JULY 2026
The magazine of St. Paul Lutheran Church

journey

The things we carry

ON THE COVER:
Knox Needham at Vacation Bible School

The day after Christmas was laundry day. I emptied my pockets, tossing forgotten items onto the dryer. Once I started the machine, I laughed at the pile of peppermint candy, two cough drop wrappers, a packet of herbal tea, a tiny Jesus figurine, a folded-up bulletin, and a communion wafer.

Looking back, however, these things tossed aside became more than just forgotten items. Each of them was a glimpse of what St. Paul means for so many people. And what St. Paul has been for me.

The candy and tiny Jesus figurine, both of which were slipped into my hand between services, were examples of the quiet, unfailing generosity I experienced every day. The cough drop wrappers and tea, even as symbols of my own fragility, reminded me of the care for me as my voice recovered from the flu. The bulletin and wafer brought me back to all those weekends we worshipped together, praising God and nourished by Christ's presence in bread and wine.

The little things matter.

This was the biggest lesson I experienced at St. Paul. We are familiar with the extraordinary stories about God, who created the cosmos and humankind, who sent Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, who fed the hungry, healed the sick, and raised the dead. The same God who came into the world, died on the Cross, and rose again that first Easter morning. These are incredible, profound stories that speak of God's unconditional love for us.

My favorite story, however, is about the two men on their way to Emmaus on that first Easter. Together, they process their grief from Good Friday while wrapping their heads around this strange rumor that Jesus was alive again. A third man joins them. We know that it's Jesus, but the men do not. Along the way, Jesus asks why they won't trust the scriptures that promises his resurrection. Later, Jesus joins them for dinner. Even in their doubts, Jesus reaches for the bread, gives thanks, and breaks it. Suddenly, the two men realized who it was among them. They ran as fast as they could, because, according to Luke, Jesus "was made known to them by the breaking of the bread." (Luke 24:35)

For anyone else, breaking bread would've been an everyday, forgettable interaction. Bread was customary at meals and needed to be torn apart to be shared with others.

But this is how the Risen Jesus was revealed, not through knowledge of scripture, but through an everyday, forgettable action that, instead, became a holy shared encounter of the living God.

In fact, Jesus is revealed to us through little, seemingly forgettable ways. I heard once that it's the little things that we remember most about a person or a community. And this is true for St. Paul.

I'll remember the collage of smiles that stepped forward, whether for bread or for a blessing, to hear the promise of God's grace for them during communion. Or the quiet moments in baptism when the waters of God's love are poured on a child's head. Then, there is that melody from a youth's favorite song that I'll hum without thinking twice. I'll remember the flyers of music events left in my mailbox and the curiosity of God's love expressed through questions and serving others.

There are goodbyes ahead. Until then, I'll just keep putting every little thing about St. Paul in my pocket to bring along with me to wherever I am headed — every story, laugh, handshake and hug, every expression of kindness you shared with me – because these seemingly little, forgettable moments matter. They tell the story of God moving among you and in our world. There is still so much to say, but for now, thank you for all your love and encouragement, your prayers and your presence, and your unfailing kindness to me.

MADDY TYLER
pastor in residency

journey

JULY 2026
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EDITOR Jessica Taylor

DESIGNER Lauren Brown

ADDRESS
St. Paul Lutheran Church
2136 Brady Street,
Davenport, Iowa 52803

CONTACT
Email journey@stpaulqc.org
Phone 563.326.3547

MISSION
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SUMMER FUN FOR KIDS

Big beautiful world

School may be out, but summer is a perfect time to keep curiosity alive and faith growing. St. Paul children's ministries has put together hands-on activities for kids and families to enjoy together during the summer months. Think of it as a season-long invitation to slow down, go outside, and pay attention to the world God made.

Bingo Cards & Nature Crafts

Summer Bingo

Pick up a bingo card and challenge your family to check off activities throughout the summer. Complete your bingo card by doing five activities in a row and return the card to St. Paul. Cards are available at the church Info Center or scan the QR code.

Nature Exploration Art Projects

Four projects are offered, from a clay nature bowl to textured leaf rubbings, a nature sketch journal, and a nature hunt checklist. Each one starts with a walk outside. The supplies are basic, and the results are beautiful. Completed art projects will be displayed at St. Paul for Startup Sunday, Sept. 13.

Return children's completed bingo cards and nature art by the end of August to the St. Paul front office during the week or the Info Center on Sundays to receive a small takeaway. For more summer projects and weekly kids and youth news during the school year, reach out to **info@stpaulqc.org**.

New for Sunday learning: Godly Play

This fall, St. Paul children's ministries launches Godly Play, a curriculum rooted in more than four decades of research, shaping faith formation in churches across the country.

Director of children's ministries Abbey Cathelyn has been working with the curriculum since 2021 and completed the Godly Play Core Training in 2024.

"Godly Play is a unique approach that invites children to explore Bible stories through storytelling, wonder, and play," Abbey said. "Rather than focusing on memorizing facts or finding the 'right' answers, Godly Play encourages children to engage with Scripture in a personal and meaningful way."

A typical session looks different from what many families might expect. A trained storyteller shares a Bible story using visual materials. Afterward, children are invited to wonder through open-ended questions: "I wonder which part of the story you liked best?" or "I wonder where you are in this story?" There are no wrong answers. Children then respond creatively through art, building, writing, or working with story materials.

Sunday morning learning resumes Sunday, Sept. 13 and runs each Sunday, 10:15-11 a.m. The classroom journey begins at age 3. Families with children are encouraged to check it out — it's a wonderful way for kids to engage with faith in a whole new way. Middle-schoolers meet at the same time for 678 Daybreak.

If you're looking for a meaningful way to get involved, both high school and adult volunteers are needed to make learning happen. No experience necessary — just a love for littles and a willingness to wonder alongside them. To get involved or learn more, contact Abbey Cathelyn, **abbey@stpaulqc.org**.

july HAPPENINGS

Summer adult learning: Beyond the Story Bible

Wednesdays in July, 12 noon – 1 p.m., Library Commons

How did you first come to know the stories of the Bible? For many of us, it was through a children's Bible — colorful, simplified, and full of wonder. But what happens when we return to those same stories as adults? What do the children's versions get right? What do they miss? And how do the stories we absorb early in life shape our imaginations and our faith for years to come?

This July, expand your thinking with a five-week summer learning series exploring the Bible through children's stories and beyond. Each week, pastors and staff co-lead an engaging conversation that bridges the gap between the simple and the profound. Bring your curiosity and your questions. Refreshments provided; bring your own lunch!

- **July 1:** Katy Warren & Laura Scott
- **July 8:** Maddy Tyler & Abbey Cathelyn
- **July 15:** Mark Niethammer & Andrea Spencer
- **July 22:** Sarah Yotter & Joel Moore
- **July 29:** Sara Olson-Smith & Teresa Keller

So All May Eat meal serving

People assemble a meal at St. Paul then serve that meal at Zion Lutheran Church, Davenport. The initiative is called *So All May Eat*. Needed for Wednesday, July 29 are shoppers, cooks, and servers at various times. Sign up at **stpaulqc.org/signups**. Contact: Joel Moore, **joel@stpaulqc.org**.

Summer music opportunities

Summer allows for a different rhythm at St. Paul, a time for musicians of a variety of abilities to shine, explore, and create beauty with instruments and voices. Musicians are needed for upcoming summer music opportunities. In August, lift your voice with a treble choir (rehearsal Aug. 2, sing Aug. 9) and a tenor/bass choir (rehearsal Aug. 23, sing Aug. 30). Join a brass choir on Aug. 16 or an intergenerational choir (rehearsal on Aug. 16, sing Aug. 23).

Interested in taking part? Sign up for these opportunities at **stpaulqc.org/signups**.

Habitat for Humanity build dates set for July and August

Put on a tool belt and help build simple, decent houses through this ecumenical ministry. Each summer, St. Paul volunteers work alongside families who dream of owning a home – and do the work necessary to make that dream a reality. No previous building experience is necessary. To help, visit **stpaulqc.org/signups**.

- **Saturday, July 18:** Morning shifts are 8 a.m.-12 noon, afternoon shifts from noon-3:30 p.m.
- **Saturday, August 20:** Morning shifts are 8 a.m.-12 noon, afternoon shifts from noon-3:30 p.m.

Youth head to Omaha for a week of service

A team of St. Paul youth and adult leaders travel to Omaha July 12-16 to learn and serve in the city. Teens will be grouped into teams and assigned a variety of service projects by day, with city exploration and worship on the agenda for the evenings. Please pray for these young people and their leaders — for hands willing to help and for hearts open to God's grace in a community of friends. Contact: Ellie Lindmark, **ellie@stpaulqc.org**.

Cinema and Spirituality

Explore the rhythms of the church year through the lens of film. On July 21, 6:30 p.m., at The Last Picture House in Davenport (325 E. 2nd St.), *The Man From Earth* (2007). A retiring professor reveals a secret to his colleagues: that he is thousands of years old. The colleauges seek proof to determine if it's possibly true.

Sign up at **stpaulqc.org/signups**. $5 tickets (cash preferred), superb popcorn, comfortable seating, and taking in stories together on the big screen make this a unique community experience. Contact: Tim Suddarth, **timsuddarth@yahoo.com**.

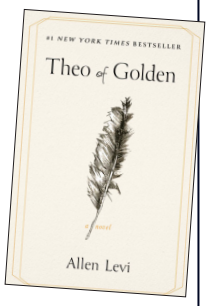
Big River Brass Band Concert

The Big River Brass Band once again makes its way to St. Paul. The band is a group of dedicated brass players and percussionists from around the Quad Cities area. Their final concert for the summer season will be Sunday, Aug. 2, 3 p.m., featuring St. Paul organist and director of music ministries, Chris Nelson. Admission is free. Contact Chris Nelson, **chris@stpaulqc.org**.

Stories with the Book Corner

Gather for story time with the St. Paul Book Corner and friends. Each Tuesday at 11 a.m., a staff member or volunteer selects and reads a preschool-aged story. Then, kids have playtime while parents take a break and socialize. Meet at the Book Corner. Each week's story will be posted on social media later that afternoon. Open to anyone. Invite your friends! Contact: Andrea Spencer, **bookcorner@stpaulqc.org**.

Save the date for All St. Paul Reads 2026: *Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi is the 2026 All St. Paul Reads book. All St. Paul Reads is encouragement for the congregation to read and talk about a single book title in the same year. This annual event takes place on Sunday, Oct. 18, 3-4:30 p.m. Enjoy desserts and conversation with a guest presenter. Childcare will be available.



Theo of Golden is a quick summer read about a mysterious elderly stranger who visits a small Southern town, collecting pencil portraits of its residents in exchange for hearing their life stories. The book is available for $16 in the St. Paul Book Corner.

Confirmation registration now open for seventh graders

Students entering seventh grade this fall are encouraged to sign up now for St. Paul's confirmation ministry. Meeting on Wednesday evenings, 6:30-8 p.m., September through April, confirmation is key to shaping the faith of middle school students.

Teenagers and parents are asked to attend a family orientation session in August before confirmation begins in September. Families can sign up for one session by going to **stpaulqc.org/signups** or scanning the QR code. For more information and registration materials, contact Katy Warren, **katy@stpaulqc.org**, 563-326-3547.

Drive with Karibu Market

Something special is happening on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month — and there's room for you in it.

Karibu Market is a partnership between St. Paul and Tapestry Farms, delivering culturally appropriate groceries to refugee families in the Quad Cities. Since launching last summer, the program has grown from monthly deliveries to dozens of families from Syria, Afghanistan, Haiti, and Nicaragua — and it's still expanding. This year, Karibu Market is reaching 40 families, and that means more drivers are needed and welcome.

Here's how it works: Bags are packed and ready for pickup anytime between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. You choose to deliver to one family or two, mostly in Davenport, Rock Island, and Moline. That's it. A couple of hours, a car, and a willingness to show up. Contact: Allison Winter, **allison@stpaulqc.org**.

Farewell

Maddy Tyler, *resident pastor*

When Maddy Tyler arrived at St. Paul in January 2025, she came with an eagerness and a lot of questions she didn't yet know how to ask. Eighteen months later, she's heading toward her next call with new skills, great friends, stories to share, and a newfound confidence.

Maddy grew up in Chicago, formed by folk music and the tight-knit community of the Old Town School of Folk Music, where both of her parents worked. She studied history and Nordic studies at Luther College, lived in Norway, served a gap year in Cambodia through Young Adults in Global Mission, and eventually followed a persistent nudge toward seminary at Wartburg in Dubuque. By the time she arrived in Davenport, she'd lived all over. St. Paul, she said, became the longest place she'd lived since she was 18 years old.

"At St. Paul, I've gotten to settle into who I am outside of being a student. From day one, people stepped toward me," Maddy said. "My time here has been a blessing in boosting my confidence and reaffirming this is who I am called to be in the world."

Life in the Quad Cities has included square dances in Iowa City and Bettendorf, jazz shows at the Redstone Room with Common Chord, River Bandits games, and plenty of evenings decompressing on her balcony off Jersey Ridge Road. She found musicians to play with, new friendships, and a sense of place.

The old time music community brought Maddy and St. Paul member Liv Carrow into each other's orbit before they ever crossed paths at church. A mutual musician friend had mentioned Maddy, a talented guitarist newly arrived in the Quad Cities, and Liv reached out with a warm welcome. When Liv and her family found their way to St. Paul not long after, there was Maddy. Since then, the two have played dances and festivals together, and the connection has only deepened.

"Seeing Maddy serve a church — knowing she will move on after two years — and still dive in, create relationships, lead, serve, and teach with her whole heart is inspiring. There are no dress rehearsals, your community is who you are with, and Maddy has embodied that kind of immediate enthusiasm and spirit of participation," Liv said. "Having a friend who bridges two very different worlds created a sense of vastness in terms of what a community is, and how we are all connected in big and small ways. There are no such things as strangers!"

The residency itself brought a steep and rewarding learning curve. Maddy joined senior pastor Mark Niethammer, who was also newer to his role, and the two found a kind of shared footing.

"Both of us coming from similar newness helped us work together and discover together," she said. "It helped me figure out how to ask when I don't know the answer to something. That prompted action and connection from the very beginning."

She preached. She led worship across the sanctuary, helped coordinate and lead adult learning in the chapel, and facilitate Theology Pub once a month later in her residency, adapting quickly from one room and register to the next. She helped run Vacation Bible School music, guitar in hand, for more than 100 kids. She planned and led the Appalachian Service Project trip, a week of home repair in rural Appalachia that she called one of the highlights of her entire ministry.

St. Paul helped her find language for what she'd long carried but couldn't quite articulate — her pastoral identity, her sense of call, the particular shape of her gifts.

"My pastoral heart, who I am, my sense of call, St. Paul affirmed it in every way," she said. "I feel well-equipped with what I've been given while also feeling open and ready to keep learning. St. Paul has helped guide the formation of my learner's heart."

Her job, as she understands it, is a straightforward one. She's been practicing it for 18 months now, in worship spaces, on mission trips, and in rocking chairs.

"I get to tell people: God loves you," she said. "That's my job and that's what I get to do every day."

Resident farewell gift:

If you'd like to donate to a gift for Maddy, please write a check to St. Paul clearly marked for "Resident Gift." You're also invited to send individual cards or notes to the church, or drop a written expression in the basket on the farewell weekend, July 18 & 19. After each service that weekend, a reception will be held in the Gathering Area. Please stop by and wish her well.

An update from Sarah Yotter

"It's hard to believe that I am almost halfway through my internship! These past five months have helped me to explore and step more fully into my pastoral identity. I have loved spending time with the people of St. Paul and hearing their stories. Walking alongside others and sharing in the joys and challenges of everyday life continues to be my favorite part of being a pastor.

What has surprised me most about St. Paul is how small it feels once you are part of it. I was worried that I wouldn't enjoy being in such a large congregation, but the ways you build community and care for one another create deep and meaningful connections.

As I approach the midpoint of my internship, I'm beginning to dream about where I feel most called and what the Spirit may have in store for me. One requirement of my program is an internship project, and I am developing a Bible study series called Sacred Landscapes: The God of Gardens and Wilderness. I'm excited to continue learning and teaching with people of all ages this fall.

I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank you to the entire St. Paul community for truly embodying radical hospitality. I could not have asked for a better place to learn and grow. Thank you for all the ways you support me!"

— Sarah Yotter

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL

With games, snacks, crafts, and music, St. Paul kids learned to be menders of God's world, working together to restore, renew, and share God's love with others.

Cantate
Choir
make a joyful noise unto the Lord

WELCOME

Dave Farr, operations director

Dave Farr spent 21 years in the United States Navy, worked supply chain for a defense contractor on the Gulf Coast and managed robotic welding projects. Dave found his way to St. Paul in 2023. He joins the staff as operations director, responsible for facilities, technology, contracts, and the systems that keep congregational life running.

What drew you to St. Paul?

"The landscaping is what originally drew me to St. Paul. Once I got inside the walls, it was easy to stay. The atmosphere immediately felt like family. I appreciate that at St. Paul, everyone is welcome at the table. I love that. I have a daugher who is gay, so it was important to me that this church be open to all."

Before he was a staff member, Dave was already serving in the St. Paul community. He volunteered with the Soil Stewards, helping to beautify the campus, donned a green apron for Lenten meals, and pitched in to help at church events. Serving, he'll tell you, is just what he does.

What shaped you before you got here?

"My military career gave me a foundation I still draw from every day. 21 years in the Navy — a decade of that out on the fleet — taught me how to lead, how to adapt, and how to wear a lot of different hats. If you care about what you do and you work hard, that shows."

After retiring as a chief petty officer in 2007, Dave finished his Bachelor of Business Administration in supply chain management at Western Illinois University, then built a career that took him from a defense contractor in Louisiana to a homebuilder on the Gulf Coast to federal petroleum operations in New Orleans to a project management role at Lincoln Electric Automation in Bettendorf. He earned his project management certification in March 2025. Across every stop, the common thread was the same: bring order to complexity, lead people well, and leave things better than you found them.

How do you think your background fits this role?

"This is the kind of role I'd always hoped I would land in, where I can showcase all of my skills. This role allows me to put all of those skills to use again. I like to serve. Practicing faith is very important in my life. It's not just words on paper."

What's something people here might not expect to learn about you?

"I'm a big fan of Star Trek. I love to cook — Boston butt, pulled pork, pizza are some of my specialities. Pizza dough is my challenge right now. I'm still figuring that one out."

When he's not in the kitchen, he's probably on a bike or in his garage workshop.

"I get a lot of energy from riding my bike and going to the gym. We have such wonderful bike trails around here — I'm still learning all of them. Woodworking is my passion. I could spend hours in my garage."

Dave has three grown adult children and five grandchildren, the youngest of whom arrived last September. He shares his home with two cats, Ned and Gus.

What are you hoping for here?

"I'm looking forward to learning more on my journey of faith. I just hope to leave St. Paul a better place than it was when I walked into it."

Council Notes

Summer is off to a great start. Council expressed gratitude for how staff handled a June power outage, continuing to provide fellowship, communion, and donuts without missing a beat.

Vacation Bible School was in full force. Abbey Cathelyn and Ellie Lindmark made this week a fun, faith-filled time for kids and youth, supported by more than 50 volunteers who showed up every day to make it happen.

The Tapestry Farms and St. Paul partnership, Karibu Market, is marking its one-year anniversary with an expansion and the ability to serve more families.

Sanctuary tower construction is complete, with ongoing repairs and projects underway.

Council affirmed the personnel committee's recommendation to hire Dave Farr as full-time operations director. (See pg. 10.) Todd Byerly, who served as interim director, remains on staff during the transition. Thank you to Todd and to both the personnel and search committees for their diligent work.

Staff Updates

Where is Chris Nelson?

You may have noticed some changes around worship lately. The organ bench has picked up a few new companions this summer while its usual occupant is off putting together pieces of a new, exciting project.

St. Paul's director of music ministries Chris Nelson is on study leave from mid-June through the end of July — a stretch that includes both dedicated study time and a little well-earned vacation. While he's away, Chris is deep into a new Advent organ devotional project set to release this coming Advent season. The work involves selecting and rehearsing music and planning how the finished project will find its way to listeners.

We'll look forward to hearing what he's been working on — and to welcoming him back to the bench. He'll be back on the organ bench the weekend of Aug. 1 and 2.

Welcome back, Becky Harper

Some people leave a place and never really leave. Becky Harper is one of those people.

After more than 20 years as St. Paul's administrative assistant, Becky stepped away in late 2023 to spend more time with family, including grandchildren in Virginia Beach. St. Paul, it turns out, has a way of pulling people back.

"I missed the people and wanted to be part of the gang again," she said.

This fall, Becky returns as a host — one of the steady, familiar faces you'll encounter on evenings and weekends. Hosts are often the first person someone meets when they walk through the front doors, and that moment matters. Whether it's a wedding, a community gathering, or a regular Sunday morning, a good host makes people feel at home before they've found a seat. That means welcoming guests, supporting groups using the building, making coffee, and making sure everything is cared for at the end of the night.

Becky has spent decades doing exactly that kind of attentive, unhurried work at St. Paul. The role may be new, but the spirit behind it isn't.

WORSHIP *at St. Paul*

July 4 & 5
Season after Pentecost

Preaching:
All services: Sarah Yotter
Liturgical tradition:
5pm/8 & 9am
Contemporary Open Spirit:
11:15am

July 11 & 12
Season after Pentecost

Preaching:
5pm/9am: Mark Niethammer
8/11:15am: Sara Olson-Smith
Liturgical tradition:
5pm/8 & 9am
Contemporary Open Spirit:
11:15am

July 18 &19
Season after Pentecost
Farewell weekend for Maddy Tyler

Preaching:
All services: Maddy Tyler
Liturgical tradition:
5pm/8 & 9am
Contemporary Open Spirit:
11:15am

July 25 & 26
Season after Pentecost

Preaching:
All services: Katy Warren
Liturgical tradition:
5pm/8 & 9am
Contemporary Open Spirit:
11:15am

Aug. 1 & 2
Season after Pentecost

Preaching:
All services: Sara Olson-Smith
Liturgical tradition:
5pm/8 & 9am
Contemporary Open Spirit:
11:15am

ST. PAUL
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2136 Brady Street
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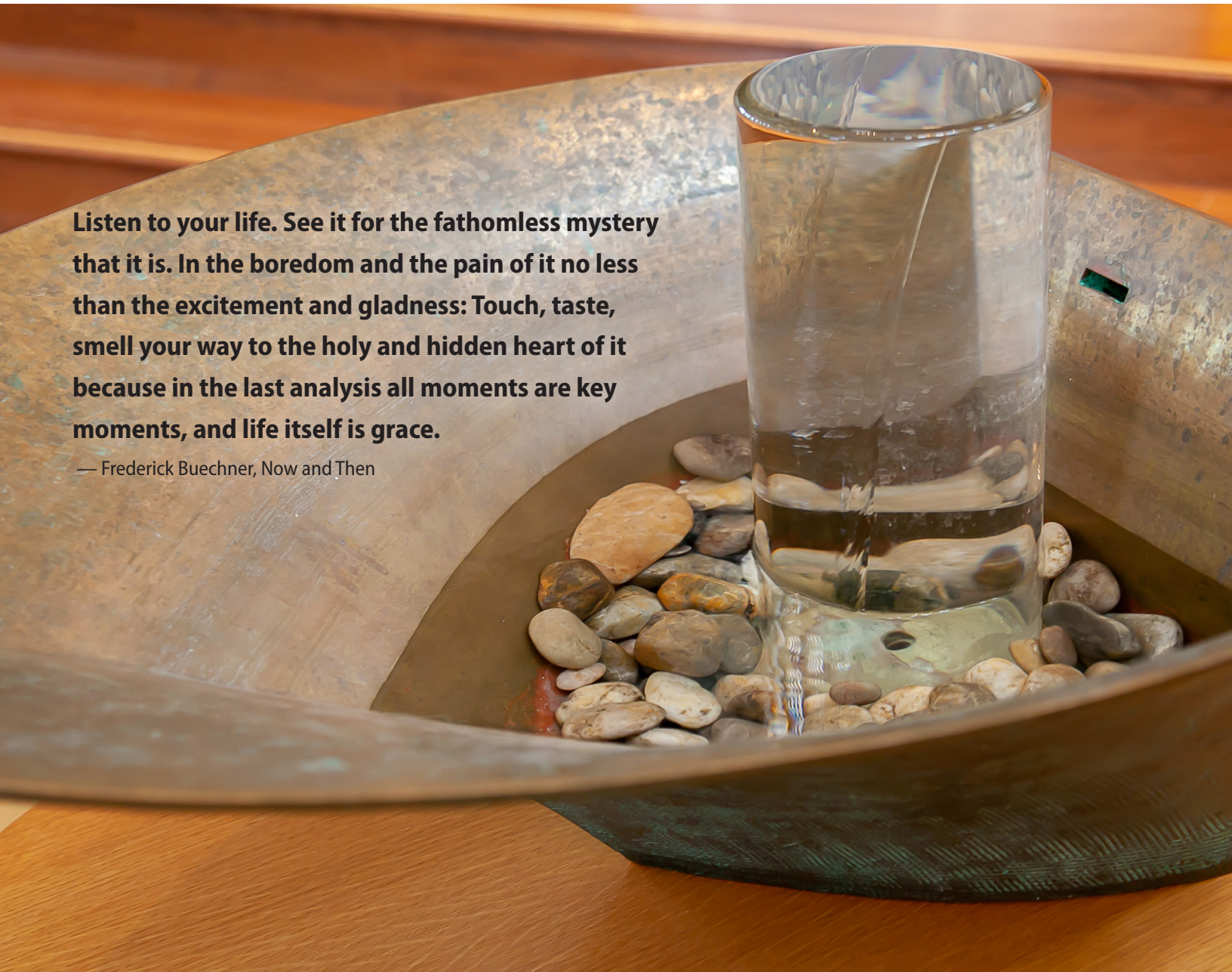

Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and the pain of it no less than the excitement and gladness: Touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace.

— Frederick Buechner, Now and Then