



Issue: January 2025



A Monthly Insight into St. Mark Presbyterian Church

The Messenger

Like Little Children

As I sit here in the quiet of my living room, just days before Christmas morning, shadowy visions of holiday celebrations yet to come filling my head, I find myself thinking about those who are missing from our celebrations this year. Perhaps you, too, feel the absence of a loved one who has passed, or someone who was too far away to join in the laughter and warmth. It's in moments like these that I'm reminded of the deep love we carry for one another and the hope we have in Jesus, who bridges every gap, even the distance between life and death.

At the same time, I think about the joy I will see in the faces of children during our Christmas services. Their wide-eyed wonder at the flickering candles, their laughter as they sing Christmas carols, and their excitement as they look forward to Christmas morning. These images serve as a reminder of the beauty of simple joy. Children have a way of seeing the world with a sense of hope and joy that we, as adults, sometimes struggle to find. And yet, isn't that what Jesus calls us to?

When Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (Matthew 18:4-5) He was inviting us to trust, to wonder, and to hope with the same open-hearted faith that we see in children.

As we greet the new year, I wonder what it might look like to embrace that kind of hope. To find joy not in over-the-top gestures or complicated plans but in the simple blessings of each day; the laughter of a friend, the warmth of a shared meal, the quiet assurance that God is with us.

This year, let's hold onto the love we have for those we miss, trusting that God's love surrounds them as surely as it surrounds us. Let's celebrate the joy we see in the children reminding us of God's promise to make all things new. And let's carry these truths with us: that Jesus is our Emmanuel, God with us, and that through Him, we have a hope that cannot fade.

Thank you for the love you bring to the community of St. Mark. My prayer for you is that 2025 will be a year filled with moments of wonder, visions of grace, and an ever-growing trust in the One who holds you close.

With hope,
Pastor MP

SESSION SNIPPETS

On December 9 Session and the Deacons met jointly, including the new incoming officers, as well as those completing their terms.

Those officers completing their terms were thanked for their dedication and commitment: Elders Mark Caplinger, Pat Feagan, Cay Noble, Christine Polak and Meghan Rouff (Y); Deacons Chris Brown, Paul Ke, Marilyn McMillen, Linda Smith, Carl Tenpas, and Sally Peters (Y).

The new officers will be ordained and installed during worship on January 12, 2025. They are: Elders Jen Melter, Clarice Hutchens, JoAnna Carter, Kim Michel, and Devin Melter (Y); Deacons Sherri Black, Paul Ke, Brad Kelling, Roy McBee, Mickey McKnight, Robyn Mikes, Loren Polak, and Emmersen Douglas (Y).

DECEMBER WORSHIP ATTENDANCE

	Sunday In Person	Sunday Online	Total Attendance
December 1	130	79	209
December 8	130	74	204
December 15	249	194	443
December 22	168	98	266
December 24, 4 pm	161	-	161
December 24, 7 pm	219	55	274
December 29	101	65	166



ST. MARK CHILI COOK-OFF

SAVE THE DATE!!! Our annual St. Mark Chili Cook-Off will take place on Sunday, February 2.

Who will be crowned champion? Will it be you!!! Or will you help decide the winner with your vote? Once again, we will raise funds to assist with lunch accounts at Claymont Elementary School. Pull out your favorite chili recipe and sign up to participate in this fun and tasty event!

DEACONS IN ACTION AT ST. MARK

Grief Ministry

Grief Ministry serves those who have lost loved ones. It is available for anyone at St Mark and the community. We provide support to help people through their grief journey. A 13-week program is held once a year. Our next program will begin on February 11, 2025. We just completed Grief Through the Holidays, a one-time event to help people navigate the holidays. Another program we are involved with is Blue Christmas. It is a service at St Mark to remember those loved ones we have lost.

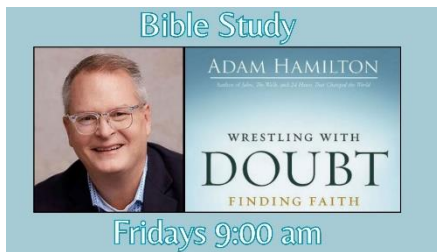
ADULT CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AT ST. MARK

MEN'S BIBLE STUDY

St. Mark Men meet in Room 102 every Tuesday at 7:30 am. We are continuing study on "What's So Amazing About Grace" by Philip Yancy. All Men are welcome and can contact Bruce Cranston for more information.

NEW MEMBER EXPLORATION CLASS

New Member Exploration Classes will be held on January 12, 19, and 26. If you would like to become a member of St. Mark or know more about the Presbyterian Church and St. Mark please contact Pastor Dave.

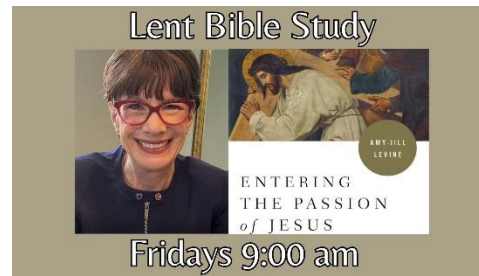


"Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith" – by Adam Hamilton"

Everyone has doubts. Where is

God when bad things happen? Does God hear our prayers? Is there a heaven? How can we know? Often, we treat such questions as the enemy of faith. But uncertainty doesn't mean our belief is lacking. Doubt can be a path to a deeper, richer encounter with God. In *Wrestling with Doubt, Finding Faith*, join best-selling author and pastor Adam Hamilton as he discusses some of our most significant sources of doubt and shows how a steady trust in God can emerge from them." Join us for 6 Fridays at 9:00 am January 10, 17, 24 and February 7, 14, and 28.

UPCOMING FRIDAY BIBLE STUDY



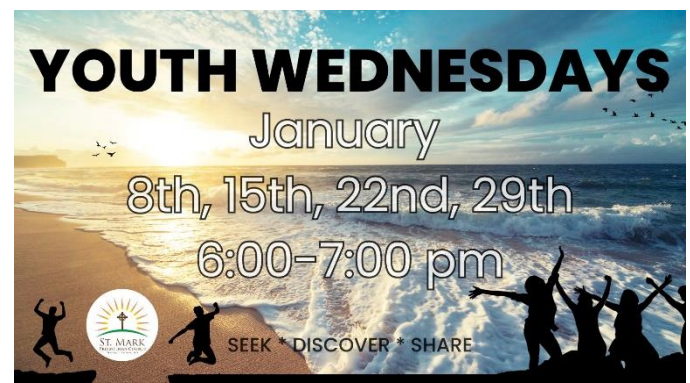
"Entering the Passion of Jesus" – by Amy-Jill Levine

Jesus' final days were full of risk. Every move he made was filled with anticipation, danger, and the potential for great loss or great reward. Jesus risked his reputation when he entered Jerusalem in a victory parade. He risked his life when he dared to teach in the Temple. His followers risked everything when they left behind their homes, or anointed him with costly perfume. We take risks as we read and re-read these stories, finding new meanings and new challenges.

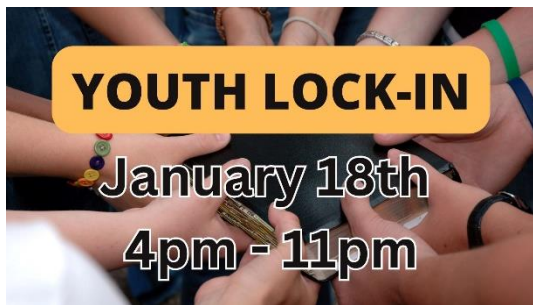
In *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week*, author, professor, and biblical scholar Amy-Jill Levine explores the biblical texts surrounding the Passion story. She shows us how the text raises ethical and spiritual questions for the reader, and how we all face risk in our Christian experience.

Join us for 6 Fridays at 9:00am March 1st, 21st, 28th, and April 4th, 11th, 18th

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUTH



Youth 6th grade – 12th. Join us for food, fun, faith, and fellowship! If you have any questions, contact Pastor MP mpanco@discoverstmark.org or call the church office.



Youth Lock-In, Saturday January 18th 4:00 pm – 11:00 pm.

Join us for food, fun, faith, and fellowship! Not sure exactly what this is going to look like, but we will have dinner, participate in a lock-in worship service, and play some fun games! Let Past MP know if you will be coming and please feel free to invite a friend! mpanco@discoverstmark.org

Youth Music Ensemble

Upcoming Rehearsals
 11:15am-12:15pm
 January 5th and 12th
 February 9th and 23rd
 March 2nd and 23rd
 Play in worship March 30th

Contact Pastor MP
mpanco@discoverstmark.org

Trivia Night
Saturday, March 8
 2025 Youth Mission Trip
 Fundraiser

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday school for children PreK – 5th grade takes place during Sunday worship, immediately following the Children's Message.

NURSERY

Nursery Care, for ages 0 - 2yrs, is available Sunday mornings from 8:30 – 11:00 am.

WEDNESDAY EVENING ACTIVITIES

PreK Choir – 5:00 – 5:25 pm
 Elementary Choir – 5:30 – 6:30 pm



THANK YOU, ST. MARK!

Children's Ministries would like to thank all who were involved in our



December Advent Bags, Children's and Youth Christmas Program & our Santa Breakfast! Our hearts are full and thankful for the support of our beautiful church family during 2024. We are excited about the new year and the many opportunities to serve our families this year!
 Latisha Gilliland

January 6 will be the first CM Committee meeting and the first VBS meeting to discuss our choice for July's Vacation Bible School!

Wednesday night activities for Pre-K and Elementary students between the ages of 3 & 5th grade begin on January 15! We will kick off the event with a party for all from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. Don't miss this opportunity to connect with friends and be involved in activities without any screen time! Contact lgilliland@discoverstmark.org for more information.

Saints and Siblings will be meeting on January 26 for lunch immediately after the morning service followed by bowling at West County Lanes! Don't miss this January tradition for our young families with children!

"Rain or Shine - Trusting God in Every Season" will be our theme for Sunday School hour during the month of January. Please join us immediately after the Children's sermon every Sunday morning in the Fellowship Hall!

MISSION AT ST. MARK

JANUARY FOOD PANTRY CRITICAL NEEDS

- Canned Pasta with Meat
- Canned Protein –
Sardines, Tuna, Chicken
- Canned Spinach and
Greens
- Peanut Butter
- Toilet Paper



All year long, we collect food and hygiene items for Circle of Concern and Isaiah 58 Ministries.

*Non-food products such as toilet paper cannot be purchased with food stamps.



WHAT MAKES A GOOD WINTER COAT?

WARMTH: a warm coat is functional in freezing temperatures, “puffers” preferred

LARGER: larger sizes leave room for layering

CLOSURE: a secure zipper or sturdy buttons

CLEAN: gives a warm welcome to its new owner

HOOD: bonus! - helps keep heat from escaping

New and gently used clean winter coats and clothing are **STILL** needed for men, women, and kids, all sizes, and styles. Our mission partners will ensure someone in need receives your gift of warmth!

Please place your donations in the bins in the office foyer.

LET US RESOLVE TO RECYCLE TOGETHER IN 2025 ...

plastic caps and lids **STILL** needed!

Plastic in our world is not going away anytime soon, so let's keep it out of the landfill and turn it into a new picnic table for Mound Ridge!



We need:

- caps/lids of all types from food grade containers and household items up to 8” in diameter
- look for the recycle symbol with number 2, 4, or 5

Please drop off your caps and lids in the collection bin near the Youth table in the Narthex.

EQUAL EXCHANGE, JANUARY 12

When we serve Equal Exchange coffee at St Mark or sell it after services



or for the holidays, we are making a strong statement about our values. We are proclaiming that our congregation believes that it's vital to keep small farmers on the land providing food for their families and having some economic control over their lives; that it's important to work with indigenous producers and women; that sustainable agricultural methods are a vital way to address climate change.

Our congregation is proud to serve a brew that is both delicious and reflects our values of social justice. By choosing fairly traded coffee, you are supporting a whole separate ethical supply chain—not huge corporations. Enjoy it at church, buy some to take home, share it with friends.

Cash, Credit, Debit, Digital Wallet Payments Accepted

MISSION COMMITTEE: 2024 ... WOW WHAT A YEAR!

As is tradition, a recap of the prior year's mission related activity will be presented during a January worship service and included in the annual report. THANK YOU for your steadfast and generous support of "all things mission related" at St. Mark. Over \$100,000 in total was raised and donated to local and international mission partners including Special Offerings, and the general mission funds of our presbytery and denomination. Non-monetary donations included food and personal care product donations of over 6,000 pounds to Circle of Concern and Isaiah 58; coats, clothing, underwear, and holiday gifts to Isaiah 58; Christmas gifts to Presbyterian Children's Home and Services, 61 Christmas shoe boxes were sent to Spirit Lake; just to highlight a few! In addition, St. Mark members were active volunteers throughout the year at Circle of Concern, Isaiah 58, Lafayette Industries, Mound Ridge, Peace Meal, the Rise Against Hunger meal pack, an adult mission trip, promoting Equal Exchange products, Christmas Alternatives, and the "all hands-on deck" (literally!) ABC Sale.

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN

BOOK CLUB

Book club will meet Wednesday, January 22, at 9:30 am. There is an option to participate virtually as well as in person. Please contact Judy Richardson for a Zoom invite to participate virtually.



Save the Date!
28th Annual St. Mark
Women's Retreat
February 21-22, 2025

RENEW
RESTORE
REFRESH

*Be renewed in the spirit of your mind.
Ephesians 4:23*

Something new is coming your way very soon. The St. Mark's 28th annual Women's Retreat...**Relax, Refresh, Renew**...will take place at St. Mark on February 21 and 22. Gathering at St. Mark provides an easy-to-get-to location for you to attend the Retreat with more flexibility to be part of it...Friday only, Saturday only, both or even just for a couple of hours. And, you can sleep in your own bed with your own pillow.

The schedule for the retreat will include some traditional activities, excellent food and snacks, time for meditation and reflection, sharing with and caring for others. Our very own Pastor MP Panco will lead the retreat study and worship. As the new year opens I hope you will put retreat on your calendar. "Official registration" will start January 20. There is now a sign-up sheet to tell the Planning Committee you are interested in participating. More information will be available in the coming weeks. If you have any questions, please contact Sharon Tharp or Mary Beth Powell.