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Connect Newsletter

December 31, 2024

Dear Friends:

For the last 13 months, I have been the Moderator of your Session, leading worship, and caring for your congregation. This has been a time of joy for me because you are welcoming, loving, generous, and grounded in your faith in Jesus the Christ.. Thank you for trusting me, calling me, and allowing me to become a part of the Washington family. It has been an honor and privilege.



December 31st was my last day as your Temporary Pastor. I already miss you. At the same time, I am so excited for you as you begin a new year and with a new pastor. I will be praying for you, and your new beginning and journey. May God continue to bless you and your ministry.

Pastor Stephanie Knopf





Clerk's Corner

By Nancy Sebastian

The Presbyterian Church of Washington Welcomes Rev. Rich Gamble

As we step into the new year, we are delighted to welcome Rev. Rich Gamble as our pastor, beginning January 1, 2025. It is an honor to have him join our church family, and we look forward to building meaningful connections as we work together in service and fellowship.



Session Updates for the New Year

Our Session team is realigning to continue guiding our congregation effectively.

- ♦ **Jim Glamann:** two-year term
- ♦ **Scott Marcus and Mike Becker:** one-year terms

Session members, along with Rev. Gamble, will participate in *Boundary Training* required by the Presbytery. This training will take place via Zoom on January 16 in the Session Room.

Our Heartfelt Thank You to Rev. Stephanie Knopf

We extend our deepest gratitude to Stephanie Knopf for her outstanding service to our congregation. Stephanie has provided us with insightful sermons and has served as our Session moderator since December 2023. Her leadership and unwavering support have been a source of strength for our church. Words cannot fully express our appreciation for all she has done.

Opportunities to Serve

The new year is a perfect time to get involved in the life of our church. Please consider joining a church committee.

Mission Opportunity: Our Meals on Wheels program is looking for volunteers. If you're interested in helping, please contact Sarah Spear.

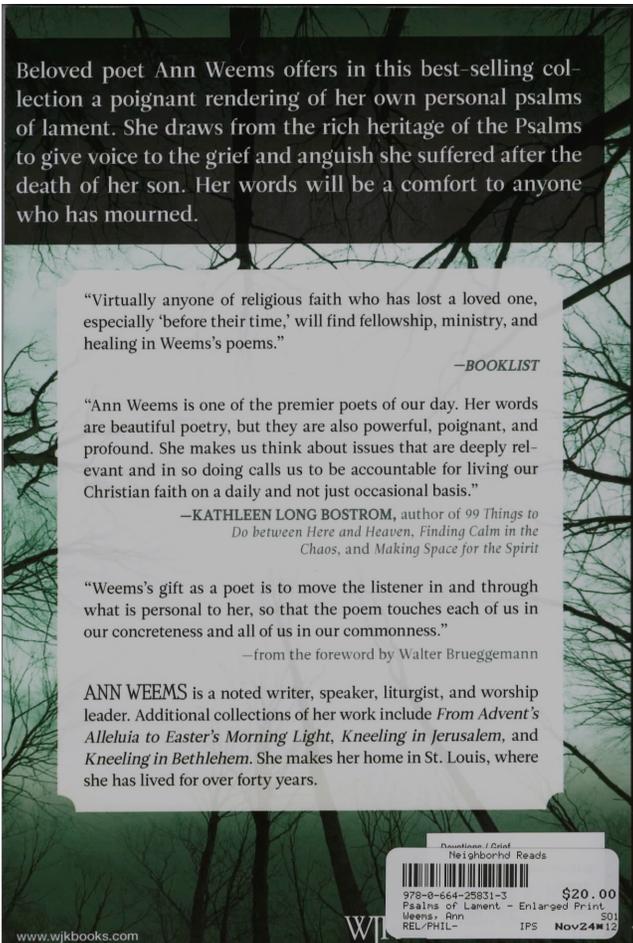
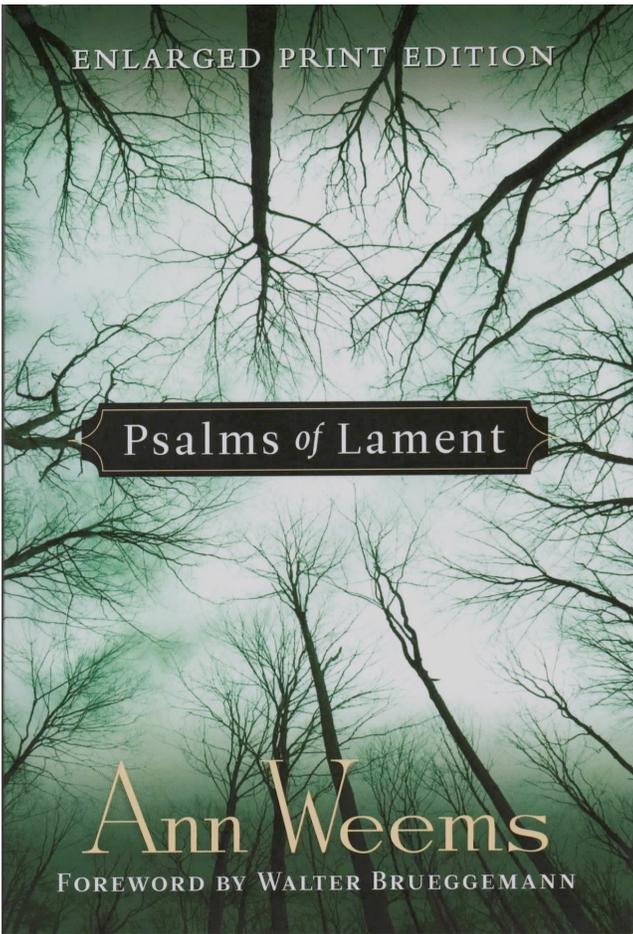
Annual Reports and Upcoming Meeting

Committee chairs are reminded to submit their **2024 annual reports** by **Friday, January 10, 2025**. These will be compiled along with the Scrip and cemetery reports for inclusion in the annual report, available by **Sunday, January 19, 2025**.

Our **Annual Meeting** will be held on **Sunday, January 26, 2025**. Please let Ann know if you'd like a hard copy of the annual report.

Wishing You a Blessed 2025. May the year ahead bring you good health, abundant blessings, and joyful surprises.

Blessings in Christ,
Nancy



PCW Book Club Starting New Book

Our church book club, now in its fifth year, will begin reading *Psalms of Lament* on January 9, 2025. If you have ever lost someone dear to you, and questioned your faith in God as a result of that person’s death, this book was written for you. The author dedicated it “To those who weep, and to those who weep with those who weep.”

The late Ann Weems (1934-2016) lived in St. Louis for more than 50 years and was called by many “the Presbyterian poet laureate.” These unrhymed poems were written to address her “unanswered and unresolved grief” for her son Todd, who was murdered in St. Louis in 1982. In the book’s foreword, theologian Walter Brueggemann writes, “The poems given here, however, are not preoccupied with the narrow range of self. Weems’s gift as a poet is to move the listener in and through what is personal to her, so that the poem touches each of us in our concreteness and all of us in our commonness.”

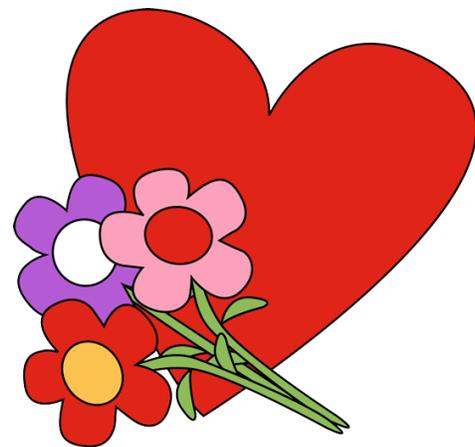


All are welcome to join our book club discussion, even if you haven’t read the book and want to see how the book club “works.” We meet Thursday mornings at 10 a.m. in the Session room, and our leader is Dr. David Brunworth.

Scrip Gift Cards

Make Perfect Valentines

Surprise your friends and family members with a Scrip gift card. See page 11 of this newsletter for the large selection of stores that offer them. When you purchase a Scrip card through our church, our church receives a percentage of the amount. YOU receive exactly the amount you paid. Our Scrip team—Gretchen, Becky, and Kathy—will be taking orders in person on Sunday, February 2, immediately after the worship service. You can also submit your order to the church office at any time OR order your Scrip cards online. Thank you for supporting this successful fundraiser for our church.



**Order Your Scrip
Gift Cards
on
Sunday, February 2**



Cooking For a Crowd?

Our Meals on Wheels teams are always cooking for a crowd, and we appreciate their skills in our large commercial kitchen. Beth Bonney recently snapped this photo after she and her crew prepared dinner for 30. They used 15 pounds of ground beef, 13 pounds of potatoes, 7 family-size cans of green beans, 2 onions, and one pound of bacon. If you'd like to join this worthwhile mission project, please contact Ann Hart in the church office.

Bell Choir Rings in the New Year and Remembers a Rich History

Aaron Bounds, our accomplished Director of Music Ministries, is an assistant professor of music at East Central College. In the past 16 years he has directed bands, orchestras, choirs, jazz and wind ensembles, and has played his trombone in various professional musical groups. As Aaron carefully chooses musical selections for one of the choirs he directs, he occasionally mutters to himself, “Can’t do that piece. Too many notes.”



Aaron Bounds

Too many notes? Aaron never met a note he didn’t like, but a bell choir—unlike any other musical group—has peculiar limitations. “Each bell player usually plays two notes, hence two bells,” he explains. “If you have sixteen in your choir, that would cover a song with sixteen notes, or two octaves. We currently have seven players in our church. We have file cabinets of bell choir music for three octaves, but we cannot use it because we don’t have enough people.”



Who used that three-octave music? Our own bell choir of 40 years ago when our congregation owned the building at the intersection of Market and Fourth Streets in downtown Washington. “Our pastor, Reverend Paul Bock, really wanted a bell choir in the church and was so excited when several of us decided to try it,” remembered Mary Eleanor Farrell. “JoAnn Vogt was our director for many years. We started with two octaves, and eventually had enough players for three octaves. Our church even had a children’s bell choir for awhile.” Former member Nancy Hooper was instrumental in helping obtain the bells, which were purchased from Schulmerich, now the world’s largest producer of handbells. Nancy’s sister Beverly worked at Schulmerich at the time. The company, located in a small town north of Philadelphia, has been manufacturing bells since 1935, and the bell sizes our choir uses cost about \$400 each in today’s prices.

“We got to see Beverly when she visited, and once she played an entire song on several bells by herself,” continued Mary Eleanor. “She was amazing. None of us ever reached her level of playing, but we sure had fun learning. Mauri Truesdell and I were actually the first bell choir members to perform in church. We were real beginners, and we agreed to play for the sunrise service on Easter. We stood behind a little table with a starched white tablecloth. After playing one of my notes, I put down my bell on that table. But the tablecloth was so stiff that it extended beyond the edge of the table, and my bell fell to the floor! It was very embarrassing, but I picked it up and we continued with our song. Mauri and I still laugh about that.”

Not everyone in our bell choir was a serious music student as a child. Mary Eleanor's parents owned Eaton Funeral Home in Sullivan, and the couple and their five children lived next door to the mortuary. "We could hear all the sounds of a funeral through the walls, and they could hear us," she said. "My dad would often say that I couldn't practice the piano on Tuesday morning or Friday afternoon because there would be a funeral. Well, that sounded good to me."

About 20 bell ringers were active in the last 10 years of the downtown church and the first 20 years in our current building, which was completed in 1994. After JoAnn Vogt died in 2005, the bell choir gradually slipped into inactivity, performing infrequently with temporary directors. Aaron Bounds understands exactly why a dozen candidates were not lining up to apply for the bell choir director job.

"Directing a bell choir is a very different experience than directing a band or an orchestra or a vocal choir, and I've done all three," he explained. "As a musician, I thought it would be easy to learn how to direct bells. It's not! I'm learning along with the ringers. I have to look at each ringer, which is challenging, even with just seven people. Bell players are very exposed. If you play in a choir or orchestra, you can hide. In a bell choir, you feel like a solo player and it's my job to know who's playing what note. Four people, for example, aren't generally playing a chord in unison. Another challenge in our bell choir is the wide range of skill levels. Fortunately, I have dealt with this before. In my community band I have students who excel in reading and playing music and others who are beginners in every sense of the word. As a director, it's both an art and a skill to choose the right piece so that every member can play it and it will sound good."

Marsha Stonerook has been playing bells almost steadily for the past 35 years in three different Protestant denominations in Ohio, Indiana, Virginia, and Missouri. She took piano lessons as a youngster, and "when my father bought a spinet organ, I amused myself on that."



Aaron Bounds directs a bell choir rehearsal. From left are Katie Collins, Lee Westerhoff, Jane Bugele, Mauri Truesdell, Marsha Stonebrook, Kathy Rogers, and John Bugele.

“Lots of techniques are involved in extending the arm that holds the bell,” she said, “depending on how long the sound should ring. Like piano music, bell music uses whole, half, quarter, and eighth notes. We hold the bell against our chest to stop the sound. I arrange my bells in front of me like a piano keyboard. Any bell that is a sharp or a flat is placed slightly higher on the table than the other bells. I know some bell ringers who do not read music, so they have to count all the notes to know where they come in.”

Marsha knows no one who owns a complete set of bells to practice with at home. “They’re too expensive. If I I’m having trouble with a particular piece I’ll practice at home with a table in front of me. I use a pencil as a bell, pick it up at the right time, and pretend that I’m ringing it.”

Even with Marsha’s wealth of knowledge and experience with handbells, she has some limitations. “I won’t play the big bells or the real high ones, either. The large bells are too heavy for me, and with the little bells, you have to snap them with your wrist to get the right sound. When you play those little bells—which are the upper notes—most songs don’t have too many of them. So my mind begins to wander and I lose my place. I’m also fighting with some arthritis in my hands.”

John and Jane Bugele, who met in high school when they were both members of band and orchestra, have the deepest musical backgrounds of any couple that has played in our bell choir. Both are longtime members of our church’s vocal choir, and John directed it briefly before Aaron Bounds (their son-in-law) was hired. “When we were a lot younger, Jane played the clarinet and bassoon, and I played trumpet. We’d never done bells and thought it would be fun and challenging,” said John. “Years ago when JoAnn was our director, bell choirs were popular in churches and we’d attend clinics and seminars. At the end of one bell festival in Belleville, Illinois, we performed a concert with several bell choirs from all over St. Louis. It was a very, very rewarding experience.”

Katie Collins is the newest member of the bell choir and she is already experiencing the rewards of being part of the ensemble. “Marsha Stonerook showed me how to hold the bell, the correct motion of the wrist, and other things,” Katie said. “Aaron lavished us with gentle, patient compliments any time we hit a right note at the right time. He humbly attested that he is learning along with us, and his patience produces better and better results as we practice. Aaron has selected music suited to our skill level, which makes us successful. When anyone is struggling, another bell ringer offers help. I am really enjoying learning how to play beautiful music for our church.”

Jane is one of the rare bell players in our church who can hold and play two bells—two different notes—in one hand. “Playing bells is so different than playing in a band or orchestra because we’re all playing the same instrument,” she emphasized. “You’re always listening to the other players. It takes incredible focus to play only your two notes in a line of many notes. I no longer play in a band or orchestra so I’ve lost my skills on the clarinet and bassoon. But the musical part of my soul is still there and bell playing satisfies me. I look at it as brain therapy. You cannot be thinking of anything else when you are rehearsing or performing bell music.”

Kathy Rogers looks forward to bell choir rehearsals every week. “I’ve learned so much from Aaron and all the players. I took piano lessons as a child, but nobody is directing you at the piano. I’d never followed a director before and was very nervous at first. When I make blunders—we all do—the others are very supportive. Aaron is always encouraging us and thanking us for our time and talent. We all get lost now and then but Aaron silently mouths the number of the measure we are on to help us.”

One of the highlights of 2024 for Kathy was attending the Gateway Ringers bell choir concert at St. Peter’s United Church of Christ in Washington. She saw for the first time a bell player using a soft mallet to strike the larger bells. “After the concert, the director invited us to leave our pews and go meet the performers. We literally ran up to the stage!”

Shortly after Lee Westerhoff and her husband Roger joined our church about five years ago, Lee began ringing bells. “Working with people is a good way to get acquainted quickly,” she said. Lee had played in the bell choir at Peace Lutheran Church for several years, and her instrumental background includes performing on the alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, and clarinet. She is probably the only member of our congregation who at one time played handbells standing on the sidewalk in front of Schnucks grocery store. “One time at Peace Lutheran we supported the Salvation Army bell ringing at Christmastime. We had no table, but just

each held two bells and played some carols for the shoppers.” Lee has high praise for Aaron as a director. “He has a *lot* of patience, and is really good at directing us.”

At left, John Bugele demonstrates how to pause the sound of the bells.

Continued on page 9.



Forty years after her first public performance in church, Mauri Truesdell says playing handbells still requires patience, attention to details, and stamina. "I've definitely found that cataracts, hearing loss, and creaky joints make ringing more difficult than when I was much younger. For someone who is thinking about joining us but has never played bells before, I would say that *any* experience with music would be beneficial, especially singing or playing an instrument. Being able to read music is extremely helpful but not a requirement. I learned to play bells decades ago, basically only able to read the two notes I was playing. I actually learned how to read music just five years ago when I retired and took piano lessons for the first time. Aaron knew nothing about ringing bells when he became our director, but he's done a great job as a newcomer to the world of bell ringing. His vast experience with musical directing has been such a bonus for us. I've learned a lot about music from Aaron."

And what happens when Aaron is absent from a rehearsal? Four people are still laughing about an incident that happened two years ago. Mauri, John and Jane, and Francie Turnure had gathered to practice a couple of Christmas carols. "We all have some hearing loss," recalled Mauri. "After playing nearly half a page, I said, *Stop! This sounds horrible!* We discovered that Jane and I were playing one song, and Francie and John were playing a different song."

END



These three rooftop bells are a distinctive architectural element of our church. But alas... they have not rung for more than 10 years. The bell ringing is controlled by a complex digital device that needs replacing or repairing to the tune of \$7,000. If you would like to contribute toward this wish list project, please see a member of the Finance Committee.



Our choir performs a glorious Christmas Cantata



Fourteen members of our choir—and eight guest musicians—were directed by Aaron Bounds and accompanied by pianist Emily Bounds in a magnificent Christmas Cantata during our worship service on December 15, 2024. The performers are pictured above. In the left photo, the Reverend Stephanie Knopf gives the benediction at the close of the worship service. Thank you to everyone who assisted Aaron and Emily with this special performance. Dr. Scott Snider arranged the music; our Worship and Music Committee handled various details; Tom Ellenberger managed the complex sound system; Ketha Bounds assisted on the

piano during rehearsals; Bob and Jan Eade made a generous financial contribution for the performance; Ann Hart prepared the worship bulletin; and Mary Ellenberger and Aneeta Brown served as narrators.

Thank You Presbyterian Choir!

Our Bell Choir Seeks New Members

The next rehearsal is Wednesday, January 15, at 5 p.m. in the sanctuary. We invite you to attend and observe our rehearsal if you have an interest in learning more about our handbells.

2024 PCW Committee Members

The 2025 PCW Committee List Will Be Published Soon

Christian Ed. Committee

Kathy Rogers, Co-Chair*
Gerry Urban, Co-Chair*
 Beth Brehe
 Micki Brehe
 Craig Matzes
 Ian McCracken
 Heather Miller
 Jolene Patterson*

Outreach Committee

Tom Farrell, Chair*
 Aaron Bounds
 Alicia Brehe
 Katie Farrell
 Ian McCracken
 Heather Miller
 Nancy Sebastian*

Worship & Music Committee

Tom Ellenberger, Chair*
 Mike Becker
 Aaron Bounds
 Emily Bounds
 John Bugele
 Katie Collins
 Tom Kempf
 Vivian Marshall
 Jolene Patterson*

Church Life Committee

Linda Booher, Co-Chair*
Sarah Spear, Co-Chair*
 Beth Bonney
 Jane Bugele
 Shirley Coulter
 Barb Hagen
 Karen Ladd
 Vivian Marshall
 Francie Turnure
 Jean Weekley
 Lee Westerhoff

Personnel Committee

Mauri Truesdell, Chair*
 Mary Ellenberger
 Gretchen Farrell
 Joe Hagan
 Nancy Sebastian*
 Elda Seener*
 Tim Urban

*Session Members

Nancy Sebastian, Clerk
 Linda Booher
 David Brunworth
 Tom Ellenberger
 Tom Farrell
 Jolene Patterson
 Kathy Rogers
 Elda Seener
 Sarah Spear
 Mauri Truesdell
 Gerry Urban

Property Committee

David Brunworth, Chair*
 John Bugele
 Bob Eade
 Jim Glamann
 Joe Hagan
 Barbara Schofield
 Steve Sebastian

Finance Committee

Tom Farrell, Chair*
Linda Booher, Treasurer*
 Gary Brehe
 Karen Ladd
 Phyllis McElhinney

MEETING TIMES:

Elda Seener*	Christian Ed.	2nd Sunday	11:30 AM
Bruce Wiese	Church Life	2nd Tuesday	9:30 AM
	Finance	2nd Monday	12:00 PM
	Mission	1st Tuesday	10:00 AM
Debbie Bandy	Outreach	2nd Wednesday	6:30 PM
Christy Eckert	Personnel	2nd Tuesday	6:00 PM
Gretchen Farrell	Property	2nd Sunday	11:30 AM
Lois Kempf	Session	4th Thursday	6:30 PM
Kathy Rogers*	Worship	2nd Thursday	7:00 PM
Sarah Spear*			

Updated 8/19/2024