

A CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION



ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HOUSTON, TEXAS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2022 AT 11 PM



Welcome to St. Paul's United Methodist Church!

*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven;
for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.*

Luke 6:23

Christmas is a vision that enables us to look around and see what is amazing and good in our lives and in our community. It is also a reminder that we all need the laughter of God to keep us from taking ourselves too seriously. Our laughter is the echo of Christmas joy in each one of us.

If you really understand and accept the mystery of Bethlehem, "glad tidings of great joy," your heart will be filled with the laughter of God. *"You are sad now but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you."* (John 16:22)

I know that Advent season has been busy and hectic for all of us. As you sit in the beauty of our sanctuary, this may be the first moment that you have had to catch your breath. May all that busyness fade away as you hear the scriptures read, as we sing the familiar carols, and then, as we light our candles. I pray that this service can be a time of rest and gladness; that you are able to feel the hope, peace, joy, and love that Jesus brings into our lives.

Thank you for being a part of our Christmas Eve services at St. Paul's and I hope you have a wonderful Christmas Day.

O Come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Jeff McDonald
Senior Pastor

CHRISTMAS EVE

SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION

*The St. Paul's family welcomes you as we worship God together.
We strive to be full, active, conscious participants in our liturgical life together.*

ENTRANCE AND PRAISE

VOLUNTARY

Prelude on "The Holly and the Ivy"

Herbert Sumsion

Canonic Variations on "Vom Himmel hoch da komm' ich her"
(*"From Heaven above to earth I come"*)

Johann Sebastian Bach

The congregation rises as the crucifer passes.

PROCESSIONAL HYMN

"O Come, All Ye Faithful"

ADESTE FIDELES



1. O come, all ye faith - ful, joy - ful and tri - um - phant, O come ye, O come ye to
2. True God of true God, Light from light E - ter - nal, lo, he shuns not the
3. Sing, choirs of an - gels, sing in ex - ul - ta - tion, sing all ye ci - ti - zens of
4. Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this hap - py morn - ing, Je - sus, to thee be all



Beth - le - hem. Come and be - hold him, born the King of an - gels;
Vir - gin's womb; Son of the Fa - ther, be - got - ten, not cre - a - ted;
heaven a - bove! Glo - ry to God, glo - ry in the high - est; O come, let us a -
glo - ry given. Word of the Fa - ther, now in flesh ap - pear - ing;



dore him, O come, let us a - dore him, O come, let us a - dore him, Christ the Lord.

GREETING

Light and peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord!

Thanks be to God.

Our Lord and Savior is drawing near.

O come, let us adore him!

COLLECT

O God, you have caused this holy night to shine with the brightness of the true Light: Grant that we, who have known the mystery of that Light on earth, may also perfectly enjoy him in heaven; where with you and the Holy Spirit he lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. **Amen.**

All sit.

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness — on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CAROL

“Ding Dong! Merrily on High”

Arr. Charles Wood

Ding dong! Merrily on high in heaven the bells are ringing.
Ding dong! Verily the sky is riven with angel singing.

Gloria! Hosanna in excelsis!

E'en so here below, below, let steeple bells be swungen,
And “io, io, io!” by priest and people sungen.

Pray you, dutifully prime your matin chime, ye ringers;
May you beautifully rime your evetime song, ye singers.

SECOND LESSON

Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

All Stand.

HYMN

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

St. Louis

Verse 3 sung by the Choir only.

1. O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, how still we see thee lie; a - bove thy deep and
2. For Christ is born of Ma - ry, and gath - ered all a - bove, while mor - tals sleep, the
3. How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly the won - drous gift is given; so God im - parts to
4. O ho - ly Child of Beth - le - hem, de - scend to us, we pray; cast out our sin, and



dream-less sleep the si - lent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shi - neth the
 an - gels keep their watch of won - dering love. O mor - ning stars to - geth - er pro -
 hu - man hearts the bless - ings of his heaven. No ear may hear his com - ing, but
 en - ter in, be born in us to - day. We hear the Christ - mas an - gels the



ev - er - last - ing light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee to - night.
 claim the ho - ly birth, and prais - es sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth!
 in this world of sin, where meek souls will re - ceive him, still the dear Christ en - ters in.
 great glad ti - dings tell; O come to us, a - bide with us, our Lord Em - man - u - el!

All turn to follow the Gospel Procession, facing the minister for the reading of the Gospel.

GOSPEL

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Please remain standing until the Gospel Procession returns to the chancel.

All sit.

SERMON

"The Fragility of Christmas"

Rev. Dr. Jeff McDonald

RESPONSES AND OFFERINGS

All stand.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

All sit.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

After each petition, all pray together in silence.

We bring before God our needs and the needs of the world.

Wonderful Counselor, give your wisdom to the rulers of the nations.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Mighty God, make the whole world know that authority rests on your shoulders.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Everlasting Father, establish your reign of justice and righteousness for ever.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Prince of Peace, bring in the endless kingdom of your peace.

Lord, in your mercy,

hear our prayer.

Almighty Lord,

hear our prayer, and fulfill your purposes in us, as you accomplished your will in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

All pray in silence.

KYRIE

Francis Jackson

Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Christe eleison.

Christ, have mercy upon us.

Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy upon us.

INVITATION, CONFESSION, AND PARDON

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore let us confess our sin before God and one another. Let us pray.

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven! Glory be to God. Amen.

PEACE

The peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also with you.

All exchange signs and words of God's peace.

WELCOME AND OFFERING PRAYER

The Christmas offering supports the benevolences of the church in Houston and around the world. Your gift will help meet human needs through children's programs, missions support, assistance ministries, and much more. Please give as generously as you are able.

OFFERING

"In the Bleak Midwinter"

Harold Darke

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan. Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone.
Snow had fallen snow on snow, snow on snow, in the bleak midwinter long ago.
Our God, heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain. Heaven and earth shall flee away, when he comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter, a stable place sufficed the Lord God Almighty Jesus Christ.
Enough for him, whom cherubim worship night and day, a breast full of milk, and a mangerfull of hay.
Enough for him, whom angels fall down before, the ox and ass and camel which adore.
What can I give him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wise man, I would do my part. Yet what I can I give him, give my heart.

All stand.

HYMN AT THE PRESENTATION

"Angels We Have Heard on High"

GLORIA



1. An - gels we have heard on high sweet - ly sing - ing o'er the plains, and the moun - tains in re - ply
2. Shep - herds, why this ju - bi - lee? Why your joy - ous strains pro - long? What the glad - some tid - ings be
3. Come to Beth - le - hem and see Christ, whose birth the an - gels sing; come, a - dore on bend - ed knee,
4. See him in a man - ger laid, whom the choirs of an - gels praise; Ma - ry, Jo - seph, lend your aid,



ech - o - ing their joy - ous strains. Glo - - - - - ri - a in ex - cel - sis
which in - spire your heaven - ly song?
Christ the Lord, the new - born King.
while our hearts in love we raise.



De - o! Glo - - - - - ri - a in ex - cel - sis De - o!

SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, almighty God, creator of heaven and earth. You created light out of darkness and brought forth life on the earth. You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.

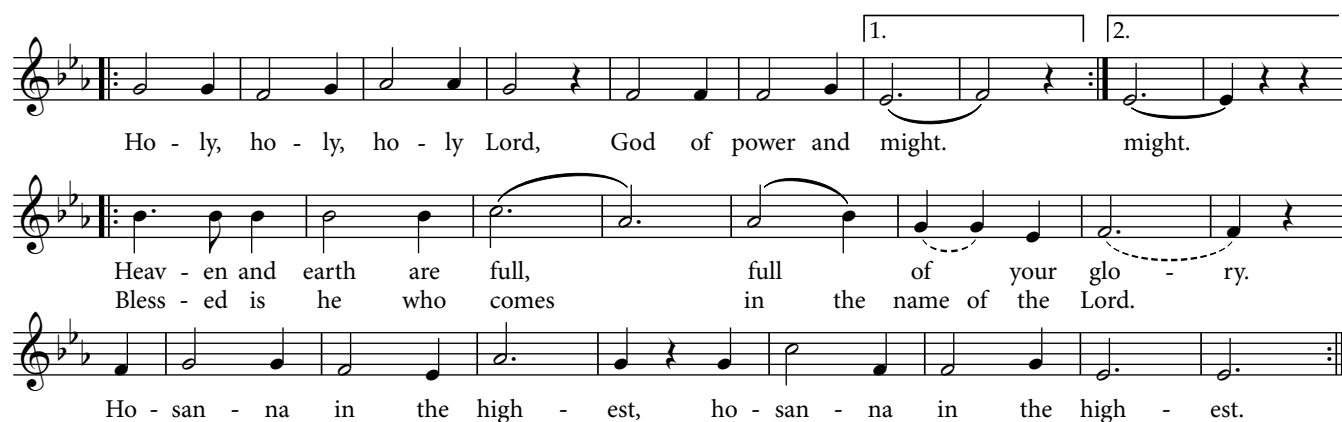
When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through the prophets.

In the fullness of time, you gave your only son Jesus Christ to be our Savior, and at his birth the angels sang glory to you in the highest, and peace to your people on earth.

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

SANCTUS AND BENEDICTUS *(sung by all)*

Franz Schubert



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of power and might. might.

Heav - en and earth are full, full of your glo - ry.
Bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Ho - san - na in the high - est, ho - san - na in the high - est.

The congregation sits.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ. As Mary and Joseph went from Galilee to Bethlehem and there found no room, so Jesus went from Galilee to Jerusalem and was despised and rejected.

As in the poverty of a stable Jesus was born, so by the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the spirit.

As your Word became flesh, born of woman, on that night long ago, so, on the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said, "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us, as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION *(sung by all)*

Franz Schubert

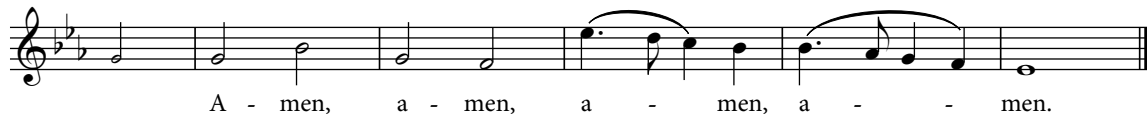


Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet. Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and for ever.

AMEN *(sung by all)*

Franz Schubert



And now, with the confidence of the children of God, let us pray.

LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

BREAKING OF THE BREAD AND BLESSING OF THE CUP

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The cup over which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

AGNUS DEI *(sung by the choir)*

Francis Jackson

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace.

All seeking God are welcome at Christ's Table. Starting from the balcony and the back of the Sanctuary, the congregation will come down the center aisle, guided by the ushers to the clergy standing in front of the Chancel. After receiving communion, you may kneel for prayer or return to your seat by the side aisles for silent prayer. Gluten-free elements are available. If you need communion brought to your seat, please let an usher know.

Hand sanitizer is available in each pew rack.

CAROLS AT THE COMMUNION

"O Little One Sweet"

Johann Sebastian Bach

O little one sweet, O little one mild, with joy thou hast the whole world filled;
Thou camest here from heaven's domain, to bring us comfort in our pain,
O little one sweet, O little one mild.

O little one sweet, O little one mild, in thee love's beauty is distilled;
So light in us thy love's bright flame, that we may give thee back the same,
O little one sweet, O little one mild.

“Away in a Manger”

Arr. David Willcocks

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
 The stars in the sky looked down where he lay, the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.
 The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes;
 I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.
 Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray;
 Bless all the dear children in thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with thee there.

PRAYER AFTER RECEIVING

Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery in which you have given yourself to us. Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves for others, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SENDING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST INTO THE WORLD

PROCLAMATION OF THE LIGHT

Jesus Christ is the light of the world:
A light no darkness can ever extinguish.

THE LIGHTING OF CANDLES

The light of Christ is passed to all. Please tip unlit candles toward the flame, taking care to hold lit candles upright at all times.

All stand.

HYMN

“Silent Night”

STILLE NACHT

1. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, all is calm, all is bright round yon vir - gin moth er and child.
 2. Si - lent night, ho - ly night, won-drous star, lend thy light; with the an - gels let us sing,
 Ho - ly in-fant, so ten-der and mild, sleep in heav-en-ly peace, sleep in heav-en-ly peace.
 Al - le - lu - ia to our King; Christ the Sav-ior is born, Christ the Sav-ior is born!

COLLECT

Let us pray. Almighty God, you have poured upon us the new light of your incarnate Word. Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

HYMN

"Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

MENDELSSOHN



1. Hark! the her - ald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King;
 2. Christ, by high - est heaven a - dored; Christ, the ev - er - last - ing Lord;
 3. Hail the heaven - born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righ - teous - ness!

peace on earth, and mer - cy mild, God and sin - ners rec - on - ciled!"
 late in time, be - hold him come, off - spring of the vir - gin's womb.
 Light and life to all he brings, risen with heal - ing in his wings.

Joy - ful, all ye na - tions rise, join the tri - umph of the skies;
 Veiled in flesh the God - head see; hail th'in - car - nate De - i - ty,
 Mild he lays his glo - ry by, born that we no more may die,

with th'an - gel - ic host pro - claim, "Christ is born in Beth - le - hem!"
 pleased with us in flesh to dwell, Je - sus, our Em - man - u - el.
 born to raise us from the earth, born to give us se - cond birth.

Hark! the he - rald an - gels sing, "Glo - ry to the new - born King!"

DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING

May the Christ who by his incarnation gathered into One things earthly and heavenly, fill you with the sweetness of inward peace and goodwill; and the blessing of God, the love of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

VOLUNTARY

"In dulci jubilo," BWV 729

Johann Sebastian Bach

Upon leaving, please extinguish candles carefully, and return them to the boxes provided at the exits.

LAY READER: Mark Hager

CHRISTMAS GREENERY is placed to the glory of God in thanksgiving by the St. Paul's Choir.

Permission to podcast/stream the music in this service obtained from One License with license #A-729097.

EVENTS AT ST. PAUL'S

Being in community with one another is an essential part of life at St. Paul's.

For all events and gatherings, more information and registration links are available by visiting www.stpaulshouston.org/events or by calling (713)528-0527.

Christmas Day Worship – *Sunday, December 25, at 10 am.* Come celebrate Christmas with your St. Paul's family and enjoy Christmas cookies on the Plaza following the service. On Christmas Day, Sunday School classes will not meet. For Sunday School on January 1, please check with your class leader.

Fine Arts Academy Registration – *Open now. Register online for the Spring 2023 semester.* Classes are offered in Art and Musikgarten. Individual lessons are available in Art, Piano and Voice. Classes begin the week of January 17.

The Art Tent Critical Need – Volunteers are needed at The Art Tent, which is a space for people experiencing homelessness to express themselves through visual art. Contact Helen Spaw at hspaw@stpaulshouston.org.

Epiphany Sunday – *January 1, at 10 am.* We will gather for one service on the first Sunday of the new year. Come together in the plaza following the service to toast the new year with your St. Paul's family.

Still on Fire: A Talk with Jan Phillips – *Saturday, January 7, at 9 am.* Come enjoy a talk with Jan Phillips - a visionary thought leader, award-winning author and dynamic speaker who provokes thought and inspires action. She creates a unique multi-sensory experience, weaving together humor, storytelling, video and music to inspire and ignite insights for life-changing action. Cost is \$25; registration is available online or by calling the front desk.

Welcome Reception for Rev. Melinda Owens and Rev. Brandi Horton – *Sunday, January 8, at 9:30 am in the parlor.* Come meet and welcome our new Congregational Care Pastor and Executive Pastor of Operations.

Wonderfully Made – *January 20-22.* We have a new educational event for our 5th - 7th graders that gives factual information on physical and spiritual development and human sexuality that's grounded in our faith. A parent meeting will take place on Friday, January 20, with the Retreat for 5th-7th graders on Saturday, January 21. On Sunday, January 22, we will wrap up the weekend with a family lunch.

St. Paul's Day – *Sunday, January 29.* Celebrate our St. Paul's community with morning worship celebrating the Feast Day of the Conversion of Paul and then return at 4 pm for a concert and all-church dinner! All our choirs (St. Paul's Choir, Choral Scholars, Treble Choir, Choristers, and Wesley Singers) will be joined by members of the Mercury Chamber Orchestra for a festive concert which will include Benedicity (Song of Creation) by British composer, Andrew Carter.



ST. PAUL'S UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

5501 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77004

713-528-0527 www.stpaulshouston.org

Rev. Dr. Jeff McDonald, Senior Minister