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THE GOOD NEWS

JULY 2025

The Search Committee has hit the ground running. We have met two times. The first time we met with Lawrence Richardson, Associate Minister for Transition and Vitality for the Michigan Conference. Lawrence's



responsibilities include assisting churches involved in the search process. He reviewed with us the requirements to update our church profile for the national database, which is accessed by ministers looking for a position. We also discussed the various types of pastorates that are possible. After some discussion with Lawrence, the committee decided that the optimal type of pastorate for St. Paul at this time is an Intentional Interim Pastor. Intentional interim pastors are specially trained to assist congregations in managing change and strategic planning, and stay with a church for a specified period of time, such as 18-24 months. Given St. Paul's need for growth and greater connection with the local community, the committee members felt that a period of strategic planning and a change in focus (toward our local community) are necessary. Lawrence has already forwarded us the profile of a potential intentional interim pastor. It should be noted that interim pastors are only voted upon by the Consistory, and not the congregation as a whole, once the committee decides that a potential candidate is suitable for the vacancy at St. Paul. The second time the committee met, we reviewed the necessary changes to update our profile, and discussed the profile of the intentional interim pastor already forwarded to us. It was decided that we will interview this candidate. During our next meeting, we will develop the questions we want to cover during the interview process, which we anticipate will take place in the near future. Our profile will soon go "live" on the national database, in case the candidate already submitted does not prove suitable. We will proceed from there.

Happy Anniversary  *Ray & Sandy Stillwell*
July 31



Consistory & Rummage

Consistory

Consistory held two meetings in June, one for regular business and one to concentrate on plans for church worship once Pastor KC has departed. We have a Search Committee working hard updating the church profile and reviewing applications for a new Pastor. In the meantime, the Consistory and the Worship Committee are making plans for pulpit supply and congregation-led worship services. Pastor KC will be providing worship services via technology as his schedule permits. We will keep the congregation updated as the schedule unfolds. We had two beautiful and well attended memorial services for Don Kolman and Barb McAdam. Both will be sorely missed.

Rummage

Thank you to everyone who has helped with sorting and folding rummage. The rummage room is almost empty, and the large dining room looks good. We are still accepting gently used items. Please place clothes on the stage and other items in the rummage room. I will be at the church to sort rummage on Saturday, June 28th from 9am to 12pm, if you would like to come and help.



Do you believe you're inherently sinful, doomed to damnation (unless redeemed by Jesus) because of your inborn nature and not by your own actions? Or do you believe that humankind is created in the image of God, sinless at birth, only accumulating sin through willful choices? Does Jesus's sacrifice and Resurrection save us from evil inherent in our nature or from the consequences of our sinful choices? Is the "base state" of humankind sinful or innocent?



One possible answer to these questions is Original Sin, a bedrock of Catholic doctrine which was carried over into early Protestant theology. It holds that, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden, humankind became separated from God and was damned. Moreover, that damnation is passed along to each new generation through the sin of sexual reproduction. Sexual awareness was not present prior to this first sin. Adam and Eve were not ashamed of their nakedness until after they had sinned. It is only after the Fall that they try to hide their nakedness with leaves. Sex equals sin.

So, sin enters humankind and, under the doctrine of Original Sin, remains in us universally, with only one exception (other than Christ, who as God is sinless). That exception is Mary, the Mother of God. The Church could not accept the sinless Jesus being born of a person who was damned, so in the nineteenth century the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception was formulated by the pope, in which Mary was born free of the stain of Original Sin, by the grace of God.

After the Reformation, the religious landscape changed slowly. Under the strictest of Protestant theology, as espoused by Calvin and John Knox, mankind is, by nature, irrevocably marked as sinful, although they avoided using the Catholic label "Original Sin." As the Reformation continued and denominations proliferated, some rejected outright the doctrine of original sin, such as the Mormons and the Quakers. Thus, the Doctrine of Free Will was born. Some denominations hold that, while the stain of sin is present at birth, baptism removes it. These doctrines vary widely in today's Protestantism, from denomination to denomination, and even from church to church within a denomination.

Given this variation, what does scripture say? The evidence is mixed and open to interpretation. The story of the Fall is no help. Adam's and Eve's punishment is *not* expulsion from the Garden. Adam's punishment is that he must live by the sweat of his brow on an unforgiving earth, and will ultimately return to dust. Eve's punishment is that she will bear her children in pain and will always desire her husband and be subject to him. They are driven from the Garden so they do not eat of the Tree of Life and become immortal, as God is. Sin has entered them, but there is no statement about whether or not this sin is to be inherited by their children. Cain sins through murder, but by choice, not inheritance. The ancient Israelites viewed separation from God as the result of not following the Law, rather than as a result of inherent sin. Psalm 51 does say that the psalmist came sinful from his mother's womb, but this is an unusual statement for Judaism. Sin is repeatedly defined as disobedience to God's law - acts of will, not an inherit quality. Even in Psalm 51 itself, the psalmist asks God to create in him a clean heart. The sin in him is cleansed by God at the pleadings of the psalmist. No other action seems necessary.

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What does the New Testament say? It doesn't, unless we read into certain passages. Consider the Beatitudes. Here "blessed," or happy, individuals are in a state of grace without any intervention. If there is Original Sin, it does not apply to the individuals described - the merciful, the meek, and so on. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that we are saved by faith through the gift of God, and not by works. No mention is made of what the initial state of humankind is, whether damned by the Fall, or by its own sinful actions. Paul's epistles repeatedly stress the importance of choosing to walk in the light and exhibit its traits, consciously turning away from the dark and its negative behaviors. Are we automatically born into the dark? Paul doesn't say. He assumes each believer was originally a creature of the world, rather than the Spirit, but doesn't say if darkness is the inherent condition of humankind, regardless of our actions. He emphasizes the choices each person has to make to live in the Light. Once we accept the Spirit through faith, we are saved. But are we born innocent or damned? The sins Paul identifies are sins of choice (or omission) and would not apply to a new born babe. Scripture seems mute on our spiritual status at birth. This question - are we born sinful or in the grace of innocence - is a question modern Christians must answer for themselves, based on their own theology and prayerful thought.



How do most people find a church? Being invited by someone you know is a common way, but today many, if not most, people find their church online. Given that fact, a church's website is a critical form of visibility in the modern world. With an eye to making the most of our online presence, St. Paul has purchased a website design package from the UCC, called UCC Everywhere. This package provides us with a website format we can customize to reflect our church's unique strengths and appeal. It will give us the opportunity to spotlight our activities, link to recordings of our worship services, introduce key members of our team (including our pastor when we call one), and accept donations electronically. In today's diverse world, our ONA status is a key element of many individuals' faith walk, and it too can be featured on the new website. Other features include FAQs (frequently asked questions), such as who can accept communion here, what the UCC believes, as well as a calendar of events. We will introduce pictures of our church family engaged in meaningful, and fun, activities. Our history will be recounted. The package also provides an easy method for updating as our circumstances change. We will be open to postings from members of the congregation. We have formed a small committee to oversee this initiative. This committee will be responsible for designing the website and either generating or finding content for the website as it premieres. Input from the congregation on an ongoing basis will be welcome. If you have ideas you think should be featured on the website, please see one of the committee members: Beth DeVlaminck, Mike Gebert, Gail Popyk or Erich Regier.