spirituals have existed, composed exclusively during legalized slavery. By all accounts, they were entirely improvised and were "honed and refined" according to the tastes and opinions of the participants. They were passed around from one plantation to another, taking on new forms and variations as they went, such that, today, they are deeply incorporated into the canon of folk music in America.

Historical accounts also indicate that slaveholders fully recognized the strong musical tendencies of their African slaves, noting that singing happened in nearly every aspect of life. Many slave owners encouraged singing and paid more for the best song leaders because it allowed their slaves to work longer and harder. Other slave owners forbade their slaves from singing and even praying, with no apparent objective other than to break the spirits of their workers.

For the enslaved African Americans, singing was an act of self-preservation made even more powerful because singing was a group activity. This allowed for community building which was especially important because the African slaves in a single household often did not share a common language. As a result, music became the common language. Singing was a source of strength and comfort and mental distraction from the cruelties of daily life. As an act of artistic expression, singing reinforced a sense of self-worth. These songs were utterances of the heart, expressing whatever needed to be said - sadness, grief, joy, exhaustion, heartache, humor, courage, compassion, anger, frustration, fear, and most importantly, hope. Singing was (and is) a form of prayer, and these prayers reveal an absolute faith in God to make things right someday.

Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave who wrote extensively about his experiences, describes the Negro spiritual like this:

"When on their way, the slaves would make the dense old woods, for miles around, reverberate

with their wild songs, revealing at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness. They would compose and sing as they went along, consulting neither time nor tune. I have sometimes thought that the mere hearing of those songs would do more to impress some minds with the horrible character of slavery than the reading of whole volumes of philosophy on the subject."

For the last few years, I have struggled with using Negro spirituals appropriately and respectfully in our worship services for a majority-white congregation. They are some of the most powerful, beautiful, and expressive pieces of music that I know. My parents grew up in Birmingham, Alabama, and I was raised in Nashville and then Knoxville, Tennessee. My father's choirs always sang arrangements of Negro spirituals, and my mother regularly assigned the H. T. Burleigh arrangements of Negro spirituals to her classical voice students. I grew up regarding the Negro

spiritual as high art, knowing that these songs are meaningful and tragic. I never considered the possibility that, as a white person, I shouldn't be singing them.

Now, white America is waking up (once again) to the challenges and injustices faced by people of color in the United States. If you doubt this, look no further than your local neighborhood church: many, like mine, have signs hanging on their buildings earnestly exclaiming "Black Lives Matter." We know that Negro spirituals came from the mouths of enslaved Africans in America. So, what right do we, as white people, have to sing them? What if we misinterpret them, or culturally appropriate them, or what if we are just *too white* to sing them?

If we continue programming Negro spirituals, we need to address the debt we still owe to the enslaved Black people who created them. Black Americans have been last in line to receive

recognition and financial compensation for the extraordinary contributions they've made to American culture

time and time again. If we, as Christians, indeed are the hands and feet of Jesus, then isn't it our responsibility to do something about this?

At the United Parish in Brookline, we are starting an ongoing initiative of collecting "royalties" for the Negro spirituals we sing in worship. Whenever we sing them, we will collect a special offering that will support the development of Black musicians. We have chosen the Hamilton-Garrett Center for Music and Arts for the next two years to receive these collections. The [Hamilton-Garrett Center](#) is a non-profit music academy that focuses on the artistic development of inner-city students in Boston, Massachusetts. The Center is named for Ruth Hamilton, an acclaimed performer of Negro spirituals, and Elta Garrett, an esteemed singer and music educator. Its mission is to "preserve, educate and celebrate Black music and culture." Launched in October, we have already raised over \$2,000 in



“royalties” and have attracted the attention of local media outlets, including [community newspapers](#) and Boston’s local [NPR station](#).

Imagine if *all* churches, schools, and music publishing companies started to pay even a small amount in royalties to organizations that empower African American artists and musicians? I would imagine that Negro spirituals have been arranged, published, and recorded millions of times for and by churches, marching bands, handbell choirs, church choirs, college choirs, recording artists, community choruses, solo instrumentalists, and singers, and orchestras. They all incorporate Negro spirituals into their repertoire.

The cost of participating in this practice is minor for the individual, but the cumulative outcome could be huge. Little by little, this practice could become an instrument of a larger quest for restorative justice in which we all participate.

Would that change things? Maybe.

In her book, *Life Begins at the End of Your Comfort Zone*, Jacqui Lewis says, “Keep your eyes on all that’s good and beautiful and possible in the world. Because the stories we tell create the people we become.”

Love is held hostage by secrets and all the shame that comes along with them. So, let’s start being honest with each other and ourselves and ask what Love calls us to do and what Black Americans need us to do. I understand that we can never fully repay the debt we owe to Black musicians, but with God’s help, perhaps we can become healers of the breach. This is the pledge we at the United Parish in Brookline have made:

### ***A Congregational Pledge***

*Today, we acknowledge the history and significance of the Negro Spiritual and its artistic and spiritual worth in the life of our community today. With great respect and deep gratitude for the tremendous musical contributions made to American music by Black people, we offer our thanks and praise*

*to God for the creators of the Negro Spiritual and their descendants.*

*We pledge that each time we sing Negro Spirituals in our worship:*

*We will sing and hear them with holy reverence and open hearts;*

*We will honor the unnamed composers who created them;*

*And we will pay royalties to organizations promoting the advancement of Black artists and musicians in America, starting with [Hamilton-Garrett Center for Music and Arts](#).*

*We understand that the debt owed to Black musicians and artists can never be fully repaid.*

If you would like to learn more about the Negro Spirituals Royalties Initiative, please visit our parish website, [www.unitedparishbrookline.org](http://www.unitedparishbrookline.org), or email Susan DeSelms at [susan@upbrookline.org](mailto:susan@upbrookline.org). ■

### **Additional Information on The Negro Spiritual Royalties Initiative**

<https://www.neumc.org/newsdetail/church-pays-royalties-for-use-of-negro-spirituals-in-worship-16265571>

<https://www.unitedparishbrookline.org/blog/the-negro-spiritual-royalties-project>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGDxey5FOc>

<https://www.wgbh.org/news/arts/2021/11/16/this-church-is-paying-royalties-when-it-sings-spirituals-composed-by-enslaved-africans>



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