
Murray Presbyterian Messenger



November 2024 

Murray Presbyterian Church

P.O. Box 196, Main Street Murray, NE 68409

www.murraypresbyterian.org Tel: (402)235-2754

Featured This Month: Pastor Heidi Celebration



**Thirty-Fifth Anniversary Celebration of
Rev. Heidi McGinness's Pastorate
December 1, 2024 10:00 am
See page 4 for details**

Upcoming Events

Sundays

10:00 am: Morning Worship

Thank you for your ongoing financial support of Murray Presbyterian! Contributions may be deposited in the offering plates during worship services, mailed to the church at P. O. Box 196, Murray NE 68409 or made online at www.murraypresbyterian.org. Click on the "Give Now" button at the bottom of the homepage.

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Who would've imagined a fifth century North African bishop might have something relevant to say to twenty-first century Americans? But as I thought about the pivotal election this past week, I was reminded of **St. Augustine's** monumental spiritual classic, *City of God*. Some of us may be reeling from the impact of an election outcome that we find deeply disturbing. Others of us may be celebrating the results of this election, but we will no doubt encounter other news events that cause us distress.

Nothing we experience, however, is apt to compare with the devastating news that reverberated around the ancient Mediterranean region in the early fifth century. Rome at the time was the largest city in the world, center of civilization, and symbolic capital of an empire. The ancients dubbed it the *Urbs Aeterna*—the “Eternal City.” Then, on August 24, 410 AD, Alaric and his invading horde of Visigoths sacked the city, killing, pillaging, and setting buildings ablaze. The news sent shock waves across the Empire. From his monastic cell in Bethlehem, St. Jerome wrote: “The whole world perished in one city.”

Human nature being what it is, people immediately cast about looking for a scapegoat, and many pagans settled on a convenient target: *the Christians!* Rome's traditional pagan deities, they reasoned, must have turned away from protecting the city because Christians had stopped worshipping them. Meanwhile, many Christians were convinced the fall of Rome was an apocalyptic event that heralded the end of the world.

Three years later, Augustine began crafting a response in his *City of God*. It took 13 years to complete and the resulting tome (1100 pages, in my English edition) spans all of history, from the creation of the world up to the time of the writing. The story of humanity, as Augustine explained it, is a “tale of two cities”: an earthly city bound together by love of self and a heavenly city—the real “eternal city”—bound together by love of God. Throughout all of history, these two spiritual societies are intermingled with one another, but also in conflict.

God's plan for the ages revolves around the growth and development of that eternal city. But it can't simply be equated with any particular institution. Contrary to what's often been assumed, it's not the same thing as the church. So, if we were to apply that model today, it would mean that we can't identify the city God is building with any historical reality in our world—whether it's our country (like Christian nationalists seem to imply), or the MAGA movement, or mainline Protestantism's progressive agenda, or some socialist utopia envisioned by religious revolutionaries. All human empires—Rome included, Augustine said—come and go.

Upcoming
Worship Opportunities
Fall Sermon Series

ROAD to REDEMPTION:
Finding Your Story in Exodus

What does it mean to be a Christian? Look over the following list of themes from the book of Exodus—stages in the Exodus journey. They should all be features of our lives! As Christians, we're on the same spiritual pilgrimage. Join us this fall as we trace these steps together and find ourselves along the Exodus “road to redemption.”

- Sept. 8:** “Starting Out in Bondage” (Exodus 1:6-22)
- Sept. 15:** “Encountering the Holy” (Exodus 3:1-14)
- Sept. 22:** “The Reality of Judgment” (Exodus 7:1-5, 9:13-21)
- Sept. 29:** “Sacrifice of a Substitute” (Exodus 12:1-13)
- Oct. 6:** “Evil's Decisive Defeat” (Exodus 14:5-9, 13-14, 21-31)
- Oct. 13:** “Guidance Through the Wilderness” (Exodus 13:17-14:4)
- Oct. 20:** “Experiencing Provision” (Exodus 16:1-15)
- Oct. 27: Rev. Dr. Michael Elliott**
- Nov. 3:** “Claiming a New Identity in Community” (Exodus 19:1-6)
- Nov. 10:** “Obeying a Set of Standards” (Exodus 20:1-17)
- Nov. 17:** “Worship at the Center” (Exodus 25:1-8)
- Nov. 24:** “Having an Intercessor” (Exodus 32:7-14)

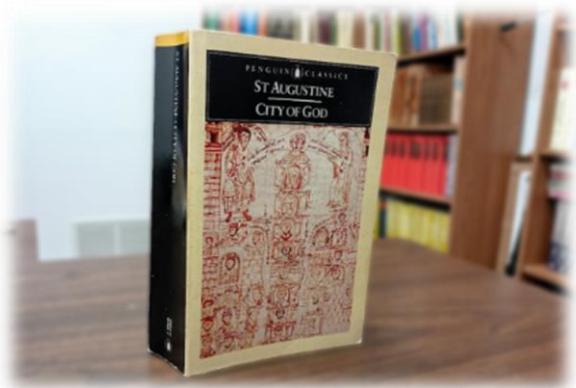
So don't pin your hopes on any of them! The true city of God can't be achieved on earth.

Thus, members of God's eternal city live in this world without truly belonging. They're what Augustine calls *peregrini*, "resident aliens" or a "band of pilgrims." "While this Heavenly City. . . is on pilgrimage in this world," Augustine writes, "she calls out citizens from all nations and so collects a society of aliens, speaking all languages" (XIX,17).

Being pilgrims, however, doesn't mean that members of God's city should adopt some otherworldly spirituality and refrain from participating in civic affairs. Quite the contrary! Even though "true justice" and "true peace" are unattainable, we can achieve approximations of those conditions—and that is something to pursue! "When the victory goes to those who are fighting for the juster cause, can anyone doubt that the victory is a matter for rejoicing and the resulting peace is something to be desired?" (XV.4).

Through it all, God is working out his purposes—but his ways are inscrutable: "The same God gave power to. . . the most attractive emperors, as well as to Domitian, the most ruthless tyrant; and. . . the same God gave the throne to Constantine the Christian and also to Julian the Apostate. . . . It is clear that God, the one true God, rules and guides these events according to his pleasure" (V.21).

What's the point of this whole theological exercise? Like a good pastor and bishop, Augustine was guiding his faithful flock of believers to maintain a spirit of equanimity, even in the face of the most devastating historical developments. When empires are teetering on the brink of collapse (as in Augustine's day), or there's a political set-back, or there's upheaval in the world, "fight for the juster cause," but know that God is working his own purposes out in ways that may not be immediately apparent to us. The real story of history isn't the rise and fall of empires. It's the eternal city that God is building, gradually, imperceptibly, often hidden from view. The City of God is being built in places like the Open Door Mission in Omaha, in a sewing collective in La Concepción, Nicaragua, in a clinic in El Cortijo, Guatemala, and (we hope) in a little white clapboard church in the village of Murray, NE. That's the conviction to which we cling, in the midst of everything happening around us.



Leadership

Session

Moderator

Rev. William McConnell

Clerk of Session

Debra South

Class of 2024

Kenny Drake

Denise Ayers

Class of 2025

Sharlyn Deterding

Debra South

Class of 2026

Tanner Miner

Kyle Nickels

Deacons

Class of 2024

Kathy Friedli

Sherrill Konfrst

Julie Nickels

Class of 2025

Ryleigh Hill

Stacey McConnell

Karla Remmers

Thank You!

No sooner had we returned from Dallas at the end of October—a trip for which we used gift money we have received from the congregation in the past—than we were surprised with yet another generous expression of affection for Pastor Appreciation Month. We are deeply grateful, not only for your financial gift, but for all the ways in which you shower us with love, encouragement, and support. Thank you so very much.

Bill and Stacey

College Care Packages



About a half dozen college students connected with our congregation got a pleasant surprise when they went to their mailboxes recently—along with a reminder that they are never far from our thoughts. Care packages filled with goodies donated by our members and friends were sent out in late October. Thank you to everyone involved in this outreach!

Worship & Family Life Sharlyn Deterding, Team Lead
Pastor Heidi Anniversary Celebration



December 1 marks the 35th anniversary of **Rev. Heidi McGinness** beginning her ministry at Murray Presbyterian Church as a first-call pastor. Her tenure, though short-lived (she accepted a call to First Presbyterian, Bellevue, in October 1992), marked a turning point in the recent history of our church. With fresh energy and creativity, Pastor Heidi helped reinvigorate our congregation and attract many new members. Those who were here at the time recall her ministry fondly, and many

have stayed in touch with her over the years as she went on to serve a church in Colorado and then become a tireless advocate for persecuted Christians in the South Sudan.

That's why we're delighted to be welcoming Pastor Heidi back this December 1 to preach, lead worship, and officiate at the Lord's table. We want to celebrate her 35 years of ordained ministry in the church and lift up thanks for the way our congregation was blessed through her gifts. If you are able, we hope you'll join us for this special celebration! It's an opportunity for long-time members to reconnect with Pastor Heidi and for relative newcomers to meet her.



Leadership Teams

Worship and Family Life
Sharlyn Deterding, Team Leader
Deb South, Session Rep.
Christina Dolvin
Linnea Hill
Julie Nickels
Sherrill Konfrst
Laraine Young

Mission and Outreach
Kyle Nickels, Team Leader
George Collins
Melanie Honaker
John McConnell
Stacey McConnell
Dana Stahl
Ann Wieringa

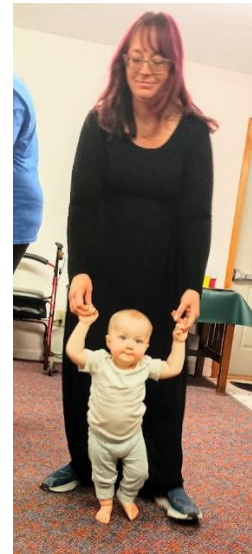
Christian Education
Denise Ayers, Team Leader.
Sharlyn Deterding
Kathy Friedli
Julie Nickels
Linnea Hill

Properties and Finance
Kenny Drake, Team Leader
Sharlyn Deterding, Session Rep.
Dave Friedli
Linnea Hill
Norm Koester
Gary Reike
Michael Stahl

Soup and Bingo Night (November 3)



Our Bingo Caller



Litter Clean-Up



Four members of the 8-person crew that policed our portion of Highway 1 on October 20.

