

ANNUAL REPORT

2023-2024





SINCE 1959, SAINT PAUL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY HAS EDUCATED LEADERS WHO RENEW THE CHURCH AND TRANSFORM THE WORLD.

OUR MISSION

Centered in Christ and rooted in the Wesleyan tradition, Saint Paul School of Theology is a seminary of intentional relationships committed to the formation of people for innovative, creative ministry through rigorous academic life; the exploration of Scripture, tradition, ministry practices; and diverse, contextual experience.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dr. Jay Simmons

Dear Alums and Friends of Saint Paul,

As we reflect on the past year, I am thrilled to share the remarkable progress and achievements we have experienced at Saint Paul School of Theology. With immense gratitude, I am pleased to report that our seminary is not only well but thriving.

We enter our seventh consecutive fiscal year with a balanced budget and no debt. Our endowment now stands at approximately ten times our operating budget, reflecting the solid financial health of our institution. Despite the challenging recruitment environment, our enrollment has remained stable at slightly more than one hundred students for several years. At a time when the Association of Theological Schools reports that sixty-eight percent of mainline Protestant seminaries experienced enrollment declines last year, we are exceptionally fortunate.

The nature of ministry is changing rapidly, and Saint Paul is responding proactively. We have introduced new social justice and advocacy concentrations for our Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Christian Ministry degrees. These programs equip our graduates to organize and advocate for those seeking aid and justice.

In partnership with Resurrection, our Kansas Campus now offers a concentration in Modern Worship Music within the Master of Arts in Christian Ministry. This specialization helps worship leaders find the intersection between faith and artistry, emphasizing theology and music.

With a generous one-million-dollar grant from the Lilly Endowment, we established the Pause/Play Center. This center creates a sacred space for preachers to enhance their creativity and reignite their imaginations through rest and play. The center sponsors podcasts, conferences, and cohort groups to support these objectives.

For the 2023-2024 academic year, we welcomed 41 new theologians from around the world. Our diverse student body includes international students and a significant percentage of women and students of color, enriching our global learning environment. In October, a team of faculty and staff traveled to South Korea to cultivate partnerships with educational and Korean Methodist Church leaders in the area.

We also launched the (Theo)Logic Studio on our Oklahoma Campus. This resource assists those seeking to extend their ministry through podcasting, video production, and digital marketing.

Our faculty continues to contribute significantly to scholarship and engagement. Notable publications and activities from our esteemed faculty include works by Dr. Israel Kamudzandu, Dr. Joshua Bartholomew, Dr. Elaine Robinson, Rabbi-in-Residence Michael Zedek, and faculty emeritus Dr. Mike Graves.

The 2023-2024 fiscal year brought changes in leadership. Rev. Neil Blair '80 retired, and I assumed the role of President at the start of 2024. In addition, Ms. Sharon Cleaver succeeded Dr. Amy Hogan as Interim Chair of the Board of Trustees through June 2024. As our current strategic plan concludes, a task force is diligently working on the next iteration to guide our efforts for the coming years.

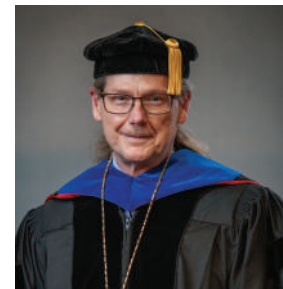
We sincerely appreciate the ongoing support from our alumni, donors, and community. Your contributions have been instrumental in our success and the continued pursuit of our mission. Thank you for being so dedicated to Saint Paul School of Theology.

All my thanks,



Jay Simmons

President, Saint Paul School of Theology



(Theo)Logic Studio

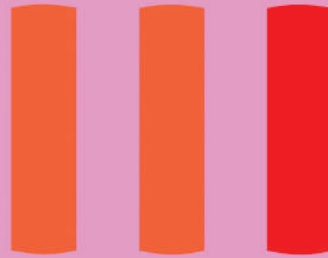
Saint Paul (Theo)Logic Studio

Exciting news for the Saint Paul community! The new (Theo)Logic Studio on the Oklahoma Campus is a game-changer for innovative, creative ministry. Whether you're a student or an alum, this cutting-edge space offers everything you need to bring your digital ministry ideas to life—from podcasting and video production to creating dynamic digital content. Don't miss out on this unique opportunity to enhance your ministry and share the Good News in fresh, impactful ways! Ready to get started? Contact Alanna Ireland at Alanna.Ireland@spst.edu to reserve your studio time today!





PAUSE



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PAUSE

Pause/Play Center for Preachers

Discover the Pause/Play Center, a unique haven for preachers seeking to rejuvenate their creativity and spirit! Thanks to the Lilly Endowment's Compelling Preaching Initiative, Pause/Play is the first and only sacred space dedicated to the well-being of preachers. It's a sanctuary where you can escape grind culture, heal from burnout, and reignite your imagination through playful and soul-enriching activities. Join our annual cohort community for spiritual direction, engage in play-based rejuvenation, and participate in coaching sessions designed to restore your passion for ministry. With our monthly podcast and annual gatherings, you'll find a supportive community eager to help you restore your "why." Visit our website to learn more and start your journey towards a revitalized and meaningful ministry!



pauseplaycenter.com

HARMONIZING FAITH AND PURPOSE: The Journey of Two Saint Paul Alums

Innovative is a word often heard within the walls of Saint Paul School of Theology. Along with studying theology, Saint Paul encourages students to think about ministry anew. Professors urge their classes to dream about novel, exciting ways to deepen relationships with God and neighbors among the communities they lead. In this spirit, the seminary has introduced a new specialization in the Master of Arts in Christian Ministry degree program: Modern Worship Music.

Dr. Casey Sigmon, Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship and Director of Contextual Education and Pause/Play Center for Preachers, the spearhead of the program, credits past and present students in tandem with the Holy Spirit for inspiring this new path. "This specialization is an organic partnership, years in the making. I really think we are just noticing what God already was up to at Saint Paul with music, worship leaders, and songs of justice and joy." Dr. Sigmon also explains the need for the program: "As a worshiper and professor of worship, I've noticed a problematic binary. Progressive and mainline theology is woven into traditional hymns and choral pieces. Sacred Music programs exist to train these leaders. Evangelical and Calvinist theology is woven into the dominant songs on Contemporary Christian Music charts. Internships and undergraduate programs exist to train these leaders. But where are leaders who are mainline theologically (concerned with social holiness and not only personal holiness, inclusive language for God, non-violent, affirming of all, etc.) but modern in musical aesthetic being trained to lead congregational song?" The answer was nowhere, but now it will be Saint Paul School of Theology.

Dr. Sigmon is correct. Saint Paul has a long history of students with musical talents who have enhanced community and spiritual formation by sharing their gifts. **Reverends Daekyung Kim** and **Leah Swank-Miller** are two alums who shared their musical training while studying. They recently reflected on how their musical backgrounds influence their ministry and how they both draw upon their love of music to inform their understanding of God.

Rev. Kim, a 2018 graduate and associate pastor at Asbury UMC in Prairie Village, Kansas, is far from his birthplace, Seoul, South Korea. He lives with his wife, Jinhee Han, who graduated from Saint Paul in May 2024 and was recently appointed to Leawood UMC as an associate pastor, as well as his ten-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter. "We are a busy family. We are now officially a clergy couple, and on Sundays, we head to two different churches." Kim shared how he has changed from being a professional pianist to a full-time pastor. "My educational background includes a major in classical piano performance from Seoul Arts High School and Yonsei University in Seoul. I came to New York in 2006 to be





a classical pianist, but I developed an issue with my hand.” He needed to change directions and returned to Seoul. “My call to be a pastor was a gradual one. When I heard a sermon about global ministries in my teenage years, I started to dream of being a pastor. Now I was back in Korea and felt God was calling me to move onto a new chapter of my life.” He enrolled in the Methodist Theological University, where he graduated before heading to America to study theology at Saint Paul.

Although now fluent in English after living in the United States for over a decade, Kim speaks of how his musical abilities helped him quickly connect to others in the Saint Paul community when language and cultural norms were more of a barrier. “Rev. Teresa Stewart, then worship coordinator at Saint Paul, invited me to play piano during worship. My music is what first introduced me to many students and faculty. People got to know me through the piano. Music is a universal language.”

Today, Kim feels his music still connects him to others in his congregation, nursing homes, and wherever he plays. Kim credits these bonds to the workings of the mystery of the Divine. “If God came to us as human through Jesus Christ, God also comes to us as a beauty through music. Meister Eckhart invites us to give birth to God in new ways on

Earth, and musicians can bring beauty into the world and help each other see the beauty in our neighbors. I think this beauty is often felt as comfort as music is experienced.” Kim’s eyes gleamed as he detailed how he witnessed the often-forgotten, isolated elderly soaking up the melodies from the piano bench. “I see people hear the music and find the comfort of God. Some suffering from dementia or loneliness feel God in the music and find connection.” He echoed that the same is true of congregants struggling to slow down and be present or facing some trial: “You can just see them finding the moment of relaxing into the comfort.”

“When asked to share who he is, Kim used three words to summarize himself: curious, harmonizer, and intercultural.”

When asked to share who he is, Kim used three words to summarize himself: curious, harmonizer, and intercultural. Curious refers to the push to keep learning and exploring himself, God, and the world. He chose harmonizer since his natural inclination is to focus on peace. However, the term that he feels most aptly defines him is intercultural. “I am always living in ‘between’ places. I live between the boundaries of

Korean and American cultures. I live between being a pastor and a musician. I am a Christian but open-minded to other religions. Part of my identity is finding space between worlds and building a bridge.” He credits his Methodist Theological University professor, Dr. Jeong Bae Lee, for permitting him to be an in-between. “It was during one of his classes when he made a statement that wasn’t even the main point of his lecture. However, when I heard it, it brought me so





much joy. He said that we should always use our talents in our ministry. I thought I was giving up being a musician to be a pastor." From that day, Kim knew he could blend his musical gift with his call and operate in the space between who he thought he would be and what he was called to do.

Rev. Swank-Miller is a professional actress with roots in musical theatre who is currently discerning whether God is calling her to be an elder or deacon in the UMC. She graduated in May with her Master of Divinity and works as the Director of Student Ministry at Resurrection. She is

married to a fellow musical theatre actor, has two children, is firmly rooted in progressive theology, and is dedicated to social justice and the affirmation of all humans.

Narrative is paramount to Swank-Miller. Yes, one of her passions is telling stories on stage through music and body language, but her respect for narrative is not just tied to the fictional characters she embodies. She is mindful of her own story. At a formative age, Swank-Miller dared to introspectively reflect on and discern if her path, one tilled in her childhood charismatic understandings and which her feet were already walking, was indeed not meant for her. Barely an adult, she dared to listen and trust her heart. "I was enrolled in Philadelphia Biblical University, where I was also engaged to a guy. He was perfect because he met all the requirements of the God-loving man I was expected to marry. Yet, I knew we were not right for one another. The decision to walk away from this perfectly scripted Christian story was difficult and confusing. It contradicted what I thought I was supposed to do for God in many ways, but I knew I had to honor all of myself by saying no. I left college, returned home to Kansas, and enrolled in Wichita State University, where I felt like I just fell into music theatre which I had loved to do since high school, and it became my church."

She met her husband, and after graduation, they married and moved to New York to secure roles in theatre. They also began attending Redeemer Presbyterian, joining a small group of other actors and opera performers. "This was a theologically formative time for me. I began hearing the scripture in new, thought-provoking ways and adopting new theology counter to what I had been taught. Dr. Keller asked

us to bring our brains into understanding the bible. It was formidable and renewing."

After having their first child, the couple moved to Kansas City and began visiting churches. Their search for a church home was complex. "It is a big deal for us how worship feels. We pay attention to detail, and we want polished but authentic music. We also want worship to be intentional and affirming for all. We couldn't find the right space." That was until they attended the baptism of a friend's daughter at the newly launched Resurrection Downtown, which initially met at a bar. "The baptism was in a tavern but immediately felt like church. We were blown away by the music - authentic and passionate. We started attending worship regularly, eventually went to coffee with the pastors, heard about Wesleyan theology, and decided that we are Methodist."

Swank-Miller remembers in detail when she felt pulled to ministry. "I was sitting in the sanctuary at Resurrection Downtown, stage right, house left, second row, three seats in, when I knew I needed to go to seminary. But I was like, no, I don't. I'm an actor, and I teach theatre. When would that even happen? That's absurd, Leah?" She shook her head while relaying what finally pushed her to enroll, laughing because she now understands that God is persistent. "I could feel the tug every time people would go up for communion, which I loved at Downtown. They do it every week. It was just all these walks of life, and I know this may sound vulgar, and I don't mean it to, but I would be there praying, and I would get a whiff of men's deodorant and a woman's perfume and then urine. It was a representation of different socioeconomic situations worshipping together. It was



also different genders, ethnicities, and identities worshipping, and I realized this is like the kingdom of God. This is what it looks like for all to come to the table. God would say to me, 'You have more to offer. I'm calling you to be present in this place in a new way.' That's how I made it to Saint Paul."

Swank-Miller shared her singing voice at Saint Paul and offered her artistic experience in production, helping to create seamless online chapel services during the pandemic. "I was familiar with camera work, editing, and the importance of transitions, and [I] offered assistance." She helped script the services, asked performers within and outside the seminary community to participate, and videoed their performances to show during the online worship. As she was honing her theological understandings, she was also honoring her previous experiences and finding new ways to create.

Maybe it was this melding that sparked her vision of a theatre church. "Theatre was my saving grace when I pulled away from my charismatic roots. I met God in so many moments - during auditions,

through characters, through storytelling, and in the relationships. It was my church for a long time. Most of my deepest, most vulnerable conversations and healing moments happened in the theatre community." Knowing what she experienced, she ponders what an intentional theatre church would

look like and how it could transform people. "I am not sure, but someday, I might do it or at least become a theatre chaplain."

"You need to be confident in how you interpret the Word and that your interpretation speaks life and hope into people."

Part of this ambition stems from how musical theatre has shaped her understanding of God and others. "I feel that theatre speaks of the vastness of God and God's creation. When taking on a character, I've always asked my students

and myself to answer: Why am I here, why is the character here, and why is this story being told? If you do this exercise, you realize that all characters, even in the simplest or the silliest of stories, always long to be loved and know they can also extend that love. Music theatre shines a light on the divineness of God's creation, the vastness of it, and the many, many spectrums of it. It forces us to expand our worldview. It forces us to understand that God has the capacity



for creation to love, look, and respond differently than we've experienced. It causes us to be more connected."

Swank-Miller noted one pitfall of musical theatre, which she discovered during her courses at Saint Paul. Somehow, she was unsure of how to tell her own story. "I couldn't find an authentic voice about who I am. Part stemmed from losing identity from juggling life and raising kids. Still, I think a lot of it was putting myself out there to do theatre where I was constantly reinventing myself, trying to trust my voice, and being told to morph myself into whoever the director wanted me to be." She knew she had to claim her story. She knew the consequences if she didn't; the authenticity she craved when seeking worship and community would not be present in her ministry. Dr. Sigmon and Dr. Kris Kvam, SPST Professor of Theology, became her mentors. "They kept encouraging me to share more of myself and to be confident in my voice. In preaching class, Dr. Sigmon told me she wanted to hear more of me in my sermons so listeners could connect with me. I had spent so much energy telling other people's stories; I had lost my own, but ministry stems from who you are, and I had to find it."

Swank-Miller said, sitting up and speaking in a slower, deeper tone, "Saint Paul gave me another gift." She explained that she questioned her commitment to being a ministry leader because she knew it would attach authority to her. People would listen to her understanding of scripture. "There is a

great burden knowing that what you say affects people's lives. So you better know what you're reading and how to read it well. You need to be confident in how you interpret the Word and that your interpretation speaks life and hope into people. Saint Paul helped me recognize my theology, taught me careful exegesis of scripture, and gave me confidence that my interpretations are life-giving." She adds that these lessons inspired her thesis: *A Critical Look at the Spiritual Trauma Inflicted on the LGBTQ+ Community by the Church and the Healing Found Through the Imago Dei in Theatre Church.*

Based on Colossians 2:2, current students crafted this year's theme: "We are woven together into a tapestry of God's love becoming stronger, like woven cloth. We celebrate our diversity because this diversity, whether cultural, ethnic, language or gender, strengthens our Saint Paul community." It is safe to say that both alums, Kim and Swank-Miller, help prove that this tapestry is framed in the richness of innovation, the sharing of talents, and the boldness of claiming who you are. Thanks be to God.

For more information on the new Modern Worship Music specialization, visit spst.edu/masters-degrees/.

"We are woven together into a tapestry of God's love becoming stronger, like woven cloth. We celebrate our diversity because this diversity, whether cultural, ethnic, language or gender, strengthens our Saint Paul community."

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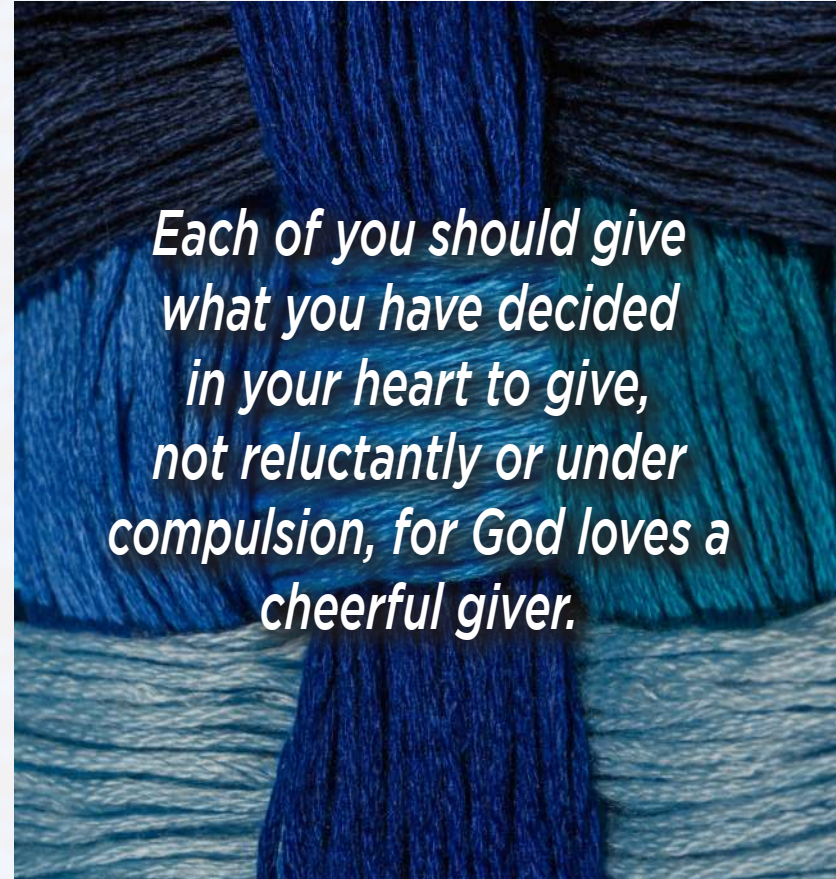
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2024
August



SFST Graduating Class of 2024

Join Us for Opening Convocation

OPENING CONVOCATION

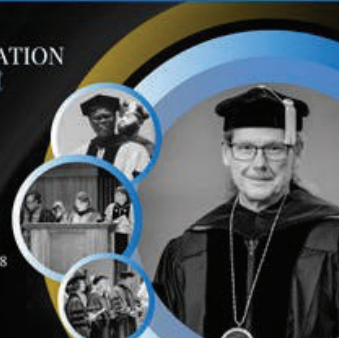
*Installation of President
Dr. Jay Simmons*

Tuesday, August 13, 2024
11:00 AM CT

Locations

- Kansas Campus
- Oklahoma Campus
- Facebook Livestream @spst1958

RSVP online by August 4



Smithsonian Exhibit Comes to Saint Paul

Saint Paul School of Theology has achieved a noteworthy feat, being chosen to host the prestigious traveling exhibition “Exploring Human Origins: What Does It Mean to Be Human?”. Through various engaging mediums such as panels, interactive kiosks, hands-on displays, and videos, “Exploring Human Origins: What Does It Mean to Be Human?” invites viewers of all ages to actively participate in learning about the milestones in the evolutionary journey of becoming human.

The exhibition will be available in Spring 2025 and is free and open to the public. Seminarians, educators, alums, clergy, schools, and churches are encouraged to visit and engage in conversations that matter scientifically and theologically. Those interested in being part of a clergy conversation, school workshop, religious educator workshop--or persons interested in being docents—please contact Nancy Howell (howellnr@spst.edu).

For information and a schedule of events, visit spst.edu.

Coming Soon

**Exploring
Human Origins**

What Does It Mean To Be Human?

Images
John Anthony Guscha, Reconstructed Faces
Kane Carr Studio, Landscape Illustrations

Smithsonian Institution

ALA American Library Association

Saint Paul School of Theology



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING **SAINT PAUL DAY**

On March 3, 1958, the National Methodist Theological Seminary (eventually known as Saint Paul School of Theology) was incorporated in Missouri.

In celebration of our birthday, we want all of the SPST community to show their seminary spirit by wearing their Saint Paul shirts and hats that day. In addition, we invite you to share memorable moments (stories and photos) that you've experienced at Saint Paul in the classroom, with fellow students, or during events on your social media pages – make sure to tag us and use the hashtag #spstday.

We'll also be having a fundraiser that day to raise \$1,958 for the Annual Fund. We look forward to celebrating with you!

SAVE THE DATE: March 3, 2025

Need to update your SPST wardrobe? We've got new items in stock!
Scan the QR code and shop SPST.



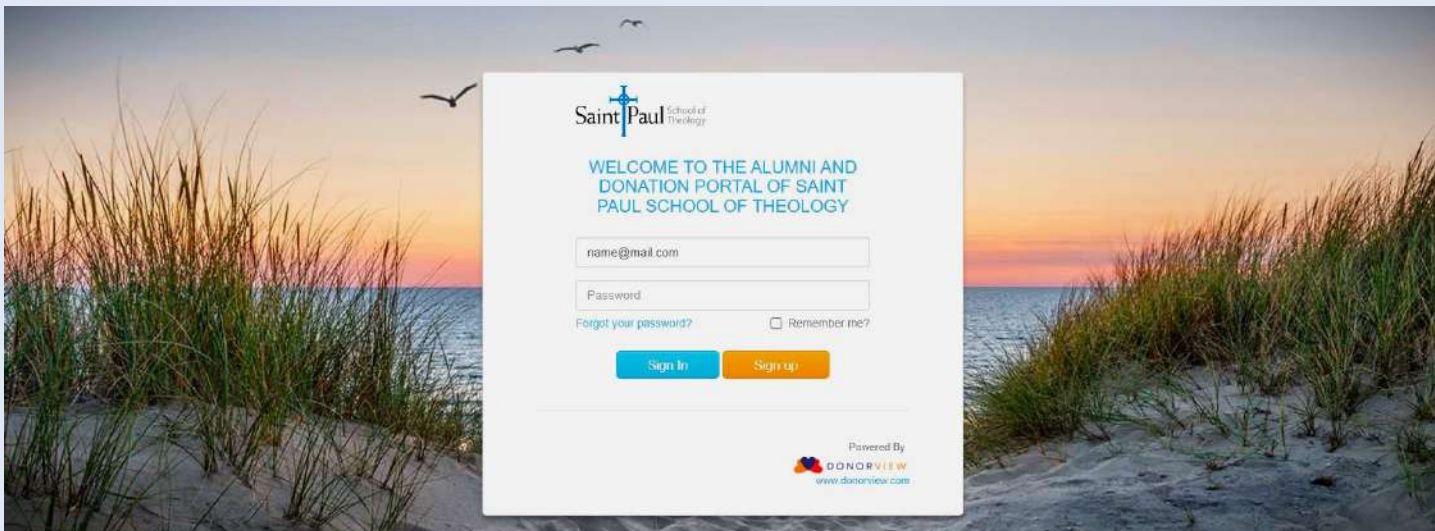
Let's get social at SPST1958

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Do you need to update your mailing address? Do you want to register for an upcoming lecture? Would you like to set up recurring donations to Saint Paul? You can do all that and more with our Alumni and Donation Portal. Just sign up to create a login and all your donation and event information is at your fingertips. Scan the QR code to set up your account.



WAYS TO GIVE

Every dollar makes a difference; regardless of how you give. At Saint Paul, we want to make the process as simple as possible for you to make a donation and change the lives of our students.

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