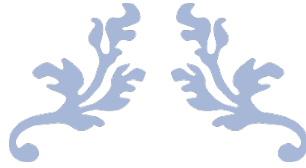


SEEDS of MINISTRY

2014-2018

St. Paul United Methodist Church



SEEDS OF MINISTRY

*The Continuing Story of
St. Paul United Methodist Church
2014-2018*



*By
Carol Florow*

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*The Continuing Story of St. Paul United Methodist Church
2014 – 2018*

Sunday, November 3, 2013, a special Worship Service was held at St. Paul United Methodist Church in Lakeland, Tennessee. It celebrated the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the church and featured a powerful and inspirational message given by Senior Pastor, the Rev. Michael Morris. Beautiful music was performed by all of St. Paul's musical groups and led by Will Dougan, Director of Music and Worship.

The above description written by Janice McCallen, provided to the media about the anniversary event in 2013, goes on to point to a Charter member, Jim Young, who produced a video spanning the 25-year history of the church. After Worship, Jim's "labor of love" was shown in the gym during the luncheon prepared by United Methodist Men. Anniversary cakes and desserts were provided by United Methodist Women. As the event closed, the document, *St. Paul United Methodist Church 25th Anniversary*, compiled and written by Church Historian Carol Florow, was distributed.

The year-to-year history booklet opened to the first page with "THOUGHTS FROM THE PASTOR." Rev. Morris wrote about St. Paul's history in elegant terms, and closed with this conviction:

It is an unfinished story, as the seed of faith that began St. Paul is still producing ministries that branch out and nestle new relationships in Christ, and the seeds of ministry they have within them.

And, indeed, as Pastor Mike projected, there have been many, many stories since then, of 'seeds of ministry' that grew and continued to expand as St. Paul's story bloomed.

In this addition to the story we hope to site those 'seeds' and document their amazing stories as St. Paul United Methodist Church continues to make *SEEDS of MINISTRY* and celebrates its newest edition of history – from 2014 to 2018.

A Capital Campaign

Yesterday's DREAM – Tomorrow's PROMISE

Growing the Church

Early in 2013, Karen Udovich sensed a 'seed' growing wildly into weeds that was severely strangling St. Paul's ability to do ministry and missions. The mortgage indebtedness related to construction of the Sanctuary in 2000 was making new ministries difficult, if not impossible. Karen went to the Church Council with her concerns, and thus, the 'seed' grew – not into weeds, but to become the Capital Campaign: *Yesterday's DREAM – Tomorrow's PROMISE*.

In January 2014, the newsletter, *Apostle from St. Paul*, had the announcement, which read in part:

In May 2013, the Church Council voted to conduct a capital campaign in 2014. (Its) purpose is to raise funds to reduce the church indebtedness of \$1,800,000 related to the building of the sanctuary.... We have partnered with Resource Ministry Partners from Birmingham to assist with the campaign. Dr. Bill Crosby is our consultant.

Karen Udovich

And so, on April 27, 2014, the kick-off for the three-year campaign began. An initial letter to the congregation from Karen, who was the newly appointed Campaign Director, and Pastor Mike explained the need for the project and referred to Jeremiah 29:11, as the basis for the campaign:

*"For surely I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord,
"plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you
a future with hope."* Jeremiah 29:11

The Kick-off Brunch in the gym after Worship that day in April was not only the beginning of the campaign but also celebrated a number of young people in the Confirmation Class who could inherit the results of the campaign.

The 2014 Confirmation Class included Grey Bingham, Shelby DeVore, Garrett Kirk, Jake Knaff, Elizabeth Newsom, and Brooke Shaw. Each was presented a polished stone from the pastor who said, "To celebrate

their profession of faith and their desires to be built into the spiritual house called the church.” The stones embedded with a silver cross served as a daily reminder of what the Christian journey is all about.

A Campaign Promise Calendar was distributed which offered daily Scripture readings and specific ministries and leaders for whom to pray. The Small Group Team presented a message to Sunday School Classes which included a Bible lesson and a discussion pertinent to the campaign.

On Commitment Sunday, May 18, 2014, one Worship Service was followed by a churchwide picnic lunch on the grounds with a live band, a selection of games, and family fun. Mike reported in his *Message from Mike* in the 6/1/14 newsletter that \$487,115 was committed from 87 pledges, with \$66,329 given as the First Sunday Response.

The Capital Campaign was completed on August 6, 2017, after three years of effort, leaving the loan balance \$1,144,000. After some creative re-financing the church could begin to see a “light at the end of the tunnel” for the 25+ year-old congregation’s indebtedness.

A Year of Renewal – 2014

*And the one who was seated on the throne said,
“See, I am making all things new.” Rev. 21:5*

During Worship Service on January 12, 2014, the Rev. Michael Morris invited the congregation to “not only remember the event of Jesus’ baptism, but to also reaffirm our own baptisms and commitments to living according to the purposes and plans of God’s new time.” Thus, in the New Year, as individuals received their baptism renewal, each was aware of a new ‘seed’ of commitment to the church and to new life in Jesus Christ.

The new Pictorial Directory was received in January. Produced by Gwen Augustine during the Anniversary year, its cover was inscribed with the words, “Praying and serving together for 25 years.” And, in addition to information on members, it included candid photos of the congregation worshipping, learning, and fellowshiping together, individual pictures of the staff, and beautiful individual photographs of members and families within the congregation.

St. Paul was especially saddened when on September 21, 2018, Gwen passed away. Gwen was attributed with planting the ‘seed’ for The Living Nativity in 2018, and the program was dedicated in her memory. More about *The Gwen Augustine Living Nativity* at the end of this document.

United Methodist Women had its Sixth Annual *St. Paul Mission Focus Day, Being God’s Hands and Feet*, on February 8, 2014. Janet Woodward coordinated the church-wide event, planting “seeds for missions” in which all could take part. Kairos Prison Ministry, UMCOR, Moriah House, and LeBonheur Children’s Hospital each benefitted from the work of the volunteers and groups in 2014. Lunch was provided by the UMW.

The *Workshop of Wonders* was the 2014 theme for Vacation Bible School, scheduled June 23-25, for ‘seedlings’ ages 3 through the fifth grade. Jill Kirk, Children’s Ministries Director, announced online preregistration and the availability of T-shirts. The children who attended the Workshop “...discovered the amazing love of God at work all around us.”

Shannon Pryor, St. Paul's Youth Director since June 2012, planted many 'seeds of ministry' within the Youth group, inspiring young people to grow into faithful living. She was commissioned a Provisional Deacon in the United Methodist Church on 6/3/14 and in 2017 was ordained a full Deacon.

In *SPY* (St. Paul Youth) *News* in June, Shannon asked members of the congregation to take a card listing a youth's name, birthday, and school and to pray for that person through the summer. Shannon reported 51 young people in the congregation in 6th through 12th grades, with 35 active members of the Youth group. All of the 51 young people were prayed for in the project.

A Kid's Drama Camp was held July 14-19. Will Dougan, Director of Worship and Music, led the weeklong event for 1st through 6th grades. Will directed the group in the performance on Sunday, July 20.

In August, Back to School Parties were enjoyed by Promiseland kids and St. Paul Youth – both groups' last fling before the daily grind of school.

On August 3, students in preschool through college were invited to participate in an annual Blessing of the Backpacks at morning Worship. As school seasons began, students who participated were assured of God's presence as they continued their studies in the new school year.

A new Bible Study for Moms began August 13, led by Amy Emerson. Childcare was available, and the Moms met each Wednesday at 10:00 am, for a "stress-free time to recharge and learn God's word." The group began their time together with the study *Listening for God*.

Sharon Higgins led her usual Wednesday Morning Study Group with *Breaking Old Rhythms, Answering the Call of a Creative God*, and Wanda Trieschman began a woman's Bible study on Wednesday evenings called *Ever After*.

Amy Emerson, Sharon Higgins, and Wanda Trieschman, along with Sandy Mauney and Sharon Brown, continued to lead many Wednesday morning and Wednesday Church Night Bible studies during 2014-18. Chris and Patty Rainey also led Disciple Study Classes during the time.

United Methodist Women's final production of its 21-year-old Fashion Show and Luncheon on 9/20/14 was chaired by Carol Florow. The event, *Puttin' on the Ritz*, brought over \$3,300 in profit divided among these ministries: United Methodist Neighborhood Centers, Kairos and Grace Place Prison Ministries, Golden Cross Ministry, and A Way Out Program. The UMW would work on a variety of other projects in the future to raise funds.

Primetimers, the 55 and older senior group, had an intriguing program in September 2014 titled: *Who Will Get Grandma's Yellow Pie Plate?* Senior Adult Ministries Chair, Sandy Mauney, organized luncheons and programs for seniors who met monthly to enjoy activities and fellowship.

The Emmaus Walks for adults and Chrysalis Flights for youth were short courses in Christianity, designed to strengthen and equip Christians to be better Christian servants and leaders in the church. Emmaus and Chrysalis Fall Retreats in 2014 were led by St. Paul Pastor Mike Morris, Shannon Pryor, and Angie and Will Dougan. By 2018, 38 St. Paul men and women had gone to Emmaus and seven youth went to Chrysalis. Another St. Paul member, Sharon Higgins, was on the Emmaus Administrative Board.

In September 2014, the first payment was made from the Capital Campaign funds toward the indebtedness of \$1,736,000, and the members were thanked for their "generous contributions to reduce the debt.

Equipping the Saints for Ministry was the theme for Stewardship Campaign in 2014 and admonished that "funds are needed to continue ministry at St. Paul." The congregation responded with faithful pledges.

Advent music this year was particularly meaningful and included the Choir's Cantata on 12/14 at 11:00 a.m. After a potluck dinner in the gym, the Children's Program was presented at 1:00 p.m.

United Methodist Men hosted a Holiday Dinner on 12/17, to provide St. Paul another reason to celebrate the season.

As the year concluded, it was evident that many "seeds for ministry" had been planted in the fertile garden of the St. Paul story; and it was clear that 2014 was an outstanding Year of Renewal.

The St. Paul Church Council

Leadership

*Humble, daring, discerning, empowering, and protecting:
these are the characteristics of leadership.*

John Wesley, Wesley Study Bible

Over the five-year period, as ‘seeds for ministry’ were planted and harvested, the Church Council Officers and Ministry Team Leaders exemplified John Wesley’s standards for leadership.

Lay Leaders

St. Paul’s Lay Leaders, Donna Lawson through 2017 and Amy Emerson beginning in 2018, were the role models as called for in Christian discipleship. Donna helped interpret the Church Council’s calling and mission during her term and was supportive of the new vision and ‘seeds for ministry.’ Amy had already excelled in many areas of ministry as teacher, leader and administrator and had proven she was, indeed, a worthy leader.

Church Council Chair

Pat Siano as Church Council Chair led the Council through many essential changes during an important era in St. Paul’s history. Pat presided over regular Council meetings and Called Church Conferences. He reported to Annual Charge Conferences conducted by the District Superintendent at the close of each church year, when officers were elected, ministries reviewed, and goals were set for the coming year.

Early in 2016, the issue of two Worship Services was presented to the Council. On September 11, after much trial and discussion, Pat announced the new single Morning Worship Service format. It combined the 9 a.m. contemporary style service with the 11 a.m. more traditional service. Pastor Mike reported the change was made after “overwhelming (positive) feedback from the congregation and members of the Council.”

On May 25, 2017, a Called Church Conference was requested. The Trustees sought approval of the Church Conference to move forward on the sale of property west of the Sanctuary, facing Hwy. 64. At the time, it had been on the market for about two years. The sale actually occurred 11/28/18.

Without a vision, the people perish. Proverbs 28:18

In the June 2018 *E-pistle* (the title for the newsletter sent by email), Pastor Mike wrote, “The Church Council is beginning to work to develop a vision statement that will guide St. Paul into the future.” By October, after working through a process, Mike created a statement using words which emerged from suggestions by members of the Council and others from the congregation. The statement was submitted and approved by the Church Council on September 27, 2018:

*Our vision is “to be a welcoming family of faith
serving others while growing together in Christ.”*

A faithful servant to the church and to the community, Pat Siano, in addition to his work as Chair of the Church Council, was a dedicated servant to the Kairos community, to the Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts of America, and to the sports ministry.

Council Lay Delegates

Council Lay Delegates were elected to represent St. Paul at District and Conference meetings. In 2014, J. R. “Moose” Woodward, Will Dougan, Eugene Butchen, and Janice McCallen filled those roles as prescribed.

Janice had also served as McKendree District Lay Leader, while “still considering myself representing St. Paul,” as she readily asserts. When the two Memphis Districts merged in 2016, she became Co-Lay Leader of the new Metro District and later Memphis Conference Associate Lay Leader.

Recording Secretary

Recording Secretary, Sharon Higgins prepared concise, easy-to-follow Minutes indicative of her unsurpassed love for her church and its mission. Erin Rawls, the Council secretary since 2018, had “big shoes to fill” but proved herself capable and dedicated.

In addition to her secretarial duties, Sharon started new Sunday school classes, led Bible and Disciple classes, worked in Kairos, Emmaus, and Barnabas ministries, and founded Chimney Rock Elementary School Adoption. She was the ‘seed’ for many ministries at St. Paul, while always shying away from special recognition.

United Methodist Women

The UMW organized unit shall be a community of women whose Purpose is:

To know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; To develop a creative supportive fellowship; To expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

United Methodist Women (UMW) was represented on the Church Council by its presidents – Virginia Hopper through 2016 and Sandy Mauney through 2018. The UMW Purpose was accomplished through programs for missions.

The annual Mission Focus Day held in February, was hosted by UMW. It was a churchwide opportunity for everyone to be involved in a number of hands-on mission projects and enjoy lunch together. They baked Kairos cookies; made teddy bears for LeBonheur and baby blankets for Hannah's Hope; filled book bags & health kits for UMCOR; made lap pillows and prayer shawls for Golden Cross; addressed cards to the homebound and "Thank You" notes to Fire and Police; and created socks of love and handwarmers for the homeless.

Each year, the women sponsored Candle Burnings on Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Veteran's Day to raise mission funds for women and children. On each of the days specified, a special person was honored or memorialized for a \$5 gift. A candle was placed on the altar in the name of the person, who was listed with the donor in that Sunday's Worship bulletin.

The Women planned a number of fundraisers every year, including Fashion Shows and Luncheons; Mother's Day sweets sales; Holiday baked goods and casserole sales; and the Christmas Cookie Sale in December.

The Unit was divided into two subgroups, Susanna Circle and Ruth Circle, which met for monthly programs, business, and mission projects. Each year, Janice McCallen created a UMW Directory for the unit, which listed members, program calendars, missions, and other pertinent information.

United Methodist Men (UMM)

*So, we can say with confidence,
“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid...” Hebrews 13:6*

United Methodist Men (UMM), represented on the Council by President Thomas Trieschman, was always there when the church needed its help and support. Thomas attested to the fact that the UMM were, and always have been, essential to the operation of the church.

Methodist Men was important to the Security Response Team and the safety of the church and its people. St. Paul’s aging congregation looked to UMM for assistance at church events which usually began and ended with the men setting up and taking down tables, chairs, and other equipment.

UMM, conscious of unexpected expenses occurring throughout the St. Paul campus, raised funds to help with those needs. On March 29, 2014, the Men sponsored a Pancake Breakfast to raise funds for St. Paul’s Building Fund. Pancakes, sausage, bacon, fruit, juice, and coffee were plentiful and, for just \$5, a real bargain. Other projects raised funds for St. Paul needs.

In May each year, the Men enjoyed a Fish Fry. When Swann Parks, a devoted United Methodist Men member, passed away in 2017, they wanted to honor his memory. They named it the *Swann Parks Memorial Fish Fry*, and the event lived on in his memory for the future.

During Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons, Methodist Men promoted the sale of smoked turkey and smoked spiral-cut hams. Costs were from \$35 to \$45 each, with delivery as required just before the holiday.

Methodist Men hosted Christmas Dinners on Wednesday Church Night for several years, with turkey and ham and all the trimmings. Everyone was invited as guests of UMM. But any donations helped fund St. Paul projects.

The Men bonded on “nights out” as they bowled together, went to Redbirds games, or cheered their favorite player in an NCAA Championship.

Ministry Directors and Chairs

*They are to do good, to be rich in good works,
generous, and ready to share.* I Timothy 6:18

Each Church Council Officer described in the Lay Structure, showed exemplary dedication to Christ and His Church. Directors and Chairpersons of particular ministries, served on the Church Council, and continued the expansion of the St. Paul story during 2014-2018.

Discipling Ministries

Discipling Ministries was chaired by Shannon Stewart in 2014, Sharon Brown in 2015-16, and by Amy Emerson in 2017-18. Pastor Mike promoted the annual *Lenten Hunger Fund Calendar for 2014*. For Advent, the Discipleship Team developed the *Advent Devotional 2014*, a handout which included a daily Scripture reading and suggestion for an activity for the day, such as, “Say an extra prayer today for someone that you love.”

In 2015, the Discipleship Ministry Team put together a trifold pamphlet called *the Roadmap of Life*. It was a “GPS” to finding ways to Discipleship at St. Paul through Fellowship, Faith Sharing, Worship, and Service. Being faithful by “our prayers, presence, gifts, service and witness.”

For several years, the Disciple Team developed an Advent Devotional Booklet. St. Paul folks contributed personal devotionals related to a Bible verse of their choosing.

St. Paul’s Nursery

St. Paul’s Nursery was directed by Nancy Ytzen since 2008. The babies and very young children were well cared for and loved under her supervision. Many volunteers and paid assistants worked with Nancy over the years.

St. Paul Preschool

St. Paul’s accredited Preschool, under the direction of Daina Aldrich, had been acclaimed “One of the best in the Memphis Area” by parents and grandparents of the students who had been a part of the ministry. There was usually waiting lists for children to get into the program.

Promiseland and the Children's Ministry

Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs. Matt. 19:13

Jill Kirk was Director of Children's Ministries and Promiseland. The children from kindergarten through fifth grade looked forward to seeing "Miss Jill" on Sunday mornings for imaginative Bible teachings and activities scaled to their learning levels.

During Sunday Worship Services, the children sat with their parents until *A Time for Children*. Then, after a short children's "sermon" led by a volunteer, they were ushered to the Educational Building as the congregation sang "*Jesus Loves Me*." Finally, in the Fellowship Hall, the children had "Large Group" where they listened to the day's lesson together. Then they broke up into "Small Group" where volunteers led activities to complement the lesson.

The children's department sponsored Project 20/20, which provided free vision care to poor of all faiths in underdeveloped countries. For several years, new and gently used sunglasses and eye glasses were given by the congregation for the project. They also participated in UMW's Mission Focus Day, making hand warmers and stuffing plastic eggs with candy for Easter.

On Palm Sunday each year, the children waved palm branches during Worship Service. They prepared eggs and participated in Easter Egg Hunts. For Halloween Trunk or Treat activities, trunks of cars that may or may not have been decorated for the occasion were filled with treats collected by trick or treaters. At Christmas, the kids made ornaments to take to shut-ins when the group went Caroling.

PJs and Pop-Tarts events were held at various times when kids were "rolled out of bed" in PJs and brought to church for Pop-Tarts. Annual Back-to-School and End-of-School Parties were held, and at one party at least, donations of underwear and supplies were collected for students at Chimney Rock Elementary School in the School Adoption project.

Operation Christmas Child/Samaritan's Purse was a project done annually for the season. Shoe boxes were filled with items from a list of

things a needy child might want or need. Church members could also pack a box or donate items for the kids to pack.

Jill and her volunteers put on spectacular Vacation Bible School events every year. Themes like *Workshop of Wonders*, *G-Force VBS*, *Surf Shack*, *Hero Central*, and *Shipwrecked VBS* gave them plenty of fun ideas and materials with which to work. The kids, the teachers and helpers alike, took away wonderful memories.

Jill's KWAM (**K**ids **W**ith **A** Mission) had a mission project the last Sunday of each month. They made Blessing Bags for the needy filled with Granola bars, fruit snacks, socks, mittens/gloves, small water bottles, packs of nuts, cheese and peanut butter crackers, and baby wipes. Socks of Love were made for Manna House. Valentine cards were created for children at LeBonheur, and Easter cards were created for shut-ins. Field trips were taken to Wesley Senior Ministries in 2014, where they sang hymns, played Bingo, and entertained the residents.

Promiseland and KWAM raised funds for various projects. In September 2014 and July 2015, the All Things Kids Clothing Sale included shoes, coats, toys, books, movies, games strollers, car seats, high chairs, and children's bedding. In 2016, the Five Below store had a promotional sale between 6/20 and 7/4 for nonprofits. Shoppers were asked to present the store's flyer when they checked out, and St. Paul would receive 10% of the purchase.

On Wednesday Church Nights, the children had music with "Mr. Will," followed by Bible and gym time. On 10/24/18, a Pancake Breakfast was served for WCN supper by Promiseland kids to raise funds for projects.

Jill's little 'seeds of ministry' would grow from Promiseland kids to St. Paul Youth with the knowledge that they had been loved, and, best of all, they learned that God loved and cared for them.

St. Paul Youth & Youth in Mission

*Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain,
some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Matt. 13:8*

The Rev. Shannon Pryor developed acronyms – **SPY** for **St. Paul Youth** and **YIM** for **Youth In Mission** – and used them frequently when referring to the Youth. In May 2017, she wrote that her life’s mission “is to help young people take ownership of their faith and to guide them through discerning where God is calling them to live out their faith in their daily lives.” At St. Paul she fulfilled that mission, planting “seeds of ministry,” as the youth grew into faithful adults.

Shannon led Wednesday Night Studies and Sunday afternoon gatherings for the Youth and provided opportunities to be involved in missions. They volunteered for First Works Summer Camp; made sack lunches for families at LeBonheur’s Fed Ex Family House; played games with kids at Tennessee Baptist Home; volunteered to help and care for guests at Manna House’s clinic; and volunteered at Bartlett Animal Shelter.

Over the years, the Youth prepared and helped serve meals at St. John’s Kitchen and Union Mission. They participated in UMW Mission Focus Days. A summer highlight was the annual mission trip to Mountain T.O.P. ministries in rural Tennessee.

Shannon worked with Pastor Mike in annual Confirmation Classes. In March 2015, the class attended Confirmation Retreat at Wesley Foundation. In 2016, they helped serve Communion at St. Paul and hosted a Sabbath School at Holy Community Church in the Looney Neighborhood, leading a Bible Study, playing games, doing a craft, and providing lunch.

In 2014, the Youth’s annual celebration for graduating seniors included a “Roasting” for Noah Siano. Lunch events after Sunday Worship featured and celebrated all of the accomplishments of graduating seniors.

Each Easter, the Youth were busy learning about all the special preparations for the Season. On Maundy Thursdays, the Youth led a Messianic Haggadah celebration and experienced the Seder Meal which included an egg, bitter herbs, matzot, and Charoset.

In 2015, the Youth developed stations in the Sanctuary building, similar to Stations of the Cross. The project was called Prayer Journey through Holy Week, and the congregation was guided through the stations in a very moving presentation. Also in 2015, for \$38 a month, 4-year-old Elisee Kabore was adopted through Compassion International.

Fundraising for projects was always a key part of youth activities. In February each year, SPY sponsored an event for adults. A Night Out for Valentine's in 2014 provided child care at church for \$20 for a family's first child and \$5 for each additional one. The kids enjoyed a craft, a movie, and snacks. Sweetheart Dinners were planned with child care available. In March 2016 flower bulbs and gardening kits were sold.

A project in 2014 involved collecting shoes. The Youth received \$100 for 30 bags of 25 pairs of shoes each. In March 2015, Window-Cling Designs were available for sale. And for \$20 the Youth would EGG (with 12 candy-filled plastic eggs) the yard of choice. In November 2016, they sponsored a Family Trivia Night and dessert auction. Breakfast with Santa events offered breakfast and a picture with Santa for \$5 a person or \$15 per family of three or more.

At churchwide Yard Sales car washes were also offered. Spaghetti lunch was served after Worship 9/27/15, raising \$442. Youth manual labor was also auctioned off (i.e. raking leaves, a traveling car wash, babysitting, etc.), which raised another \$540. A car wash raised funds for BigStuf 2016. YIMs held their first Palm Sunday Youth Bake Sale in 2017. In 2018, they sold chocolate-covered strawberries with a profit of \$854.37 for Mountain T.O.P.

Projects to raise funds offered many opportunities to learn life skills – money management, creativity, organization, and cooperation. Trips, retreats and mission projects would not be possible without the funds raised to cover them.

YIMs had fun times, too, including hangouts in the Youth Room, back-to-school parties, Spooky Nights at Shelby Farms for Halloween, and progressive dinners at Christmas.

Mission Opportunity Ministries

*For just as the body without the spirit is dead,
so faith without works is also dead.* James 2:26

One of the important “seeds for ministry” on Church Council was the Mission Opportunities Ministries Team led by Al Filippelli. Ministries such as Project Transformation, St. John’s Soup Kitchen, Kairos, UMCOR, School Adoption of Chimney Rock Elementary, UMNC Easter and Thanksgiving Baskets, Hannah’s Hope Adoption, MIFA, Golden Cross, and Lenten World Hunger all fall under the purview of missions ministry.

Projection Transformation

St. Paul had been a partner church for Project Transformation since 2016. Karen Udovich coordinated the ministry which recruits college interns to run summer programs at Longstreet and Centenary UMCs. The ministry seeks to help vulnerable children avoid consequences of poor or no reading skills. Each summer St. Paul provided two meals for interns and spent a week from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Centenary helping reading programs.

St. John’s Soup Kitchen

St. John’s Soup Kitchen ministry for the homeless and indigent in Memphis is coordinated by Sharon Higgins. Several times a year, St. Paul volunteers shop, prepare, serve, and clean up after the meal for 75 to 100 men, women, and children.

Kairos Prison Ministry

Kairos Prison Ministry is the parent organization of a body of ministries addressing the spiritual needs of incarcerated men and women and their families as well as those working in the prison environment.

Kairos Cookie Time – That pronouncement by Pat Siano in the newsletter, was a flag that a men’s prison weekend was planned. St. Paul would make 4,000 dozen (that’s 48,000) home baked, chocolate chip cookies for the weekend. For imprisoned women, their children, and families, only 1,300 dozen cookies were required for their weekend. On 10/17/14, St. Paul hosted a Bunco Party to raise funds for the Kairos Outside project.

United Methodist Committee on Relief

United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) assists all sorts of disaster victims with help for recovery. At UMW's Mission Focus Day in 2014, 50 health kits were assembled for UMCOR. When Hurricane Harvey hit the Texas Gulf Coast in 2017, UMCOR was there, and St. Paul helped by donating funds and supplies for the cleanup. In September 2018, Hurricane Florence depleted supplies; when Hurricane Michael hit, UMCOR began an intense drive for health kits and cleaning buckets.

Then in November 2018, Pastor Mike stated for the Communion Offering, "UMCOR...is the humanitarian relief and development arm of the United Methodist Church, and works globally to alleviate human suffering. In light of recent hurricanes, please consider making a donation."

Adopt Chimneyrock Elementary

In 2014, the Church Council agreed to pursue a reading program at a local elementary school. Al Filipelli, Missions Chairperson, began to talk to Chimneyrock Elementary about a program, and in the fall of 2015, a church-wide Missions meeting was held to recruit leaders and volunteers for several projects. Sharon Higgins volunteered to coordinate the reading program, later named Adopt Chimneyrock. It began with eight volunteers reading once a week on different days, and a churchwide collection for certain school supplies. In 2016-17, the school changed the program to Fridays only, and collections of school uniforms were added to the need for school supplies. In 2018, Kim Siano became the program's coordinator.

United Methodist Neighborhood Centers

United Methodist Neighborhood Centers (UMNC) was assisted at St. Paul by efforts of UMW's Key Women for the 110-year-old Memphis mission agency. They were: in 2013-14, Susan Keutmann; in 2015-16, Katie Roy; and, beginning in 2017, Rebecca Estridge.

Each year, St. Paul provided Easter Baskets for Miriam Center kids and Thanksgiving food baskets with Kroger or Walmart gift cards for meat. The Annual Awareness Day Luncheon in May is a special day for UMNC when churches gather to learn of agency programs. For several years, a fundraiser at the event included a Cake Sale in which our own Bill Cumming's beautifully decorated cakes were available.

Lenten Hunger Fund Calendar

During the Lenten Season each year, the Memphis Conference provided the Lenten Hunger Fund Calendar for daily use from Ash Wednesday until Easter Sunday. Scripture readings related to hunger and suggestions for giving to the Lenten World Hunger Fund were listed.

Communion Offerings

Communion Offerings were designated by Pastor Mike, some for local church needs, others for local missions. Hannah's Hope, Fayette Cares, Kairos Ministry, MIFA, Golden Cross Ministry, Lakeshore Assembly, the Wesley Foundation, and Project Transformation were among those missions listed for Communion Offerings.

Life Blood Ministry

Another important mission opportunity at St. Paul was the Blood Drive, chaired in 2014 through June of 2016 by Martha Fay. Martha said in 2015, "Our community is thankful for the donations, and it is a blessing to those in their time of need in life situations." In 2017 and 2018, Kim Siano chaired the project and helped fill the need for blood.

Stewardship Ministries

*For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21*

This Scripture was the basis for a trifold brochure designed for the 2014 Stewardship Campaign titled *Equipping the Saints for Ministry*. Inside was a colorful pie chart showing portions of the budget used for ministries and expenses from October 2013 to September 2014. It was enhanced by photographs of various groups at St. Paul and was a great tool for promoting faithful Stewardship.

Called to Be Faithful, through our Witness was the theme for the 2015 Stewardship Campaign announced by Chair Brad Emerson. At the close of the campaign, Brad and Pastor Mike led a Pledge Card Dedication on Sunday, November 22. Brad encouraged those who had not yet turned in their pledge card to “participate in this act of faithfulness with God and St. Paul United Methodist Church.”

During 2016, *Bearing Fruit* was the theme, and the team wrote:

“On Oct. 23, 30 and Nov. 6, we ask you to participate each Sunday by sharing your own examples of ‘Bearing Fruit.’ We will compile these in what we hope will be a powerful reminder that we are all responsible for furthering the Lord’s work...and that our most broad-reaching influences occur when we are ‘Bearing Fruit’ as a church family.”

Called to be Faithful was the 2017 theme and *Step Up in Faith* in 2018, as Stewardship Ministries asked St. Paul’s people for their faithful response. The Pledge Cards stated:

*You must each decide in your heart how much to give. Don’t give reluctantly
or in response to pressure, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Winning Ministries

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2

This group of interrelated ministries was chaired by Sharon Higgins and covered the many services that “watch over the congregation,” Sharon said. A Welcoming Team led by Judy McMurry reached out to visitors. The Hospital Ministry led by Leah Etters, visited hospitalized church members. Sandy Mauney led Homebound Pals and kept in touch with the homebound. Intercessory Prayer led by Virginia Hopper included the congregation’s prayer concerns. The team mailed outreach postcards inviting new families in the area to St. Paul Easter and Advent activities. Membership Care was also included with Winning Ministries.

As part of the ministry, the group followed tips from *50 Ways to Welcome New People* from the Lewis Center for Church Leadership. Sharon stated, “We want to be the most welcoming church we can be. And...hospitality is a ministry that everybody can participate in.” The team worked with and conveyed to the congregation some of those valuable tips toward being a more hospitable church. These were:

~ *Escort newcomers to the nursery, classrooms, coffee hour, etc.*
Don’t just point the way or give directions.

~ *Adopt the ‘rule of 3’ which says, “Members will not talk to other members in the first 3 minutes following the service.”* It typically takes a guest that long to exit the church building.

~ *Enact the ‘circle of 10’ rule – each member greets everyone who comes within 10 feet of them.* (guest or member)

~ Say, “*I don’t think we’ve met before...*” if you are not sure if the person next to you is a member or a visitor.

The team developed First Time Visitor Bags which included goodies and information about St. Paul and ways to be involved. Postcards were mailed to new residents, and Visitor Luncheons were hosted. They urged the congregation, “If you are seated near a visitor, hand them a bag, located on the table at the back of the church.”

Fellowship Ministries

*And let us consider how to provoke one another
to love and good deeds.* Hebrews 10:24

This Ministry, chaired by Pat Siano and Wanda Trieschman, included a Hospitality Team, the Senior Adult Ministries Team which was chaired by Sandy Mauney, and Sports and Recreation Ministries Team, chaired by Julie Tolbert.

Hospitality Team

In September 2014, Pat and the Hospitality Team hosted what was a real “cool” event – an Ice Cream Social for families and friends with a screening of the movie, *Frozen*. They also hosted a Family Trivia night on 7/17/15.

A Movie Night Out activity was planned in August 2015 to see *War Room*. Elizabeth Von Hofe, who organized the event said, “We want to make this a regular gathering to see and support faith-based movies.”

Another movie event featuring *Cars* was held on 7/22/15 in the Fellowship Hall, for which the kids decorated a box to look like a car to sit in during the movie. On 1/21/16, an outdoor movie, *Kung Fu Panda*, was shown on the church lawn by the gym. On March 18, 2018, Amy Emerson announced a family outing for the new movie, *I Can Only Imagine*.

Senior Adult Ministries Team

The Senior Adult Ministries Team, chaired by Sandy Mauney, planned regular monthly lunch meetings for Primetimers, the 55 and older seniors. Lunch menus varied and featured programs with community speakers, including one on funeral planning and another on the Zika virus.

They also played bingo, checkers, and other board games. One field trip included Collierville Bible Museum followed by lunch at the Silver Caboose. Each time the Primetimers were together, items for missions were collected.

The events were planned monthly during the five-year period, and Sandy’s reports indicated how important the program was to the seniors it served.

Wesley Group

A new study/fellowship group began in 2013, with mostly couples who met the 2nd and 4th Tuesday nights in homes. The group conducted a variety of studies over the years, and in 2018, there were about 17 members. Their mission was Wesley Foundation at the University of Memphis. The group had provided food for the Food4Finals event during Semester Finals.

Sports and Recreation

The chair of Sports and Recreation, Julie Tolbert from 2014 to 2016, reported to the Church Council and kept the church aware of the program. The ministry included basketball, T-ball, soccer, and pitched baseball teams for kids from age 4 to 12 years old, about 80-100 kids collectively.

In October 2014 Julie reported, “Fall Soccer went very well, and having games on our own field was great.” Soccer was at St. Paul while other sports were played at other facilities. St. Paul jackets were sold in November, raising funds for expenses, and basketball registration began.

In January 2016, Julie reported there were five basketball teams doing well, with many of the kids also receiving academic awards in their schools. Good training had been done for coaches seeking to be certified by East Shelby Church Recreation Association (ECRA). The kids sold car decals and sports apparel to raise funds for reversible jerseys which were more expensive and required by ESCRA.

In August 2016, many issues were being addressed for the sports program; so in early 2017, the Council decided not to continue the ministry at that time. The City of Lakeland had begun a program and asked to use St. Paul’s gym for practice. In late 2018, Sports Ministry was again on the Council’s Agenda, and though it was decided to revamp the program, no volunteers came forward, so it was officially disbanded.

Scouting at St. Paul

Pat Siano reported that the Scout programs at St. Paul boasted about 120 total scouts during the five-year-period. Boy Scout Troop No. 455 and Cub Scout Pack No. 455 were chartered ministries of St. Paul United Methodist Church. The church provided space and oversight for the two troops.

Julie Tolbert led two Girl Scout troops until 2018. Rebecca Estridge and Patty Rainey led Brownie Troop No. 13771, beginning in 2014. Patty and her daughter also started a new Junior Troop, No. 13580, in 2018. There were 34 girls in these two Scout groups. Since 2015, Troop No. 10338 was a Senior Girl Scout Troop with 9th and 10th graders, led by Cindy Davis.

Since 2015, five Court of Awards/Bridging ceremonies and four Re-dedication and Investiture Ceremonies took place at St. Paul. The troops sponsored a canned food drive for Mid-South Food Bank, a diaper drive for Porter-Leath, and a winter clothes drive for Moriah House.

Wednesday Church Night

*God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship
of his Son, Jesus Christ our lord. 1 Cor. 1:9*

Wednesday evenings were times of fellowship and learning at church. For many years, the event started at 5:30 p.m. with a meal prepared by individual groups within the church, followed at 6:30 p.m. by several Adult Study groups, Youth activities in the Youth Room, and “Mr. Will’s” Children’s Music. Choir practice began at 7:30 p.m. And it was, indeed, a full evening of activity.

In 2017 the Hospitality Committee, chaired by Tracy Stephens, was instrumental in beginning a catered meal program, suggested by Amy Emerson. The Pink Flamingo began serving the meals at a reasonable cost, and the church started accepting electronic prepayment of individual meals. See “...a typical Wednesday Church Night dinner” menu for January 24, 2018, in the section, *A Year to Remember*, later in this document.

The Discipling Ministries Committee, chaired by Amy Emerson, coordinated the Adult Study Groups, led by Pastor Mike and several other Bible study leaders. Shannon Pryor always planned instructive, enjoyable activities for the Youth. “Mr. Will” always had fun with the kids who sang their hearts out.

Equipping Ministries

*Remember your leaders, those who spoke
the word of God to you... Hebrews 13:7a*

Equipping Ministries on the Church Council included committees pertinent to the administration of the church: Finance, Trustees, Staff-Parish Relations, and Lay Leadership. These areas were typically autonomous, in that little of their function is publicized to the general congregation. But their work affects the very life of the church and equips it for ministry.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee, chaired by Mike Jordon, included the pastor, Chairs of the Board of Trustees, the Church Council, Staff/Parish Relations, Stewardship, the Church Lay Leader, Lay Delegate, Capital Funds Campaign, and paid staff member Financial Secretary/Treasurer.

Pastor Mike reported in the January 2014 Council meeting: “St. Paul finished the year relatively strong...financially. Bills were paid, including three main air conditioning units, one refrigerator and a stove. But, because of earlier shortfalls in Conference apportionments...Lay-offs and ministry cuts could be necessitated conference-wide. That is why it is so important to work together it reduce our indebtedness.”

The church was reminded in September 2014 that since the summer, “We are proud owners of a much-needed new gym roof (\$52,000). We need to catch up on pledges, as cash flow is a little tight.” In March 2015, the church was advised, “There is still a balance of \$7,500 (on the gym roof) and it is PAST DUE. Please catch up pledges!”

“*Sign up for Kroger Community Rewards* and raise money for St. Paul.” In the newsletter, the congregation was urged to enroll in the program by going to a named website: “...select St. Paul, so that any time you shop at Kroger, our church ministries get credit and can receive a donation from Kroger...” In September 2015, St. Paul received the first check from Kroger for \$593.69 and in May 2016 the church received \$571.91. Kroger checks came to the church each quarter, and the program made fundraising easy.

Trustees

The Trustees have responsibility for major repairs at the church. In October 2014, Jack Pearson, Chair of Trustees, reported that the sewer line

in front of the Sanctuary building had “busted and backed up into the building.” Repairs had been made and, “All is well.” At the same time, he said the roof over the Preschool had a blockage that was cleared.

In January 2016, Jack reported the heating unit covering the Youth Room, bathrooms, and the hallway next to the gym had stopped working. Repair of the unit would be \$3,555, and a new unit would be \$7,349. Since the current unit was 23 years old, Jack recommended replacement, which would begin the following week. The Financial Secretary, Susan Holmes, said the payment for a new unit would be separated into two doable payments.

In 2018, Trustees Bill Cummings and Frances Lawson (both retired) were frequently seen taking care of problems around the church campus.

Staff-Parish Relations

The Staff-Parish Relations Committee, (SPRC) was chaired in 2014 by Bill Cummings, in 2015-18 by Elizabeth Von Hofe, followed by Robert Higgins through 2018. The committee was responsible for setting the salaries of the pastor and church staff and serving as a sounding board for the congregation’s positive and constructive ideas and concerns for staff.

At Coffee Fellowship on Sunday, August 31, 2014, SPRC hosted a reception for church member and Custodian Jennifer Dinwiddie to say “Goodbye” as she moved to Alabama to take care of her mother. Jennifer was hired as the church custodian when the church had the need. The SPRC stated in the newsletter that she would be sorely missed by staff and congregation.

In February 2018, Elizabeth announced to the congregation that the District Superintendent would participate an annual Church and Pastoral Leadership Review meeting. The committee would be reporting to the DS on “what (St. Paul) has done as a church, and what we would like to do...to move into a more fruitful ministry.”

“See You Later Von Hofe Family” – This was the newsletter lead-in to announce the family’s move to Alabama for Desmond’s new career position. Elizabeth had served in many ways during the seven years the family was at St. Paul. At a reception on Sunday, March 4, 2018, the church celebrated the Von Hofes and sent them off with prayers, love and hugs.

Three months later, the Von Hofes suffered the fire loss of their home from lightning while they were on vacation. The congregation created a love offering to assist the family. They responded, “Words cannot express our gratitude for your calls and prayers and the generous Love Offering...” St. Paul was saddened by their loss and happy to return the love they had shown the church during their years at St. Paul.

Adult Sunday School Classes

The adult Sunday School Classes are few in number but faithful to the core and significant to missions and the ministry of the church.

The Fellowship Class was organized in 1990 and in its infancy had 125-135 members on roll. In 2018, there were about 25 active members. Over the years, health problems, moving, and death (about 62 in 30 years) had taken a toll on membership but not the spirit of the class. Every year, MIFA food baskets with gift cards for meat were collected. A donation of \$385 to Golden Cross Ministries was made. They painted and refurnished their classroom. Each member who died was memorialized with a gift to the church and/or with flowers. And, their Spirit was always alive and well!

The Inquirer’s Class was one of St. Paul’s earliest Sunday School Classes and boasted 54 members on role in 2014. Teachers were volunteer class members who used the Adult Bible Studies for discussion style classes. Over the years, they participated in many mission projects wherever there was a need. Care for members and their families was a priority, and they enjoyed many occasions to celebrate and fellowship together.

The Connect Class began as an extension of the Love and Respect Marriage Conference organized by Elizabeth Von Hofe in March 2015. The group of young couples studied Scripture and material related to marriage, parenting, prayer and more. The class ended when the Von Hofes relocated.

The St. Paul Staff

*Then he said to his disciples, “The Harvest is plentiful,
but the laborers are few.”* Matthew 9:37

Just as St. Paul depended on its volunteers to harvest the ministries of the church, the paid staff supported and nourished the ‘seeds of ministry.’ These “few laborers” helped make things happen.

Directors of children’s and youth ministries have already been mentioned – Jill Kirk’s Children’s Ministries, Daina Aldrich’s accredited Preschool, “Miss Nancy’s” (Ytzen) Nursery Ministries, and Pastor Shannon’s Youth Ministries, as caretakers and educators of the youngest ‘seeds of ministry’ at St. Paul.

Vickie Hamilton, Office Administrator and Membership Secretary; Susan Holmes, Financial Administrator; Will Dougan, Director of Worship and Music; and the Rev. Michael Morris, Senior Pastor – all were essential for mission and ministry at St. Paul and the community of faith.

Office Administrator/Secretary

Vickie’s job as Office Administrator was multifaceted. From putting the weekly newsletter together and gathering information for the Sunday Bulletin, she was also “putting out fires” and planting ‘seeds for ministry.’ She maintained membership records and communication and supervised the administration of the day-to-day operations of the church.

Financial Administrator/Treasurer

Susan Holmes as Financial Administrator and Secretary/Treasurer, handled all financial transactions of the church, maintaining records of contributions, paying bills and keeping the congregation apprised of financial needs.

In May 2016, the bulletin contained a brochure with the heading, “What is Online Giving?” It sparked the imagination for a new way to give to the church and explained how to create an online account.

Director of Worship and Music

The multitalented Will Dougan was Director of Worship and Music at St. Paul – Choir Director, musician (he often played piano for special music), Worship innovator, Band Leader, Choir/Drama Director, and Kid’s

Drama/Choir Director. He brought many new ideas, drama and worshipful musical productions to Sunday Services.

In 2014, St. Paul had two services, the early morning Praise Service with the Praise Band at 8:30, and the traditional Worship Service with piano and choir at 11:00. When services were combined in September 2016, the Praise Band added dimension and spirit to all music at one service.

During Lent and Advent, Will directed beautiful Cantatas for each season which included the choir, the band, and actors. The productions, with costumes, props and scenery, were well-received by the congregation who looked forward each season to new presentations.

Will was also a mentor for the children who enjoyed drama. Every summer he directed Kid's Drama Camps, for rising first through sixth graders. After the weeklong camp, the kids performed the play they had learned for the congregation (and all the proud parents). The kids also prepared and performed a Christmas play production during the season.

St. Paul's Pastor

The Rev. Michael Morris, preferred to be called "Mike" and was as friendly and personable as the name implies. Mike and his wife Cindy came to St. Paul in the summer of 2013, during the 25th Anniversary year, and were immediately members of the "family." This document began by highlighting that Anniversary Celebration for which Mike brought "a powerful, inspirational message."

In fact, all of Pastor Mike's sermons were inspirational and thought-provoking. After the Scripture reading, his message might include something humorous or relevant to current events then bring in the day's point. A strong, Biblically based message followed. Then, after the Invitation, he normally closed by invoking *An Irish Prayer* as benediction:

*May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields,
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of His hand.
~copied~*

A Message from Mike was usually the opening feature of the weekly newsletter. As the year 2014 began, the *Message* urged the congregation to renew their baptism in a special ceremony the following Sunday. The congregation responded to the baptism renewal, and felt it was a way to begin the year with new hope and celebration.

In each writing of *A Message from Mike*, he had a knack for inspiring his readers with ideas and stories. The closing might be a pertinent question to inspire thinking and to pray about.

What Does It Mean to Be United Methodist? The newsletter stated that this six-week course was designed for non-Methodists as well as new and longtime members. It was one of the studies led by Pastor Mike after Wednesday night suppers. The video-based, discussion-oriented course helped people become acquainted with the heritage, beliefs, practices, mission, and structure of the United Methodist Church. Mike led many such informative and inspirational studies for Wednesday Church Night.

In October 2014, Mike stated to the Church Council, he was “ready to start talking about the direction of St. Paul and want to hear (your) dreams for the church.” He pointed out that in six or seven years, “we could have minimal debt and need to focus on ministry to do greater things together.”

As Mike prepared for retirement in 2019, the St. Paul congregation could say that together, with his guidance, many things had been accomplished, and the church was grateful for his years of ministry.

A Year to Remember - 2018

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Matt. 5:16

The year 2018 was a Year to Remember, with remarkable mission and ministry and notable possibilities for St. Paul's future.

A Chrysalis Weekend January 13-15 was attended by three young "Caterpillars," Ainsley Emerson, Katie Stephens, and Shelby Udovich, with Matthew Siano on the leadership team. Shannon Higgins asked for prayers for these young people as they experienced the weekend retreat.

On January 20, St. John's Soup Kitchen was served by the Youth at a cost of about \$275. The newsletter announcement asked that any donations be marked "soup kitchen" and placed in the offering plate.

On January 24, the catered Wednesday Church Night dinner consisted of "Bacon and Gouda smoked chicken with salad, veggie and roll for \$9, and chicken tenders and fruit for the kids for \$5." Amy Emerson added in the newsletter article, "After enjoying your delicious dinner, you are invited to stay for a time of fellowship and study or go to the kitchen for the new ministry there!"

The "invitation" described the women's Bible study, *Armor of God* led by Sharon Brown and Wanda Treischman, and Pastor Mike's *Faith Lessons from the Holy Land*. Or, participants might work in the kitchen with the Freezer Meal Ministry team. These activities described a typical Wednesday Church Night at St. Paul.

The Freezer Meal Ministry was developed by Angie Dougan. "St. Paul is home to several ministries," Angie said. "This one centers on making freezer meals for those in need, or for a busy family. RSVP by Monday morning if you'd like to join us, or if you know of someone who could use a home-cooked meal."

A Message from Mike in February affirmed that the Season of Lent is the time to prepare for Easter. "We are invited to discipline our lives through sacrifice and prayer so that we can reflect the love He has shown us, and

truly discover the meaning of Easter.” He explained that the Lenten Hunger Fund Calendar was a disciplined means to prepare every day of Lent through Scripture and suggestions for saving a few pennies, nickels, dimes or quarters, etc., for World Hunger. “Five cents for every towel you have in your kitchen...” etc.

Wednesday, February 14, the Promiseland Kids served a Valentine Pancake Dinner with a menu of pancakes, sausage, hash brown casserole, fruit, and dessert. The fundraiser cost only \$5 per person, payable online. The Ash Wednesday Service followed the meal in the Sanctuary.

Are You Smarter Than a Confirmation Class?!? Sharon Higgins and Amy Emerson opened with this question in the newsletter as they announced a five-week Sunday morning course on the basics of Christianity and Methodism. New ‘seeds of faith’ were planted by these two leaders and Bible teachers.

United Methodist Women’s 10th Annual Churchwide Mission Focus Day was held Saturday, February 17. Projects for a number of missions were completed. As in the past, lunch was served by the Women.

The Youth’s chocolate-covered strawberries sale and a Parent’s Night Out for Valentine’s were both tremendous successes, raising \$854.47 from the strawberries, and \$584.61 from the Night Out project. They set aside 10% of their profits to help with mission projects throughout the year.

Easter Season 2018 was a happy and busy time for Promiseland kids and KWAM. They enjoyed a Stuff It Party – stuffing plastic eggs with candy and having pizza; had a ball finding eggs at the Annual Easter Egg Hunt on March 31; enjoyed fun, interactive Sunday School lessons; and made 10 dozen decorated hard-boiled eggs for UMM to serve at St John’s Soup Kitchen.

The new Easter Cross Witness project featured the sale of Yard Crosses to be used blank side out during Lent, and on Easter morning, turned around to display to the world the words *He is Risen*. The yard display provided an easy and beautiful witness to the community.

The Youth were busy as usual during 2018 Lenten Season, with studies and activities on Sundays and Wednesdays. They joined the church

family on Movie Night to see “I Can Only Imagine”; had a Panera Bread Fundraiser; and had their Second Annual Palm Sunday Bake Sale on March 25. Rev. Shannon served a modified Seder Meal on Maundy Thursday, March 29, for the Youth and “anyone who would like to attend.”

On Easter Sunday, St. Paul’s traditional Worship Service was held. At the beginning of the Service, an empty cross was placed near the center of the altar. As the congregation entered the sanctuary, the cross was covered with fresh flowers brought by members. The barren cross came alive as each blossom was added and, when the final bloom was placed, a beautiful symbol of Easter stood, inspiring awe and decorating the Sanctuary.

After memorable Easter music performed by the Choir and Band, and the meaningful message by Pastor Mike, the congregation knew that Easter 2018 had been dedicated to the Glory of God.

The SPY mission trip to Mountain T.O.P. in July was a memorable experience for the St. Paul Youth. Preparations began in June, when lists of needs were distributed and a long list of tools required to meet T.O.P. requirements was publicized. Shannon thanked the church as “The donations have been rolling in!”

After the trip, Rev. Shannon reported, “We had a wonderful trip. Thank you for all the support and prayers offered on our behalf over the last week...Mountain T.O.P. is faith in action. We not only worked alongside the community, the whole program is designed to encourage the youth to take on leadership roles both on the worksite and back at the camp, by helping lead worship, developing prayer stations and sharing their talents.”

In September, the churchwide UMW Social Action Luncheon featured Heather Bennett of Blessed Earth Tennessee who spoke on “Creation Care, Being Good Stewards of God’s Planet.” The program focused on recycling and saving the earth.

Carol Johnson and Rebecca Estridge began a churchwide recycling program called Creation Care. The plan included having receptacles in the Fellowship Hall for collection of recyclables and called for volunteers “to transport the collection bags to a Recycling Center weekly for processing, or take the collection to their own curbside.” It was a way for the church to help conserve God’s world for future generations.

A significant occasion celebrated St. Paul's 30th year. Tracie Stephens, Fellowship Ministries/Hospitality Chair, and the committee, Amy Emerson, Wanda Trieschman, and Rebecca Estridge, called the event "30 Years of Fellowship and God's Faithfulness." T-Shirts announcing *Celebrating 30 years of family and God's faithfulness* were for sale to wear on the day of celebration.

The celebration included a country-style Picnic held on a beautiful fall day, September 30, at Lakeland City Hall Park. "First-rate, smoked BBQ" was supplied by United Methodist Men – Thomas Triescman, Pat Siano, and Dale Estridge. A dessert contest followed the meal.

After the event, Tracie gave "a huge thanks to (the committee) for months of planning and flawless execution." She congratulated the winners of the Dessert Contest: Frances Lawson – 1st Place-Pie; Tracie Stephens – 2nd Place-Sweets; Melody Wynne – 1st Place-Sweets; Kim Siano – 2nd Place-Cake; and Linda Hanley – 1st Place-Cake and the Grand Prize winner.

During Hurricane Season 2018 several storms hit the U.S. Coast, depleting UMCOR supplies for victims. The Memphis Metro District was asked "to join in an intense drive for supplies," and St. Paul answered the call, thankful to be giving rather than receiving aid.

WE DID IT! Exclaimed the Youth in September, after stripping and repainting the floor of the Youth Room and updating the bookshelves. The church was invited to, "Come by and check it out. It's looking good!"

The first hint of an exciting new ministry at St. Paul came in September. The seeds had been planted, *The Living Nativity* was sprouting, and excitement was growing. The project would take three months to complete and the results would be amazing and memorable.

A 2018 storm damaged the building at 3000 Walnut Grove Road, headquarters for United Methodist Neighborhood Centers. UMNC Key Woman Rebecca Estridge asked that, "Due to the ongoing transition of Miriam Center and Social Services to Good Shepherd on Summer Avenue, Kroger or Walmart gift cards of \$25 for Thanksgiving instead of food baskets would be accepted this year." Non-perishable food items for the Binghamton Food Pantry could be placed in the donations bin for delivery.

On November 4, St. Paul celebrated All Saints Sunday. The Lord's Supper was observed, and the "Saints" of the church family who died during 2018 were named. Mike said, "Their individual lives made a difference in the life of the church because of their commitment to Christ." They were: Nanette Shapiro, Joe Tanner, Wanda Cooper, Richard Mauney, Gwen Augustine, and Wally Wright.

On November 28, there was good news on the sale of the property on Highway 64. After about two years on the market, the sale was closed with net proceeds of \$421,938.07.

An Advent Devotional Book was put together by Angie Dougan and Amy Emerson from the Discipleship Team. Devotionals were written by St. Paul members: Mike and Cindy Morris, Amy and Ainsley Emerson, Deb Thomas, Gwen Augustine, Donna Price, Mary Harris, Pat Edwards, Norma McCarroll, Sammie Walker, Patty Rainey, Sandy Mauney, Shannon Pryor, Sharon Higgins, Carol Florow, Sharon Jordan, Will Dougan, Shelby Udovich, Tracie Stephens, and Jill Kirk.

The cover of the booklet displayed a group of lighted candles on a spray of Holly, very simple and lovely, just as were the written thoughts and words inside.

As usual, the Christmas Season was a busy one for St. Paul, with a calendar full of special celebrations and activities.

"Join Us as We Celebrate" – This invitation in the newsletter noted the events for the Season:

12/1 – Breakfast with Santa – Pancake breakfast, crafts and the "Jolly Elf"

12/3 – UMW Christmas party @ Bellevue Woods

12/5 – Wednesday Night Christmas Party, hosted by the Hospitality Team with food, games and socks gift exchange

12/7-8 – The Live Nativity at St. Paul – See the spectacular report by Bill Cummings on the next page

12/8 – UMW Christmas Cookie Sale – fill a box with cookies for \$10, proceeds benefitted missions

12/15 – Amy's Cookie & Ornament Exchange

12/16 – 9:30 “Tale of the Drowsy Shepherd” – the Children’s Christmas Play

10:30 “O Night Devine” – the Cantata by Choir and Band

12/20 – PJs and Pop-Tarts for Promiseland

12/23 – “Happy Birthday Jesus” – the Promiseland Kid’s Christmas Party

12/24 – Candlelight Christmas Eve Service and March to the Manger

12/30 – Youth Fellowship with Pizza & Caroling to the homebound

Each of these events helped make 2018 a “Year to Remember.” And many ‘seeds of ministry’ were evidenced in St. Paul’s continuing story. But as the celebrations faded and St. Paul anticipated the New Year, another event on December 31st was cause for sadness. This notice appeared in the January 9, 2019 newsletter:

Thank You Shannon Pryor

Shannon Pryor, our youth minister for the past 7 years, resigned her position effective December 31, 2018, in order to pursue other roads of ministry to which God is leading her. We have been blessed by Shannon’s passion for youth ministry and for her desire to equip and enable young people to not only learn about and understand their faith, but also how to live out that faith. Our thoughts and prayers go with her.

The Gwen Augustine Memorial Living Nativity was a spectacular event on 12/7, organized by Bill Cummings and Amy Emerson, but, as he maintained, “Directed by the hand of God.” Bill was called upon to write a report for this history, and it is reproduced here with as few edits as possible.

The Gwen Augustine Memorial Living Nativity

By Bill Cummings

In the beginning, Shannon Pryor, St. Paul’s Youth Pastor, was working with Bill Cummings to interest the Youth in design, construction, and the implementation of a Christmas display for the church. Word spread to other members of the congregation, including a very excited Gwen Augustine. Gwen’s vision was to have our Youth perform a Living Nativity! She came to Bill to offer support and even volunteered to make costumes.

Just a few days following that conversation, however, September 21, 2018, Gwen Augustine was called away to Heaven, but her idea did not die with her. As memories of Gwen were shared over the following days, word of that “final conversation” with Gwen took a life of its own, and soon, Gwen’s idea grew into a churchwide Living Nativity.

The hand of God directed the people at every step. The challenge seemed impossible! There was no time, no budget or money, no planners, actors, artists, animals, props, costumes, music, volunteers – they didn’t even have a script! They saw Gwen’s vision but not a way to put it together.

However, the beauty of people at St. Paul United Methodist Church is that where there is a need, someone always steps up to fill it! In this case, every family, every person, every group contributed. Donations poured in – a script, costumes, props, lighting, even farm animals – almost everything needed. Volunteers came forward – for planning, designing, artwork, construction, costume tailors, and even money.

One example of “filling a need: pertained to the camels. With no budget or funds, renting the animals was out of the question. Two weeks prior to the scheduled event, a telephone call was received asking if all the needed animals were available. Normally booked solid all of December, the company was offering camels at a discounted rate. Fifteen minutes later, the cost was covered by St. Paul members!

Actors and supporting roles were filled by volunteers from every age group. The Children played angels, sheep, shepherds, and even made items to give to visitors. The Youth were excellent guides and filled most of the critical acting positions. The adults were greeters, townspeople, supporting cast, and handled traffic control for parking.

Costumes were a special challenge, as almost everyone in the church accepted some part of responsibility for the presentation. Glynda Whitlow and Frances Lawson organized a work day at St. Paul with a team of women who brought sewing machines, irons, hangers, notebooks, tags and a host of other supplies. Actors were fitted for costumes, and a massive amount of work was done in one night. The costumes were altered, cleaned, pressed, tagged, catalogued and organized for the production. Everything and everyone – all the challenges came together for first night! And, it was miserable. It was wonderful. The story of Jesus’ birth done by

St. Paul members was a blessing to behold. The interaction between age groups will be a benefit for years to come. The talents that were offered made St. Paul very special: artists, writers, actors, organizers... anything and everything the church needed for being a blessing to each other and to the community, came together.

The “miserable” mentioned? Maybe dedicated and determined would better describe the people presenting the story outside in a windy, very cold, misty rain. Not a single person backed out due to the bad conditions. The show went on as if they had been doing it for years.

Only two complaints came from the many visitors who came. One suggested a drive-thru version because of the bad weather, which could also benefit visitors with limited mobility. This can be addressed in the future.

The second “complaint” is a special story of the church’s influence, and its blessing to the community. A visiting family walked through the Living Nativity, enjoyed the hot chocolate offered at the end of the tour, then left the church. They soon returned, commenting to Brad Emerson, who was in charge of traffic and parking, that they were very impressed by the people and the presentation. They had visited Nativity programs all over the Nation and said, “St. Paul’s was as good as the best (we’ve) ever seen.”

They had one issue, however, “The actors were too cold.” And, of course, Brad agreed with that observation. Then, they opened their SUV and presented 10 patio heaters, complete with full propane tanks. The heaters had just been purchased for St. Paul’s use in the program, and they wanted to help by doing something about the cold. The gift cost them over one thousand dollars! And, incidentally, they were first in line for the UMW Cookie Sale the following morning.

There were more than 250 people who came to experience the Living Nativity and afterward, many in the community went out of their way to express “thanks for the very special presentation.” Many others have said, they heard about the Nativity and were planning to visit next year.

The people of St. Paul and the giving of their time, talent and dedication – these are the best blessings of all.

The Church is the People of St. Paul, Again!