

THE

# VISION

MAGAZINE

Fall 2021/Winter 2022

## New Connections

NYAC Cooperative Parishes:  
Rebuilding for the Future

## TRANSFORMING LIVES

Building roads and saving  
lives in The Gambia

## MAKING DISCIPLES

Laying the foundation  
for a period of  
revitalization and  
renewal

## ACTUALIZING FAITH IN THE COMMUNITY

Partnering  
with Laity to  
Share the  
Good News

# @NewThing



New York Annual Conference  
The United Methodist Church



# NORTHPORT'S OLDEST CHURCH WELCOMES A NEW PASTOR

By: Alex Edwards-Bourdrez



As the country is cautiously creeping out from under the pandemic, Rev. David Czeisel (pronounced SIZE-ul) is excited.

Rev. Czeisel is the newly-appointed pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church (UMC) in Northport, Long Island, Northport's longest continuously worshipping congregation. The church campus of three buildings was recently listed in the New York State National Registry of Historic Places.

St. Paul's has a rich, symbiotic relationship with Northport, a historic maritime village on the Island's north shore. The church culture is rooted in the quiet and generous caring that members provide for each other and through area service organizations.

Rev. Czeisel is invigorating the congregation to explore with him the possibilities for creative and expanding ministry.

Lay Leader Cathy McDonough has worked closely with Rev. Czeisel during the first two months of his tenure. "Change is never easy, but each new pastor brings unique talents and experiences, and we are excited about the gifts that Rev. Czeisel has to offer," Ms. McDonough says. "His technical ability enables us to have live hybrid worship that is meaningful and engaging to participants at home on Zoom as well as those in the sanctuary.

His interest in children's ministry, networking in the community, and working with other churches is inspiring, and will guide us to 'transform the world through Christ.'

Indeed, Rev. Czeisel is focused on the transforming power of the triune God, for individuals, groups and whole communities. His approach is both practical and visionary. Eager to re-energize the community engagement that has defined the church's presence since its inception in 1834, he embraces the St. Paul's mission of cultivating "a family where faith expression, growth, and renewal challenge us to find ever new ways to serve God through service to God's world wherever need is found."

Perhaps the most visible emblem of vibrant interaction and service is the all-volunteer St. Paul's Thrift Shop, situated prominently on Main Street next to the church building. Donations are heaped daily on the front porch of the two-story nineteenth-century converted residence. In addition to meeting the needs of those whose budgets are seriously strained, the operation spares landfills more than ten tons of materials each year.

There is also much activity involving outside groups within the walls of the 1873 church building and the adjacent three-story Depression-era addition behind the sanctuary.

"St. Paul's has always been in tune with the community's pulse of life," Rev. Czeisel notes. "Many of the activities held here have been community-wide celebrations."

He cites the example of the annual Northport One-Act Play Festival, showcasing local playwrights, actors and directors, which has returned this fall for its twelfth run after going dark during the pandemic.

St. Paul's is looking forward to reviving other pre-pandemic performing arts programs, such as the Northport Arts Coalition's monthly Starlight Coffeehouse Music Series, featuring performances in the church's fellowship room, as well as the monthly Opera Night concerts of arias in the acoustically blessed sanctuary.

"Just as the medieval churches became preservers and cultivators of the arts, St. Paul's has been home to a variety of musical and artistic efforts," Rev. Czeisel says. "The creative Spirit of God can be shared through the arts, and we will continue to offer our spaces to performers who resonate with our mission."

As a trained singer and musician (he plays the djembe, a traditional West African drum), Rev. Czeisel began collaborating with parishioners, many of whom are talented musically, to enhance the spiritual experience of worship through music.

While he is committed to re-opening the church's doors to community-based programs, Rev. Czeisel also plans to expand the church's collaboration with other houses of worship.

St. Paul's is one of a dozen member congregations of the Ecumenical Lay Council (ELC) of Northport-East Northport, a consortium of houses of worship of varying denominations, founded in the 1970s by a St. Paul's parishioner. The ELC operates the local food pantry and supports the programs of Youth Directions and Alternatives, a local nonprofit working through the area's school districts. In that spirit, Rev. Czeisel sees St. Paul's taking the lead in the North Shore Cooperative Parish of United Methodist churches in the nearby towns of Centerport, Dix Hills, East Northport, Huntington, Commack and Smithtown.

"The Cooperative Parish is relatively new as a formal alliance, and by joining hands we will discover a deep well of opportunities to strengthen our outreach and impact," he explains. "There are pockets of need in our otherwise affluent area that we can help meet more fully. We need to step out more, think creatively and encourage each other."

## Inspired by St. Paul's History of Taking Bold Steps

In the early 1900s, African-American educator, orator, author and presidential advisor, Booker T. Washington, lived in nearby Fort Salonga. St. Paul's pastor at the time invited him to deliver a message from the pulpit. Many members of St. Paul's protested, but its pastor insisted, and Washington's inspiring sermon won the congregation over.

It was an event that helped pave the way for changing attitudes in the community. Much more recently, the St. Paul's congregation engaged in a process of discernment that led to a vote to declare itself a reconciling congregation, openly welcoming people of all sexual orientations and identities into the full ministry of the church.

St. Paul's congregants cherish the church's proactive caring for the humanity and wellbeing of all who worship here, a quality that Rev. Czeisel will tap as he leads the congregation in ministry and outreach. Longtime parishioners who were raised in the church, and who are now bringing their children and grandchildren to worship and Sunday school, continue to draw solace and strength from what they all experience as a warm and supportive family. They are a church community that answers the call to serve quietly and energetically.

Rev. Czeisel is assiduously engaging with members of the congregation on various levels. Many have expressed excitement about his approach to worship and the substance of his sermons. He is cultivating trust with parishioners through genuine curiosity about each person's talents and spiritual life, openness about himself, sharing ideas while respecting St. Paul's traditions and proactive pastoral care.

Recognizing the spiritual, economic, and physical challenges that the pandemic has brought, Rev. Czeisel sees the hand of God in meeting them collectively with joy and hope.

"Despite how much it is requiring of us in terms of energy and emotion, this is the perfect moment for a spiritual revival. There's no time better for spiritual awakening than when we are already on our knees," he explains. His example is a beacon for us to follow.

*Alex Edwards-Bourdrez is a freelance writer and St. Paul's Staff Parish Relations Committee Chair*