GOOD NEWS

VOL. 64, NO. 4

WINTER 2026-27

December, January, February



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After three months of sabbath and study



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VILLAGE CHURCH
Presbyterian (USA)

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The grass withers, and the flower fades,
but the Word of our God stands ***forever.***

The GOOD NEWS is a quarterly publication for all members, friends, and partners of Village Presbyterian Church.
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Suggestions for future topics and articles are always welcome.

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IN MEMORY

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88 Songs in a Time of Waiting



Advent is a time of waiting, preparation, and transformation. Our Advent sermon series will explore these themes through the gift of Advent hymns—not only in worship but in concerts and even in our daily devotionals. To help set the mood, we invited three staff members to tell us about a Christmas song that resonates with them.

Angel Patterson, director of youth ministry: "The Christmas Song (Merry Christmas to You)" sung by Nat King Cole

The Christmas season was such a magical time growing up. The decorations, the traditions, and the pure joy in the sunny, California air. The reason this is my favorite Christmas song is because of what would happen when it started to play. My maternal grandmother (who raised me) would play it every Christmas Eve as she began to bake treats that filled the air with sweet aromas that I can vividly smell as I sit here writing this. As I got older, we would bake together, making family classics and creating new ones. Now that she is no longer earthside, this tradition, this song, helps me keep her close—reminding me of that time. I continue this tradition with my children. My two daughters are finally old enough to help me bake. Their baby brother will get to look on this December. Christmas Eve always starts in the kitchen, baking treats and listening to "The Christmas Song," which never fails to bring joy to my heart.

Brooke Brundige, director of children & family ministry: "Mary, Did You Know?"

I'm not sure there is a Christmas song that touches me more deeply than "Mary, Did You Know?" And when our very own Becky Bliss sings it with her phenomenal voice, all the better! There is something about imagining Jesus as a little baby, born into the world just like you and me, that I absolutely love. So many needs, so little sleep (for the parents!) when a tiny human is born. Jesus entered the world in this most vulnerable and human way. Thinking about Jesus' birth from Mary's perspective makes the story even more powerful. I am inspired by her—a young woman in a precarious situation, embracing a future she could hardly imagine. And yet, she made space in her life and her body for this infant, trusting God with what she could not understand. And then there is the line that gets me every time: "This child that you've delivered will soon deliver you." What a beautiful paradox. Mary holds the child who will one day hold the world.

For me, this song captures the extraordinary mystery of Christmas: God came to us not as a distant power, but as a baby who needed to be held, fed, comforted, and loved. The sacred arrived in the most ordinary of packages. And every time I hear this song, I am drawn into the wonder of that tiny child, that remarkable young mother, and a love so profound that it changed everything.

Carol Solenberger, director of engagment: "Frosty the Snowman"

I vividly remember singing this song in elementary school during the holidays and I loved attending my own children's All-School Sing Along and hearing the entire elementary school sing "Frosty the Snowman" (with gusto). I had a "Frosty the Snowman" board book that I read and sang to my two kids—and not only during the holidays.

I love the story of Frosty; a powerful message of kindness, friendship, hope, and a little magic, all wrapped up in a clever and catchy song! I think we could all learn something from Frosty—seeing the similarities in others and the joy of laughing and playing with friends. The song's message is about appreciating the gift of time and living in the moment. I loved watching the 1969 animated TV special as a child and then sharing that experience with my own kids. We still watch it today and my children are teenagers. Who knew a song/book/TV show could have such an impact. "Thumpity, thump, thump, look at Frosty go!" I wish you lots of laughter, magic, and hope this holiday season!

RODGER RETURNS



I am deeply grateful for the incredible gift of my July–September 2026 sabbatical. Here are some of the experiences I shared in my November Session report.

THE JOURNEY

In Athens, Greece, I toured the amazing new Acropolis Museum. It's not actually new. It opened nearly 20 years ago but it's been that long since I was in Athens. The whole third floor is a scale replica of the Parthenon.

During a nearly week-long stay on the island of Patmos in the eastern Aegean sea, I stayed in a guest house attached to the Monastery of Saint John the Divine. I translated a 14th century manuscript into English and read the Revelation to John in the Cave of the Apocalypse (photo below), the site where John received and wrote the Revelation.



I read the Hebrew Bible, Genesis to Malachi. I read the Bible many times a day but it had been years since I had read the Old Testament straight through.

I read 11 other books mostly on leadership and the church, but also a couple of fun books, including "Theo of Golden" which many of you recommended (delightful and moving) and "James" by Percival Everett, the Pulitzer Prize winning novel about Jim, the fictional slave who accompanied Huck in Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (powerful and enlivening).

I spent nearly five weeks in Japan. I visited my niece who is teaching English in Sendai. I did some language study but my sensei (teacher) told me on the first day of class that I was too advanced for her basic class. She was right. I spent six days walking 37 miles on the Kumano Kodo, an ancient trail in the Wakayama prefecture. The Kumano Kodo is one of two UNESCO-recognized pilgrimages in the world. The other is the Camino de Santiago in Spain. The Kumano Kodo was more strenuous than I expected. It is very mountainous and on the most challenging day, I had to ascend a little over 4,000 feet up and then descend 2,500 feet to get to the next village. It took me nearly ten hours. The best part of the day was reaching a new guest house in the evening and soaking in the Japanese onsen bath.

I also visited the hill of the Christian martyrs and the memorial and museum to victims of the atomic bombing in Nagasaki, Japan. Both were moving experiences but the monument to the Christian martyrs (four European and 21 Japanese Christians) who refused to recant their faith and were crucified, was incredibly striking. I had heard about

Rev. Dr. Nishioka gives thanks for three months of sabbath and study.

sab·bat·ic·al *1. noun. A period of paid leave granted to a university teacher or other worker for study or travel, traditionally one year for every seven years worked. Similar: break, rest, recess, time off, time out, leave, journey, expedition, vacation, vacay.*

the martyrs but did not really know much about them. The museum has a tribute to each of the martyrs, including the three Japanese boys who died for their faith.

I closed my time with a Nishioka family reunion in Los Angeles (right). I visited with cousins I had not seen in many years. It was wonderful to reconnect with nearly 30 family members and a fitting way to end my sabbatical.

THE HOMECOMING

I found that by the end of September, I was ready to return. I missed all of you so much and found myself thinking of you and praying for you daily (well, almost every day). I have renewed energy and my spirit feels revived. I am so glad to be back among you. I am also profoundly grateful to Rev. Dr. Diane Janssen Hemmen, Kathy Lueckert, Rev. Alice Whitson, Rev. Zach Walker, Rev. Maggie Johnson Phillips, Rev. Anna Owens, Laura Hobbs (my executive assistant), and all our staff and leaders for their good and faithful work while I was away.

The sabbatical was such a gift. Thank you. You will hear more about my sabbatical in the weeks and months to come.

–Gratefully, Rodger



L to R: Rodger's nephew, Cameron Nishioka; brothers Jason, Rodger, Brandon, and Garfield. Seated: Auntie Nancy and Auntie Yuri.

Giving That Transforms

villagepres.org/giving

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

As we conclude our giving season sermon series (Nov. 8-22), these familiar words from the Lord's Prayer invite us to think about generosity in a new way. Giving is not simply a financial transaction or a way to meet the church's budget. It is an expression of our faith and a way to participate in God's work in the world.

When we give, we help make God's kingdom visible—in the lives we touch, the people we welcome, the needs we meet, and the hope we share. Our gifts support the ministries of Village Church and help create a community where people can grow in faith, experience God's love, and discover a place to belong.

Giving is not merely transactional; it is transformative. It transforms lives, strengthens our church, and shapes us as people of faith. Each gift, whatever its size, is an opportunity to put our prayers into action and help bring God's kingdom a little closer to earth.

As we enter a new year, may our generosity reflect not only what we believe, but the kind of world we hope to help create—one marked by compassion, welcome, justice, and love.

1991-2026

Antioch Preschool Celebrates 35 Years

by Paula Benefiel

In 1991, the Antioch Preschool first opened its doors with just a few students and two teachers. This was when the church was known as the Presbyterian Church of Stanley. In December 2016, the Village Church Session voted unanimously to establish a satellite congregation here, which means we are approaching a ten-year anniversary! (The first worship service as Village Church on Antioch was held on Feb. 5, 2017 with 107 attendees.)

> "We have been so blessed to send both of our children through the Antioch Preschool. The director and teachers are knowledgeable, caring, and dedicated. They genuinely love what they do—and it shows in how they care for the children. Our experience has been nothing but positive. I couldn't recommend a better early childhood program."
>
> –Adrianne Zielke, Village Church member and preschool parent

Now, 35 years later, the Antioch Preschool joyfully employs 10 teachers and serves 69 students. The preschool operates four days a week, Monday through Thursday. Classrooms are organized by age (for children from ages 2.5 to 5) with different scheduling options available for parents. We have modified our daily and weekly schedule a few times over the years, trying our best to accommodate the needs of families. Currently, preschool classes are offered in the mornings as well as a full-day choice for families who need a longer option.

Our goal has always been to nurture the growth of the whole child by providing a comprehensive curriculum and supportive atmosphere that fosters the child's social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual well-being. We use a Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) curriculum.

Some of my fondest memories include Open Houses, the Christmas musicals, holiday visits from Mrs. Claus (who was one of our earliest preschool teachers), Spring Musicals, and the end-of-the-year celebrations—honoring all the children "graduating" from preschool and heading to Kindergarten. We love seeing all the older siblings and former students come back to visit during these events. Sometimes the best moments are the simple ones—when I can pop into a classroom while they are singing action songs, laughing, and making memories together!





One thing that makes our preschool so special is the lasting relationships we have built with our families. Many of our teachers first came to know our preschool as parents. They brought their own children here and watched

them grow as students in our program. When those children moved on to elementary school, quite a few moms decided they wanted to come back to our school family to work as teachers. Some of those parents are still here today, teaching, doing what they love, and making a difference in the lives of children in this community. One of the things we treasure most is that this is a small enough 'family' that everyone knows one another, relationships matter, and people genuinely care. This sense of close connection is what makes the Antioch Preschool feel like a home.

Paula Benefiel *has served as director of the Antioch Preschool since August 2005. She grew up in Shawnee, Kansas and attended Shawnee Mission Northwest High School. She began teaching preschool at age 16 at Trinity Christian. She received her B.A. in Elementary Education with an emphasis in special education from Pittsburg State University. After college, Paula served five years as the preschool director at La Petite Academy. She was able to bring her three young children (ages 15-months, two, and four, at the time) with her for free care, which was an immense perk. Paula has worked at the Antioch Preschool since its inception.*

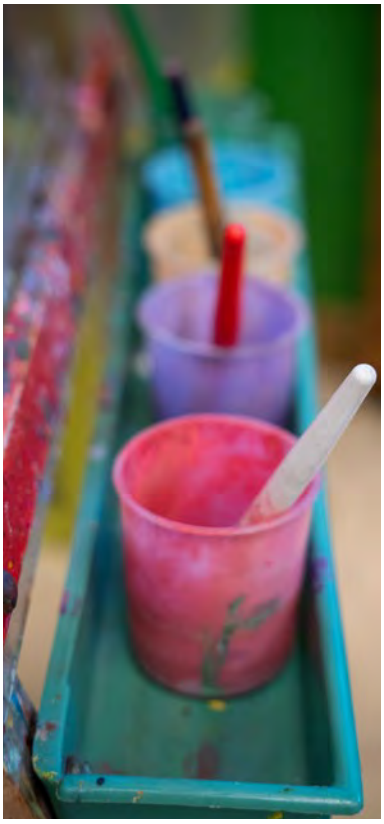
villagepres.org/preschool/antioch



Director Paula Benefiel

"One day my car spun out on black ice on my way to pick up my daughter Isabella at the Antioch Preschool. When I finally arrived (very late) to get her, the two teachers were nearly in tears worried something had happened to me and one teacher said she had already decided she would take in Isabella if needed! The staff at the Antioch Preschool is beyond caring. They love our children like their own."

–Julia Scammahorn, Village Church member and former Preschool parent





















Wednesdays@VILLAGE

FOR ALL

Faith isn't just for Sundays.

We have received terrific feedback on our launch of Wednesdays@Village. More than 170 people for came for the Kickoff on Sept. 16! We dined on tacos, played games, and asked people "Who was most famous person you've met?" Three people in attendance had met Harry S. Truman, one had met Elvis Presley, and co-director of music, Dr. Josh Maize, sang with the Rolling Stones. We concluded the event with an impromptu talent show that included juggling and a magic trick.

Church member and volunteer Brooke Morrison shares this story, "Wednesdays are now our favorite day of the week. Our family enjoys getting to meet and hang out with new people. We sat with a family we didn't know very well the first week of Wednesdays@Village, which has since led to a women's hike, coffee dates, a new goldendoodle puppy for them (after meeting ours), and weekly requests from the kids to sit together. This is why we love Village!"

For those who like numbers and statistics: Average attendance for Sept. 23, Sept. 30, Oct. 7, and Oct. 14 was 123 people. That does not include the "All-In" dates. At Festi-Fall on Oct. 2, we fed 202 people and many more were present for the fun autumn activities like pumpkin and face painting.

In October 2025, the five-week average was 82 people (when we remove Oct. 8, which was when we offered a free dinner for the grand re-opening of Friendship Hall and 186 people joined us).

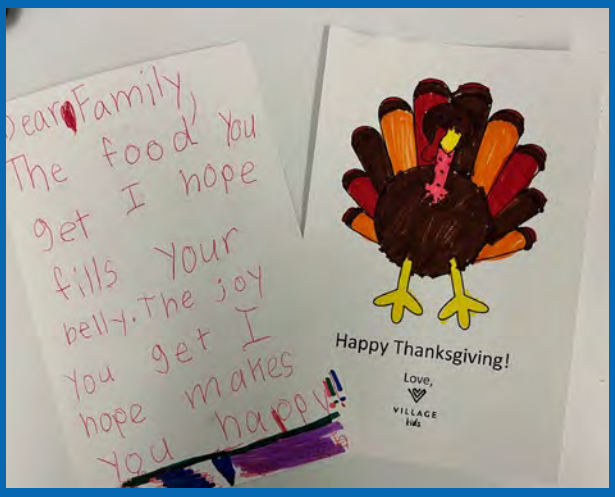
Each Wednesday evening, an average of 123 people came together for dinner, connection, faith formation, and joy!

In children's programming (for kids ages 5-12), we average 17 children each week. Our vibrant young-adult ministry has seen about 20 young adults in attendance each Wednesday. Rev. Alice Whitson's class on Minor Prophets averaged 40 attendees, of all ages, over the three weeks. There were 77 people in the first of Pastor Rodger's classes on "The Revelation

DOING THE GOOD:

500 Thanksgiving Baskets for our neighbors in need

Each fall, the Village Church Food Pantry gears up for their annual Thanksgiving project: Baskets that include a turkey and all the fixings for holiday meal for four. A $45 donation funds each Thanksgiving basket.



Dennis Cobb, director of the Pantry and Clothes Closet, shares, "We like to include a card with each Thanksgiving basket that the Food Pantry gives out. We often get help from church members and outside groups to create the cards. I was with a Girl Scout Troop of 9- and 10-year-olds and they used the Village Kids' template to color and decorate. Some of them wrote a thoughtful message on the card as well." (See photo at left.)

"We are on track to give out 500 Thanksgiving baskets this year. We add folks to a wait list after all 500 are reserved," says Dennis.

Thank you to all the donors and volunteers who make this massive effort possible, living out the call in Matthew 25:35-36, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

villagepres.org/food-pantry

of John." We had to hustle to find more seating for that classroom.

Director of engagement Carol Solenberger says, "As I've reflected on the success of Wednesdays@Village, I've determined that it is because it's a Village Church program—not one particular group's event. Every department is participating every week and I'm so grateful. There's a positive vibe, it has felt warm and invitational, and there have been new faces each week. Folks are inviting others to join them. I can't stop smiling!"

Rev. Dr. Diane Janssen Hemmen shares, "Just as a little more movement brings great health to our physical lives—a second walk each week yields benefits for our overall wellness—so, too, a little more time and attention to our faith brings great spiritual fitness! Worship is the 'body' of all we are and do, so a second touch with our community each week can yield more connection, learning, and spiritual well-being to sustain us as we are sent out into a life of faith, service, and witness. We want to take the welcome and love we know at Village into the world—and we are encouraging each other in doing that."

Wednesdays@Village finished up for the calendar year on Nov. 18 to make time and space for Advent and we will restart on Feb. 3 and go through April 21, 2027. See you in the new year! ***villagepres.org/wednesdays***

MUSIC NOTES



December is one of the most exciting months in the music department, and this year is no exception. On Dec. 13, we will enjoy a delightful **Children's Christmas Musical** called "Angels, Lambs, Ladybugs, and Fireflies" during morning worship services at the Antioch and Mission Campuses. You will get to experience the Christmas story told through the eyes of insects, shepherds, and adults.

Then, return to the Mission Sanctuary at 3 or 6 p.m. to experience the 26th annual **Tidings of Joy** concert. We are particularly excited about this concert, as it will feature the near 90-voice Tidings Chorus, Village Chamber Choir, Alegria choir, soloists, and the Kansas City Wind Symphony. The concerts will open with a newly-composed work written for Village Church by local composer Ian Coleman, titled "This New Noel, Sing We!" The piece—scored for chorus and wind ensemble—beautifully weaves together a few familiar Advent carols. The concert will also feature a choral arrangement of Dolly Parton's song, "Light of a Clear Blue Morning." While not a Christmas piece, Dolly's lyrics speak to the hope found in a new day, and thematically, the pieces in the concert's second half speak to the hope Jesus' birth brings to the world.

The **Kansas City Percussive Arts Ensemble** will present a thrilling concert on Saturday, Jan. 30 at 7 p.m. in the Mission Sanctuary. This ensemble, led by former Village Church music coordinator Theo Musick, features professional percussionists who will perform on instruments of all shapes and sizes. The chancel will be full of drums, vibraphones, xylophones, timpani, bells, chimes, cymbals, and you might even hear music being performed on flowerpots, car brakes, trashcans, and more! This concert will be exciting for people of all ages and is not to be missed.

On Saturday, Feb. 20 at 7 p.m., St. Louis-based **classical guitarist Patrick Rafferty** will perform a concert in the Mission Campus Chapel that is sure to be a highlight of the season. Patrick is an experienced performer of traditional and popular guitar repertoire. He is an expert on early guitar music, including Baroque and 19th-century guitars. His busy schedule has included performances



Guitarist Patrick Rafferty

with the Chamber Project Saint Louis, Chamber Music Sundays at Three Series, the Elliot Chapel Friends of Music Series, the Shepley Concert Series at Christ Church Cathedral in St. Louis, and appearances at The Tavern of Fine Arts. He's also been on NPR affiliate KRCU as well as the St. Louis Classical Guitar Society's radio program "Inside Classical Guitar." Tom Harte, NPR host of Caffe Concerto, says, "Anyone who has a chance to hear Patrick play will be well rewarded." Tickets will be available at the door.

villagepres.org/music

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

See the full calendar and sign up for all events at **villagepres.churchcenter.com**

• Mission Campus • Antioch Campus • **At Both Locations** • Offsite

DECEMBER

2 Service of Comfort and Hope, 6:30 p.m.

3 Tallgrass Creek Social, 1 p.m.

4 Handel's Messiah Community Sing-Along, 7 p.m.

5 **Poinsettia Delivery Pick-Up Day**
Village Voices and Youth Caroling, 9 a.m.
Advent Family Workshop, 2-3:30 p.m.
Young Adult Christmas Party, 7-9 p.m.

6 New Member Luncheon, noon
Kicks Band Christmas Concert, 3 p.m.

9 Women's Advent Celebration, 6-8 p.m.

10 2nd Thurs Recital: Trio Fontana, 12:15 p.m.

11 Cross-Lines Volunteer Day, 10:30 a.m.

13 Children's Musical, 9 & 11 a.m.
Children's Musical and Brunch, 10 a.m.
Tidings of Joy concert, 3 & 6 p.m.
Youth Christmas Party, 6:30-8 p.m.

15 Te Deum presents "Then The Angel Said: Christmas Carols of Hope, Courage, and Promise," 7 p.m.

20 Self-Guided Service of Comfort and Hope, 8 a.m.-noon

24 **Christmas Eve**
Family Worship, 3 & 5 p.m.
Family Worship, 4 p.m.
Candlelight Worship w/ communion, 7 p.m.
Candlelight Worship, 7 & 9 p.m.
Village Voices Alumni Reception, 9:30 p.m.
Candlelight Worship w/ communion, 11 p.m.

25 **Christmas Day: Campuses Closed**

27 **10 a.m. Services Only (Both Campuses)**

28, 31 Antioch Campus Closed

JANUARY

1 **New Year's Day: Campuses Closed**

3 **Epiphany/Star Words in worship**
Adult Faith Formation classes resume

7 Blood Drive, 2-6 p.m.

8 Cross-Lines Volunteer Day (Mission team), 10:30 a.m.

10 **Ordination & Installation of Officers**
Kids Sunday School classes resume
Adult Faith Formation classes resume
Wonder & Word Bible Exploration for 3rd Graders, 10 a.m.

12 Blood Drive, 1-6 p.m.

13 Lunch with the Pastor, noon

14 2nd Thurs Recital: Sharee Thompson, organ, 12:15 p.m.

16 Prairie Village MLK Action & Celebration Event, 3 p.m.

17-18 Youth Winter Retreat at Tall Oaks

18 **Martin Luther King Jr. Day: Campuses Closed**

21-24 Young Adults: Manna Retreat in North Carolina

23 Village Serves at Village Food Pantry, 1-3 p.m.

24 Jared Brooks, UMKC Choirs, and the New Vintage KC Bluegrass Band present "Dear Appalachia: Stories from the Southern Hills," 3 p.m.

30 KC Percussive Arts Ensemble concert , 7 p.m.

FEBRUARY

3 Wednesdays@Village returns, 5:30 p.m.

7 New Member Luncheon, noon
Kansas City Wind Symphony Chamber Winds, 3 p.m.

10 **Ash Wednesday**
Drive-Up Ashes, 7-8 a.m.
30-minute prayer service, 8 a.m.
30-minute prayer service, noon
Family service, 6:15 p.m.
Traditional service, 7 p.m.

11 2nd Thurs Recital: Nicholas Good, harpsichord, 12:15 p.m.

12 Cross-Lines Volunteer Day (Antioch team)

14 **Souper Bowl Sunday**

17 Wednesdays@Village: "Be The Church" Service Night

20 Patrick Rafferty guitar concert, 7 p.m.

21 New Member Class, 11:15 a.m.

27 Village Choir Spring Retreat, 9 a.m.-noon

VILLAGE CHURCH
Presbyterian (USA)

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MISSION CAMPUS
6641 Mission Rd., Prairie Village, KS 66208
913-262-4200 (main line & pastor on call)
Worship: 9, 11 a.m., and 4 p.m. Sundays

ANTIOCH CAMPUS
14895 Antioch Rd., Overland Park, KS 66221
913-681-8180
Worship: 10 a.m. Sundays

MENEILLY CENTER FOR MISSION
Food Pantry & Clothes Closet - 9960 Mission Rd.
Child & Family Development Center - 9900 Mission Rd.
Overland Park, KS 66207

Worship online at villagepres.org/online