

St. Paul's Epistle

An Inviting Community of Christ's Disciples

Volume 37, Issue 12

December, 2014

St. Paul's United
Methodist Church

105 E. Main St.

Elida, OH 45807

419-339-3801

officeespc@gmail.com

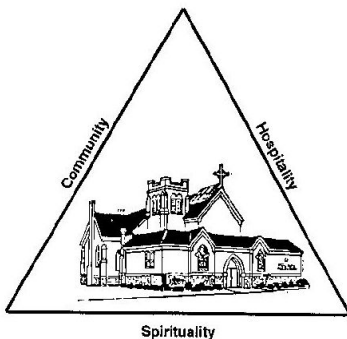
Rev. Paul Scannell

419/909-9419

Cell Phone: 734/660-1984

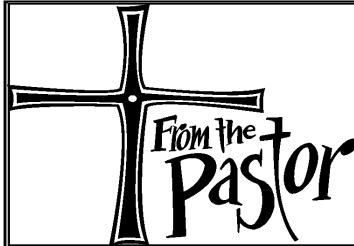
pastorespc@gmail.com

4pastorpaul@gmail.com



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Well, by the time you read this, you will have survived Thanksgiving and Black Friday and that means we are head long into the Advent Season. Thank you to everyone who helped fill over 100 shoeboxes to give children all over the world a Merry Christmas. The Cookie Walk is coming on the 14th after church. Free up some time this season and buy your cookies so you won't have to bake. Also, I want to invite you to come and sing on the 17th for shut-ins and come back to church for some soup and sandwiches. These are two opportunities to have fun and fellowship with your friends at St Paul's. We'll see you there.

This year we will be celebrating the Christmas Season with an Advent Conspiracy. We will be looking at what Christmas really means and what it is we could do differently that would have a huge impact in the world for God's Kingdom. First, we will be talking about loving all, not our love for everyone, but God's love made real in the birth of a savior. The following week we will look at how we could spend less and give more. Christmas was never supposed to be about who gets the biggest present but it is about giving yourself to the ones you love. Maybe it is time we followed the example of God in making time with those we love a priority instead of a burden. Finally, we will talk about fully worshiping the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Stepping back from the hectic holiday and coming to him just like the shepherds and wise men did that first Christmas to worship.

From my family to yours, we wish you the Merriest Christmas this year and we look forward to an exciting 2015 here at St Paul's Church where kingdom things are happening and the Holy Spirit is leading.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Paul



Thought for the Month:

Sometimes the smallest family rituals create the richest memories.

- Nicole Wise

All Church Christmas Caroling Party!

All singers and those who love bringing cheer to those unable to get out in the winter weather are invited to a Christmas Caroling Party. It will be held on **Wednesday, December 17 at 5:30 PM.** After caroling, we will gather in the Fellowship Hall for soup and sandwiches and leftover cookies! Hope to see you there.



**December
Coins for Communion
to benefit
Lima Salvation Army**



Seniors Day Out

**Tuesday, December 16th
At Noon**

Come and enjoy Christmas
music by Dick Valentine



Upcoming Events for St. Paul's

Newsletter
deadline:
the **16th**
of each month



St. Paul's Book Club

**Saturday, January 3, 2015
At 9:00 AM**

Join the group for some interesting
conversation about
Yellow Rose Bride,
by Lori Copeland

**Saturday, March 7, 2015
At 9:00 AM**

to discuss **The Book Thief,**
by Markus Zusak

**Books to purchase are in a box in
the church library.**



**Sunday,
December 21st**

Winter officially
begins,
BRRRRRRR!!

St. Paul's Epistle

is published by St. Paul's
United Methodist Church

Subscription Rate: NONE

Secretary:	Gail Fessler
Secretary:	Jone Lane
Organist:	Linda Holman
Pianist:	Lois Cook
Choir Director	Judy Chaffins
Custodian:	Dave Decker

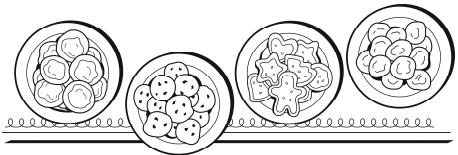
Third Annual Christmas Cookie and Goodie Walk

Again this year a special Christmas celebration is awaiting you after worship on Sunday, December 14. All those yummy sweets you think of at Christmastime will be available for you to sample and purchase. As you listen to Christmas music and sample some of the cookies available, you may also purchase a box or container to fill with your favorite homemade cookies and candy. With your container you will walk around the different tables, filling the container with your favorite selections. The larger the container, the more cookies you can put in it. Also available to purchase will be such items as buckeyes, chocolate covered pretzels, turtles and pies. Buy some of these items for yourself, your holiday party, a neighbor, or as a gift exchange item. (Homemade goodies make the best gifts!) All the proceeds from this event will be given the "Crafty Creatures" small group, for quilt supplies.

Cookie and candy donations are needed to make this event successful. Bring your items to the church on Saturday morning, December 14 or early Sunday morning.

If you have any tins that could be recycled from last year, place them in the Fellowship Hall kitchen.

So, mark December 14th on your calendar and come downstairs after worship to experience the Christmas spirit at St. Paul's and help continue the mission outreach of our church.



Cookie Walk

Upcoming Events for St. Paul's



December 7, 2014



December 24, 2014
Early Service 6:00 PM



December 14, 2014



December 21, 2014



December 24, 2014
Candlelight Service
10:00 PM

EASY Program

Blessings and Praises from EASY

In the past few months, I have been asking for volunteers, supplies, money, and prayers for our Elida After School Youth (EASY) program. Now, I want to tell you how some of the requests have blessed the children of Elida Middle School.

A volunteer stepped out of her comfort zone to work with the children. She is great with the kids but her other gifts of business knowledge, social work, and administration quickly saw the need for getting paperwork in order to apply for grants. This has given EASY a more secure financial future and taken some of the work off the site coordinators, allowing them to focus on programming.

A volunteer prayed about how to support the children and felt she should come to help. She is the perfect fit for a child who works at a different pace than the others.

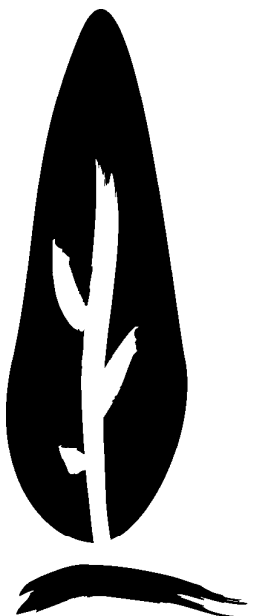
A volunteer came just to see "what was going on". He has become a "regular" with home repair-type interest groups and his table is a hang-out place for the boys.

A volunteer retired recently from teaching gifted children. She has found the perfect release for her love of teaching but dislike of everything about education and a daily schedule. Her inventiveness at keeping children busy when the homework is completed and then leading fun interest groups has expanded their involvement.

A volunteer is giving his professional costs as an in-kind gift to figure out some IRS paperwork.

A volunteer was just chatting with one of the students who has a difficult time concentrating and staying on task. He gets lots of reminders to be quiet. This volunteer listened to him say his numbers and said that he should become an auctioneer! That praise made the little guy puff up and smile!

You will still hear and read my messages pleading for help of various kinds. When you hear those, think of these volunteers who gave their time and gifts and are making a big difference in families' lives. Thanks to all who are supporting us in any way. You are truly valued!



Christian Symbol:

Cedar Tree

A species of evergreen used to decorate for Christmas, the tall cedar tree symbolizes Christ's majesty year-round. Cedars of Lebanon, which have grown to 130 feet, were known to Old Testament people. "The trees of the Lord are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted" (Psalm 104:16, NIV). David's palace and both Solomon's palace and temple were built of cedar wood. The word cedar is found 75 times in the Bible. Due to its evergreen nature and longevity, this tree is associated with eternal life and thus sometimes used in cemetery landscaping.

The Business of Church

We're Communicating in New Ways



We are told to spread the good news of Jesus any way we can.

- ◆ The disciples went into all the known world and told the Gospel.
- ◆ Paul wrote many letters, only some of which are in the Bible. These letters were shared among congregations beyond those who received them.
- ◆ The first book printed on the Guttenberg press was the Bible.
- ◆ Christian speakers have used newspaper, magazines, radio and television since their beginnings.

Today's media is the Internet and St. Paul's has begun to use social media to share our faith stories.

⇒ **Check out our website:** www.elidastpaulschurch.org/

⇒ **"Like" our Facebook page:** Elida St. Paul's Church
post some pictures, thoughts, upcoming events, etc. Just don't "tag" anyone. (If you don't know what "tagging" is, you probably aren't going to do it, so don't worry).

⇒ **Follow our Twitter account:** @ESPCHURCH

Let people know where you are on Sunday mornings or name a hymn we are singing which you especially like.

Thank you to **Becky Ellinger** for giving us new ways to share the Good News of God.

HOSPITALITY CART:

1st Sunday: Book Club

2nd Sunday: various members of the congregation

3rd Sunday: "Crafty Creatures" small group

4th Sunday: Choir

5th Sunday: Sr. High Class

Thank you to these groups who help welcome our congregation and guests to our church through this service of Hospitality, before worship on Sunday mornings.

If you or your group are interested in helping out please contact Corinne Piper.

Hat and Mitten Christmas Tree.

St. Paul's special Christmas tree for hats, mittens and scarves will be up again this year. Items will be delivered to Elida Elementary, Samaritan House and Lima Rescue Mission to help keep people warm in the winter. Consider buying insulated men's and women's sized gloves for the tree to compliment the many knitted scarves and hats that are donated.



Faith In Action

Worship Attendance:

November 2, 2014	101
November 9, 2014	88
November 16, 2014	109
November 23, 2014	86

Financial Giving

Weekly Need for
Unified Ministry Budget
\$3,466.00



Unified Ministry Giving:		Other:
November 2, 2014	\$5,263.53	\$553.37
November 9, 2014	\$3,271.54	\$336.01
November 16, 2014	\$2,587.00	\$1,136.84
November 23, 2014	\$2,073.00	\$2,081.13

Sunday School Attendance

November 2, 2014	30
November 9, 2014	27
November 16, 2014	29
November 23, 2014	23

Greeters

December 7, 2014	Jerry & Becky Bean
December 14, 2014	Ray & Phyllis Trigg
December 21, 2014	Mike & Becky Ellinger
December 28, 2014	OPEN

Flower Calendar

December 7, 2014	Dan & Margie Best
December 14, 2014	Poinsettias
December 21, 2014	Poinsettias
December 28, 2014	Poinsettias

Communion Servers December 7

Station #1	Shirley Shoup
Station #2	OPEN
Station #3	OPEN

Daily Bible Readings

Monday 12/1

Psalm 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, Amos 2:6-16
2 Peter 1:1-11, Matthew 21:1-11

Tuesday 12/2

Psalm 5, 6, 10, 11, Amos 3:1-11
2 Peter 1:12-21, Matthew 21:12-22

Wednesday 12/3

Psalm 119:1-24, 12, 13, 14
Amos 3:12-4:5
2 Peter 3:1-10, Matthew 21:23-32

Thursday 12/4

Psalm 18:1-50, Amos 4:6-13
2 Peter 3:11-18
Matthew 21:33-46

Friday 12/5

Psalm 16, 17, 22, Amos 5:1-17
Jude 1-16, Matthew 22:1-14

Saturday 12/6

Psalm 20, 21, 110, 116, 117
Amos 5:18-27
Jude 17-25, Matthew 22:15-22

Sunday 12/7

Psalm 114, 115, 148, 149, 150
Amos 6:1-14
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Luke 1:57-68

Monday 12/8

Psalm 9, 15, 25, Amos 7:1-9
Revelation 1:1-8
Matthew 22:23-33

Tuesday 12/9

Psalm 26, 28, 36, 39
Amos 7:10-17, 24-25
Revelation 1:9-16
Matthew 22:34-46

Wednesday 12/10

Psalm 38, 119:25-48, Amos 8:1-14
Revelations 1:17-2:7
Matthew 23:1-12

Thursday 12/11

Psalm 37, Amos 9:1-10
Revelations 2:8-17
Matthew 23:13-26

Friday 12/12

Psalm 31, 35, Haggai 1:1-15
Revelation 2:18-29
Matthew 23:27-39

Saturday 12/13

Psalm 30, 32, 42, 43, Haggai 2:1-19
Revelation 3:1-6, Matthew 24:1-14

Sunday 12/14

Psalm 63, 98, 103, Amos 9:11-15
2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, 13-17
John 5:30-47

Monday 12/15

Psalm 41, 44, 52, Zechariah 1:7-17
Revelations 3:7-13
Matthew 24:15-31

Tuesday 12/16

Psalm 45, 47, 48
Zechariah 2:1-13
Revelation 3:14-22
Matthew 24:32-44

Wednesday 12/17

Psalm 49, 119:49-72
Zechariah 3:1-10
Revelation 4:1-8
Matthew 24:45-51

Thursday 12/18

Psalm 33, 50, Zechariah 4:1-14
Revelation 4:9-5:5
Matthew 25:1-13

Friday 12/19

Psalm 40, 54, 51
Zechariah 7:8-8:8
Revelation 5:6-14
Matthew 25:14-30

Saturday 12/20

Psalm 55, 138, 139
Zechariah 8:9-17
Revelation 6:1-17
Matthew 25:31-46

Sunday 12/21

Psalm 8, 24, 29, 84
Genesis 3:18-15
Revelation 12:1-10, John 3:16-21

Monday 12/22

Psalm 61, 62, 112, 115
Zephaniah 3:14-20
Titus 1:1-16, Luke 1:1-25

Tuesday 12/23

Psalm 66, 67, 116, 117
1 Samuel 2:1-10
1 Titus 2:1-10, Luke 1:26-38

Wednesday 12/24

Psalm 89:1-29, Isaiah 59:15b-21
Philemon 2:5-11

Thursday 12/25

Psalm 2, 85, 110, 132
Micah 4:1-5, 5:2-4
1 John 4:7-16, John 3:31-26

Friday 12/26

Psalm 93, 96, 148, 150
Galatians 3:15-22
Luke 1:67-80 or
Matthew 1:1-17

Saturday 12/27

Psalm 72, 111, 113
2 Samuel 7:1-17
Titus 2:11-3:8a, Luke 1:39-56

Sunday 12/28

Psalm 34, 93, 96
1 Samuel 1:1-2, 7-28
Hebrews 2:10-18
Matthew 1:18-25

Monday 12/29

Psalm 18, 2 Samuel 23:13-17
Revelation 1:1-8, John 7:37-52

Tuesday 12/30

Psalm 20, 21, 23, 27
1 Kings 17:17-24
Revelation 1:9-20
John 7:53-8:11

Wednesday 12/31

Psalm 46, 48, 1 Kings 3:5-14
2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2
John 8:12-19

Missions

The members of St. Paul's Church have been busy with mission projects this fall. Jamie Wyant led a small team to **Camp Wesley** in the fall to finish the boardwalk in the woods, and to build a shed to house the paddleboards at the camp. Thanks, Jamie for your leadership. More work is planned for next summer so stay tuned for more details on our 2015 Camp Wesley mission work. On Thursday, October 30th Gary Hurd, Cari Metzger, Corinne Piper and Tim Piper handed out coffee, hot chocolate and pencils to parents and their children at the church for our **Trick-or-Treat Night Mission**. Over 350 cups of hot beverages were distributed along with pencils with St. Paul's name and website on it. Thank you to our volunteers for helping on this mission. On October 31st, a group of St. Paul's members served meals at **Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen** in Lima. Thank you to Deb Hurd, Jamie Wyant, Larry Moser, Shara Bowsher, Martha Vazquez, Helen Staas, Dillon Staas and Tim Piper for serving those in need at ODB. Jamie Wyant lead a mission called **Operation Christmas Child by Samaritan's Purse**. The congregation at St. Paul's collected hygiene items, school supplies, personal items and fun things and placed them in **103 shoeboxes**, which were delivered on November 17th. The shoeboxes are to be distributed by Samaritan's Purse to needy children throughout the world. Thank you to everyone who filled shoeboxes for this mission. November 30th was **\$5 on the 5th for UMCH Family Services**. Thank you to everyone who donated to this United Methodist mission. Food donations for the **Five Loaves Food Pantry at Allentown** continue to be strong. The need is still great for families in the 45807 zip code area. Thank you to all who routinely give to the food pantry to help feed those in need. Christmas Season is upon us, which means a **Hat, glove and mitten tree** will soon appear in our sanctuary. Consider buying insulated men's and women's sized gloves for the tree to compliment the many knitted scarves and hats that are donated by members of our congregation. Items will be delivered to Elida Elementary, Samaritan House and Lima Rescue Mission to help keep people warm in the winter. Blessings to all who worked on missions or donated money, food or other items to mission work this year. You have truly become the "hands and feet of Christ"!



The 2014 Special Christmas Offering will be Divided between Samaritan's Purse, Operation Christmas Child and the Elida Community Center EASY Program.

EASY

Who's that under the Foster Grants....

I was fortunate to be part of a mission to fit eyeglasses for the needy in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico last February. This mission, sponsored by the Alabama Lions Clubs, checked the eyes of over 2,000 people in four days and dispensed reading glasses, prescription glasses, or sent them for more advanced medical care. One thing I learned was the damage the sun can do our eyes, causing cataracts and pterygium growths which decrease vision. To help prevent future problems we gave out non-prescription sunglasses to as many people as we could. With only a couple hundred pair to share, they were gone within a couple of days.

I would like to take as many pairs of sunglasses with me when I go to Moscota, Mexico, this February. I have been buying them as I shop but I know those won't go very far. So here's your chance to help. If you would like to donate used sunglasses or new ones you have purchased when out Christmas shopping, put them in the Lions' Glasses box in the church narthex. I would love to pay for an extra suitcase to carry them and your prayers to Moscota and the Alabama Lions Team!



Corinne Piper

Thank you to Missions Volunteers

Thank you to **Gary Hurd, Cari Metzger, Corinne Piper and Tim Piper** for helping with the St. Paul's Halloween Mission of handing out hot chocolate, coffee and pencils having St. Paul's name on them. The mission was during Elida Trick-or-Treat night on October 30th. Over 350 cups of hot beverages were handed out with many parents thanking St. Paul's for a hot beverage and a rest stop.



Thank you to **Deb Hurd, Helen and Dillon Staas, Jamie Wyant, Shara Bowsher, Larry Moser, Tim Piper, Martha Vazquez**, for helping to serve those in need at Our Daily Bread Soup Kitchen on October 31st the 5th Friday. (Above photo)

Jamie Wyant led a small team at Camp Wesley to build a shed to house the paddleboards.

Spotlight On Youth



Meet **Cody Scannell**, son of Paul and Marla and a home schooled student at Scannell Academy where he is in the 3rd grade. Activities at school include science, math, spelling, history and piano. His favorite subject is Science and doing science experiments is what Cody likes most about school. His least favorite part about school: all other subjects!

Cody moved to Elida in July, 2012, when his father, Pastor Paul, was appointed to St. Paul UMC. He has two sisters, Emma and Brittany, and an older brother, David, a student at Eastern Michigan University and participating in ROTC at the University of Michigan. Cody serves as one of the acolytes on Sunday.

Cody likes baseball and basketball. He plays Upwords Basketball and Elida Baseball. He is also in an Awana club. Cody's hobbies include dance, playing drums and flipping. Other activities he enjoys are riding his bike without hands (watch out for wet cement and ground-level

windows, Cody), playing Frisbee and playing Uno.

Cody likes to practice his drums, play basketball, play with Legos, and play with Brittany in his spare time. He likes to do front flips, dance and sing, play the guitar, mac and cheese, and hot dogs over the fire. He dislikes doing schoolwork, watermelon and the fact that David has moved.

In the future, Cody would like to learn to make pottery, be a great baseball player, and be a firefighter or a policeman. Great goals, Cody!



Meet **Ian House**, son of Sara and a student at Ada Elementary School where he is in the 2nd grade. School activities include computer, gym, art and music classes. His favorite subject is Math, but his favorite part about school is recess. His least favorite part of school is music.

Ian attends St. Paul UMC with his grandmother, Linda Matlock, and his older brother, Logan. He also has two sisters, Maddy and Caitlyn. Ian is also one of the acolytes on Sunday.

Ian likes soccer, baseball, tennis and playing ball. Other activities include board games and reading. Ian is a member of Cub Scouts. In his spare time he likes to play video games. Ian loves his family, but he hates to clean his room.

Some day Ian would like to be a NASCAR driver. Good luck, Ian!



Connecting With ...



Brittany, Paul and Cody Scannell on way to St. Paul's Church to take their rest break from trick or treating.

Joanna Hurd passing out Halloween candy to Lena Whetstone at Primrose Retirement Center of Lima.



Sherilyn and Adrianna Ellinger taking a rest break at St. Paul's Church while out trick or treating.

All Saints Sunday Acolytes
Oliver Fessler and Emma Scannell lighting the candles on the Altar in memory of loved ones who have passed.



The People of St. Paul's

Thank you to all who expressed concern and sent cards following my recent cataract surgery.

Lavonne Segovia

Thank You!

I want to thank everyone for the beautiful wind chimes and the gift card. I have been blessed to have had the opportunity to work almost 40 years with so many wonderful children. It is truly my calling. I know I have received more from this experience than any of the children.

Again, thanks to my church family,

Shirley Moser

The Trustees would like to send out a big thank you to **Art Holman** for mowing the grass this past summer. Good job!

Ron Steiner, Chairman



A Christmas Prayer

Faithful God, we rejoice that you have sent your promised Christ. And yet, O God, we confess that we are still not ready for Christ's coming; we are reluctant to live as if the whole earth were your domain. We know the story – the shepherds, the angels, the magi – but we don't fully understand what it means. Awaken us to your Spirit, let Christ's birth make a difference in our lives and grant us your peace, through the grace of Jesus Christ.

– Ruth C. Duck, "The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers," Christianity Today

Remember in Prayer

Recovering from Surgery or in the Hospital

Lynda Evans
Vicki McAdams
Lavonne Segovia
Mary Steiner

Homebound Members

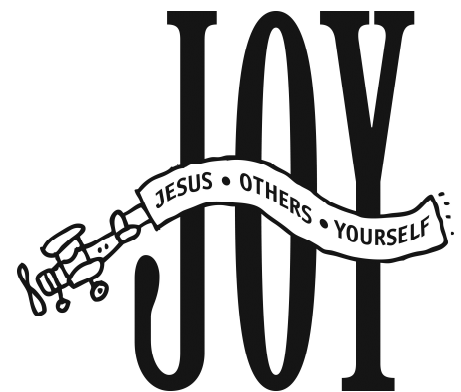
Karen Bible
Hazel Dunn
Jean Redd

Those in Need of Healing, Support, Strength & Encouragement

Joanna Hurd
Rodney Lee

In the Military & Missions

Dani Milke



Prayer List Updates

Please Contact

Lavonne Segovia

Meetings

December 1, 2014

PPR...7:00 PM

December 2, 2014

Trustees...7:00 PM

December 3, 2014

Worship mtg...6:00 PM

December 8, 2014

Finance ...7:00 PM

No Ad Council mtg.

TBA
Missions

Sundays

Prayer...8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:00 AM

Fellowship...9:30 AM

Worship...10:00 AM

Wednesdays

Chancel Choir.7:00 PM

December 2014

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

	1 Lena Whetstone A.J. White	2 Michael Craft Lavonne Segovia	3 Mary LaRue 94 years	4	5 Shirley Adams David Segovia	6 Jerry Crates Sue Theodore
7	8	9	10	11 Ron McAdams John Segovia Phyllis Trigg	12	13
14	15 Taryn Piper	16	17 Audrey Fox	18 Pam Gaghen Mary Holmes	19	20 Ruth Burgoon Mary Steiner
21	22 Kara Woeller	23	24 Linda Craft	25 Denny Grapner	26	27 Deb Hurd Megan Wyant
28	29 Tammy Segovia	30 Tristin Gaghen	31 Jack White			

Anniversaries

John & Beverly Foster
December 17; 48 yrs.

Derrick & Ashley
Edwards
December 18

Shara & Dennis Bowsher
December 19

Larry & Gloria Brunk
December 21; 46 yrs.

John & Val Kuenzli
December 27

Denny & Janna
Thompson
December 29

Ron & Karen Bible
December 30

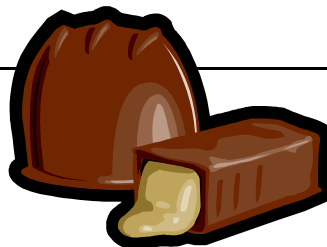
Mike & Kim Crates
December 31

Featured Recipes from St. Paul's Cooks

Buckeye Candy

By Sue Theodore

Ingredients		Instructions
1 lb. bag	Confectioners sugar	Mix together sugar, peanut butter and butter. Roll into balls and place on ungreased baking sheet. Place into freezer for 5 minutes or until firm.
1 1/2 cup	Jiff Peanut butter	
2 sticks	Soft butter	
1 (16 oz.)	Chocolate Chips	Melt chocolate and paraffin in a double boiler. Insert a toothpick into ball and partially dip into chocolate. Refrigerate until ready to serve. Makes about 4 dozen candies.
1 Tbl.	Paraffin	



Peanut Butter Fudge

By Linda Craft

Ingredients		Instructions
2 cup	Sugar	Put sugar and milk into sauce pan and bring to boil. Boil 2 1/2 minutes. Remove from heat; add peanut butter and vanilla.
1/2 cup	Milk	
3/4 cup	Peanut Butter	
1 tsp.	Vanilla	Stir just until well mixed. Pour into greased pan. Cool and cut.

KIDZ KORNER

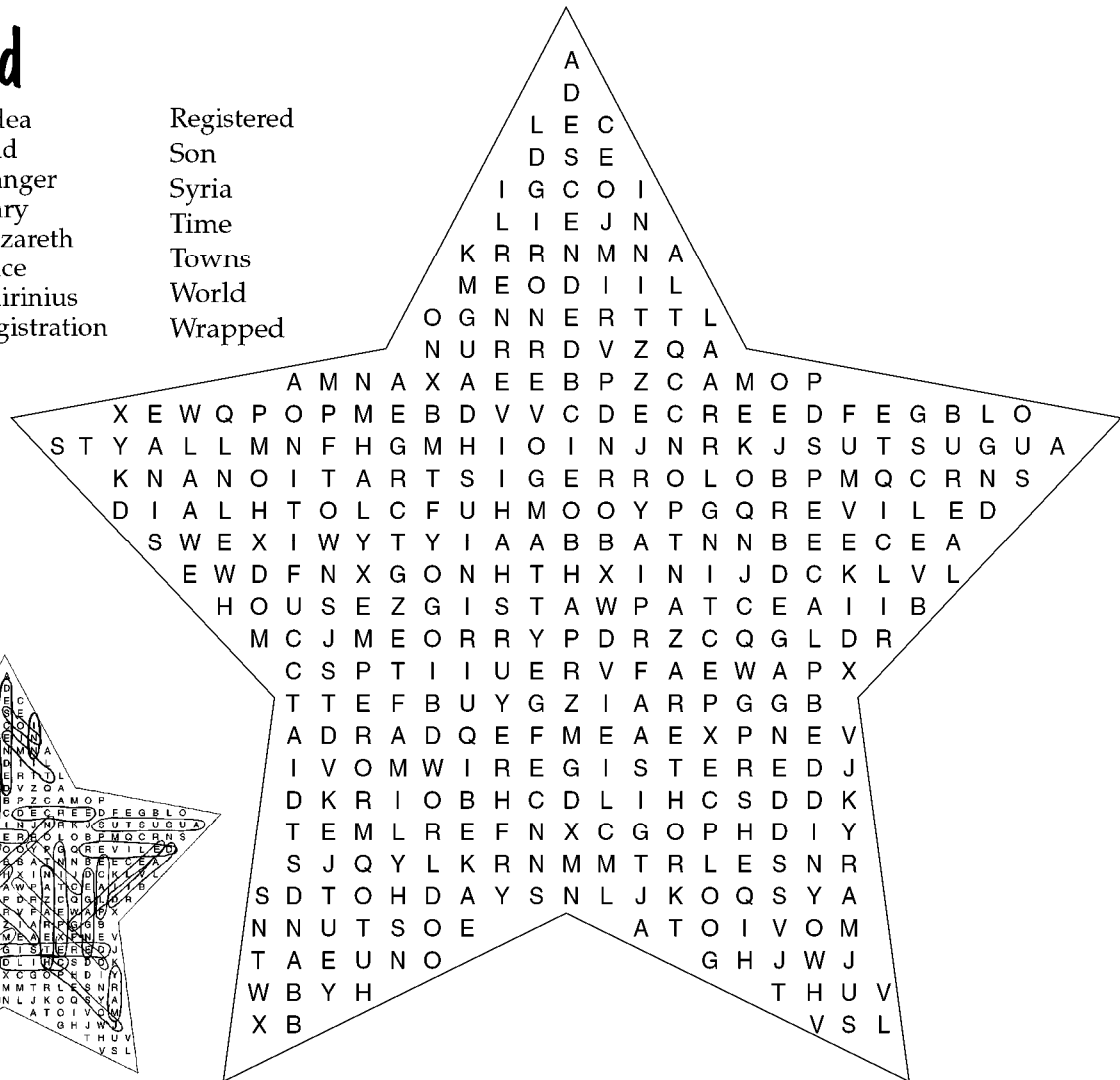
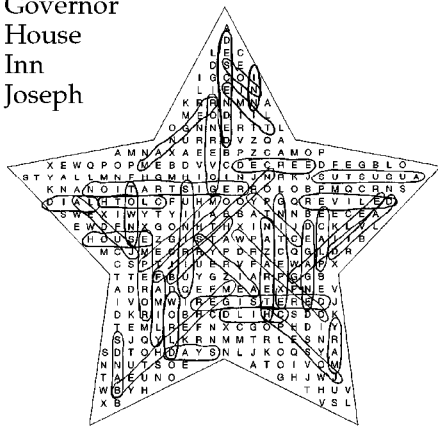
Fill in the Blank

Fill in the blanks below with the words from the Word Find.

In those _____ a _____ went out from _____ that all the _____ should be _____. This was the first _____ and was taken while _____ was _____ of _____. All went to their own _____ to be registered. _____ also went from the town of _____ in _____ to _____, to the _____ of _____ called _____, because he was _____ from the _____ and _____ of David. He went to be registered with _____, to whom he was _____ and who was _____ a _____. While they were there, the _____ came for her to _____ her child. And she gave _____ to her _____ and _____ him in _____ of _____, and _____ him in a _____, because there was no _____ for them in the _____. – Luke 2:1-7

Word Find

Augustus	Judea	Registered
Bands	Laid	Son
Bethlehem	Manger	Syria
Birth	Mary	Time
Child	Nazareth	Towns
City	Place	World
Cloth	Quirinius	Wrapped
David	Registration	
Days		
Decree		
Deliver		
Descended		
Emperor		
Engaged		
Expecting		
Family		
Firstborn		
Galilee		
Governor		
House		
Inn		
Joseph		



St. Paul's United Methodist Church

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www.elidastpaulschurch.org



Living Our Faith

A Special Baby

Mark Lowry, who wrote the lyrics to the Christmas song "Mary, Did You Know?" says he's always been amazed by Mary's silence at the cross, as her son was being crucified. Maybe she was remembering back to that first Christmas, he wonders, when she counted Jesus' fingers and toes.

"I wonder if she realized then that those were the same fingers that had scooped out the oceans and formed the seas. I wonder if she realized those were the same feet that had walked on streets of gold and been worshiped by angels. Those little lips were the same lips that had spoken the world into existence. When Mary kissed her little baby, she wasn't just kissing another baby; she was kissing the face of God."

Mary silently watched her son die 33 years later, Lowry notes — not just for the world but also for his own mother. "The baby boy she had delivered on that first Christmas was now on a cross delivering her."

Upside Down?

Even amid increased secularization, God makes the core Christmas message known. Take, for example, the story of a "winter pageant" a mother attended at her son's grade school. Songs of reindeer, snow and Santa included one titled "Christmas Love," in which the youngest performers held up letters as the song progressed: "C," "H," etc.

When a little girl unknowingly held her "M" upside down, the older kids snickered and the adult audience smiled acceptingly. But as the song drew to a close and all the letters were revealed, surprised recognition struck the Christians in the room.

"**CHRIST WAS LOVE,**" read the string of student-borne letters. God's truth had penetrated the human clutter and confusion around Christmas — as it has power to do throughout our lives: "Christ was love." And of course, he still is.