



ST. PAUL'S UCC

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Our Mission is to grow spiritually,
worship God,
serve others,
welcome all.

ST. PAUL'S
UNITED
CHURCH
OF CHRIST

BE THE CHURCH
that is open, caring, and
forgive often. Reject
fight for the power
of earthly and spiritual
authorities in Love God



400 N Market St
Selinsgrove, PA 17870



(570) 374-8749



saintpauls-ucc.org



Joyful Noise choir



St. Paul's United Church of Christ
400 N. Market St.
Selinsgrove PA, 17870



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instagram.com/saintpaulsselinsgrove

Conference: Penn Central

Association: Central

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1. Summary Ministry Description

A recently completed vision and strategic planning process led us to the recognition that we need additional leadership from an Associate Pastor to help us better do God's work and achieve the goals of our plan.

St. Paul's United Church of Christ, guided by the UCC Statement of Faith, is a vibrant Open and Affirming church located in central PA in the borough of Selinsgrove. With a membership of about 300, a regular weekly attendance at Sunday services of 80-90, and a stable financial picture, we support a number of ministries for adults, children, and our local community. St. Paul's is a church whose strengths include a sense of community and an unwavering commitment to being Open & Affirming. We extend an extravagant welcome to all people. We are a church that cares deeply about each other and the broader community, actively engaging in outreach and service to make a positive impact. Music is an essential part of our worship, with a vibrant music ministry that includes wonderful choirs. St. Paul's is outward-looking, actively involved in ministries like the Loaves & Fishes food bank ministry, the Green Team focusing on sustainability, our Prayer Shawl ministry, and the Card and Caring ministry, demonstrating our love for others through action. We are a multi-generational community, united in fellowship and a shared love of God, always willing to grow and serve together.

A recently completed vision and strategic planning process led us to the recognition that we need additional leadership from an Associate Pastor to help us better do God's work and achieve the goals of our plan. Ideally the Associate Pastor called to St. Paul's will be firmly committed to our Open and Affirming mission, a supportive partner to the Pastor, and an innovative leader of our youth and small group ministries. To determine the best candidate, we solicited feedback from the congregation on what characteristics of St. Paul's are important to include in this description and what characteristics of an Associate Pastor will lead us to the best candidate for our church.



2. Who Are We Now and Who Is God Calling Us to Be?

Who Are We Now?

St. Paul's is an active church that consciously identifies with the United Church of Christ (UCC) and engages regularly in ecumenical and interfaith activities. We are an engaged, theologically diverse congregation that enjoys excellent leadership from our Pastor, Reverend Dr. Dietmar Plajer who has served St. Paul's for 17 years, as well as from devoted lay leaders led by an elected Church Council. A variety of committees such as Stewardship and Finance, Worship, Christian Education, and Personnel carry out the work of the church in collaboration with the Pastor and the Council. The congregation is a blend of families and individuals who have been multigenerational members as well as those who have more recently been drawn to St. Paul's.

We offer a lively Sunday morning worship service and, with the aid of technology developed during the pandemic, we livestream and record our services so that we are able to reach a wider population of members and friends. We offer regular worship and sermon series which integrate themes of faith and culture. There is both a senior and children's choir (the Joyful Noise); and many talented church members provide special music on a regular basis to enrich our service. Music is a highly valued part of our ministry.

We grow in our faith in a variety of ways. We offer a rotating topic-based adult education program, led by church members. This past fall, the topic centered on reading and discussing some of our favorite Bible stories from the First Nations Version of the New Testament. Prior adult programs have included more traditional Bible studies, book discussions, and video series on current events or topics such as racism. There is a Children's Message that is part of each Sunday morning service, offered by a rotating group of adult volunteers. After the message, the children go to Sunday School for the rest of the service. There is a



Loaves & Fishes Food Distribution

nursery provided for younger children at each service. A highlight of our intergenerational ministry that reaches the wider community is our monthly Messy Church event. People of all ages and families with children gather in our Fellowship Hall to engage in a variety of crafts and activities related to a Bible story, which is followed by a short Celebration with message and music in the sanctuary. We then provide a family style dinner which enables everyone to enjoy a relaxed meal together before heading home. The large cohort of adult volunteers led by our Messy Church coordinator enjoys participating in Messy Church together with all Messy Church attendees, young and old. We also offer opportunities for fellowship following certain church service celebrations, for example the receiving of new members, and Meet and Eat, a potluck supper.

A particularly important ministry is St. Paul's Loaves and Fishes, a food outreach program. A group of volunteers from here and other local churches and organizations, led by a St. Paul's member in cooperation with the Central PA Food Bank, provide a food distribution to 90-100 local families on the last Friday of each month from our Fellowship Hall. We also host a food distribution for the holidays in collaboration with other local churches.

St. Paul's became an Open and Affirming congregation in 2018 and we consider diversity to be a core value. Although the local area is predominantly white (over 90% according to the 2021 census) and our congregation reflects that, there is significant economic diversity locally and in our congregation. We openly welcome and affirm members of the LGBTQ+ community, and our leadership reflects this diversity. St. Paul's recently began hosting a PFLAG group that meets in our church monthly. The welcome statement that is found in our pews makes it clear that we offer a warm reception to all, regardless of who they are or where they are on life's journey. The statement is included at the end of this document and can be viewed by clicking this link: [St. Paul's Welcome Statement](#).

St. Paul's UCC is fortunate to be a financially healthy church, pursuing options to grow staff and programs while providing strong maintenance to existing facilities. St. Paul's has a calendar year 2023 budget of \$350K, which we are expecting to meet. We have

125 giving units. The 2024 budget is just under \$440K, which includes approximately 4% growth as well as the addition of this Associate Pastor position. We have dedicated investment funds, some of which act as an endowment for ongoing interest income, and some are dedicated to certain efforts including the initial funding of the Associate Pastor position. Maintenance of our facilities is important, and we recently approved the purchase of a new boiler system which was installed in November 2023. We are working on a \$250-300K building improvement fund to address some needed improvements with sidewalks, stairs, etc. That effort is partially offset by dedicated funds as well. We support various part-time staff positions including an administrative assistant, choir positions, cleaning and maintenance staff, and financial management. We believe that stewardship is an ongoing activity. We have an annual pledge process but will highlight the need for stewardship throughout 2024 to keep St. Paul's financially healthy and growing.

Finally, we are happily situated in a small community where people care about each other and there is very little crime. St. Paul's is located in the borough of Selinsgrove, PA, a community of about 5,700 people in central PA, about 50 miles north of Harrisburg. We live within a few hours drive of several major northeast cities (Baltimore, Washington DC, Philadelphia, and New York). Located in the scenic Susquehanna River valley, our rural setting supports agriculture and several manufacturing industries. Selinsgrove is also the home of Susquehanna University, with a student body of 2,200, and we are about 12 miles from Lewisburg, home to Bucknell University with an enrollment of about 3,800. Both universities offer a range of cultural, arts, and sporting opportunities which enrich the area. We have a strong local school district supporting a community of 22,000, and the river and nearby mountains offer gorgeous settings for outdoor activities. We find Selinsgrove to be a safe and friendly community, but residents here face problems related to poverty, mental health concerns, and substance abuse typical of all communities. We are fortunate to have excellent medical facilities nearby, such as Evangelical Community Hospital in Lewisburg and Geisinger Medical Center, a level I trauma center, in Danville.

Who Is God Calling Us to Be?

St. Paul's embarked on a strategic planning and visioning process in the winter and spring of 2023. In open sessions for the congregation led by Reverend Dr. Carrie Call, our Conference Minister, we affirmed our mission (to grow spiritually, worship God, serve others, and welcome all) and laid out a series of new undertakings to support the mission, focusing on four key elements: passionate engagement, authentic welcome, spiritual growth, and faithful service. The resulting strategic plan

can be found on our website and at this link: [St. Paul's Strategic Plan](#). This visioning process clarified the need for additional ministerial support to achieve our goals. Therefore, we are searching for an Associate Pastor to enable us to both better do the things we currently do as well as launch the new programs and objectives in our strategic plan. A description of the attributes we seek in an Associate Pastor and details of the duties the individual will undertake is found on the next pages.



Block Party/Messy Church

3. Detailed Job Description

Recently our search committee asked the congregation at our Sunday morning service to share their thoughts about the qualities that would be most important to look for in an Associate Pastor. From the 75 or so comments we received, we used Chat GPT to organize and summarize

the information into a narrative which we think did a great job of expressing our priorities for this position. We share an edited version of that narrative below, before providing a more detailed job description.

"Ideally, the Associate Pastor called to St. Paul's embodies kindness, compassion, and a commitment to supporting diversity in all its forms. A strong commitment to St. Paul's, the ability to wear multiple hats, and a proactive nature are essential. Grounded in faith, with a solid biblical knowledge, the individual shares the church's vision and mission, prioritizing communal service and a devotion to God's ways. This individual is enthusiastic, aware of and supportive of Open & Affirming practices,

and possesses a warm, open-minded, and accepting personality. Ultimately, this individual is a source of inspiration for the congregation, creating a sense of unity and growth within and beyond the church community."

We are open to individuals who have already served at a church and are looking to grow their skills and experiences, as well as individuals who are new entrants into ministry.

Job Description Summary

The Associate Pastor at St. Paul's United Church of Christ (UCC) partners with the Pastor to serve as the spiritual leaders of the church, ensuring through worship, pastoral care, and community involvement that the church fulfills St. Paul's vision and mission. The Associate Pastor is the leader of children and youth ministries and small group ministries. The Associate Pastor works with the Church Council, Christian Education Team, Messy Church Coordinator, and other committees and staff members to execute the functions of the church in a spirit-led manner.

Duties and Responsibilities

- 1. St. Paul's Vision and Mission:** The Associate Pastor embraces, lives, supports, and reflects wholeheartedly the vision and mission of St. Paul's UCC as an Open and Affirming congregation within the United Church of Christ. The Associate Pastor furthers St. Paul's vision, mission, and strategic plan through worship, faith formation, youth leadership, and small group ministry.
- 2. Worship:** The Associate Pastor partners with the Pastor to create uplifting, moving, and meaningful worship experiences, including sermons (once or twice per month and in the absence of the pastor). Together, with the Pastor and the Worship Team, the Associate Pastor explores new ways of meaningful engagement with those looking for a faith connection, for example creating new experiences for younger generation (Gen Z) worshippers. The Associate Pastor explores new forms of music and worship, cooperates with the Worship Team, and participates in all its meetings.
- 3. Faith Formation:** The Associate Pastor partners with the Pastor and the Christian Education Team to create, plan for, coordinate, supervise, and facilitate faith formation programs for all ages, including but not limited to Bible studies, book studies, retreats, Hot Topic Conversations, workshops for parents/families, and youths. The Associate Pastor and Pastor work together to determine the division of responsibilities so together they can reach as many people as possible. The Associate Pastor also supports and cooperates closely with the Green Team and Messy Church Coordinator.

- 4. Youth Ministry:** The Associate Pastor establishes and oversees the children and youth programs of the church in coordination with the Christian Education Team. Youth leadership invites, nurtures, and encourages children and youth to participate in youth activities, to grow spiritually, and to build strong relationships with God and one another. The Associate Pastor oversees (personally, or through the use of volunteers) the Sunday School Program for children grades K-6 during Worship Service, the nursery including the paid nursery attendants and volunteers to cover the Worship Service, Vacation Bible School, Confirmation Class, and clearances for all persons involved in children and youth activities. The Associate Pastor plans and carries out, using volunteers where available, regular 6-12 grade teen programming, involving parents and other church members and friends.
- 5. Small Group Ministry:** The Associate Pastor establishes a lay-led small group ministry for members, friends, and others from the community. The Associate Pastor finds and trains resource group facilitators, invites and communicates effectively through various venues the benefits of the small groups' ministry, finds hosts for small group gatherings, and coordinates the schedule around the week and month to allow for as many people as possible to participate. Volunteers can be used to assist whenever available.
- 6. Administration:** The Associate Pastor acquires resources needed to carry out the above programming, following budget guidelines. The Associate Pastor communicates effectively all activities via email, mailings, social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), newsletter articles, bulletin boards, phone calls, text messages, etc. to advertise events and encourage participation. The Associate Pastor schedules and coordinates all activities with the church office (Master Calendar). The Associate Pastor reports to the Pastor and Church Council in writing (monthly) on all accomplishments, fulfilled responsibilities, planning, and future orientation of ministries. The Associate Pastor keeps track of time invested in ministry as requested by the Pastor, participates in church meetings as necessary, including the teams discussed above and Messy Church, coordinates and plans with staff and lay leaders for responsibilities and meeting agendas, and communicates effectively with the Church Secretary and Communications Coordinator.
- 7. Community and Invitational Ministry (Evangelism):** The Associate Pastor represents St. Paul's in the community and networks with people and organizations in the community, especially for youth activities. The Associate Pastor consistently invites friends and community members to participate in St. Paul's ministries and worship services. The Associate Pastor maintains a clear sense of always being a representative of St. Paul's in the community and beyond.
- 8. Pastoral Care:** The Associate Pastor is available (on call) for pastoral care concerns as needed and as coordinated with the Pastor, including visiting people in the hospital, nursing/care facilities, and homebound persons. The Associate Pastor is available for all pastoral care responsibilities in the absence of the Pastor (vacation, continuing education, and wider church events).
- 9. Wider Church Ministry:** The Associate Pastor works with the Pastor in supporting the mission and ministries of the church beyond St. Paul's (for example, the Selinsgrove Ministerium, the UCC Central Association, the UCC Penn Central Conference, Interfaith Events, etc.) and participates in and supports those areas assigned to the Associate Pastor.
- 10. Stewardship:** The Associate Pastor supports wholeheartedly the congregation's practice of generosity of time, talent, and treasure, living generously and inspiring others to follow their example.
- 11. Pastoral Responsibilities:** The Associate Pastor takes on all pastoral responsibilities in the absence of the Pastor as coordinated and assigned by the Pastor (during Pastor's vacation, continuing education, sabbatical, etc.).
- 12. Personal Study and Spiritual Formation:** The Associate Pastor continues to be a lifelong learner through continuing education events, retreats, spiritual direction, coaching, clergy support group, reading, practicing spiritual disciplines, opportunities for faith formation, personal renewal, and time away from church responsibilities.
- 13. Other Duties as Assigned:** The Associate Pastor may perform other related duties to ensure the smooth and effective functioning of St. Paul's mission and ministries. This job description is not intended to be all-inclusive.

Required Qualifications

Work Experience: Experience working in a church or similar faith-based environment. Experience working with various age groups, especially children and youth, in settings such as education and small groups.

Skills & Experience: Good relationship skills. Ability

to educate and lead. Good organizational skills to promote an inviting space. Good understanding of technology and a willingness to learn and expand their digital knowledge as needed.

Education: Master of Divinity or equivalent.

Preferred Qualifications

Skills & Experience: Experience leading youth programs and small group ministries. Experience in leading

worship and in preaching. Pastoral experience and community involvement preferred.

Work Location and Travel

The Associate Pastor needs to live in Selinsgrove, PA or the surrounding area and be able to make evening meetings (meetings ending as late as 9pm) and occasional early morning meetings (starting as early as 7am). The Associate Pastor needs to live in a location that allows for an in-person arrival to pastoral care emer-

gencies when on call within an hour of receiving a call, when needed. The Associate Pastor needs to have reliable transportation and be able to travel to visit members in their homes in Snyder, Union, and Northumberland counties, and at healthcare facilities in Selinsgrove, Lewisburg, and Danville.

Compensation

St. Paul's follows the guidelines for fair and just compensation for ministerial leadership provided by the

Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ. Those guidelines are provided at this [link](#).



Easter Sunrise Service



Sunday School



Children's Message



Christmas Caroling

4. References

References were asked to respond in a letter to the following prompts. The letters are found at the end of the document.

Prompts for References

- Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry.
- Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.
- Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.
- Anything else you wish to share.

Reverend Sally Dries - salann@ptd.net - cell: (570) 850-6062 - Pastor Sally has known St. Paul's since the mid 1980s and has been a colleague of all pastors who have served St. Paul's since that time. She knows several lay leaders from St. Paul's with whom she participated in our Central Association ministries. She regularly led worship services at St. Paul's while Pastor Dietmar was on vacation or out of town for continuing education events. She has known Pastor Dietmar since 2007 and currently participates together with him in a monthly Spiritual Growth Group.

Reverend Robert Doll - rev.robert.selinsgrove@gmail.com - cell: (215) 429-8071 - Pastor Bob is serving Sharon Lutheran Church here in Selinsgrove, PA. He has known St. Paul's and Pastor Dietmar since he moved to town in August 2010. He also knows several lay leaders from St. Paul's and cooperates closely with them in our ecumenical area ministries and in the local ministerium.

Reverend Dr. Carrie Call - ccall@pccucc.org - phone: (717) 433-3196 - Pastor Carrie is our UCC Penn Central Conference Minister. She guided our congregation through a visioning and strategic planning process in 2023. She knows Pastor Dietmar as well as many lay leaders from St. Paul's.

Reverend Mary Schmotzer - mschmotzer@shilohucc.org - office: (570) 275-1943 - cell: (570) 594-2044 - Pastor Mary knows several lay leaders of St. Paul's with whom she cooperated in various UCC service projects and on our Central Association committees. She is a colleague of Pastor Dietmar and currently serves Shiloh UCC in Danville, PA, about a 30 minute drive from Selinsgrove.

Dr. Michael Gibbs - gibbsmh@comcast.net - cell: (717) 779-9562 - office: (717) 244-9151 - Michael Gibbs is a retired educator with 39 years of experience as a teacher, school administrator, and consultant. He has a Ph.D. in Education Policy and Leadership from the University of Maryland. Mike has presented professional development programs in school and church settings on local, state, and national levels. Mike served on the Conference Road to Vitality Program, the Board of Directors, as Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee, and Chair of the Search and Call Team for an Associate Conference Minister. Currently, Mike is involved in the Keystone Conference Planning and the Conference Futures Commission. He continues to provide workshops and coaching services to church leadership teams and individual pastors focusing on mission, vision development, strategic planning, and governance issues.

5. Closing Section

5a. Closing Prayer

At St. Paul's, we are embracing our vision to deliver passionate engagement, authentic welcome, spiritual growth, and faithful service. We pray that our loving God will deliver to us an Associate Pastor who will be a good partner for our Pastor Dietmar in fulfilling that vision; that He will provide for us a servant leader who will find our church and our community a meaningful environment

for professional and personal happiness; and that we as a congregation will be welcoming and helpful to our Associate Pastor in ways that are meaningful to that individual as they integrate into our environment and grow during life's journey. We offer our unending support and gratitude to our Pastoral team as they help us and our community take care of and affirm each other.

5b. Statement of Consent

The covenantal relationship between a church and those called by that church to serve as pastors and teachers and in other ministerial positions is strengthened when vital information is openly shared by covenantal partners. To that end, we attest that, to the best of our abilities, we have provided information in this profile that accurately represents our church. We have not knowingly withheld any information that would be helpful to candidates.

As the committee charged with the responsibility for identifying and recommending a suitable Associate Pastor for our church, we have been authorized to share the information herein with potential candidates. We

understand that a candidate may wish to secure further knowledge, information, and opinions about our church. We encourage a candidate to do so, recognizing that an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for continuing and healthy relationships between calling bodies and persons seeking a ministry position.

This profile was created by the Search Committee and approved by St. Paul's Church Council at its meeting on January 9, 2024. The Search Committee members are Marty Blessing, Jack Lewis, Peggy Peeler (Chair), Pastor Dietmar Plajer, Jared Roush, Raven Rudnitsky, Shane Sanders, and Chanin Wendling.

Signed: 

Name/Title/Date: Peggy Peeler, Search Committee Chair, February 15, 2024

5c. Validation by Conference/Association

The congregation is currently in good standing with the association / conference named.

Staff Comment:

St. Paul's is a solid congregation in good standing.

To the best of my knowledge, ministerial history information is complete.

Staff Comment:


Since this is an AP position, ministerial history is not included. It is a new position. Rev. Dietmar Plajin has been there since 2007.

To the best of my knowledge, available church financial information is presented thoroughly.

Staff Comment:

Indeed.

My signature below attests to the above three items.

Signature: 

Name / Title: Rev. Dr. Nora D. Foust, Associate Conference Minister

Email: nfoust@pccucc.org

Phone: 717-652-1560

Date: 2/14/24

January 3, 2024

Reference for St. Paul's United Church of Christ, Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania

Associate Pastor Position

To Whom It May Concern:

As an ordained pastor in the Central Association of the Penn Central Conference, I have known the St. Paul's congregation and its pastors for over 40 years. I have lead worship and preached, offered educational events, helped train lay leaders, and have often been available for pastoral care.

St. Paul's has continued to be actively involved in the life of the Association and Conference. Many of its members serve on committees, participate in the various community building events, and provide leadership for educational offerings. St. Paul's warmth and hospitality is well-known. An example is the many years it hosted the annual Church Leaders Banquet for well over 100 attendees. St. Paul's continues to provide welcoming meeting space as a part of its ministry.

St. Paul's UCC and Susquehanna University, a small liberal arts college, share the same town of Selinsgrove. Both were founded around the same time in the latter half of the 19th century. In many ways over the years, they have continued to be two separate communities. In more recent times this congregation with a rather conservative Pennsylvania German heritage found its membership beginning to change. More of the congregation have been committed to reaching out and creating to a more diverse community, providing support for justice issues, and developing shared mission work within the Selinsgrove area and the United Church of Christ.

Change with compassion is never easy. Moving forward demands patience and persistence. Transitioning to a new vision of ministry calls for courage and sustained faith. The leadership of St. Paul's congregation and their pastor, Rev. Dr. Dietmar Plajer, are building a beautiful tapestry of God's presence. It is with highest regard that I offer this reference.

Please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Rev. Sally Dries

1724 Dornsife Mountain Road
Sunbury, PA 17801
570-850-6062
salann@ptd.net

SHARON LUTHERAN CHURCH

120 SOUTH MARKET STREET
SELINGROVE, PA 17870
570-374-8444

Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry.

St Paul's is a place of welcome and engagement. They have dialogue and conversation on current topics and have creatively invited children, youth, families, and individuals to "Messy Church" once a month. They also actively serve the community and those in need through their monthly food distribution. Additionally, in our ministerium collaboration, they participate in facilitating our food basket distribution at Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.

With all their energy and activity of ministry, I am less aware of their growth areas. Like many of our congregations, we constantly need to develop new leaders and strengthen broad participation across our faith communities.

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.

For many years I transported a number of community members to the monthly food distribution and benefitted from the conversations and service of all who participate in that ministry.

Personally, I enjoy my colleague, Dietmar, for his faithfulness and witness to God's Spirit as well as for his friendship.

Anything else you wish to share.

As I serve in this community, I continue to be open to further partnership and the possibility of shared ministry. The ministry of St Paul's is in our prayers as we seek together to deepen our witness to God's grace throughout this community and the world.

Submitted by



Rev. Robert P Doll
Sharon Lutheran Church, Selingsrove



PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

United Church of Christ

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717-652-1560 | pccucc.org | facebook.com/penncentralconferenceucc

January 9, 2024

Reference for St. Paul's UCC, Selinsgrove, PA

1. Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry.

St. Paul's is a dynamic and Spirit-filled church in the Penn Central Conference. Several things make it so. First, the lay leadership at the church is exceptional. They are energetic, engaged, faithful, and passionate. The church has a deep leadership capacity, as well. There is a broad array of skills, talents, and gifts among the members. This is unusual and provides them with resilience and commitment.

Second, the pastoral leadership is excellent and sets the tone for collaboration and energy. Dietmar is theologically well-read and grounded. He is also intuitive and open, making for a flexible, collaborative, and deft leadership style.

This community is passionately open, welcoming, and brims with hospitality. They are what I call a 'flagship' O&A church, acting as a model for other churches in our Conference. Not only for what "being O&A means" but also for vitality and dynamism in general.

2. Describe some areas for improvement in this church's ministry.

The only area for improvement that I can discern right now is the need for a larger staff. The church is active and has many moving parts. A second ministerial staff position would allow the congregation to expand and fully live into all its gifts and potential.

3. Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.

I have experienced worship that was vibrant, intentional, and theologically rich. That alone is significant in my experience of our churches. Clearly the worship is carefully thought-out and planned yet is also inspired by the Holy Spirit. The congregation has been gifted by God, and I believe they embrace that with gratitude and humility.

Peace,

Rev. Carrie Call, PhD
Conference Minister

Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ



SHILOH UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

**Nurturing our faith, Serving Others, Welcoming all
We are an Open and Affirming Church**

512 Bloom Street

Danville, PA 17821

Phone 570 275-1943

20 December 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is being written as a reference for St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Selinsgrove, PA as they seek an Associate Pastor.

I have been part of the Central Association, Penn Central Conference for the past 14 years and have come to know the congregation and pastor of St. Paul's through our participation together in a variety of activities. They are a vibrant and healthy congregation, and although they've had the normal kinds of struggles over the years that many churches have, they have dealt with each situation with attentiveness and consideration for how best to be a community of faith that imitates Jesus.

St. Paul's actively participates in Association and Conference meetings and other events, and regularly has members serving on wider church committees. I have worked directly with members as part of the Committee on Ministry, Executive Committee, and Program Committee for the Association and have appreciated getting to know them in that capacity. Based on my interactions, I believe the congregation to have a strong identity and connection with the United Church of Christ.

The congregation is mission and social justice focused, and is invested not just with their own members, but also with the wider Selinsgrove-area community. I've seen them build inter-faith relationships and come together with other congregations for shared mission work. St. Paul's recently became an Open and Affirming congregation, and they are continuing to live into that commitment by partnering with a local Pflag Chapter to provide support for LGBTQ persons, families, and allies. They have established a meeting site on their property and provide an active presence at local PRIDE events, faithfully representing not just their congregation, but their understanding of the unlimited nature of God's love for all people.

Their pastor, Dietmar Plajer, is thoughtful and cooperative in his leadership style. I know him to be attentive to trying to lay out a clear vision for the congregation and then building consensus and support to meet their goals. I am aware of several instances when a desired goal was not met. Rev. Plajer was able to encourage the congregation to see the situation as a temporary set-back rather than a failure, and to keep discerning a way forward together.

I hold Rev. Plajer and the congregation of St. Paul's in high regard.

If you would like to speak by phone or email, you can reach me at the contact information below.

Sincerely,

Rev. Mary Schmotzer
Senior Pastor

revmschmotzer@gmail.com

570-594-2044 (cell phone)

570-275-1943 (office phone)

Church Futures Commission Penn Central Conference of the United Church of Christ

Reference for St. Paul's UCC Church Profile

Describe some areas of strength in this church's ministry.

One area of strength exhibited by this congregation is persistence in the pursuit of its vision. When I first encountered this congregation, they were involved in the Penn Central Conference Road to Vitality program, and I had been assigned as their coach. They had just gone through the UCC's "Open and Affirming" process, and while the majority of the congregants had voted in favor of moving in that direction, the supporters had not acquired the supermajority they had hoped for. Consequently, there was a great deal of disappointment surrounding this decision. Fast forward a few years, having given time for emotions to calm, the issue was raised again, and this time the support for becoming O & A prevailed. As in many other places where the congregation declares itself officially O & A, the minority has continued to resist efforts to live into that vision. Despite this resistance, the congregation in general has seemingly embraced the vision and are moving forward.

Another area of strength is the congregation's support for and responsiveness to clergy leadership. In the Fall of 2022, Pastor Dietmar approached me with some concerns he had for the future health of the congregation. As we spoke about them over the course of the next year, he was able to articulate a new vision that has required an increased level of time-talent-treasure support from the congregation. I have listened to how he has communicated the vision with them, recruited their support, and gained their commitment to achieving these goals. I have been amazed at the congregation's response.

Describe some areas of improvement in this church's ministry.

When a congregation has the level of commitment to its mission and vision as noted above, it is easy for the number of goals to expand more quickly than their capacity to accomplish them. To some these unrealized pieces of the vision can be frustrating and lead to notions of areas in which to improve. I take another view. It does not seem to be difficult for this congregation and its pastor to envision new ways to minister to the flock and to the wider community. What they might want to explore in the future are ways to be more intentional about establishing regular cycles of assessment, visioning, and planning as a means of managing the expanding ministry they seem to desire.

Describe a significant experience you have had of this church's ministry.

I believe that the significance of my experience with this congregation has already been noted. I have served as a coach to both the leadership team that functioned as the Road to Vitality Team and now as a coach to Pastor Dietmar. I think this role has provided me with a unique perspective on the congregation's health and vitality. There are issues as in all congregations, but I do believe that this setting provides wonderful growth opportunities for someone who is called to do parish ministry.

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ST. PAUL'S UCC

An Open and Affirming Congregation

Jesus Welcomes All - We Welcome All

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, gay, confused, filthy rich, comfortable, or dirt poor. We extend a special welcome to wailing babies and energetic toddlers.

We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're "just browsing," just woken up, or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Pope, or haven't been to church since Christmas ten years ago.

We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet and to teenagers who are growing up too fast. We welcome soccer moms, NASCAR dads, starving artists, tree-huggers, coffee-sipping hipsters, vegetarians, junk-food eaters, and people who stay up too late at night. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps, or don't like "organized religion;" we've been there, too.

We offer a welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, don't have a job, can't spell, or are here because grandma is visiting and wanted to go to church.

We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both, or neither. We offer a special welcome to those who need some prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throat as kids, or just drove by and saw the sign and decided to stop by. We welcome tourists, seekers, doubters, bleeding hearts ... and you!

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"Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God!'" - Mark 11:22