St. Paul
Ann Arbor

Sowing Truth. Building Faith. Shining Love.



St. Paul and Emmaus: A New Stage in the Relationship

By: Pastor Ted Hopkins

Dear friends,

For the past three years, Emmaus Lutheran Church has been worshiping in St. Paul's downtown sanctuary and building relationships with people in the Old West Side of Ann Arbor. Through a dedicated group of members and supporters, Emmaus has developed meaningful ways to serve and connect with our neighbors. Over the summer, however, Pastor Chris Troxel accepted a call to Trinity in Clinton Township, and Emmaus now faces an important transition. This transition also presents an opportunity for St. Paul to come alongside Emmaus, support its ministry, and strengthen our shared commitment to bringing the Gospel to the Old West Side.

St. Paul has served the Old West Side for more than 100 years, and we remain committed to bringing the Gospel to people in this neighborhood. While our congregation has grown to reach and serve people from across Washtenaw County and beyond (especially through our school ministry) we have not always done as well at connecting with those who live close to our downtown sanctuary. Recognizing this, we partnered with University Lutheran Chapel about five years ago, providing the use of our sanctuary to establish Emmaus Lutheran Church.

Emmaus has accomplished a great deal with a relatively small but dedicated group of people. Its garden cooperative has connected with neighbors throughout the Old West Side, while the Easter egg hunt and S'mores evenings have created opportunities for local families to gather and build relationships. Through its work with the Delonis Center, Emmaus has also

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St. Paul and Emmaus... *cont'd from cover*

St. Paul Lutheran Church of Ann Arbor

EMMAUS LUTHERAN CHURCH

found ways to serve some of the most vulnerable people in Ann Arbor. Through these efforts, Emmaus has helped carry forward St. Paul's longstanding commitment to the Old West Side.

In this period of transition, we have an opportunity to partner more closely with Emmaus and continue its ministry. I have proposed a two-year covenant relationship in which St. Paul would call a seminary graduate to serve as Emmaus' site pastor while also serving on St. Paul's ministry staff. In this arrangement, the new site pastor would benefit from the support of a senior pastor and the collaboration of a larger church staff. We would also provide the pastor with a parish house (the old youth house) as a residence, allowing him to live in the neighborhood. Living next to the sanctuary would provide additional opportunities to build relationships with our neighbors and engage in ministry in the community.







Through Emmaus, we can continue pursuing our long-term vision of Welcoming Community, extending deeper relationships with Jesus and his people to more neighbors throughout the Ann Arbor area.

The two-year agreement would give Emmaus and St. Paul time to discern whether this arrangement should become permanent, with Emmaus becoming part of St. Paul, or whether it would serve as a transition in the life of Emmaus as an independent congregation, as the pastor would follow Emmaus in that separation too. During this period, Emmaus would retain its own finances and cover the costs of the site pastor, staff, and programming. St. Paul would not be required to pay for Emmaus' costs out of its budget.

On November 1, Emmaus voted unanimously to pursue this relationship with St. Paul, and I am excited about this partnership as well. I believe it is an opportunity for St. Paul to further the work of God's kingdom in Ann Arbor. Through Emmaus, we can continue pursuing our long-term vision of a Welcoming Community, extending deeper relationships with Jesus and his people to more neighbors throughout the Ann Arbor area. More importantly, this partnership creates opportunities for more people to hear the good news of the Gospel and come to believe in Jesus, the Savior.

For more details, please read the covenant agreement recently sent out in the eNews (or scan the QR code below). **Before we vote in January on whether to enter into this agreement with Emmaus and call a seminary graduate to serve as its site pastor, please take time to read the agreement and reach out to me with any questions**. My hope is that this arrangement will not simply sustain Emmaus through a pastoral transition, but strengthen its ministry and help us reach more of our neighbors with the love of Jesus. As we seek to become a Welcoming Community, this partnership offers us an opportunity to strengthen our presence in the Old West Side and bring the love of Christ to more of our neighbors. I hope you'll join me in prayerfully considering how we can support this ministry.

God bless you all!
Pastor Ted

Building for the Next Generation: St. Paul Ann Arbor's School Expansion and Fundraising Campaign

By: Dan Brieschke



What a blessing it is to see the vision for St. Paul Lutheran School in Ann Arbor becoming a reality! Through the generosity and faithful support of our congregation, we are making a significant investment in the future of our school, our children, and our ministry to the community.

Our school expansion project was originally envisioned as a two-year fundraising effort for 2023 and 2024. As the project developed, however, the vision grew, the scope expanded, city reviews and approvals dragged on, and the timeline has now extended beyond four years, with completion planned for 2027.

It's fair to say the delays, strange as it seems, have worked in our favor, as several well thought out improvements were added to the original plan, including new access to the playground, a kiddie car track for our preschoolers, a new outdoor full size basketball court, and safer outdoor walkways. Together, these enhancements will provide a much smoother physical experience for our students and families while maintaining a focus on Christ-centered education.

To date, our congregation has pledged approximately **$1.8 million**, with nearly **$1.5 million already received**. These gifts are a tremendous testament to the commitment of our St. Paul family. We are deeply grateful to everyone who has contributed, whether through a financial gift, a pledge, prayer, or encouragement.

As we move forward, our immediate priority is to fulfill the pledges already made. Every contribution toward an existing commitment brings us closer to completing this important work. At the same time, we welcome new commitments from those who would like to participate in this growing ministry.

In addition, we have the icing on the cake with our "Fill It Up" campaign, allowing individuals to sponsor the furnishings and equipment selected by our staff for use in the new educational spaces.

This project is about much more than buildings. It is about creating welcoming spaces where children can learn, grow in faith, and experience the love of Christ. Improvements to our future classrooms and school library will help provide enriching educational experiences, while the expanded facilities will strengthen our ability to serve families for years to come.



We are also blessed by the generous matching opportunity provided by our St. Paul Foundation made possible with a gift made by the Oscar Haab Foundation, which offers 50 cents in matching funds for every dollar contributed. This opportunity makes each gift even more impactful.

As members of the St. Paul congregation, we have an opportunity to leave a lasting legacy—not simply in the buildings we construct, but in the lives of the children and families whose faith and education will be nurtured here. As we look at our pledges to date, it's certainly understandable that in some cases, pledge completion has slowed as the project timetable has extended. But now, as concrete is pouring and we see this project taking shape, consider these three things:

- **If you made a pledge, make plans to complete it.** We will reach out to all pledgers to ensure we understand the latest status of every pledge.
- **If your pledge was planned for 2023-25, and you have the heart and the mind to expand it,** pledges can be extended through 2028. This could meaningfully reduce the amount the church borrows from Church Extension Fund.
- **If you haven't yet made a pledge or a donation towards this project,** you are invited to pray about it and make pledges or dedicated gifts which will be welcome through 2028.

Thank you for your continued generosity, prayers, and support. Together, we can bring this vision to completion and continue building a strong foundation for the next generation.

Let us continue to build—not only for today, but for the generations to come.

A Sneak Peek Inside St. Paul School

By:Amy Roth, Elise Snapper, Monica Slack & Angela Boakye

If you've been to school lately, or even just driven by, you've probably noticed that things look a little messy! Our parking lot project is in full swing, and while it may look like organized chaos right now, we're beginning to see the progress and can picture the beautiful improvement it will soon be. We are getting there!



While there's plenty happening outside, there's even more happening inside! Let me give you a little peek at just some of the wonderful things our students have been learning and experiencing each day.

Our middle school students have had some pretty exciting learning opportunities! With the help of scientists from GLSC, our 7th and 8th graders explored the retention pond up the road, observing pond life up close, including tadpoles and some rather large dragonfly larvae! Our 6th graders had a different kind of science lesson. During a light rain, they learned directly from our project manager, Tom Roth, about where water collects and where it gets absorbed. And where did they conduct their experiment? Right in our very own parking lot! Who knew a construction project could become such a great science lab?

Back in our classrooms, learning has been just as engaging. Our 8th graders took on the role of history detectives, analyzing passenger lists from the America and the Planter to discover what they could about colonial settlers in 1635. Meanwhile, our 5th graders enjoyed reading Holes and took their learning one step further by creating their own lizards and celebrating with a fun Holes-themed party. Learning is always a little more fun when you can bring a good book to life!



Our youngest learners have been enjoying fall! The infant and toddler families had a time of fellowship with their Pumpkins, Donuts and Cider event. They enjoyed the delicious treats and were able to pick a pumpkin to carve with their little one.





The preschool has been bustling this fall with visits to the apple orchard, a pumpkin-carving night, and various fall parties. They have been learning about the life cycles of apple and pumpkin seeds. However, the most exciting part has been watching the construction work happening right outside our playground. Our dig zone and sandbox have been active from morning until night. The highlight is the new bike path that has

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Youth Growing in Faith - Making Room for Friends

By: Tyler Seehafer, Director of Youth Ministry

There's a lot to celebrate in our high school and middle school ministries! We have been blessed with continued involvement and growth as students gather for Christian fellowship and Bible study—and invite their friends to join them. It has been encouraging to see students not only getting involved themselves but also welcoming others. Those invitations are helping build a community where students can connect, belong, and grow in faith.





Our new youth center has been a wonderful blessing for our high school ministry, providing a comfortable space to gather and making room for continued growth. It's exciting to see students use the space, build friendships, and invite friends to join us!

Our middle school ministry has plenty to celebrate, too! Faith, Fun, and Fellowship events have welcomed close to 40 students, including new friends from outside St. Paul. Beyond the fun, we take time to reflect on our activities and talk about how those experiences connect to our everyday lives and our walk in faith. What a blessing to see students make those connections, and families encourage them to be part of a faith community!



Another highlight was our confirmation camp retreat at Arcadia, where 10 eighth-grade students joined Pastor Roggow and DCE Intern Grace for an awesome weekend of faith and fun. Alongside students from across Michigan, they enjoyed opportunities to grow in faith, build friendships, and share a memorable weekend together.



There is a place for you in our youth ministry! If you're a middle school or high school student, we would love to have you join us. And if you know a student who might enjoy being part of this community, encourage them to come along. A simple invitation can open the door to new friendships and meaningful connections in faith. We are grateful for the students and families who make these ministries such a joy, and we're excited to see how God continues to work through them!









MISSIONS

St. Paul Lutheran Church of Ann Arbor

Sowing TRUTH. Building FAITH. Shining LOVE.

A Longtime Partnership A New Opportunity to Serve

By: Tyler Seehafer, Director of Youth, Media & Missions





After years of supporting Pastor James & Christel Neuendorf and their ministry in Puerto Rico, our congregation took an exciting new step this November: we sent our first mission team! From November 3–9, both of our pastors and 11 other congregation members traveled to serve alongside Pastor James & Christel, and the other missionaries working with LCMS churches on the island. This trip offered a special opportunity to strengthen our longtime partnership and join in the ministry happening in their communities.

Throughout the week, the team focused on coming alongside our missionary partners—lending a hand with physical projects, supporting outreach and art workshops, and participating in the life of the local churches. With Mayagüez as their home base and opportunities to spend time in Ponce and Arecibo, team members joined a week of service, learning, and connection.





As important as the work was, so was the time spent together. Shared meals, Bible studies, and fellowship offered opportunities to connect with Pastor James, Christel, fellow missionaries Gustavo and Ruth Maita, and local church members. Worship was also an important part

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Missions: Puerto Rico *cont'd from pg. 6*

of the visit, including opportunities for Matins with the missionaries and Sunday worship with the congregation at Iglesia Luterana Fuente de Vida in Ponce. Through serving and worshiping together, the trip brought a personal connection to the ministry our congregation has supported for years.

Thank you to everyone who supported this first team and kept them in your prayers! Be sure to connect with a team member to hear their stories, ask questions, and learn more about our partners in Puerto Rico. If you're interested in joining next year's team, reach out to Tyler or either of our pastors. We look forward to continuing this relationship and sharing in the work God is doing through these missionaries and congregations!





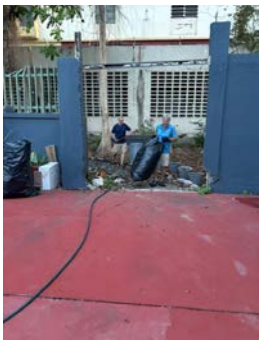


















Hey Pastor: Are Christmas Trees Pagen?

By: Pastor Aaron Roggow



This, and other memes like it, will be popping up in social media feeds over the coming weeks. You may have seen this before or heard this claim: "Christianity/the Church has co-opted Christmas celebrations from Pagan rituals." There are so many accusations of Christmas celebrations stealing from ancient worship practices, we can't cover all of them in this article. What I can do is offer some historical context in refuting this particular misleading claim.

SO TELL ME ABOUT THE PAGAN TREE CLAIM

The pagan tree claim sprouts from misconnecting a historical practice to Christian Christmas rituals. Romans certainly used greenery in their Saturnalia celebrations (December 17–23) and in the Kalends of January (January 1-3). They hung boughs, wreaths, and garlands across doorways and around pillars to honor Saturn and Janus, and to establish luck for the new year. Christians quickly condemned imitating this practice in the 3rd century. Tertullian wrote against hanging boughs and wreaths, calling it an imitation of pagan civic loyalty. The early church didn't preserve this practice. By the end of the 500s AD, Roman paganism died out, and Christian culture had become mainstream. The use of greenery in Christmas celebrations didn't continue after the 6th century, and it didn't show up for another 500 years. Any co-opting or adoption from ancient Roman traditions related to the modern use of the Christmas tree lacks historical foundation.

The only ancient text that mentions any greenery used in other cultures is when Pliny the Elder writes about the ritual of Celtic Druids harvesting mistletoe from oak trees (a rare find) and waiting until the 6th day of the lunar cycle of any given month to harvest it for an antidote for poison. But it wasn't used in connection to any holiday celebration. The first speculation that the use of holly, ivy, and mistletoe was born from Celtic and Druid practices comes from the writings of John Aubrey in 1686. This was expounded on by William Stukeley in the 1740's. But for over 1600 years, there is no carry over or appropriated practice of any kind that resembles what Aubrey and Stukeley attempt to tie to modern Christmas practices. The only connection is the word mistletoe. There is simply no logical connection between Celtic and Druid rituals and the modern tradition of kissing under the mistletoe, which we see beginning in 18th century England.

There are also very suspect historical references to Viking and Germanic cultures decorating their homes with evergreen branches during the Winter Solstice (December 21) and in connection to Yule. The claim is that they hung loose boughs over doors, windows, and fireplaces to ward off evil spirits and remind the sun to return. However, there are no known primary sources from the Scandinavian and Germanic cultures that mention the use of greenery around the solstice or in Yule celebrations. The earliest claim of this practice is from Jacob Grimm in 1835. He surmised literary details about celebrations 800 years before his writing without supporting historical evidence. Subsequent books and encyclopedias echoed his musings, and it generally became accepted as fact.

Note now, that only one Roman 1st century reference documents the use of greenery in European winter rituals. And this cultural practice was discontinued for half a millennia before Christians began using evergreens – and the greenery used by the Romans was certainly nothing close to the use of decorated pine or fir trees that were first used in Western Europe.

THEN WHAT'S THE REAL STORY BEHIND THE CHRISTMAS TREE?

The precursor to the Christmas tree is the Paradise Tree used in Paradise Plays in the 11th and 12th centuries. These were plays used on the Feast of Adam and Eve, which the medieval Western Church celebrated on December 24th. (While our modern Lutheran Service Book commemorates them on Dec. 19 to keep Christmas Eve focused on the Nativity, this older medieval calendar shows a pattern of the use of trees around this time frame. You're starting to see the beginning of a connection now, aren't you?) Evergreen fir trees would be used on stages in the town square in the dead of winter. Fruits and flowers would be attached to them to evoke images from the Garden of Eden and teach about creation, the fall, and God's Messianic promises of redemption. This paired directly to

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the evening's Christmas Mass to recognize the promises of God fulfilled in the Messiah born in Bethlehem.

This tradition was adapted in the 14 and 15th centuries to teach even more through visual imagery. The fruits and flowers decorating trees in Paradise Plays began to be replaced by red apples to reference the Fall of Man, original sin, and death. Paired with these apples, the tree was decorated with unconsecrated communion wafers to point to Jesus, the bread of life, who rescues us from that sin. This was meant to visually connect Genesis and the Gospels.

SO WHY DO PEOPLE HAVE THESE IN THEIR HOMES? IT WAS MARTIN LUTHER, RIGHT?

No, Martin Luther wasn't the first one to put a Christmas Tree in his home. But the practice does come from the same time period. In the 15th and 16th centuries, these trees started moving from the plays into people's homes. When the paradise play tradition started to culturally drift, churches began to discontinue supporting them. Yet the attachment of the people to the visual traditions of those plays continued. Families in the Upper Rhine and Alsace regions began setting up Paradise Trees in their own living room. Because of the Paradise Tree's attachment to December 24th, families would set up and decorate the indoor trees on that exact date.

BUT WE DON'T DECORATE WITH APPLES AND COMMUNION WAFERS

Good point! The 16th to 17th centuries saw a shift in the tree's decorations. Bakers began adding sugar and spice to the tree's plain bread discs, creating sweet German gingerbread (Lebkuchen). Dates and pretzels (a medieval Catholic symbol for prayer) were also added to the apples on the tree. By the 17th century, the trees were often called Zuckerbaum (sugar tree), because they were covered with cookies and sweets.

The shift from apples to ornaments happened in 1847 by Hans Greiner in Lauscha, Germany. The apples were heavy and made branches droop, so he created red blown glass substitutes in the shapes of apples to mimic the traditional Paradise Tree. These glass bulbs quickly became popular because they were lightweight and annually reusable. This germinated the development of many other ornament shapes and sizes that now decorate trees today.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTS?

This is where the Martin Luther legend comes in. The claim is that Martin Luther, inspired by the beauty of stars twinkling through evergreen branches, brought a fir tree into his house and wired small lit candles to it. He used these to symbolize Jesus, the light of the world, and also the Star of Bethlehem. However, there's no historical record that this ever happened. The first time this legend showed up in print was 300 years after Martin Luther's death and was propelled by the 1845 engraving, Luther in the Circle of His Family on Christmas Eve by Carl August Schwerdgeburth.

The first written account of candles on a tree comes in 1611, and this practice gained popularity in the 17th -18th centuries. The lights were also an opportunity to amplify the theology of the Paradise Tree. Reflecting the theology of John 1 and John 8, this tree pointed to Jesus whose "light shines in the darkness" and who is the "light of the world." The connection between the Festival of Adam & Eve on December 24th and the arrival of the Messiah on December 25th wasn't lost, but amplified. The name of the tree also shifted during this time from the Paradise Tree to the Christ Tree (Christbaum) or Holy Night Tree (Weihnachtsbaum), announcing the Savior's presence during the 12 days of Christmas celebration.

To "top the tree" on this article, the connection to British and American traditions was established by the marriage of Britain's Queen Victoria to Germany's Prince Albert. In 1848 they were pictured in the Illustrated London News standing by their decorated tree. The English speaking families quickly adopted the tradition themselves and brought evergreen trees into their homes to celebrate the season. At the end of the 18th century, Weihnachtsbaum was translated into English, not as Holy Night Tree, but as "Christmas Tree." Hence, the term and tradition we have in our homes today.

WOW, I'M GLAD I ASKED

I'm glad we can be confident that Christmas trees, and the many other observances that we use surrounding Christmas, aren't recycled paganism. They're actually rooted in celebrating God's creation and redemption from Adam and Eve to the birth of the Second Adam, Jesus. So freely set up your Paradise/Christ/Holy Night/Christmas tree on December 24th, the day after Thanksgiving, or anytime in between, celebrating the truth that this tree points to Jesus Christ, the Savior, who is born for you. Merry Christmas!

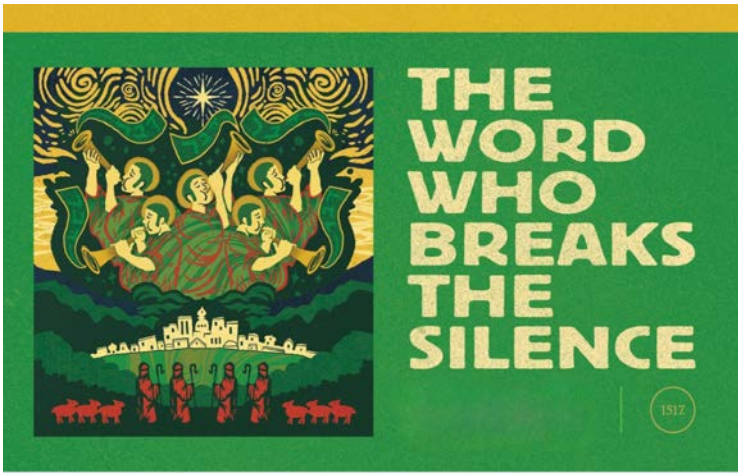
Do You Have a Hey Pastor Question?

We'd love to know what it is!
Just email Pastor Roggow at
aroggow@stpaulannarbor.org.



An Invitation for Advent

By: Pastor Ted Hopkins



In the midst of the busy-ness of fall as it feels like a sprint to the holidays, we hope that worship at St. Paul during Advent is a time for rest and refreshment in God's Word. You are invited to join us for Wednesday evening worship on 12/2, 12/9, and 12/16 for the contemplative and restful service of Holden Evening Prayer. During these Wednesdays we will reflect on God's promises for the burdened, the restless, and the fearful.

Our Sunday morning Advent series is called "The Word Who Breaks the Silence" as we meditate on the life-giving, active Word of God that has pierced the dark silence of sin, suffering, and waiting. God's Word is ultimately Jesus Christ in whom all of God's promises are a "yes." It is this Word who has broken into our silence to bring forgiveness for our sin and peace even when life feels like a sprint.

We look forward to seeing you at our Downtown Campus on Advent Wednesdays at 5:30pm (dinner in Fellowship Hall & 6:30pm for worship (Sanctuary), and on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings at the usual times/locations to receive the Word of promise and rest in Him.

Advent Worship Schedule

December 2nd / 9th / 16th

Downtown Campus: 420 W. Liberty

5:30pm - Dinner (Fellowship Hall)

Donations accepted for dinner approx $5/person or $10/family

6:30pm - Worship (Sanctuary)

Advent Devotion Calendar Here >

Christmas Eve Worship

December 24th

4pm Family Service (School)

6:30pm Lessons & Carols (Downtown)

10pm Candlelight (Downtown)

Christmas Day Worship

December 25th

10am Christmas Service (Downtown)

Downtown: 420 W. Liberty St, Ann Arbor 48103

School: 495 Earhart Rd, Ann Arbor 48105

St. Paul Ann Arbor

Mark your calendars!

Congregation Meeting

TUESDAY, NOV 17TH @ 7PM

DOWNTOWN CAMPUS

FELLOWSHIP HALL

Scan for meeting agenda & important handouts!

Thanksgiving Worship

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26

10 AM DOWNTOWN CAMPUS

Our 2026 Thanksgiving Offerings this year will be sent to:

Love Ypsilanti Mission

Food pantry ministry out of Cross & Resurrection/EMU Chapel in partnership with Faith Lutheran Church serving veterans and the working poor in the Ypsilanti area.



Puerto Rico Mission Support

Supporting mission planning in Puerto Rico with LCMS Missionaries Rev. James & Deaconess Christel Neuendorf

Scan to Give Now

Sneak Peak.. *cont'd from pg. 4*

been added to our playground. PTL has generously purchased new bikes and road signs for this new area. We are eagerly awaiting the bike track to be ready for us to use. Zoom zoom!

And there's plenty happening beyond the classroom! Our athletic teams and student clubs have been busy. From volleyball, cross country, and flag football to our current basketball and cheer seasons, our student athletes have been developing their skills, learning to work as a team, and representing St. Paul so well. Students are also enjoying opportunities to explore their interests through robotics, chess club, and drawing club. There really is something special about watching children discover a new interest or develop a talent!

Do you know a family considering school options, whether for next year or in the coming years?

We encourage you to invite them to our upcoming St. Paul Open House & Parent Panel on Sunday, January 10! Word of mouth is one of the most meaningful ways we can share the wonderful things happening at St. Paul. Pick up an Open House flyer at one of the church or school entrances to share with a friend, neighbor, or family member, or share our Open House webpage (QR code below), where families can learn more about the event and RSVP!

This event is a wonderful opportunity for prospective families to discover all that St. Paul has to offer, from preschool through 8th grade. Families will gather to learn more about St. Paul, hear from our current parents, and then be invited to explore our classrooms and see what makes our school community so special! Childcare will be available with Mrs. T-K so parents can fully enjoy the experience.

January 10 Open House Event Schedule:

12:30–1:30 PM:
Welcome & Parent Panel
1:30–2:30 PM:
Open House & Classroom Tours

We look forward to welcoming new families and sharing what makes St. Paul such a special place!



SPAA
CHURCH & SCHOOL

To learn more about the ministries of St. Paul Ann Arbor visit our website at: www.stpaulannarbor.org

If you would like to submit an article or news item for any of the St. Paul communications please contact Natalie Nesbitt, Media Outreach Coordinator at nnesbitt@stpaulannarbor.org.

St. Paul
Ann Arbor

We equip families and individuals to *know* Christ, to *discover* truth, and to *create* meaningful connections.