Preparing the Way 2027 capital campaign



Proverbs 3:5–6

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." (NIV)

I've always been a planner. I love a full calendar, a well-organized to-do list, and the comfort of knowing what comes next. For much of my life, I think I've confused having a plan with having peace. If I could just organize everything, make the right decisions and anticipate what was around the corner, surely everything would fall into place.

But God has a way of reminding us that we aren't the ones in control.

For those who know us, you know my husband Phil and I don't particularly enjoy being bored. For nearly a decade during his medical training, we lived in what can best be described as organized chaos. We moved three times, changed jobs, welcomed three children (two at once, even!), and navigated young parenthood through a pandemic, states away from our families and support systems. When we finally settled in Duluth, I thought, *Now. Now we'll finally settle down and relax*. I'm still waiting for that day to come!

Through it all, I've been reminded that God's timing isn't always my timing. There have been plenty of moments when I've wanted clearer answers, faster resolutions, or reassurance that everything would work out according to my plan. But looking back, I can see how faithfully God has provided through unexpected opportunities, the people He's placed in our lives, and even the doors that closed to make room for something better.

I'm learning that peace isn't found in knowing what comes next. It's found in trusting the One who does. And while I may never stop making lists or planning ahead, I pray that God continues to help me loosen my grip, embrace the season I'm in, and leave a little more room for His plans alongside my own.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your faithfulness through every season of our lives. Help us surrender our need for control, trust in Your timing, and find peace in knowing You are always guiding our steps. Amen.

—Emily Thomas

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John 17:20-21

"I (Jesus) am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me." (NLT)

During my time at Duke Divinity School, I had the privilege of serving in various ministry settings, including at Hyde Park United Methodist Church in Tampa, Florida. The Senior Pastor at the time was Jim Harnish. I remember Jim's sermon on this text from John 17 which he titled simply "Jesus Prays for Us!" Every Sunday at Peace Church as we come together in worship to build the beloved community, I'm reminded of Jesus' prayer that we will all be one just as the Father and Son are one. Our God is all about relationships! I'm glad to be on this prayerful journey with all of you.

Prayer

God, help us reflect your love in the world around us. Use us to be a blessing to everyone we meet.

—Matt Hunter

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Genesis 9:16-17

"When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

Il remember the first time I had the thought: *All of these children's toys depicting Noah's Ark are so morbid*. I was in my final year of seminary, sitting in the movie theater, watching the live-action film *Noah*. The animals two-by-two and the rainbow make for colorful, kid-friendly imagery, but what about God's destruction of the earth and all of creation that didn't make it onto that boat?

The older I get, though, the more I see this story differently. The rainbow is a symbol of God growing alongside the people, moving from wrath to promise, from anger to hope. It's an acknowledgement that terrible things can and do happen in our world, and God promises to walk alongside us through all of it.

Last summer, when smoke blanketed Duluth and the Northland, Peace Church was called upon to provide emergency support to our neighbors least able to seek safe air. It's a privilege to be seen by our wider community in this way, as a source of support and solidarity. Unfortunately, because we have no ventilation in the majority of our building, we were unable to help. By overhauling our HVAC system, we are building a kind of ark where all are welcome to seek shelter from the elements. We are also walking faithfully with God, trusting in God's hope, gathering under that rainbow of promise.

Prayer

Loving God, even in the face of hard things, remind us that your promise is for us always. Gather us under your rainbow, in the prismatic light of a hopeful future for all of creation. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

—Corinne Freedman Ellis

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Romans 12:3-8

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the encourager, in encouragement; the giver, in sincerity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness." (NRSV)

Romans 12:3-8 is a call to Unity and Service in the church. It reminds us we are interconnected, we depend on each other and we each have different gifts to offer.

I have been a member of a UCC congregation nearly all my life. As a child in 1957, I remember sitting in my Congregational Church on the day my church, Congregational, and the Evangelical and Reformed Church voted to become the United Church of Christ.

That day made an impression on me and since then I have witnessed, participated and marveled at how we come together to get things done and make a difference in this big world.

Prayer

Glorious God, thank you for your guidance as we make our way through each day.

—Jan Eschbach

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1 Corinthians 3:9-11

"For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." (NIV)

When we talk about what makes a church special, we mention kindness, hospitality, service, justice, and the ways we care for one another and our wider community. These are the things that give a church its purpose. They are the reason we gather.

But there are less glamorous things that make all of that possible. We don't often give much thought to a building's heating and cooling system. When it's working properly, we hardly notice it. But imagine trying to gather for worship on a cold winter morning without heat, or welcoming people into a building that isn't properly ventilated. Something as seemingly mundane as an HVAC system plays an important role in making our church a welcoming place.

The building isn't the church; the people are. But the physical space we share matters. It's where we've worshiped, found community, served others, celebrated milestones, and grown in our faith. Taking care of that space isn't separate from our mission — it's one way we care for the people who come through its doors.

As we consider this capital campaign, we're not simply investing in a new heating and cooling system — we're investing in the continued life of a community that has meant so much to so many people. We're preparing the way for all the worship, fellowship, kindness, and service still to come.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the people and places that have nurtured our faith and brought us together. Help us recognize the importance of caring for the gifts we've been given, both seen and unseen. Guide us as we work together to make Peace a welcoming home for all who will come through its doors in the years ahead. Amen.

—Jeremy Anderberg

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Mark 10

"The children stared up at the wall … unlike most walls, this one was friends of Yeshua (Jesus) who were using their bodies to keep children from Jesus. *Because kids are loud and distracting*, they thought. *Because kids are not as important*, they thought. But Jesus knew. His laugh rang out up and over the wall as he called to his friends, "Let them in!" . . .

[As] the kids tumbled toward Jesus, his eyes warmed and welcomed even the shyest of the group as he crouched down to greet them. And oh, what a greeting. All the goodness of God wrapped up in a human – can you imagine how that must have felt? Kindness, peace, humor, safety, trustworthiness – all the things that are best in a person – shone out at their brightest. The kids felt their fear melt away and their wonder come alive as they stared in his eyes, which seemed to shine out the same message over and over. *You Belong. You are Beloved. You Delight me.*" (The Book of Belonging)

Our family attended Peace for the first time in late 2014. Our family looked a little different then, with two wiggly, loud, distracting, perfectly feral children under 5 years old. We had just moved to Duluth; I had very short hair and was a stay-at-home mom. We were looking for a church home to belong to. We had really been looking for about a year, since we left the UMC in protest of their retrenchment (at that time) of full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ folk. We had visited several UCC churches, first in the Twin Cities, and then after our move to Duluth, all of which were warm and welcoming, full of loving people – but for one reason or another these communities were not quite the right fit.

After our first visit to Peace, we knew this was a place we could find belonging. It was full of wiggly, loud, distracting, perfectly feral children and young people – just like our kiddos. And what's more, the pastor, children's minister, Sunday school teachers, nursery workers, and congregants seemed to delight in this vibrant and lively creative chaos. I remember thinking that morning that it was a place of nurture, a place where children would grow up knowing they are loved, no matter who they grew up to love.

Over the years my small young people have grown into young people who are taller than me. Peace has patiently accompanied them (and me!) as they have questioned and grown into people with values that align with following in the ways of Jesus.

Moving into a staff/ministerial role at Peace three years ago, I have felt deep joy and purpose in being even a small part – with all of you! – to continue Peace's legacy of nurture and delight in our young people. And as the Bible story says, "Jesus knew." After all, an environment that nurtures and centers its most vulnerable people will end up being an environment that is good for all people.

Prayer

Playful God, open our eyes, our hearts, our spirits to wonder, to possibility, to mystery. We thank you for your love and for this community of belonging. May we share our delight across walls and divisions, opening your nurture to all of our neighbors. Amen.

—Amanda Hunter