

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

NORTH PARK CHURCH
WINTER 2024. VOL 199



THANK YOU

Dear North Park Church,

We want to thank all of you for the wonderful celebration we got to enjoy on November 17. Every part of that day will be something we cherish. The people who shared about us captured meaningful moments of life and ministry that we hope to never forget. In God’s kingdom, those things will never be lost regardless of where we go from here.

The decorations and food symbolically spoke of the ways in which you have come to know us over the years. Who could ask for more than smoked meat for the main course and antlers for the decor? I couldn’t imagine a better way to celebrate, and I want to thank you for seeing us and honoring us so well. We will always have a fond memory of that day.

As I transition out of my role here at NPC, I wanted to let you know where things stand with some of my responsibilities. First, I am passing a lot of my duties off to other people, mostly volunteers in the church. For example, the missions committee will be chaired by Emily Harrer who brings on field experience and a lot of energy to the table. I look forward to seeing what she brings to the missions aspect of the church.

As it regards care groups, I will be turning that over to someone to manage and oversee. NPC wants to continue encouraging people to engage in deep, meaningful relationships, and there will be opportunities for you to do so going forward. Thus, capable people will be stepping up to carry much of my ministry responsibilities into the future.

The biggest change you’ll notice is that I decided to end Compass as it takes a good deal of work and energy to run. In October, I brought the team together for (okay, you guessed it) smoked brisket and honored the work that the team has done together over the years. They have been a solid, energetic team, and I wanted to thank them personally for their creativity, faithfulness, and determination. While Compass is ending, I expect many of the other great things we have gotten to enjoy at NPC will continue on into the future.

Thus, I want to thank you all for the pleasure of serving at NPC for the past 8.5 years as your assistant and then associate pastor. I took the role because I wanted to learn and grow as a leader, and I can affirm that happened. I hope God will reward you in kind for giving me that opportunity.

In His Grace,
Pastor Ben (on behalf of the Burkholders)



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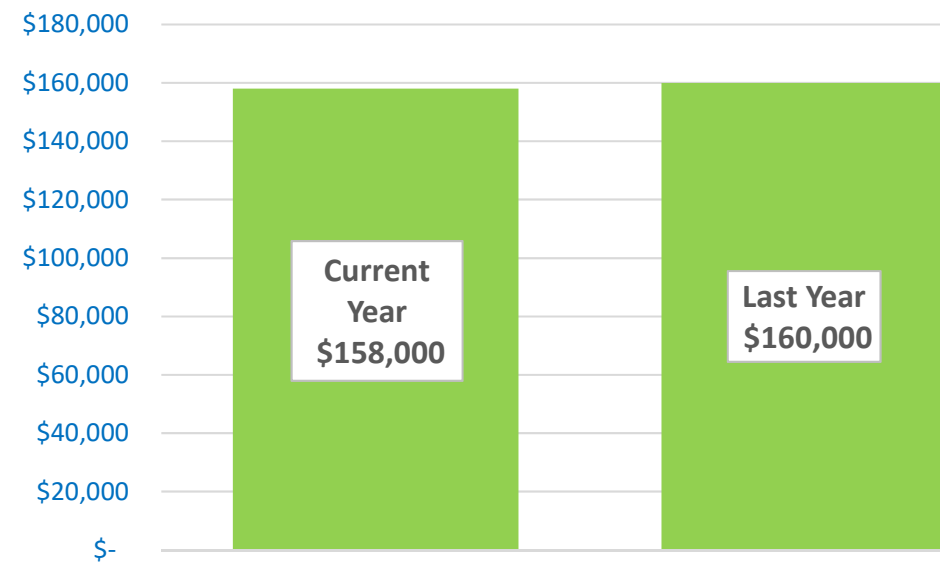
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FINANCE UPDATE



Giving Through 10/31

FEBRUARY 21, 2025 | 1:30-7:00 PM

THE WESTIN | 1000 PENN AVE. | PITTSBURGH, PA

www.jubileeprofessional.com

jubilee
CCO | PROFESSIONAL
#



FAITH WORK + ALL OF LIFE

Does your work seem meaningless? Or, maybe you know your work matters, but you're not sure what that actually looks like day-to-day.

Your work is capable of more good than you may be able to imagine.

Jubilee Professional gathers graduate students, organizations, and individuals to gain a vision of Christ's restoration of all things. Learn from a wide range of local and national practitioners, connect with others, and find a vision for work + all of life.

REFLECTIONS FOR ADVENT

by Pastor David O'Leary

I'm excited to be joining you all right at the beginning of Advent, a time to reflect together on the reality of Christ's coming into the world to save sinners. With this marvelous event in mind, I wanted to share a verse that I find myself returning to often. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). In this summary statement of the gospel, Paul upends how we think about riches in Christ. I have just two observations to make.

First, Christ became poor. Among people like us, this happens all the time. You lose your job; medical insurance won't cover your surgical bill; natural disaster strikes; you get behind on the credit card, etc. It's not hard to envision the many ways to become poor. But how could Christ become poor? To him belong the glories of heaven and earth. In his divine being he needs nothing, even while he has a right to everything! So how could one who is God become poor?

This is part of the wonder that we celebrate at Christmas: the Son of God took on human form, in all of its natural weakness. He added to himself what was poor, and thereby became like us. We may spend the rest of our lives trying to understand this theological mystery more deeply and precisely. But Paul's focus is not the mystery of Christ's person, that he is God and man in two distinct natures and one person. His theme seems to be the mystery of Christ's work.

And this brings us to our second observation, that the church is enriched not by Christ's riches but by his poverty. This is not what we might have asked for. If we were

planning out Christ's work, we'd probably settle on something like this: he takes some of his riches and gives them to us so that we by his riches might become rich. It sure seems like a win-win. He's still rich, and then so are we. Except that the gospel doesn't work that way. What we need is not merely his riches. We need his poverty. We needed him to become poor so that not only his belongings but also his very life might be stripped away from him in his death.

Job's famous words—"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return"—just as Paul's—"we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world"—might both be appropriately applied to the kind of poverty the Son of God took on when he became man. The reminder for us is this: as we enter into this Christmas season, filled with the anticipation of gifts, celebration, feasts, decorations, traditions, etc., may our hearts be humbled by the fact that Christ's coming to a cradle was aiming at the grave. He came into the world not to gain its life but in order that he might lose his life, and in so doing gain his people. This is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May this fill our worship and celebration together.



"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." - Hebrews 11:1

FEATURE FAMILY

MILLERS

by Jim Ludwig

At the September COMPASS Smoke-off Competition event, I had the pleasure of meeting Gary and Rachael Miller. Rachael has been attending North Park Church for about a year and a half and recently became a new member.

Gary is a lifelong Catholic in the same parish as my wife, Linda. That sparked an interest in me to get to know their story better.

Rachael grew up in Erie, PA, with an older sister. Their father was a practicing Catholic, but when their parents divorced,

they lived with their mother and quit attending church regularly. Her father remained a role model in her life.

After high school, she went to cosmological school and began to cut hair. When she observed a coworker struggling to support herself, she aimed higher and enrolled in the Penn State Behrend campus as a chemistry major. Rachael soon became a double major in psychology and sociology with a minor in religious studies.

She loved learning and transferred to Pitt for her junior and senior years. She had many jobs while in college and many more after college. Her longest stint using her degree was three and a half years at Western Psych in the geriatric section. Her most recent job was as a loan specialist at S&T Bank in Warrendale.

Gary's family has lived on 35-48 acres of land on Mt. Nebo Road since 1863. Gary grew up on that property with three sisters and a brother. His father remains his primary role model.

Most of his grade school years were at St. Teresa. He graduated from North Catholic (on Troy Hill) in 1996. He played the trumpet and ice

hockey. After some time at CCAC, he joined the family business his grandfather founded, Pitt Auto Electric, full-time with his father and uncle.

Changes in the industry eventually forced them to sell their portion of the business, but his mechanical and building skills were not forgotten.

After another short stint at CCAC, Gary worked for Total Hockey in retail for three years. The skills he learned from his father led Gary and his brother into the business of flipping houses. Soon, other clients contracted with them to renovate houses to be flipped.

COVID-19 crushed that business for a while. He and his brother's business currently focus on doing "punch list" repairs discovered after an inspection so the buyers can obtain a mortgage.

A chance meeting occurred in 2009 when Gary and Rachael were both with other friends at a bar in the South Side.

After a pleasant conversation, Gary handed Rachael his card and said, "If you ever want to hang out together, give me a call." They had an on-and-off relationship for some years, and with the

third effort, everything clicked.

Once, Gary impressed Rachael by cooking spaghetti and meatballs for her with only a microwave. This was a time in his life when he leveraged his in-line hockey officiating skills into some travel opportunities.

He became part of the US National Program and was selected to officiate the in-line Hockey World Championship in the Czech Republic. Networking led him to officiate and train other officials in Australia.

He spent some of the money he earned buying an amethyst stone he had mounted back in Pittsburgh as an engagement ring for Rachael. They were married at St. Mary's in Sewickley. The timing was such that Gary and Rachael could move into Gary's great-great-grandmother's house on that hallowed land near his father's house.

After five years of marriage, their son Hugh was born. Ronnie (Veronica), their daughter, was born three years later. They also

have two dogs and two cats, but just this last year, they added 15 free-range chickens and ten quails. It is a full house!

Rachael's favorite scripture is Hebrews 11:1. Her spiritual rebirth was sparked when her mother-in-law, Barb, asked her to Community Bible Study (CBS) at North Park Church. A desire to learn scripture and a knowledge that God loves her changed her life.

Already familiar with NPC, she decided to come one Sunday. The fact that childcare was available made the decision easier. When she arrived, Norma Lamperski, who she already knew from CBS, greeted her at the door. At the top of the stairs, she found Amber Stites and Kelly Laird, who further welcomed her and registered Hugh and Ronnie.

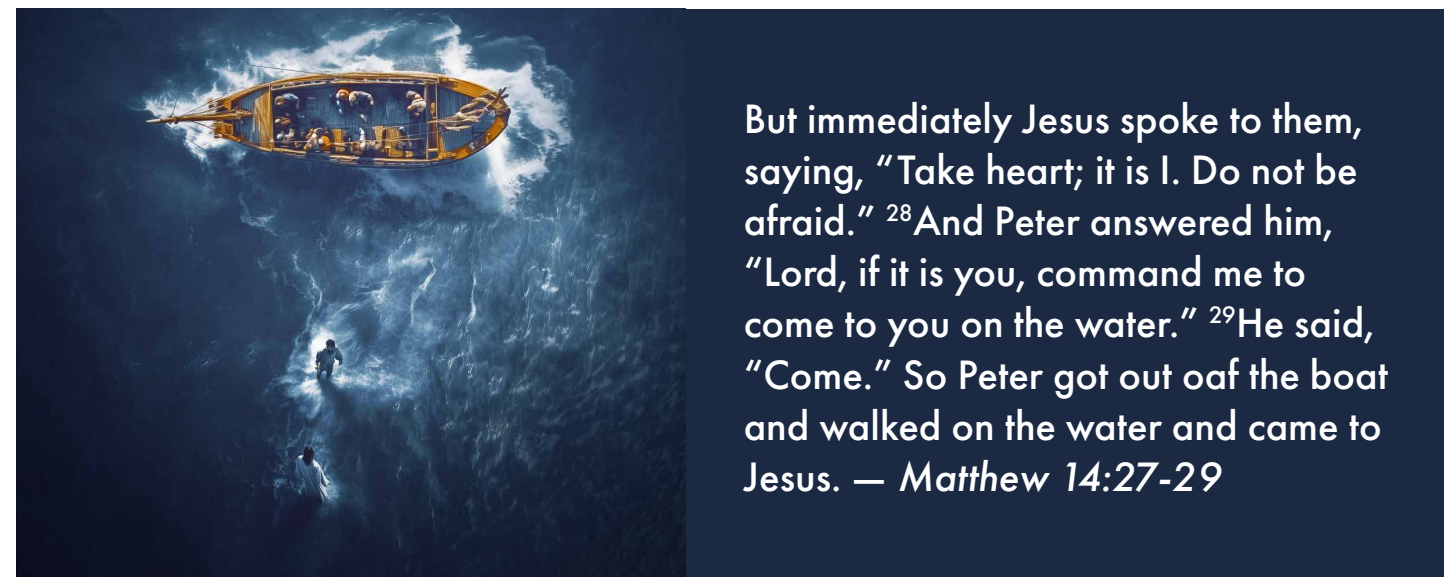
The next day, she attended Woman's Bible Study. Rachael even agreed to volunteer at Alpha, where she met Scott and Kate Shriver, and others. Well done NPC!

When I asked Gary how he felt about Rachael becoming a part of NPC, he said, "It brought her closer to Jesus, so I have no complaints." Gary's favorite scripture is Matthew 14:27-29. Much like Peter stepped out in faith, Gary has been responding to nudges from the Holy Spirit.

Gary, his brother, and uncle stepped out in faith. They initiated and delivered three trailers full of supplies to the devastated areas of North Carolina (see the article "Serving The People Of Swannanoa.") Pastor Ben allowed him to speak at church and Phil and Laura responded along with others to help.

Gary recently increased his participation in the Eucharist by regularly attending a 6:45 a.m. weekday mass at St. Mary's with his brother-in-law, Jeremy.

Now that you know a little about them and see their picture, please introduce yourself.



But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." ²⁸And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. — Matthew 14:27-29

MERCY MINUTES

FLOWER DELIVERY

By Michele Moir

"Flowers are a gift to this earth." As Gerard De Nerval once said, "Every flower is a soul blossoming in nature." They paint contrasting colors along the ground and bring joy to many. Their elegance and delicate touches have us all in awe and exhilaration. This is often why flowers are seen as loving gifts for the special people in our lives, and the reaction of the person receiving the flowers is priceless."

The mercy deacons of North Park Church delight in facilitating excellent care of our church family. We care for others by overseeing the ministry of providing flowers for our shut-ins, widows, and widowers for Christmas and Easter. We would love for you to join us in caring for our church family with the gift of flowers.

History Of Flower Ministry

Providing poinsettias at Christmas or lilies at Easter to shut-ins was a policy of the Melwood Church before it became North Park Church. There was a sign up sheet where people could pay for poinsettias or lilies to decorate the church and then designate their flowers for a shut-in who attended the service to take home or have delivered to them after services. In recent years, the church decided to pay for the plants for decoration and shut-ins. Jim Ludwig didn't want to see any plants go to waste, so he suggested we also offer them to widows and widowers after the holiday services.

How Does This Flower Ministry Work?

We decorate our church with flowers for Easter and Christmas. We order 30-40 plants to decorate our sanctuary and then deliver or offer to these special people in our church family. After the church service, widows or widowers who attended may take one of the flowers home. We now have nine volunteers blessing us and our shut-ins by delivering poinsettias at Christmas and lilies at Easter. The children's ministry creates hand-drawn cards, which are delivered with flowers.

How Does This Ministry Bless Attendees And Members?

Giving flowers to our NPC family members who can't attend church regularly allows us to see if the church can help them in any way. Marge Stauffer said that Susann Pinkerton brought flowers to her at home, and they had a lovely visit. She had never met Susann but enjoyed talking with her. Laura Osmond checks in on the Rimmels when she delivers flowers and other times.

How Can You Help This Ministry?

You can help us bless others with flowers by delivering these "loving gifts" to those in our body who cannot attend NPC regularly or at all. Perhaps you can deliver one or two to people who live nearby. We would love and appreciate your help with this ministry. Please contact Michele Moir at (412) 983-3560 or michelelmoir@gmail.com.

THANK GOD FOR STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES IN NORTH PARK CHURCH FAMILY!

By Mark Sharpnack

Do you remember on September 8 when Catherine & Scott Mercer spoke during our worship service about Weekend To Remember? Three couples of NPC attended this FamilyLife marriage conference on November 15-17 at the Marriott in Cranberry Township. Over 500 people attended, and five people professed a new faith in Jesus Christ. The Mercers report that many of the couples lingered for the time of prayer and to commit to the 'next spiritual steps' in their marriage covenant. Here are some comments:

"When you spend an entire weekend with your spouse, without outside distractions, you remember and appreciate how important is your marriage and how you (wrongly) put other less important things ahead of that relationship."

— Jim Warmbrodt

"We are now getting back on the road to 'oneness.' We have been 'inactive' when it comes to working on our marriage and we are now focused on actively pursuing a marriage that lasts."

— Wife, married 12 years

"Great impact. Received great advice and reminded me a lot about things I need to do and my responsibility as a husband. It was not overwhelming. But it was educational and entertaining. Felt supported and not attacked. Loved that spiritual aspect and glad it was mentioned that our struggle is indeed spiritual."

— Husband, married 22 years

"Hands-down, best conference I have attended. Focused time with my wife and God is special, and this carves out time for it. World-class married speakers make it a Weekend to Remember."

— Mark Sharpnack

"It helped confirm things that we are doing in our marriage are in line with God. It also helped us see where we can strive to have a better oneness with each other by applying some of the techniques and practices you all have provided."

— Husband, married 25 years

"Loved the Weekend To Remember. I would suggest to everyone to go."

— Denise Weimann

"We attended several years ago and the conference is still having a positive impact. The speakers were very engaging and entertaining, the atmosphere enjoyable, and it was not intimidating or uncomfortable in any way. The have you work through a simple and gentle process (that you would not typically initiate on your own) of knowing your spouse better and working to grow closer. Skeptical husband convinced!"

— David Pinkerton

**SAVE THE DATE:
November 7-9, 2025**

Go to www.familylife.com/weekend-to-remember to learn more.



SERVING THE PEOPLE OF SWANNANOA:

A JOURNEY OF HOPE AFTER HURRICANE HELENE

by Laura Daly

In the wake of Hurricane Helene's devastating impact on the mountainous regions of North Carolina, many have answered the call to provide relief to the communities left in shambles. One such group, led by Gary Miller, the husband of NPC's Rachael Miller, made it their mission to deliver essential supplies to the hard-hit areas. Their first trip, which took place on October 10, was a powerful reminder of the resilience of God's people in times of disaster.

Gary and Kevin Miller were joined by Phil VanSickel and several other of Gary's family members, who headed out to Swannanoa, NC, with a convoy carrying approximately 8 tons of much-needed supplies. This generous donation included clothing, hygiene items, baby supplies, heaters, and cleaning materials.

Their first stop was at Hearts With Hands, a Christian, non-denominational organization dedicated to aiding victims of natural disasters and poverty. Sadly, Hearts With Hands was impacted by the hurricane and struggled to manage the overwhelming influx of support requests. Another delivery of supplies went to First Baptist Church of Swannanoa, and from there, Gary, Kevin, and Phil continued to St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Conover, NC, a central distribution hub for supplies for the surrounding counties. On this trip, these men learned heart-wrenching stories of the storm's impact—people trapped in their cars, families fleeing to higher ground, and others suffering from the trauma of losing everything. It was evident that the devastation reached far beyond physical damage and had left deep emotional scars.

Later in the month, on October 27, a team of ladies from the Precepts Monday Bible Study, including Laura Daly, Kelly Laird, Linda Siger, and Kelly Martin, traveled to St. Peter's to lend a hand. These women helped organize the mountain of donations in the church's gymnasium, unloading tractor trailers full of supplies, assisting in the creation of Flood Buckets and Hygiene Kits, and sorting through tons of donated clothing and blankets. Though they were not in the epicenter of the physical devastation, the women felt a deep sense of purpose in organizing and preparing the donations that would provide relief to those in need. Their service was an act of compassion for both the weary volunteers and the families affected by the storm.

In the weeks that followed, yet another trip was made to deliver more supplies to Hearts With Hands. Gary and Phil revisited First Baptist in Swannanoa, and connected with new disaster relief agencies - Red Truck Men's Ministry and Valley Hope Church. Valley Hope is an EPC church and is in the process of building a facility to provide both supplies and housing for volunteers in future relief efforts. As they continued their mission trip, Gary and Phil witnessed the ongoing emotional toll of the hurricane on

the residents of Swannanoa. Many of the locals were grappling with severe PTSD, having faced life-threatening circumstances. Some recalled standing on kitchen countertops, struggling to breathe as floodwater rose to their necks. For others, the storm claimed lives.

In the face of such overwhelming hardship, one thing became clear: God calls His people to serve in times of crisis. The journey of Gary, Phil, and the ladies from the Precepts Bible Study and all the Pittsburgh people that donated generously, exemplified a willingness to respond to the immediate needs of the community with flexibility and determination. Each knew in whatever way they were called to contribute, His presence was with them every step of the way. The people of Swannanoa and the surrounding counties may be scarred by the trauma of Hurricane Helene, but through the selfless efforts of those who brought aid, love, and support, there is hope for healing and restoration.



WOMEN'S INTEREST GROUPS: WHAT'S GOD BEEN DOING?

by Amber Stites

We are two months into our women's interest groups and God has been working in amazing ways! At the September gathering of our **MEAL PREP GROUP**, we chopped lots of vegetables, opened a few hundred bouillon cubes, and filled nearly 50 freezer bags with wedding soup and chicken taco soup in the Blue Room kitchen. It was extra fun because we were chatting with each other at the same time! Each lady took home several meals to bless her own family, but we also had quite a few meals that were used to bless others outside of NPC who were dealing with various challenging times. One of our ladies was able to pray with their unbelieving neighbors when she dropped off their first meal at home after returning from the hospital with a new baby, some delicious wedding soup.

At our **DINNER CLUB**, we enjoyed a delicious meal with wonderful conversation. It was a joy to get to know some ladies at the church better. Our first gathering was small and intimate, so there is plenty of space for more women to join us!

The **PICKLEBALL GROUP** has met many times in order to take advantage of all the great weather we've had this fall. We have some seasoned veterans willing to teach the newbies and we've all had so much fun! We do not meet on the same day each week but are trying to meet as we are able. We have had a great time hanging out together and playing pickle ball!

The **SERVICE PROJECT GROUP** has set up some projects for individuals who need a little extra help with yard work and they have helped Educations stuff envelopes to be mailed out to families, who sponsor children in their schools. There is a plan currently in the works for some to make and serve meals to men at The Pleasant Valley Shelter in late November or early December.

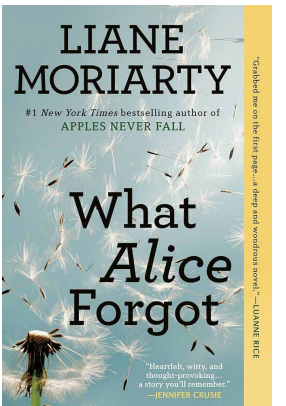
Our **EXPLORERS' GROUP'S** first adventure was to Fall Run Park for a hike to the waterfall. Nine ladies hiked to the falls and while there, we added a tenth to our group! A lady was there hiking with her husband and shared with us that she has been wanting to start an adventure group for a while. We invited her to join our group and she immediately signed up to attend the November outing to the Bayernhof Museum. She did in fact attend that second outing and we are looking forward to what God will do moving forward.



BOOK CLUB: What would it be like to wake up after a fall and not remember the past 10 years of your life?! Could God use that kind of difficult situation, forgetting everything, even your own young children, to redeem places in your life that are spiraling out of control? YES! And we were able to remind each other of this as we gathered and shared about some pretty hefty themes in a book that we recently read together at our first book club meeting. The second book club just met and it was another wonderful discussion!

We've had a lot of lovely weather for walking and talking together with our **WALKING GROUP**. It's been fun and productive to gather together and get some extra steps in while getting to know others better through conversations along the trail.

If any of these groups interest you, please join us! We would love to have you and any of your lady friends, neighbors and co-workers at our next gathering. Go to www.northparkepc.org/adults or contact Amber Stites to learn more.



STUDENT MINISTRY

By Kelly Laird



RETREAT

22 teens and eight leaders traveled to Stoystown, PA, to spend a weekend away on our Fall Retreat at Camp Allegheny. The kids and their leaders had a blast from fishing to pickleball to black light dodgeball and hiking the trails. We had a special speaker from Bakertown Presbyterian Church named Jeremy Collins who spoke three times about the Gospel, How Do We Live It, and How Do We Share It? And our times of worship with the worship band were great, too. What a great time to be a teen!



SERVICE PROJECT

The Youth Group has been learning what God has to say about service during the Fall through several great guest speakers. At the end of October, we had a night dedicated to doing a service project together. We put together treat bags filled with pencils, sticky notes, erasers, candies, treats, and homemade cookies. We gave them out to our friends at school to let them know we are thinking of them. Here are some pictures from this fun event.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

By Kelly Laird

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER

Have you checked out the Family Resource Center yet? This is a great place to gather, borrow or cover the cost of some great products. It's located just off the lobby near the Children's Ministry hallway on the second floor. And some of these items are just in time for Christmas gifts or stocking stuffers for kids, grandkids, or other family members! The colored labels on each item will tell you whether they are free to take (green), for borrowing (yellow), or if we're asking you to cover the cost of the brand-new materials (pink).

Here's a few items to whet your whistle:



GRATIKUBE

\$15 Suggestion Donation

Gratikube is a fun game for families of all ages and it helps develop an attitude for gratitude all year long. We've ordered three sets for the Family Resource Center, but one is already taken!



STOPLIGHT CHAT CARDS

\$2 Suggestion Donation

Looking for a way to maximize your time in the car with your kids or grandkids? These fun cards are designed for just that!



ADVENT BLOCKS

\$30 Suggestion Donation

Advent Blocks are a way to celebrate Advent with kids! We have ordered two sets for the Family Resource Center and each comes with:

- 27 - 1.5 inch beech blocks with rounded edges.
- Hard back version of The King Is Coming, a 25-day guide for each day in Advent, with a red place-keeping ribbon.
- Natural wood finish, wood box with acrylic sliding top.



REUSABLE BIBLE ACTIVITY CARDS

\$2 Suggestion Donation

These fun puzzles can be written on with a crayon or dry-erase marker and erased with a paper towel, to be used again and again.

KIDS' WORSHIP

Recently, we have been learning all about the Exodus of God's chosen people, the Israelites. We've had so many great lessons! And also recently, we learned about the man whose friends lowered him through a roof to get to see Jesus! Some of our kids tried it out for themselves too. Check out the Younger class having fun here.

Speaking of fun, Rebecca & Grace, two of our newer Preschool Kids' Worship leaders, are packing their lessons full of fun too! Imagine being a preschooler and pretending to "go to sleep" but then waking to find "manna" all over the room! What a great visual of how it might have been in Old Testament times too! Check out this picture of our actively engaged little ones!

In our Older Kids' Worship class, which is new and has been meeting once a month, the 3rd-5th graders have been challenging themselves to see how quickly their team can put the books of the Bible in order. They've gone from over six minutes in September to just over four minutes in November! Wow! What a great thing, to learn where those books are located!

SUNDAY SCHOOL

We have all of our kids' Sunday School classes staffed with solid teachers again this year!

- **Preschool**
Meg Stimpson & Laura Wiggins
- **Kindergarten & 1st Grade**
Susan O'Leary
- **2nd & 3rd Grades**
Susan Burke & Joyce Kish
- **4th & 5th Grades**
Laura Daly & Mike Stitt

We have learned about Noah and what God told him to build - an ark and what he filled it with - pairs of many animals! We even went searching our room to see how many pairs we could find. In older classes, we talked about the rich fool building bigger barns, what his mistake was and how we can learn from him. If your child (or grandchild!) hasn't joined us, try it out some week! Lots of great Bible learning going on here!

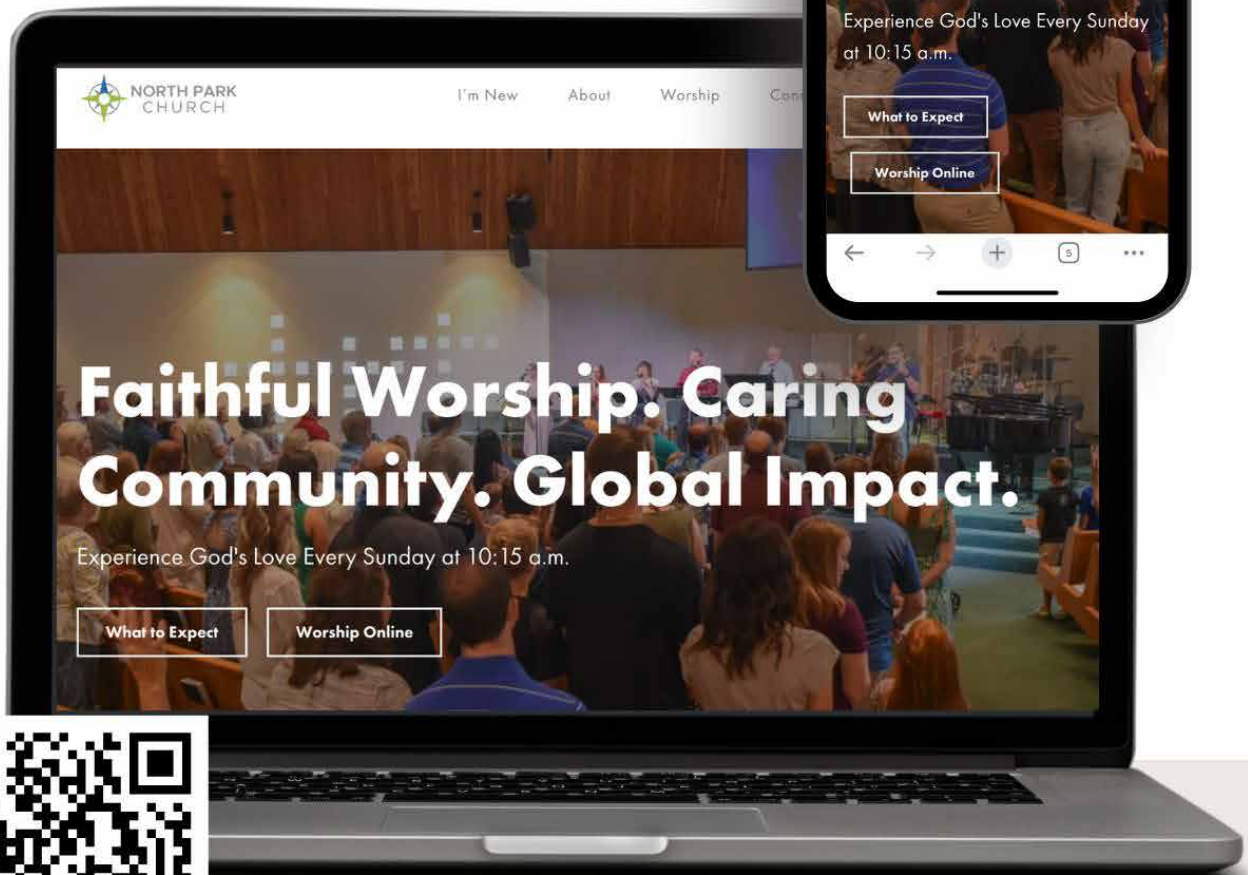


TREKKERS

Trekkers kids have also been having fun, studying God's word, eating delicious meals and playing lots of games together! Here's a recent lesson with MilesBot, the robot who showed us that God didn't create us to be robots who can only follow programmed commands. Instead, He gave us free will which means we can make choices. We can choose to love God or not. Life can seem unfair because we can choose to do good, or we can choose to hurt others and do evil. The robot showed us that we can freely choose to love God without being forced to love Him. Great lesson!

Check Out Our Website For: —

- Events + Sign Ups
- Leadership
- Sermons
- Bulletin
- FYI
- and so much more!



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Making disciples of Jesus who WORSHIP God passionately,
CONNECT with each other in caring community, & IMPACT the
world through word and deed.