

## Good vs. Bad



ON THE COVER: Denny Reichenbacher and Anke Maass' Christmas village

### journey

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#### **MISSION**

St. Paul Lutheran Church is a faith community, shaped around five core values: radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith formation, courageous service, extravagant generosity.

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#### **POSTMASTER**

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Just about every evening at our house, you can find our 4-year-old and one of his parents sitting in his room reading a stack of books. It's been our bedtime routine since he was old enough to sit up. On one particular evening a few weeks ago, Micah and I happened to be reading a library book he'd picked out a few days before. It followed the adventures of a group of superheroes, all of them using their superpowers to save the day.

As we were reading, I noticed Micah closely studying the pictures. After a while, he pointed and asked, "I know that's Spiderman and this guy is Captain America, but... what about this guy over here? Is he a good guy or a bad guy?"

For a brief moment, I was caught off guard. I understood the simplicity of the question, but I wasn't quite sure how to answer it. Of course, so much of children's play is focused on "good vs. bad." It's nothing new. As far back as the three little pigs vs. the "big, bad wolf." Or Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. Harry Potter going head-tohead with Lord Voldemort. Or Peter Pan taking on the mischievous Captain Hook. From the earliest of ages, we're taught to separate people into two groups: good or bad. Everyone, it seems, is either one or the other.

That evening, as Micah made sense of the story by innocently attempting to define who was good and who was bad, I found myself struck by the complexity of how to answer. Yes, in this make-believe story, there are good guys and bad guys. There are the ones you want to emulate and cheer for... and others you're supposed to root against.

But in real life, I'm not so sure I want to encourage anyone of any age to see the world in such a dichotomy. When we boil people down to being "bad," what we're doing is missing an opportunity to get to know a fellow child of God.

Greg Boyle, an author and Jesuit priest, once wrote that his whole life and work is founded on two unwavering principles: "(1) Everyone is unshakably good (no exceptions) and (2) We belong to each other." Can you imagine what our world, our country, our communities might look like if everyone lived by such a perspective?

Could we imagine signing on to the belief that there's no such thing as bad people? Sure, we've all met people who are broken, struggling, desperate, or otherwise unwell. There are people who are not whole. Ones who are trau-



matized or suffering in mind, body, or spirit. But, as Boyle puts it, "I've never met anyone evil... and neither have you." There's no such thing as bad people. Just those in need of more love, support, or care.

In a season when we're eager to sing "Joy to the world" and "Peace on earth, good will to all," we have to believe that all people are worthy of such things. That all deserve peace, hope, and belonging.

Late in the tenure of Pope Francis, he challenged people to move "toward an ever wider WE." When we're constantly concerned with who fits into what category or what demographics make people different than someone else, then we'll always find a reason to exclude some or disregard others.

Yes, we can love our cartoon villains or our mighty superheroes. But when it comes to real life, I hope one day we might move away from good vs. bad or us vs. them. Maybe someday it could be nobody vs. anybody.

KATY WARREN associate pastor

# lives here

## St. Paul people: Have you pledged?

#### 2025 Offerings

Our offerings are critically important for the financial health of our congregation. Every offering we make adds to the goodness of what we can accomplish. Thanks for making St. Paul a priority in your life.

#### **Pledging for 2026**

The St. Paul expectation is that every member make a financial pledge commitment a faith promise of what you believe you can give to support the ministry of the congregation. Please make every effort to turn in your pledge card for 2026. Extra cards are available



at church. Or, save time by making your pledge electronically at stpaulqc.org/pledge or by scanning the QR code. Online pledges are completely confidential.

#### **Year-end giving**

You should have recently received a statement of your giving through October 31. To be credited to 2025 giving statements, all offerings must be received in the offering baskets, in the lock box at the receptionist desk area of the main office, or postmarked/initiated online by Wednesday, Dec. 31. Any gifts received after these dates will be included on 2026 giving statements.

#### **Gratitude**

Thank you for your gifts of gratitude to St. Paul all year long. The Christ-centered mission and ministries of St. Paul depend entirely on the giving and pledges of every single household. Our pledged giving for 2026 makes possible St. Paul's expanding mission character, staffing, and ministry vision. Thank you for your generosity.

Have a question about pledging or stewardship? Contact Tony Runkle, giving ministry coordinator, 563-326-3547, tony@stpaulqc.org.

#### JOY: Jesus, Others, and You!

"We've called the Quad Cities home for nearly 40 years (Sam from central Iowa, Dee from eastern Nebraska). After retiring from the grocery industry and office administration, we're blessed to share our days with our son and daughter-inlaw, two grandsons, and our four-legged companion, Teddy.

When we hear the word "Joy," we think of it as an acronym: Jesus, Others, and You. This guides how we try to live each day.

Joy fills our lives through family, friendships, and our St. Paul community—the worship, beautiful music, and fellowship. We're especially excited about expecting our first greatgranddaughter on Christmas Eve! Daily joys include morning coffee together, devotions, sinking a long putt, tending our garden, and working on jigsaw puzzles.

Volunteering has brought unexpected joy into our lives. Recently, we've helped with the Tapestry Farms food program for refugee families and Soil Stewards—both fill our hearts deeply. We also find joy in simple gifts: the magnificent colors of fall hardwoods, a songbird's melody in spring, eagles soaring at Credit Island, or a warm story in the morning paper.

We cultivate joy by staying positive, expressing gratitude for our blessings, building new relationships, and finding more opportunities to volunteer. Whether in the big moments or ordinary days, joy surrounds us when we remain open to seeing it." — Sam & Deanna Gross



# december

#### Faith formation transitions and updates

St. Paul is delighted to welcome St. Paul member Katie Hanson to the staff as the interim adult education coordinator. Katie is an associate professor of English and Edu-

cation at Augustana College. In her role at St. Paul, she will coordinate and host weekly Chapel Forum sessions, helping St. Paul live out the core value of intentional faith formation.

Beginning in January, Mark Niethammer takes over leadership of the weekly Heart|Soul|Mind Bible study. December's sessions are led by Maddy Tyler with discussions focused on Revelation. More information on weekly chapel forum topics and the winter 2026 Heart|Soul|Mind Bible study focus is forthcoming.

Please note that Heart|Soul|Mind will return to its previous schedule, meeting on Thursdays at 9:30 a.m. only. For those with



Katie Hanson

daytime commitments, we encourage you to join the Wednesday evening Bible study at 6 p.m., which explores the upcoming weekend's readings. Questions? Contact: Mark Niethammer, mark@stpaulqc.org.

#### **Upcoming concerts: Tidings of comfort & joy**

Talented ensembles and acclaimed choral performances. Music events are a gift from St. Paul to the community, welcoming area music lovers.

▶ A Nova Christmas | Saturday, Dec. 13, 7:30 p.m.

The Nova Singers' Christmas concert is an annual tradition at St. Paul. The sanctuary blooms with songs of the season, thanks to this nationally-known vocal ensemble. Tickets available at **novasingers.com** and at the door.

▶ QCSO Holiday Brass Concert | Sunday, Dec. 14, 3 p.m.

Ring in the holiday season with the Quad City Symphony Orchestra brass and percussion sections and St. Paul organist Chris Nelson. The concert includes uplifting selections of classical and holiday favorites. Tickets are available online at **qcso.org**.

▶ Big River Brass Band Holiday Concert | Sunday, Dec. 21, 3 p.m.

Join the Big River Brass Band for an afternoon of your favorite holiday classics, featuring St. Paul organist Chris Nelson. The concert is free (donations accepted).

▶ Choirs for Christmas | Dec. 21-25, various times

Choirs and ensembles from all across the Quad Cities recorded in the St. Paul Sanctuary for a KWQC program called *Choirs for Christmas* to air the week of Christmas.



# Humble Dwellings helpers needed

Help create a home for the holidays! Volunteers are needed for Humble Dwellings on Sunday, Dec. 7, 1-3:30 p.m. Transform a living space into a warm and inviting home using gently-used furniture and household items for someone in need in our community.

Sign up at **stpaulqc.org/signups**. Contact Katy Warren, **katy@stpaulqc.org**.

# Need a listening ear this holiday season?

If you're experiencing overwhelm, holiday fatigue, or simply need someone to talk to, staff counselor Steve Kalber is here to help. Steve offers a safe, confidential space to process whatever you're going through during this busy time of year. His services are completely free to the St. Paul community. Contact Steve at 563-326-3547 or steve@stpaulqc.org.

#### **Theology Pub continues in December**

Word has it that some of the best theology has been fashioned over tables loaded with good food and drink, and an atmosphere of strong friendship. On the second Thursday of the month (Dec. 11) at 6 p.m. at Mac's Tavern (316 W. 3rd Street, Davenport) enjoy a rich mix of people and perspective, as we informally explore the many ways in which our faith intersects with our lives and the world. Pastor Maddy Tyler will lead the conversation in December. Contact: Maddy Tyler, maddytyler@stpaulqc.org.

#### **Coats for Madison Elementary**

It's a quiet ministry that works behind the scenes: gathering coats and cold weather items to keep kids at Madison Elementary School warm so they can learn. This cozy ministry is not only continuing—it's thriving.

The mission continues to be supported by St. Paul's mission giving budget and the generous donations of individuals who understand the need.

Madison Elementary serves families facing significant financial challenges, and the need remains as pressing as ever. Children sometimes arrive at school without proper winter clothing, or families who have moved or faced difficult circumstances find themselves without adequate resources.

▶ **How You Can Help:** As you clean out closets this winter season, consider donating gently used coats, socks, gloves, hats, and pants to help keep local children warm. Items can be dropped off at St. Paul's main office, earmarked for Sue Grove and Madison Elementary. Your donation becomes part of our ongoing prayer for the children in our community.

#### The Book Corner shines for Advent

The St. Paul bookstore glows with the season. Most gifts come from organizations commited to global justice and fair trade. Come and see! You'll find Advent calendars and devotional booklets for all ages. In addition to Sunday mornings, the Book Corner has expanded its hours for the season to include Wednesdays, 5:30-7 p.m., and Saturdays, 4:30-6 p.m., and some special events.

The St. Paul Book Corner has new selections for adults and children on the shelves. Every book is carefully selected by St. Paul pastors, staff, and avid St. Paul readers. Books are priced below retail, without sales tax. Recommendations include:

- More Than Words by Roz Maclean
- *The Great River* by Boyce Upholt
- Strong Roots by Olia Hercules
- Tiger Daughter by Rebecca Lim











Let the glories of song and an intergenerational gathering of St. Paul choirs carry you into the beauty of the Advent season at the 9 a.m. worship service. From preschool choristers to adults, Choral Advent Sunday is a joyful tradition for preparing the way for Jesus' birth and a magnificent day to invite others into our church home. Communion will not be served at this service.

#### Blue Christmas Worship Monday, Dec. 22, 6 p.m.

This quiet service of longing and hope is designed for those who don't feel like celebrating. During the holidays, grief, illness, and loneliness can be magnified. Blue Christmas acknowledges pain and longing, while offering hope and comfort for the broken-hearted. Counselors are available at the reception following the service.





#### **Children's Christmas Pageant**

The St. Paul congregation is warmly invited to this year's Christmas pageant on Sunday, Dec. 14, 10:15 a.m. in the Sanctuary. *I Was There: Stories from the First Christmas* weaves together Christmas carols with a fresh reimagining of the nativity story.

Children of St. Paul, ages 4 through grade 6, bring this meaningful presentation to life. Don't miss this special opportunity to celebrate the season and experience the Christmas story in a whole new way! Contact: Abbey Cathelyn, **abbey@stpaulqc.org**.

#### **Youth Advent Events**

- ▶ **Shopping for Empowering Abilities:** On Sunday, Dec. 7, at 5:30 p.m., high schoolers gather at Target to shop for Christmas gifts for residents of Empowering Abilities (formerly the Handicapped Development Center). Bring \$5-\$10 to share if able. Students gather at church afterward at 6:30 p.m. to wrap gifts and worship through music, camp style. Contact: Ellie Lindmark, **ellie@stpaulqc.org**.
- ▶ Christmas Party & Caroling: On Sunday, Dec. 14, high schoolers meet at church at 4:30 p.m. for a pizza party and white elephant gift exchange. Following the Christmas party, students in grades 6-12, along with the St. Paul community, are invited to come together for an evening of Christmas caroling around the community from 6-8 p.m. Sign up online at stpaulqc.org/signups. Contact: Ellie Lindmark, ellie@stpaulqc.org.
- ▶ **Gingerbread House Building:** High school youth gather on Sunday, Dec. 21, 6:30 p.m. to create Bible-story inspired gingerbread houses. Bring candy to share and a spirit for friendly competition. Contact: Ellie Lindmark, ellie@stpaulqc.org.



# Christmos Eve

#### Wednesday, Dec. 24

Come celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### 12 p.m. | Holy Communion & Carols

All the glory of Christmas Eve at noontime. Scripture and hymns tell the story of this holy night. *Pastor Sara Olson-Smith preaching*.

#### 2 p.m. | Holy Communion & Carols

All the glory of Christmas Eve in an early-afternoon option. Scripture and hymns tell the story of this holy night. *Pastor Sara Olson-Smith preaching*.

#### 4 p.m. | A Children's Christmas Eve

A service focused toward children, with traditional carols and a lively children's message. Children and youth choirs sing. Kids are invited to play a short Christmas piece on the piano as part of the pre-service music. Interested in playing? Sign up at **stpaulqc.org/signups**.

#### 6 p.m. | Holy Communion with Open Spirit

The Open Spirit ensemble leads Christmas singing with a contemporary flair. *Pastor Mark Niethammer preaching.* 

#### 8 p.m. | A Service of Lessons & Carols

Music by the Chorale with candlelight. Pastor Mark Niethammer preaching.

#### 10 p.m. | Candlelight Holy Communion

The evening concludes with *Silent Night*, strings, a darkened Sanctuary, and worshipers' candles. *Pastor Mark Niethammer preaching*.

#### **Poinsettias for Christmas**

Christmas poinsettias decorate the Sanctuary as Christmas approaches. If you'd like to donate a plant in memory or in honor of a loved one, orders may be placed in the church office or by mail no later than Sunday, Dec. 7. The cost for each plant is \$10. Forms are available at the Info Center. Please complete the form and drop it with payment attached in the lock box marked by a poinsettia across from the receptionist's desk. Contact: MacKenzie Griffin, mackenzie@stpaulqc.org.

# Decorate a community Christmas Tree

Dec. 6 & 7 and Dec. 13 & 14

All are invited to decorate a special ornament to hang on our community Christmas tree! Bring your creativity and personal touch to help make this year's tree truly unique. Located in the Elevator Commons, a table will be set up with supplies to create your own ornament. Come share in the festive fun!

This holiday season, give the gift of warmth by donating hats and gloves to those who need them. A donation box is located under the community Christmas tree.



**Holy Communion** is served at the 12, 2, 6, and 10 p.m. services on Christmas Eve.

**Childcare:** The nursing moms' room is open with toys and childcare supplies. Childcare staff have the day off. Children are always welcome in worship.

**Christmas Eve parking:** In addition to St. Paul lots & side streets, Madison School lots across Brady Street are available. Observe extra care when crossing Brady Street. A St. Paul shuttle will be making the rounds to help transport folks back and forth.

#### Open to being a Christmas greeter?

Welcoming people into the warmth of St. Paul on Christmas Eve is a joyous experience. Would you be willing to spread some Christmas joy before worship? Contact Jennifer Garvey, 563-326-3547, jennifer@stpaulqc.org.

# **Building wonder**

Two St. Paul families carefully craft traditions that bring joy to the holiday season.

#### A village takes shape

Denny Reichenbacher and Anke Maass

The transformation began a little before Halloween this year, when Denny Reichenbacher started to plan. After 40 dedicated hours, Denny and his wife Anke's living room has turned into something magical: a three-tiered Christmas village with 148 miniature characters populating 53 intricately detailed buildings surrounded by 106 trees and bushes.

The village's origin story is as charming as the display itself. When Denny owned Kile's Hallmark and Gifts in Duck Creek Plaza, the store featured an impressive collection of Department 56 houses. These ceramic buildings were popular collectibles featuring miniature buildings, often utilized as holiday or seasonal decorations. Damaged pieces that suppliers didn't want returned became Denny's restoration projects.

"I know how to use glue," Denny said with characteristic humor, giving broken pieces a second chance at life.

After they married in 2018, Anke contributed her own Alpine Village pieces to Denny's collection, and the display grew. Now, Anke and Denny scour resale and antique shops for pieces to add to the village.

"Some years have brought significant redesigns like the most recent being changing the direction of the houses. All houses now face outward instead of toward the center," Denny said. "It requires careful engineering—hiding cords beneath cotton snow layered with faux flakes on a styrofoam base.""

The patience required amazes Anke, who watches her partner work with fastidous care, adding elaborate details like a garage sale, bales of hay, rocky cliffs, even using a pencil to draw tiny motorcycle tracks on the snow dusted roads, and fighting with the waterfall that still hasn't cooperated despite trial and error with construction paper, blue saran wrap, and rocks.

Among the buildings glowing with warm light, Anke's favorite is Oma's Bakery.



"Oma's Bakery is special to me because my mom was called 'Oma' in our family (German for grandmother) and she was a wonderful baker. It reminds me of her," Anke said. "Many pieces feature German writing—the hotel, the toy store—reflecting my upbringing and the German traditions we hold dear."

They're all about building holiday traditions with their families. Anke leans











into her German heritage with Germaninspired decorations.

You never know what may become a tradition. Sometimes the most meaningful ones begin with broken pieces growing into something whole—a reminder that care transforms everything.

#### **Tinsel and tradition**

The Evans family

The Evans family's connection to the Festival of Trees runs deep—from Steve's parents attending the very first event when Cary Grant came to town forty years ago, to the Evans girls dancing on the performance stage, and the family navigating giant balloon characters through downtown parade streets.

Rachel's sister Karly, who now lives in Nashville, served on the Festival of Trees committee and recruited Rachel and Steve as volunteers years ago. It wasn't until the two saw a greater need that they began designing.

"When the festival returned after its COVID hiatus, we wanted to be part of bringing the festival back to its past glory. We wanted to get the festival back on track and be part of the solution. What this organization gives to the arts in this community is incredible and we wanted to help regrow it," Steve said. "We started entering a tree as designers. These trees are on display throughout the festival and guests can

bid on and buy the trees. The money raised supports the mission of Quad City Arts."

Steve brought creativity and determination; Rachel, her love of crafts and an artist's eye. A big box of yard sticks sitting in the garage brought inspiration and possibility. The family fashioned them into a tree that was positively illuminating...starting with 500 lights, then 600, and ending up with 1,000 lights on the tree.

"We throw tree ideas around throughout the year. I start getting texts from my dad in December," Rachel said. "My mom, Michelle, can't stop thinking about the next year's design any more than we can."

Past years brought innovations: a plexiglass tree lit from within, their most difficult; a lattice work tree using Habitat ReStore pieces for easy transport; an advent calendar tree with individually wrapped boxes containing daily surprises and instructions for reusing and recycling on the back, a passion of Rachel's.

This year, for the festival's "Tinsel and Tradition" theme, the Evans family is doing something different: a traditional tree adorned with about 350 Hallmark ornaments, collected throughout the past yeartheir first conventional Christmas tree. In addition to the annual tree tradition, Rachel also submits a wreath design. This year's design uses paper quilling techniques she learned at the Figge Art Museum.

For the Evans family, the Festival of

Trees isn't just about raising money for Quad City Arts, though over 40 years the event has generated more than \$8 million for local arts. It's about the hours spent side by side, the creative problem-solving, the shared vision of turning ordinary materials into something extraordinary. It's about knowing when to set the saw down and step back, and when to add just one, or two, or maybe three more strands of lights.



# new members



Nataly Bahns is a student at Trinity College of Nursing and works as a vet assistant at Creekside Hospital. She enjoys baking, being outside, and spending time with friends and family. The community is what attracted her to St. Paul.



Deborah Dayman works as an administrative assistant with the Pleasant Valley School District. She enjoys hiking, music, reading, and quilting. The learning, music, and community outreach are what attracted her to St. Paul.



**Mike Hoenig** is a sports fan, especially of the St. Louis Cardinals, and likes to walk and read. He's passionate about music, travel, and good conversations.



from the Arsenal and Bobbi from a range of jobs. They like to fish, paint, and walk. They care a lot about their family and friends.



Liv Carrow & Chuck Walters are parents to Eleanor and Charlie. Liv works as a clinical manager at Top of the World Ranch. Chuck works at the Rock Island Arsenal. The inclusivity, music, and kids programming are what brought them to St. Paul.



Karen Jorgensen & Cindy Waugh, her mother, join St. Paul together. Karen works in finance at SSAB steel manufacturers. Cindy is passionate about mental health and animal welfare. The inclusivity of the church is what brought them to St. Paul.



David & Nicole Kelso have four children: Natalie, Danielle, Alex, and Bennett. David is an active duty officer at the Rock Island Arsenal. Nicole manages the homefront. The opportunities to grow and live out their faith is what drew them to St. Paul.



**Douglas Kuhl** is a patrol officer with Per-Mar Security. He likes to watch sports and spend time with friends and family. He enjoys Saturday night worship at St. Paul.



Sandy & Doug Powell join with their daughter, Samantha. Doug is a fleet manager with Westmore Carriers. Sandy is a regional director of operations with the Quad City Times. Samantha enjoys reading, crafting, and being with her family - and she's a quadruplet!



Alex Ryser & Morgan Griffin-Ryser are parents to Jack and Maggie. Alex is a teacher at John Deere Middle School. Morgan works for the Girl Scouts of America. The accepting congregation is what attracted them to St. Paul.



Joel & Allison Ryser are both retired from the Moline School District. Joel now runs Hot Glass in Davenport making art. They appreciate that St. Paul is welcoming and open to all. They are the parents of Alex Ryser and Abby Schoeck.



Mitchell Sand & Abby Schoeck are engaged. Mitchell is a print manager with OneStep. Abby works as a nurse practitioner with Unity-Point and is mom to Hudson.



**Dawn Taghon** is an administrative assistant with Pleasant Valley Schools. She's married to Mark and enjoys reading and biking. She finds St. Paul to be welcoming to all.



Cindy & Steve Schrock are retired – Steve from insurance and Cindy as a secretary at Black Hawk College. They care a lot about veterans affairs. St. Paul is Cindy's home church and they are back after a number of years away.



Mike & Joann Vinzenz (not pictured) were drawn by the warmth and welcome to St. Paul. Joann is a retired nurse and enjoys sewing and volunteering. Mike is a retired agribusiness recruiter and likes to ride his motorcycle.

#### A word from St. Paul's council treasurer:

At St. Paul, extravagant generosity isn't just one of our core values. We strive to live it each day, working to show God's love in our lives. We can only do so thanks to the continued support of each of you. Our \$3.1 million budget this year has enabled important mission outreach activities, supported beautiful worship experiences each week, and empowered our remarkable staff. Your generosity has made this possible. Thank you for your continued faithful giving as we work to finish the year strong. With your support, our St. Paul community can continue shining God's love to all! — Jenny Gosse

## **WORSHIP**

at St. Paul

#### December 6 & 7

Second Sunday of Advent Choral Advent, 9 a.m. worship

#### **Preaching:**

All Services: Katy Warren

**Liturgical tradition:** 

5pm/8 & 9am

**Contemporary Open Spirit:** 

11:15am

#### December 13 & 14

Third Sunday of Advent

#### **Preaching:**

All Services: Mark Niethammer

**Liturgical tradition:** 

5pm/8 & 9am

**Contemporary Open Spirit:** 

11:15am

#### December 20 & 21

Fourth Sunday of Advent

#### **Preaching:**

All Services: Katy Warren

**Liturgical tradition:** 

5pm/8 & 9am

**Contemporary Open Spirit:** 

11:15am

#### December 24 (Wed.)

Christmas Eve

See page 7 for details

#### ➤ December 27 & 28

First Sunday after Christmas

#### **Preaching:**

All services: Maddy Tyler

**Liturgical tradition:** 

5pm/8 & 9am

**Contemporary Open Spirit:** 

11:15am



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