



The Epistle

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 117 East Arch Street, Fleetwood, PA

September 2026

Encouragement for the Harvest

Almost three years without a settled pastor is a long stretch on its own — a slow, grinding kind of waiting. Then Dana, the youth and family ministry candidate the search team had worked so hard to bring on board, changed her mind at the last minute. If you're tired of hearing "stay strong," you're not alone. Grief over a vacancy that persists and grief over a call that didn't come are not the same thing, and neither one is a failure of faith. They're allowed to sit here a minute before we move on.

But move on we do, because a congregation isn't only as strong as its pulpit. It's as strong as what grows around an empty one, and this fall's stewardship theme — Stewardship of the Harvest — fits St. Paul's better than anyone planned.

Look at what's been planted and tended this year. Linda and Mark Coutts spent weeks turning a tired playground into a new one — lining up the vendor, arranging for the old equipment to go, raking up and relaying the mulch themselves. Donna Ahrens pulled youth into special music all summer, voices and instruments both, and worship was richer for it. Tony and Carol Cox turned an idea into action in our youth ministry search but the investment wasn't wasted — it showed a congregation willing to try, without losing heart.

(Continued on page 3)

Up Coming Events

**Rally Day, Men in Mission Breakfast
Playground & Buddy Bench Dedication Sunday 9/13**

GWBU

10:30 a.m. Wednesdays, starting 9/9





(Continued from page 2)

Add to that the Cookies at the Cross bakers, the Food Bank volunteers, Gretchen Mertz holding the office together, Donna Fick lining up supply pastors and worship helpers week after week — and the steady stream of ushers, readers, and communion assistants nobody notices until they're missing.

The apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians puts it plainly: let us not grow weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up. St. Paul's hasn't given up. That's worth saying out loud.

Pastor Marty Milne



**Celebrating Grandparents Day and Rally Day
with a FREE Breakfast**

Sunday, September 13 we are celebrating Grandparent's Day, Rally Day, Sunday School kickoff!



Invite your grandparents or grandchildren to join us for this special day. We'll be dedicating the new playground and Buddy Bench. Join us for a free breakfast for your family and friends. Let's celebrate families and friendships at the beginning of the Sunday school year.

Our hands do God's work. Are you interested in being part of a team to provide lunch or dinner at Opportunity House? You may choose to cook and serve--or just provide a portion of the meal for our team to serve. They serve approximately 90 people for each meal. If you're interested, contact Holly Wolf at gensemer331@gmail.com. Indicate if you prefer lunch or dinner, and if you prefer a weekend or week-night. More details to come.





Council Corner

Devotion: Autopsy of A Deceased Church: Chapters 13 & 14

- Discussed how our church is known in the community and who are the newest members of our congregation. All agreed this book was a good read.

Parish Administrator's Report

- 2 Ring doorbells have been secured and ready to be installed.
- Pastors are scheduled through December 17, need pastor for Christmas Eve 7 pm service.
- Need to identify a back up for the Gretchen, knee surgery scheduled for November.

Treasurer's Report

- For the month of July our expenses exceeded our income by -\$556.84 and a year to date - \$6,211.20.
- Messerli Fund - opened a money market fund for \$10,000. Gretchen will put an announcement in the bulletin and newsletter reminding everyone of the Messerli Funds.

Financial Secretary's report

- 2 months of M&M were greater than last year.

Church Council Report

- Youth & Family Leader – resigned.

Preschool

- 54 Students enrolled for Fall. Meet the teachers 9/1, school starts 9/8.
- Buddy Bench ordered in memory of Finnian Messick and will be placed in the playground.

Learning

- VBS went well. St. Paul's Lutheran had the largest number of students.
- Rally Day, 9/13.

Property

- Quote from Paul Wright Roofing to replace up to 150 slate tiles and seal gutters.
- Playground equipment from King Swings installed on 8/21.
- White boards and metal shelving unit were picked up from Berks Arts, thanks to Holly Wolf for acquiring them.
- Speaker Fabric installation the week of 8/24, by Desco.

Worship

- Liturgy will change after Rally Day.
- Choir starts 9/2, Praise Choir 9/9

2027 Budget – Are due soon!

Volunteers are just ordinary people with extraordinary hearts. Start Fall with volunteering!





Special Monthly Offering Fleetwood Fire Company

The Fleetwood Volunteer Fire Company has been protecting and serving the people of Fleetwood Borough and surrounding townships since 1914. They provide fire, rescue and EMS services. Supporting our local fire company keeps our neighborhood safe. These dedicated teams rely on community donations, fundraising events, and new volunteers to maintain life-saving equipment and fast response times. You can help by donating money, attending local events, or joining the crew.



Every Season Matters



With temperatures soaring to triple digits, few of us are thinking about winter coats, sweaters, gloves, hats or boots.

Did you know that you can donate clothes for any season throughout the year? Opportunity House stores winter gear during the summer so that when the temperatures drop, they have coats, gloves and scarves ready for clients. Warm weather clothing helps people today when they arrive at Opportunity House.

Please put your clothing in the bin located at the rear of the parking lot.

Your donation of gently used clothing, shoes, belts and purses are always in season. Thanks for your generosity.

Christmas Sharing - The Lutheran Home at Topton

A "store" is created in which the residents are treated to a holiday shopping experience. They shop for a gift for themselves which is lovingly wrapped and delivered to them Christmas morning by Santa and Mrs. Claus. There is no cost to the residents. Most of the residents would not receive a gift and experience the joy of the holiday season without this tradition.

New, unwrapped items can only be accepted. Donations accepted from October 18, 2025 through November 8, 2026. A list of items can be found on the bulletin board and kiosk, plus future bulletins!

Thank you for your support!



Thank You

Sir or Ma'am,

My name is Joshua Mitten, and I am the recipient of this year's scholarship for graduating high school seniors. I am writing to sincerely thank Saint Paul's for this extremely generous award! The funds will be incredibly helpful for funding my college experience. Thank you again for your support!

Sincerely,

Joshua Mitten

ST. PAUL'S RELAY FOR LIFE TEAM (AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY)
(Non-Profit Organization)



**ONE DAY ONLY - WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2026
SHOP 8AM - 11PM**

DONATE \$5 AND ENJOY:

- **25% OFF** DISCOUNT SHOPPING PASS*
- **REGISTER TO WIN** A \$100 BOSCOV'S GIFT CARD
One Winner at every Boscov's store

100% OF YOUR DONATION GOES TO OUR ORGANIZATION
For Shopping Passes or information, contact:
CINDY TOBIAS
relay.cindy@verizon.net ☎ 484-866-1513

*Exclusions apply. For more details visit [boscovs.com/category/friends-helping-friends-event](https://www.boscovs.com/category/friends-helping-friends-event)

It's soon time to save BIG and support a great cause! Boscov's Friends Helping Friends coupons are available now! Donate just \$5 to The American Cancer Society through your St. Paul's Relay For Life Team and receive a coupon to save 25% on virtually everything purchased from any Boscov's, either in store or on line, on Wednesday, October 21, 2026 from 8 a.m. to 11p.m. See Cindy Tobias for YOUR savings!

Food Collections are ongoing!

Now more than ever, food insecurity is a problem throughout our nation and world and in our community. Kindly remember the many families and individuals who are struggling to afford food. Simply drop your non-perishable donations in the food bin in the lobby.



shutterstock.com · 1810459120



Prayer: Sometimes I am blind to the many ways Your love comes to me. Open my heart and eyes to be ever aware of Your loving blessings. As Pastor Fox reminded us recently: Lead with LOVE.

How To Save Money In Your Household With the Rising Food Costs

- Use leftovers. Make a store list and check store sales before shopping. Prepare dishes where meat is cut up like stir fry and add more veggies. Use generic brands. Avoid pre-washed veggies that are more expensive.
- Buy in bulk, divide and freeze to secure the lower price.
- Avoid buying expensive desserts, especially baked goods. Make your own.
- If overweight, reduce portions. Shop less often.

Do you have a will?

- Most of us avoid this subject, talk about it but never really complete this important step. An estate plan doesn't have to be

complicated, and is made up of a few main documents:

- A will serves as a foundation of your plan, outlining how you want assets distributed and who will carry out your wishes.
- Beneficiary designations direct specific assets straight to who you choose, bypassing probate and operates outside of your will.
- Powers of attorney allows someone you trust to manage financial or legal decisions on your behalf if you are unable to do so.

Healthcare directives ensure your medical preferences are known and respected, providing guidance for loved ones during difficult moments.

Courage for Changing Times:

- ❖ Commit to this effort by stating:
- ❖ What it is you want to change?
- ❖ Why you want to change it?
- ❖ How you will be different?
- ❖ How you will feel different?
- ❖ Who will be positively affected by this change, in addition to yourself?
- ❖ Pray that this change is the proper action.

Choir News

Chancel Choir

Get ready to sing! After a well-deserved summer break, rehearsals will officially resume on **September 2, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.** We always welcome new members, so feel free to join us.



Praise Choir Returns

The Praise Choir is returning! Join us for our first rehearsal on September 9, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. We need your voice to bring beautiful music to our services—without a dedicated group of singers, this ministry cannot continue and let us know if you play an instrument to help us lead a truly uplifting worship service. Please come out, share your musical talents, and help us make a joyful noise!



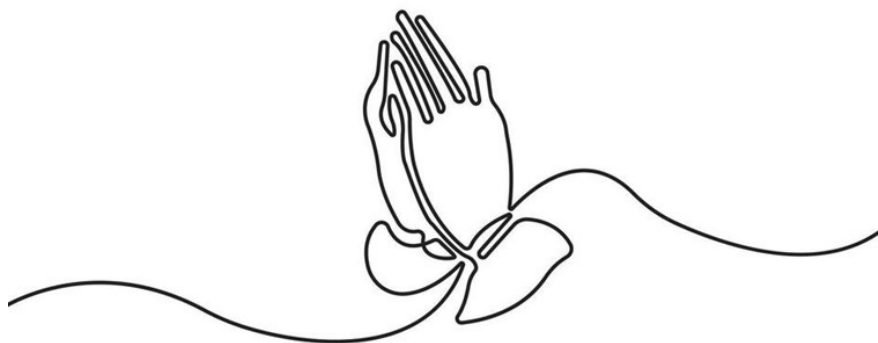
Prayer List

The prayer list is an instrument to remind us of our responsibility to intercessory prayer for our community, world, and church. To add a name to the prayer list, call the church office. Names will be removed after four weeks, unless otherwise advised. Prayer makes a difference!

Pray for those serving in the military: Connor Geer, Rob Geer, Daniel Keller, Brayden Kiebach, Travis Meck, Lauren Moyer, Sydney Plucker, Matt Roberts.

Pray for those in need of ongoing, long-term prayer:

Kathy Boalton, Marion Boyer, Gene Delp, Essie Dietrich, Lynnwood Fegley, Joanne Fink, Hugh Gensemer, Nancy Heffner, Maya Hein, Juanita Heist, Jane Hill, Gino Hinnershitz, Rexine Krause, Martin Keller, Don Kirby, Sharon Kirkhoff, Betty Kurzweg, Chris McHale, Steve Miller, The Neff Family, Ruth Oxenreider, Charles Pinter, Bruce Remmel, Ken Schlegel, Leonard Schlegel, Lori Spatz, Mabel Stopp, Dan Troxel, Frank Vroman, Daisy Wahl, Russell Wendt, Marie Wessner, Erik Weyer (Glenn & Vicki Weyer's son).



A Note about Pastoral Care



Please contact us if you or another member of your family enters the hospital or experiences a significant illness, trauma, or need. Pr. Marty Milne can be reached through the church or at 484 505-0987 or by email to: mamilne@gmail.com

A reminder to please call the church office with any hospital admission, as only Tower Health Hospital notifies our church office and only if St. Paul's Lutheran Church is listed at time of admission.



September Worship

September 6 – Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Pr. Susan Fox - Supply Pastor

Conflict is a part of relationships and life in community. Jesus' words in today's gospel are often used in situations having to do with church discipline. The prophet Ezekiel tells of warning the wicked to turn from their ways, and Paul reminds us that love is the fulfilling of the law. We gather in the name of Christ, assured that he is present among us with gifts of peace and reconciliation.

September 13 – Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – Rally Day

Holly Wolf & Pr. Allen Forsman - Supply Pastor

Today we celebrate the kickoff of Sunday School. We will be dedicating the new preschool playground and Buddy bench in memory of Finnian Messerick. Bronson Wyland will talk about his Eagle Scout project, painting the preschool stairwells. We will be honoring Grandparents and top it off with our Men in Mission free breakfast.



September 20 – Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

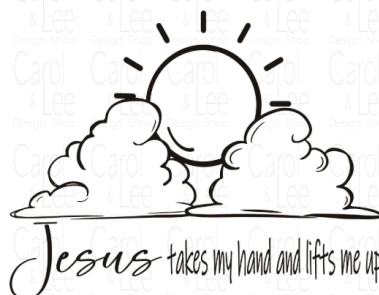
Pr. David Rowe - Supply Pastor

Matthew narrates one of Jesus' controversial parables in which Jesus says that the reign of God is like that of a landowner who pays his workers the same wage no matter what time of day they began to work. When God changes God's mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yet God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. In baptism we receive the grace of God that is freely given to all. As Martin Luther wrote, in the presence of God's mercy we are all beggars.

September 27 – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Pr. Tom Scornavacchi - Supply Pastor

Jesus' parable about two sons who don't do what they say reveals surprises in the reign of God. In the reading from Ezekiel the people claim the ways of the Lord are unfair, while God offers repentance and new life. Paul urges us to look to Christ as a model of humility, putting the interests of others above our own. Nourished by the broken bread and shared cup, we offer our lives for the sake of our needy world.





Looking Ahead: Building a Vibrant Future for St. Paul’s

As part of our commitment to keeping St. Paul’s vital, relevant, and growing in faith, your Church Council recently finished reading and discussing Thom S. Rainer’s book, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive*.

While the title might sound heavy, the book’s core message is actually deeply hopeful: the most effective way to care for a church is to stay focused on Jesus, love our community, and look toward the future with open arms.

Key Takeaways from Our Reading

Rainer looked at hundreds of churches to identify habits that caused them to decline—and more importantly, what healthy churches do differently to thrive. Here are a few key lessons that resonated with our Council:

- **Inward vs. Outward Focus:** Thriving churches don't just look inward to care for current members; they constantly reach outward to bless, serve, and welcome their surrounding neighbors.
- **Embracing Meaningful Change:** A healthy church honors its rich history and traditions while remaining flexible and excited about new ways to share the Gospel with younger generations.
- **Passionate Community Impact:** Growth happens when a congregation asks, "If our church disappeared tomorrow, would our local community miss us?" and actively works to make a tangible difference in people's daily lives.
- **Prayer as the Foundation:** Lasting vitality starts with prayer—asking God to guide our decisions, open our doors, and give us joyful hearts for service.

Check Out a Copy from the Church Library!

If you'd like to dive into the conversation with us, copies of *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* are available in the church library. Feel free to pick one up to read, you are welcome to keep it or return it when you're finished!

We are also excited to dive into the follow-up book, *Anatomy of a Revived Church*, which focuses on practical steps for renewed vitality. Copies of this follow-up book are also available in the library to read or return.

What’s Next for St. Paul’s?

Reading these books isn't about dwelling on the past; it’s about equipping us for a joyful, proactive future! St. Paul’s has so much heart, faith, and foundation to build upon.





(Continued from page 10)

In the coming months, the Council will be sharing simple, practical steps we can all take together to strengthen our outreach, welcome newcomers, and ensure St. Paul’s remains a vibrant light in our community for years to come. We invite you to join us in prayer for this exciting next chapter

Creating a Prayerful Connection.

Prayer is a powerful way to increase our faith while we care for each other. In the Fall, we hope to start a prayer group that will meet after the service. Requests for prayer will be honored and shared. Or, if you prefer to keep your request private, we’ll honor that, too. A small group of people will pray with you or for you, your family, or any joys or concerns.

Watch the Epistle, the bulletin and the screen for more details. All are welcome.

Holly Wolf



Mystery Members

Submitted by Melissa Neff

This month’s mystery member grew up in Boyers Junction, which is between Pricetown and New Jerusalem. For her first five years of school, she went to a one room schoolhouse. There was no kindergarten. Then in 1957 the state closed all the one-room schoolhouses because they did not have indoor plumbing. She then went to sixth grade at Topton Elementary School. For seventh grade she started at the Brandywine Heights junior and senior High School.

Her husband had been a member here at St. Paul’s also, but he passed away in 2011. He was born and raised in Fleetwood and taught math at Fleetwood High School. He taught with Roger Bowman.

Mrs. started to get to know her husband when he was the best man at her sister’s wedding, but she had met him previously. They were

married on November 23, 1973 at St. Paul’s by Pastor Simmons, and she has been a member since then.

The church looked different when they got married. The carpet was bright red. There was no stained-glass window up front. The altar was where the choir is now, and the organ was on the right, not the left. The men and the women up front faced each other.

She went to Penn State and majored in Textile Sciences (a science major), studying fibers, clothing, and chemistry.

As a child she had wanted to be a fashion designer. She loved to color and play with paper dolls. She likes to sew, and she is good at math and science.

She was a color chemist in her career. Color

(Continued on page 12)



(Continued from page 11)

science was her specialty. She held several different positions in that field. The closest she got to being a fashion designer was at a consulting job, working for Ralph Lauren in NYC. Another place she worked at was Konica Minolta in New Jersey, working with color measurement and computer color matching. She spent her last twenty years at CyberChrome in New York, where she traveled around the world and helped companies set up color matching systems.

She has two grown children. Her son is in New York and is married with two kids. Her grandson will be a sophomore at Bucknell, and her granddaughter will be a senior in high school. Her daughter is married and lives in Conshohocken, near Philadelphia.

She has a few hobbies. She likes to read, walk, travel and play cards. She recently started doing card stitching, which is called card embroidery.

She enjoys traveling and taking cruises. She has been to six out of seven continents, all except Africa. When she was in Antarctica, she saw thousands of penguins. She also saw whales, seals, and icebergs. Last fall she was on a cruise to Iceland and Norway. Iceland was bleak and stark, and Norway was beautiful and her favorite place. She has been on cruises and vacations to Europe. Some other places she has been to include Japan, China and Thailand.

She is involved in the church. In the past she taught Sunday School to the nursery age children and four-year-olds. She also taught catechetical class for one year. Currently she is on the handbell choir and helps run the A/V and sound system.

Other family members include an older brother who passed away, a younger brother, and her sister, who also belongs to St. Paul's.

If you have not guessed who this is, find out next month.



***Last month's mystery member was
Donna Ahrens***

Finances at St. Paul's



Did you know that you can now manage your giving to St. Paul's online? Simply Giving is an easy, secure, and convenient way to have your weekly, monthly, or yearly offering transferred directly to St. Paul's from your checking or savings account. No more writing checks and searching for that offering envelope. It just takes a few minutes to enroll and you are on your way to Simply Giving! Enrollment forms are available in the church office or visit

www.spelcfleetwood.com\give-online\

JULY 2026	<u>Jul-26</u> <u>Actual</u>	<u>YTD</u> <u>Actual</u>
Income		
Non-Preschool M&M	\$ 17,749	\$ 128,505
Preschool M&M	\$ 1,035	\$ 62,235
Total	\$ 18,784	\$ 190,740
Expense		
Non-Preschool	\$ 16,798	\$ 137,839
Preschool	\$ 2,543	\$ 59,112
Total	\$ 19,341	\$ 196,951
Income Less Expenses - Non-Preschool	\$ 951	\$ (9,334)
Income Less Expenses - Preschool	\$ (1,508)	\$ 3,123
Total Income Less Expenses	\$ (557)	\$ (6,211)

Making a Difference with Your RMD - Supporting St. Paul's Ministry

Members have asked how they can be intentional in their financial stewardship—especially when it comes to Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs). We're pleased to share that **you can now set up your RMDs electronically** to support St. Paul's Lutheran Church with ease and consistency.

Whether you choose **monthly, quarterly, or annual withdrawals**, your RMD can be directed straight from your retirement account to St. Paul's. This method not only fulfills your IRS requirement but also helps sustain the vital work we do—sharing Christ's love through worship, outreach, education, and service. Additionally, when you direct RMD monies to a church or charitable organization, those dollars aren't added to your income for the year so you avoid paying taxes on that portion you designate to the charity.

Your faithful giving ensures we can continue to nurture disciples, care for our community, and grow ministries that reflect God's grace and justice.

📞 To get started or learn more, please contact Linda Coutts. She is happy to help you set up an arrangement that works best for you.

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church

117 East Arch Street
Fleetwood, PA 19522
(610) 944-8388

Office Hours:
Monday 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Tuesday 1:00 P.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Wednesday & Thursday 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.



Purpose

*Filled with the Holy Spirit
We inspire Spiritual Growth in the Community of Christ
by striving to ...*

Guiding Principles

- ◆ *Welcome All People*
- ◆ *Pray Daily*
- ◆ *Worship Weekly*
- ◆ *Read, Listen, Reflect and Share the Word of God*
- ◆ *Serve at and beyond St. Paul's*
- ◆ *Encourage Spiritual Friendships*
- ◆ *Share God's Blessings Generously through the Giving of Our Time, Talents and Resources*

Contact Us

Gretchen Mertz

Parish Administrator 610-944-8388
Email: office@spelcfleetwood.com

Pastor

Pastor 610-944-8388
Email: Pastor@spelcfleetwood.com

Linda Coutts

Treasurer 610-944-8488

Sue Rimmel

Financial Secretary 610-944-8388

Donna Ahrens

Organist, Interim Choir Director
Director of Handbells 610-944-8388

Carol Cox

Sunday School Director 610-944-8388

Gretchen Mertz

Epistle Editor 610-944-6492
Email: gkm321@ptd.net

Jenn Davies, Director

Preschool 610-944-0922

Phone: 610-944-8388
Fax: 610-944-3011
Email: office@spelcfleetwood.com
Website: www.spelcfleetwood.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/spelcfleetwood

Church Office Hours:

Please check the weekly bulletin and the sign on the parking lot door.

You are welcome to call with questions or concerns or to stop in to discuss your needs in person. Please ring the doorbell and Gretchen will meet you at the door for admittance into the building.

Editor's Note:

All articles, announcements etc. should be emailed to Gretchen Mertz (Editor) at gkm321@ptd.net or office@spelcfleetwood.com or hard copies put in her mailbox in the choir room/library
Thank you, Gretchen Mertz

St. Paul's Cultural Series and Hess Promotions present

Doug Anderson & Justified Quartet In Concert

Sunday, October 11 at 3:00 pm
Doors open at 2:00 pm

St Paul's Lutheran Church
117 East Arch Street
Fleetwood, PA 19522



Tickets

\$20 in advance \$22 at the door

\$8 Children 5 – 12

For tickets call:

Sharon Neff 610-657-8727 or

Liz Hess 717-669-1785 (credit card accepted with a \$2 processing fee)

September 2026

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 GS 6:30 pm- 8 pm Preschool Camp/ Meet Teachers	2 CHOIR 7 pm GS 6 pm- 8 pm	3 GS 6 pm-7 pm	4	5
6 Worship & Music 9:45 am	7  LABOR DAY	8 Preschool Starts	9 GWBW 10:30 am Praise Choir 6 pm CHOIR 7 pm	10 Cultural Series Mtg 7:15 pm	11	12
13 RALLY DAY GRAND PARENT'S DAY FREE BREAK-FAST	14 GS 6 pm-7:30 pm	15 Council Mtg 6:30pm	16 GWBW 10:30 am CHOIR 7 pm GS 6 pm- 8 pm	17 GS 6 pm-7 pm	18	19
20	21 Epistle Deadline	22	23 GWBW 10:30 am CHOIR 7 pm GS 6 pm-7 pm	24	25	26
27 Food on the 4th Altar Guild Brunch 10 am	28 GS 6 pm-7:30 pm	29	30 GWBW 10:30 am			

NOTE: AA/AI-non Meet every Sunday at 7 PM

GS = Girl Scouts

GWBW = God's Word Blesses Us

EPISTLE

SEPTEMBER 2026



stpaul's

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

117 EAST ARCH STREET, FLEETWOOD, PENNSYLVANIA

**SAINT PAULS LUTHERAN CHURCH
117 EAST ARCH STREET
FLEETWOOD, PA 19522**

Return service requested

Phone: 610-944-8388, Fax: 610-944-3011
Email: office@spelcfleetwood.com

www.spelcfleetwood.com