

The Epistle of St. Paul

January 2026

St. Paul

United Methodist
Church
244 Kurtz Road
Marietta, Georgia
30066
770-422-1089

www.stpaulumc.com
churchoffice@stpaulumc.com
<https://onrealm.org/stpaulumc>

Rev. Shelia Preacher
sheliapreacher@comcast.net
678-925-0103

Children's Ministry
Victoria Godfrey

Music Director
Hope Field

Accompanist
Dorothy McCracken

Administrative
Assistant
Louise Byrd

Financial Secretary
Ed Jackson

Lead Nursery
Morgan Field

Nursery Assistant
Zahra Taylor

Sunday Schedule
9:45 Sunday School
11:00 Worship

January's Epiphany: Keep or Release?

Rev. Shelia Preacher

Are any of you like me? Does the start of a new year produce an unexpected urge to "deep clean"? Even to those of us who have a natural aversion to housekeeping (hehe), January has a way of inviting us to clear things out. Christmas decorations are packed away. Closets are reorganized. Drawers that we have studiously avoided are opened. Old items are sorted, donated, or discarded. There is something deeply satisfying about creating new space—as we decide what stays and what goes.



EPIPHANY

But perhaps January is not only a time to unclutter our homes. Perhaps it is also a time to unclutter our lives, hearts, and souls. What do we need to keep, and what needs to be released? Perhaps a new year is a sacred invitation to take a fresh look at our lives—to notice what we are carrying that no longer gives life and what God may be inviting us to release.

We all carry things that weigh us down—things that quietly hold us back from the new life God is calling us into. Sometimes it is an old narrative, an old hurt, an old expectation that holds us bound. Sometimes it is guilt that God has already forgiven. Sometimes it is grief we have never fully named. Sometimes it is anger, resentment, or a grudge that has taken up far too much room. Sometimes it is patterns or commitments that drain us rather than give us life.

(Continued on page 2)

January's Epiphany: Keep or Release? (Continued from page 1)

January presents us with the opportunity for a real epiphany as it asks: "What are you carrying with you into this New Year...AND...does it still belong with you?"

This self-reflection is not meant to be self-criticism, but an honest look at ourselves taking stock of what we carry and asking—is this helpful, is this needed, is this moving me forward? If not, maybe it needs to go. Some things are meant to be kept. Faith. Hope. Love. Wisdom gained through struggle. The relationships and practices that nourish us. But other things may need to be released—not because they were meaningless, but because they are no longer life-giving.

For example, what might it look like to release:

- ⌚ Old grudges that harden the heart
- ⌚ Expectations that no longer fit the life God is shaping
- ⌚ Busyness that leaves no room for rest
- ⌚ Voices, internal or external, that tell us we are not enough

Letting go makes room. It creates space for grace, for joy, for renewed purpose.

This invitation applies not only to individuals but also to the church. Healthy growth often requires pruning. Are there ministries, habits, or ways of doing things that once served us well but now drain energy or obscure our mission? Are there places where we need to let go in order to flourish? Jesus reminds us that branches are pruned not to harm the vine, but to help it bear more fruit.

So perhaps our Epiphany prayer this year is simple and courageous:

God, help us discern what to keep and what to release. Help us let go of what weighs us down so we may make room for your light.

Help us trust that what you offer us throughout the new year will be more than enough.

Ways to give:

Place offering in basket

www.stpaulumc.com/donate;



◀ Scan the QR Code

Text SPUMC244 + amount to 73256

Download the App on our website.



January 2026 Mission Focus: Unhoused

Susan Short

Happy 2026, St. Paul Family!

January is a season of new beginnings. It invites us to consider fresh starts and how we can live out God's love in practical, meaningful ways. This month, St. Paul UMC focuses its prayers and mission support on the **North Georgia Housing and Homeless Council (NGHHC)**. The Council is an administrative agency of the North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church, created to partner with and support churches and other organizations that minister to those experiencing poverty and homelessness. The Council awards grants to churches and non-profits that provide housing, food pantries, rental and utility assistance, clothing closets, and other services to our neighbors in need.

Scripture reminds us to view housing as a holy concern. *"The Lord is my refuge and my shelter,"* (Psalm 91:2). For those without a safe place to call home, NGHHC works tirelessly to help individuals and families find stable housing and a path forward. NGHHC lives out its calling by coordinating housing resources, advocating for those experiencing homelessness, and supporting programs that move people from crisis to stability. The work helps restore dignity, hope, and community to some of our most vulnerable neighbors. Collectively, we can make a difference! I invite you to check out the NGHHC website to find more information on resources and recent award recipients. Please visit <https://www.nghcc.org> for complete information.

As we begin 2026, let's prayerfully consider how we can help in this work through our awareness, prayers, and giving. Supporting NGHHC is one way we can start the year grounded in compassion and generosity. Please designate NGHHC on your offering.

Thank you all for being a church that continues to open hearts, hands, and doors in Christ's name.

His blessings in 2026!



New Year's Resolution: Contract or Covenant?

Mike McMillin

As a new year begins, many of us find ourselves thinking about resolutions—things we hope to change, improve, or finally accomplish. This year, I found myself wondering how to make my New Year's resolutions more meaningful, more spiritual, and perhaps more lasting.

When I think about a typical New Year's resolution, I think of something I want to do. The stakes are fairly low. If I fail, the only real consequence is personal disappointment. Often, God and spirituality never quite enter the picture.

So, I wondered: what if I treated my resolutions more seriously—like a contract? A mortgage, for example, has real consequences. None of us wants to lose our home, so we make sacrifices, adjust priorities, and find ways to meet our obligations. Real-world consequences can be powerful motivators.

A “contract-style” resolution might look something like this: if I fail to lose 15 pounds, I donate \$1,500 to MUST Ministries. That kind of penalty would certainly get my attention! But if I want the resolution to be truly spiritual, perhaps the gift should be given whether I succeed or fail. After all, when we receive blessings, one of the best ways to honor them is to share them.

Still, even a contract has its limits. It keeps the focus on my effort and my willpower. And that led me to a better question: what if the New Year began not with a resolution or a contract, but with a covenant?

A covenant reminds us that we are not meant to do the hardest things on our own. A covenant resolution begins with prayer—asking God what needs to change in us, and what God might be calling us to do. In that quiet, honest conversation with God, we may discover work that is both challenging and holy: forgiving someone, asking for



(Continued on page 5)

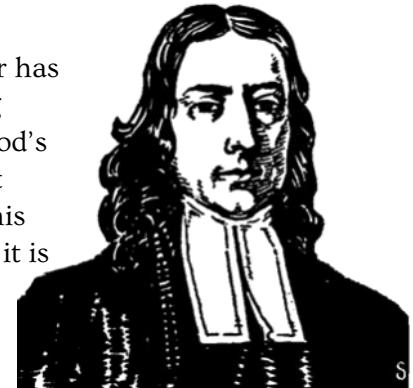
(Continued from page 4)

forgiveness ourselves, making restitution where possible, helping others when we would rather not, or stepping into new ministries that require faith and courage.

A covenant places God at the center and invites us to let go of control. It acknowledges that real transformation comes not through pressure or penalties, but through surrender and grace.

For generations of Methodists, the Wesley Covenant Prayer has provided a powerful way to begin the year. It is a humbling prayer—one that asks not only for God's blessing, but for God's direction, purpose, and action in our lives. When we pray it slowly and listen carefully, we remember that God walks this road with us. Change and action may require sacrifice, but it is never faced alone.

A covenant with God—that is the kind of New Year's resolution I'm seeking. How about you?



The Wesley Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,

Praised for you or criticized for you.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.

*And now, O wonderful and holy God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
you are mine, and I am yours. So be it.*

*And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it also be made in heaven. Amen.*

New Year, New Hope

Bob Trengove

We are at the start of a brand-new year. Where does the time go? A New Year brings new year's resolutions that we hope to achieve going forward. How many New Year's resolutions have you kept over the years? Some people consider dieting, reading a book series, taking a class, or visiting relatives they haven't seen in a while.

I am thinking along the lines of a gratitude journal. List several things each day that you are grateful for. You will be surprised as the days pass, and the number of items listed grows. There is truly no end to the things we are grateful for, thanks to God. We look around and realize all that God has done for us. Looking at a leaf on a tree or a petal on a rose, the laughter of one of our grandchildren, watching birds in your backyard, the need for advice by one of our grandchildren, or our child. How about holding your spouse's hand? All the above can be viewed as miracles by God in our daily life because God is at the heart of everything.

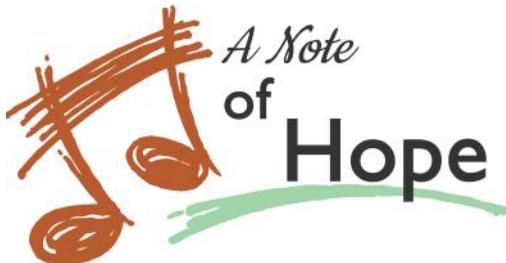
We hope to view this new year with hope for the future. We would like to see peace in this world. Take time to spread joy and love everywhere you go. We cannot tell you how many people tell us their story. Being a good listener can make all the difference in the world. Some just need to know that someone cares.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for all miracles you put in our lives every day. Thank you for watching out over this world of ours and helping, guiding and watching out for your children. Your children are listening to you for help and advice. Please direct us down the path that leads to you. In Jesus' name we pray, AMEN.

Many activities are still being performed at St Paul by the Building and Grounds Team. The following are a few of the tasks completed or in progress.

- ✿ Computers: Mike set up two new Dell computers in the sound booths, loaded software, and prepared them for December services. Thank you, Mike!
- ✿ Workday: Join us March 14, 2026 (rain date March 21) to help prepare our church for Easter.
- ✿ Maintenance: E-Smith serviced our heating and air on December 17 and replaced the furnace filters.





A Story, not a Spreadsheet

Hope Field

Here we are again—brand new year, fresh calendar, clean slate. Some of us feel excited. Some of us feel tired already. Some of us are quietly hoping this year will finally make sense of the last one. And here's the truth we don't

always like: God usually doesn't hand us the full plan.

If God showed us everything at once—the twists, the delays, the detours—we might freeze up. So instead, God gives us enough light for today. Enough grace for this step. Enough strength for right now. Trusting God's unfolding plan doesn't mean pretending everything is clear. It means believing that even when life feels messy, God is still working. Behind the scenes. In ways we can't see yet. Think about it: most of the best things in life didn't arrive fully formed. Faith grows. Healing takes time. Relationships deepen slowly. God's plan tends to unfold like a story, not a spreadsheet.

God has never been late.

God has never been confused.

God has never abandoned a story halfway through.

So as this new year begins, maybe the goal isn't control or certainty. Maybe it's trust. The kind that takes God at His word—even when the next chapter hasn't been revealed yet.

Take the step in front of you.

Breathe.

Keep going.

God is still unfolding the plan—and you're right where you need to be.



**Thursday, January 8
1:00-6:00 pm**

call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767)

OR redcrossblood.org code SPUMC





Thank You, St. Paul!

Maureen Fleming

I would like to sincerely thank everyone at St. Paul for the incredible support you have shown during my three years serving as Leadership Finance Chair. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve alongside such faithful, generous, and dedicated members. Your encouragement, trust, and commitment to our church's mission made this role both meaningful and rewarding. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to serve and for the continued support of this wonderful church family.



As we welcome a New Year, we also welcome a new Leadership Finance Chair. Welcome, Chris Heldreth. I am certain that you will find this position both challenging and rewarding. We are grateful for your willingness to serve and look forward to working together as you help guide our financial vision and priorities.

Just remember, you are not alone in this. Everyone on the Leadership Board has a hand in making the decisions that guide the church towards fulfilling our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Your willingness to serve as Finance Chair and bring your experiences and financial oversight into the role is refreshing.

I am sure everyone will join me in welcoming you aboard.

Discipleship Opportunities

ChristWalk—

The Chosen Season 5

Beginning January 6, our Christ Walk small group will explore Season 5 of *The Chosen*, entering the final days of Jesus' ministry—marked by tension, courage, and deep love. As the disciples face the cost of following Him, we're invited to reflect on our own faith and transformation. Christ Walk meets Tuesdays at 10 a.m. in person and 7 p.m. on Zoom. All are welcome.

Open Door Class

Join us each Sunday at 9:45 AM in Room 206 as we explore *6 Decisions that Will Change Your Life*. Our days are filled with choices, yet we rarely pause to consider the ones that shape our faith. In this simple and inspiring study, pastor and author Tom Berlin invites us to reflect on six key decisions in our walk with Christ, offering Scripture, meaningful quotations, and space for personal journaling as we grow together.

The Spiritual Practice of Giving

Chris Heldreth

As we begin our 2026 Giving season, I am honored to serve as the Church Finance Chairman at St. Paul's.

Giving is more than an annual campaign—it is a spiritual practice. It is how we respond to God's generosity by faithfully offering our time, talents, and financial resources in support of the ministry and mission of our church. Every gift given is an expression of trust in God and a commitment to the work we are called to do together.



The New Testament emphasizes the attitude behind giving. The apostle Paul writes: "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver," 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV).

And I must confess that I was what I call the special occasion giver. School book bags, children's coat drive, staff gifts, I gave! But a little voice kept nudging me to do more! Be a cheerful giver! So I signed up for weekly online giving, and I'll continue doing the special occasion giving too!

Giving allows St. Paul's to sustain current ministries, maintain our facilities, support outreach efforts, and remain prepared for future opportunities to serve.

Giving is an expression of love, faith, and obedience. It reflects God's generous heart, strengthens trust in Him, and blesses both giver and receiver. Whether through financial generosity, acts of service, or compassion for others, giving draws believers closer to God and helps reveal His love to the world.

New Address:

Marcie Windsor
2100 Roberts Ridge Road
Apt. D-8
Ellijay, GA 30540
Cellphone: 470.653.0159

New Address:

Tricia Glidewell
Montclair
2100 Clairmont Lake #215
Decatur, GA 30033
Cellphone: 404.375.8317



Spotlight on: Mary Lou Flenner

A Legacy of Faith and Community

Kathy Lim Sang

St. Paul is a congregation built on the strength of its people, and few members embody the spirit of long-term commitment and active service quite like Mary Lou

Flenner. This lady and her little posse who sit together every Sunday—Marcie Windsor, Alma Taylor, Betty Gwynn—are all still young at heart. This familiar face at our church since the mid-to-late 1970s, Mary Lou's journey to St. Paul is a beautiful story of family, transition, and finding home in a new community.

Mary Lou's story began in Bridgeport, New York, where she grew up attending the local Methodist church. Her path eventually crossed with Don Flenner, a Pennsylvania native, while they were both working at General Electric in 1961. After being set up on a blind dinner date by mutual friends in 1962, the pair married in 1964. They shared a remarkable 60 years of marriage until Don's passing in early 2022.

The Flenners moved to the local area in 1969 after a stint in Dallas, Texas. As their children, Donna (now 60) and Robert (now 59), began attending Bells Ferry School, Mary Lou found herself deeply involved in the school community. It was through volunteering at the school and meeting the parents of her children's friends that the family was first drawn to St. Paul. This connection to local families turned a simple invitation into a decades-long spiritual home.

Professionally, Mary Lou dedicated 25 years to the Cobb County School system. She began her career at Bells Ferry School before eventually moving to the County office, where she worked until her retirement in 2001. That same dedication to service is evident in her church life. When asked about her God-given strengths, Mary Lou is quick to point out that she simply loves being active and involved.

Today, Mary Lou continues to live by her personal mantra: "Just do it!" Whether she is walking, solving puzzles, reading, or maintaining the deep friendships she has cultivated over the years, she remains a vibrant part of our community. She is also a proud grandmother to her granddaughter, Kelly.

Next time you see Mary Lou, please take a moment to say hello and thank her for the many years of warmth and activity she has brought to St. Paul.



St. Paul
Member Spotlight



Mary Lou Flenner

Noticing More Together

Victoria Godfrey

I love starting my lessons with a question. So here's my question for you: what if this January launches a year of not *doing* more, but *noticing* more?



As we step into a new year, there's often an unspoken pressure to add. We introduce more activities, more goals, and more commitments. But what if this January invites us to do something different? What if it launches a year of slowing down just enough to notice? To see God not only in the big moments but tucked into the ordinary rhythms of everyday life. To listen more deeply to ourselves, to God, to one another, and to the community around us... What if?

In Children's Ministry, we're constantly reminded that kids are natural noticers. Sometimes delightfully, and sometimes painfully—especially if you happen to have a pimple you hoped no one would notice. Kids see wonder where adults rush past it. They pause to point out a ladybug on the sidewalk, ask big questions during a simple prayer, or notice when a friend seems a little sad. They listen with their whole hearts, even when they don't yet have the words to explain what they're sensing.

This year, I wonder what might change if we learned from them. What if noticing became a spiritual practice for our families? Noticing the quiet moments when God feels close, like during bedtime prayers, car conversations, or shared meals. Noticing the needs of the people around us and responding with kindness, not obligation. Noticing how God is already at work in our church, our schools, and our neighborhoods.

Listening more deeply might mean giving space for children's questions without rushing to answers. It might mean truly hearing each other's stories, joys, and struggles. It might even mean listening long enough to hear God's gentle nudges instead of waiting for a loud directive. (Yikes—not my strong suit!)

As a Children's Ministry Director, my hope for this year isn't that we cram more into our calendars, but that, as we say in Children's Church, we use our eyes and our ears. That we model for our children a faith that pays attention. A faith that trusts God is present in the ordinary and active in the in-between moments.

So as January unfolds, may we resist the urge to rush ahead. May we notice. May we listen. And may we discover that God has been here all along.





Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 OFFICE CLOSED 	2	3
4 9:45a SS 11a Worship 3p Staff 5:30p KSU Wesley Bible Study/Hangout	5 10:30a Monday Servants 12:15p Chair Yoga 6:30p Building & Grounds	6 10a ChristWalk (FH) 7p ChristWalk (Zoom)	7 8p KSU Worship	8 1p Red Cross Blood Dr	9	10 1p Ruth Gmyrek Celebration
11 9:45a SS 11a Worship 5:30p KSU Wesley Bible Study/Hangout	12 10:30a Monday Servants 12:15p Chair Yoga	13 10a ChristWalk (FH) 7p ChristWalk (Zoom)	14 8p KSU Worship	15 6:30p Stephen Ministry	16	17 11a Gail Burgess Celebration
18 9:45a SS 11a Worship 3p Leadership 5:30p KSU Wesley Bible Study/Hangout	19 MLK Jr Day 12:15p Chair Yoga	20 10a ChristWalk (FH) 10:30a Monday Servants 7p ChristWalk (Zoom)	21 8p KSU Worship	22	23	24
25 9:45a SS 11a Worship 5:30p KSU Wesley Bible Study/Hangout	26 10:30a Monday Servants 12:15p Chair Yoga	27 10a ChristWalk (FH) 4p Hope House 7p ChristWalk (Zoom)	28 8p KSU Worship	29	30	31

Serving This Month

January Servants

Worship Leader—Maureen Fleming

Open/Close Facilities—Darrell Morgan

Monday Servants:

01/05 Darrell Morgan & Marj Rhodes

01/12 Tom Short & Ruth Castellaw

01/20 TU Tom Short & Ruth Castellaw

01/26 Darrell Morgan & Marj Rhodes

Media Team—Mike McMillin

Easy Worship—Terry Palmer, Tom Preacher

Audio/Video—Robbie Littlefield, Jyo Vanapalli

Could it be YOU? Join Us!

Our Faithfulness

"I will be loyal to St. Paul United Methodist Church and support her with my prayers, my presence, my gifts, my service and my witness."

NOVEMBER 2025

Our Presence

Average weekly Sunday School attendance 17

Average weekly 11:00 worship attendance 39

Average weekly online attendance 40

Our Gifts—General Fund

NOVEMBER 2025 INCOME

Contributions \$ 16,535.00

Processing Gifts \$ 69.50

Total Contributions \$ 16,679.50

Rental Property \$ 1,695.00

Soccer Rental N/A

Total Revenue \$ 18,374.50

YTD 2025 Income \$169,388.65

Total Expenses for NOVEMBER \$ 20,327.40

TOTAL 2025 Expenses \$211,929.50



1 Robert Simpson	5 Laura Lim Sang
3 Robbie Littlefield	6 Stephanie Fleming
7 Maureen Fleming	7 Jasmine Ogene
18 Mike McMillin	12 Ndidi Ogene
18 Mary Helen Setser	14 Karen LeCroy
23 Terry Palmer	15 Thomas Preacher
31 Victoria Godfrey	16 Anna Castellaw
	
18 Lynn Tanner	19 Darrall Salter
19 Cheryl Nick	20 Lucy Agresta
26 Jamie Hayes	27 Bob Homer
28 Sherry Pletcher	

	
<i>Altar Flowers</i>	
Cost: \$55.00	
01/04	Marcie Windsor
01/11	Available
01/18	Available
01/25	Available
Sign up on Bulletin Board	



January 19
Suggested word count: 350-400