

First Congregational  
United Church of Christ  
*Gaylord*

January 2018

We aim to embrace people at every age and every stage of life, and help them become the most loving version of themselves possible.

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First Congregational United  
Church of Christ  
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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday  
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Church Service: Sunday: 10:00 am

### From Your Pastor...

The only way to begin 2018 with my church family is with the two most important words in the English language – THANK YOU! What an incredible Advent we had together! From the choir that Rokko so ably pulled together to the Kalember family’s Christmas Eve songs, from Dona Wishart’s day in the pulpit December 3 to our congregation’s December 24 outpouring of over a thousand dollars for the local Meals on Wheels program that she administers through the OCCOA, from our Kidz on a Mission annual trip to CASS to our ever-faithful Friday Community meals, we did Advent right in 2017! Thank you – each and every one of you – for allowing yourselves to be pathways for God’s love!

As we flip our calendars to 2018 and begin to look forward to another year of loving one another and the world, there is one critically important matter to which we all must attend. I am speaking of our recent pledge campaign. As of the publication of this newsletter, we are still over \$20,000 short of what we need for a balanced budget in 2018. This means that we must begin some uncomfortable but necessary conversations about what to cut from our ministry plans for the coming year. If any of you still haven’t responded to our October 2017 pledge drive, please do so immediately. We have plenty of blank forms just outside the church office, or you could simply write a confidential letter of financial intent to Rod Anderson, who manages the income side of our budget, telling him what you plan to give this year. All of us benefit from what this incredible and active church brings to our lives; it’s only fair that all of us find a way to contribute to its financial wellbeing. Thank you!

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From January 1 through the end of February, our Reaching Out Team will help us focus our love toward our homeless brothers and sisters. These are the folks that you all selected as targets for our collective love during the two most frigid months of the year. We are blessed to have the President of The Refuge's board – Vicky Rigney – right here in our congregation. She, as always, will keep us updated as to what is needed in that vital ministry which we have supported since its inception. While it is always great to give financial gifts to an organization like The Refuge, let's all make a special effort to give some of our time and volunteer service in the next two months. Vicky will guide us in the best possible ways to do that. Thank you, Vicky!

Through our worship services and sermons in the next two months, I'll do my part by exploring homelessness in the broadest possible sense. We'll begin by considering the implications of Jesus, himself, living the vast majority of his life with "no place to lay his head." From there, we'll examine a wide range of homelessness, including a new kind that has resulted from our kids and grandkids moving away from Gaylord after their school years to a place without any family or support system. I'm confident that all our work and worship in the next two months will move us further down the path of becoming the most loving version of ourselves as possible.

Thank you all for the privilege and pleasure of serving as your pastor. I am confident that 2018 will be an even more amazing year of ministry for all of us, as we continue to open ourselves as pathways for God's love.

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## **What Your Pastor Has Been Reading Lately...**

### *Fleeing Fundamentalism* by Carlene Cross

This powerful memoir comes from a woman who married a seminarian with a compelling Christian faith, only to later discover his corrupt underbelly. The kinds of abuse and theological distortions she initially endured, she ultimately casts off en route to reclaiming her own voice and path as a Christian woman.

### *Boys in the Trees* by Carly Simon

I have always been a huge Carly Simon fan. Her songs resonated with me as a teenager, and they still speak to me in my 50s. Her memoir is beautifully written and reveals the experiences behind her hits. From her childhood as the third daughter of publishing mogul Richard Simon (Simon & Shuster) to her summer romance with fellow Martha's Vineyard dweller James Taylor, Carly hits all the right notes in this enjoyable book.

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## ***From Your Reaching Out Team...***

*As Toby referenced on page 1, we will be focusing the congregation's collective energy on homelessness in January and February. The word "homelessness" is probably not the best word to use however, because if we aren't careful, it turns people into an issue. One of our goals in these two months is to keep all of our work, thoughts, and prayers focused on real people – men, women, and children – who have no place to call home. So we want to begin our Reaching Out efforts in 2018 by asking everyone to be sure and say "homeless people" rather than "homelessness," as often as possible.*

*A second dimension to our work in these next two months will be to get as many of our church participants as possible some personal, face-to-face contact with a homeless person. We believe that personal contact greatly lessens fear and misunderstanding where people without homes are concerned. At a recent meeting of the Reaching Out Team, Toby shared with us his work in starting a shelter ministry for homeless people in the Chicago area in the 1980s. He saw his fear and discomfort dissipate the more time he spent sharing conversations and meals with homeless brothers and sisters. We think it would be great if as many of us as possible capitalize on the opportunity that these next two months provide to shed our fear and misconceptions where homeless people are concerned.*

*Cathy Otto received a message from Jody at DHS expressing their tremendous gratitude for our contribution to the adult foster care homes. She mentioned that most of the residents do not have family or friends and that we warmed their heart this holiday!*

*Finally, we have some BIG thank you's to communicate. This generous church family poured out its love toward our elders in three special offerings last November and December. Here are the final tallies:*

*To the UCC's Christmas Offering for Retired Pastors - \$698*

*To the Otsego County Commission on Aging's Meals on Wheels Program - \$1053*

*To the local food pantry - \$410*

*Thank you for your constant generosity!*

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## From Your Reaching In Team...

Happy New Year! We hope you and your families had a meaningful, memorable Christmas season. As we begin 2018 together, there was one particular scripture passage that Toby alluded to in his Christmas Eve sermon that we wanted to highlight. It is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians, the very first chapter: "God has made known to you the glorious riches of this mystery – Christ in you, the hope of glory."

What Paul tells us here is that one of the greatest and most wonderful mysteries of the universe is that the Christ force – the Logos, the Word – dwells inside each one of us! Christ in YOU is the hope of glory. Everything we say and do as a Reaching In Team grows out of this verse and the truth it conveys. If the God of the universe lives inside each of us, then reaching in becomes one of the most important things we do on a daily or even hourly basis. Reaching in means tapping into that living, divine presence. We do this by focusing on our breath – in and out – telling ourselves that God (Yahweh) is in our breath. We quiet ourselves and listen attentively to the peaceful rhythm of our breathing. We might quietly whisper to ourselves, "God is not out there but in here – in me."

As we begin this New Year with a focus on loving our homeless brothers and sisters, we might wonder how we can reach in amidst such an outward orientation. Actually, the more we reach out in our Christian path, the more important reaching in becomes. It's actually why our breathing process is the still best analogy of the healthy spiritual life! If all we do is reach out in loving action to others, then are exhaling without inhaling! Just as we need to breathe in in order to breathe out, we need to reach in in order to reach out effectively and without burning out.

So as we concentrate our loving efforts on those without shelter, let's meditate on Luke 9:57-58:

*"As they were walking along, one of the disciples said, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus replied to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'"*

What does it mean that the one we call "Lord" lived much of his life as a homeless person? As we breathe in in the coming weeks, may we reflect on the living Christ within us. May we be sure to offer roomy accommodations in our heart and to listen in silence for the still, small voice within, who will surely guide us in our efforts to provide shelter to our homeless brothers and sisters.

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## Kidz ON a MISSION...

The Kidz on a Mission had an extremely busy month of December. The first weekend was spent downstate helping at two different organizations. The Kidz and their chaperones were split into two teams; one went to spend the morning at Cass Community Social Services, while the rest of the group went to One Stop Shop. The Cass group helped stuff envelopes for the organization's primary Christmas fundraiser. The One Stop Shop group helped clients who had appointments with the all-day free store shop for gifts and also took care of the children of the shoppers. Thanks to our group, the children had craft projects and snacks while their parents shopped.

At noon, the groups switched. The afternoon Cass group did a variety of jobs, but ended up at the Cass Church, where they helped set up for an evening fundraiser. The rest of the team joined them after One Stop Shop closed, and we cleaned, decorated, arranged cookies, and help set up displays of products that were to be sold. It was kind of like the "frosting on top of the cake" as all the kids got to meet Faith Fowler, the incredible administrator of Cass Community Social Services.

For the first time, the kidz were joined by three alumni of the class who are now college freshmen. Their input at our "debriefing" meeting on Sunday reinforced what a life changing influence this trip can be.

Many thanks to Lori and Steve Ferguson, and Jeff and Stephanie Kalember for going on the trip. We were also joined by Heather Holland, who has worked with me on previous trips.

Later in December, the class sponsored a coffee hour and spent a Saturday making cookies. Some of the class went shopping for the family that the Women's Fellowship adopted. They wanted the outfits and toys to be just right for the children of that family. The class members also were primary participants in one of the church services as singers, liturgist, and helping with the younger class.

Finally, they were not only involved with the Christmas Eve service and helping Roger get 100 luminaries outside the church, but their families brought and distributed plates of cookies to people who had to work on Christmas Eve. The smile on the face of the young man at the Mobil station where Roger and I went was a gift itself!

As we enter the new year, we look forward to more trips as well as a fun weekend here in Michigan. We are beginning to plan our second annual Madrigal dinner as well as planning the church service in which we can tell you more about our December trip.

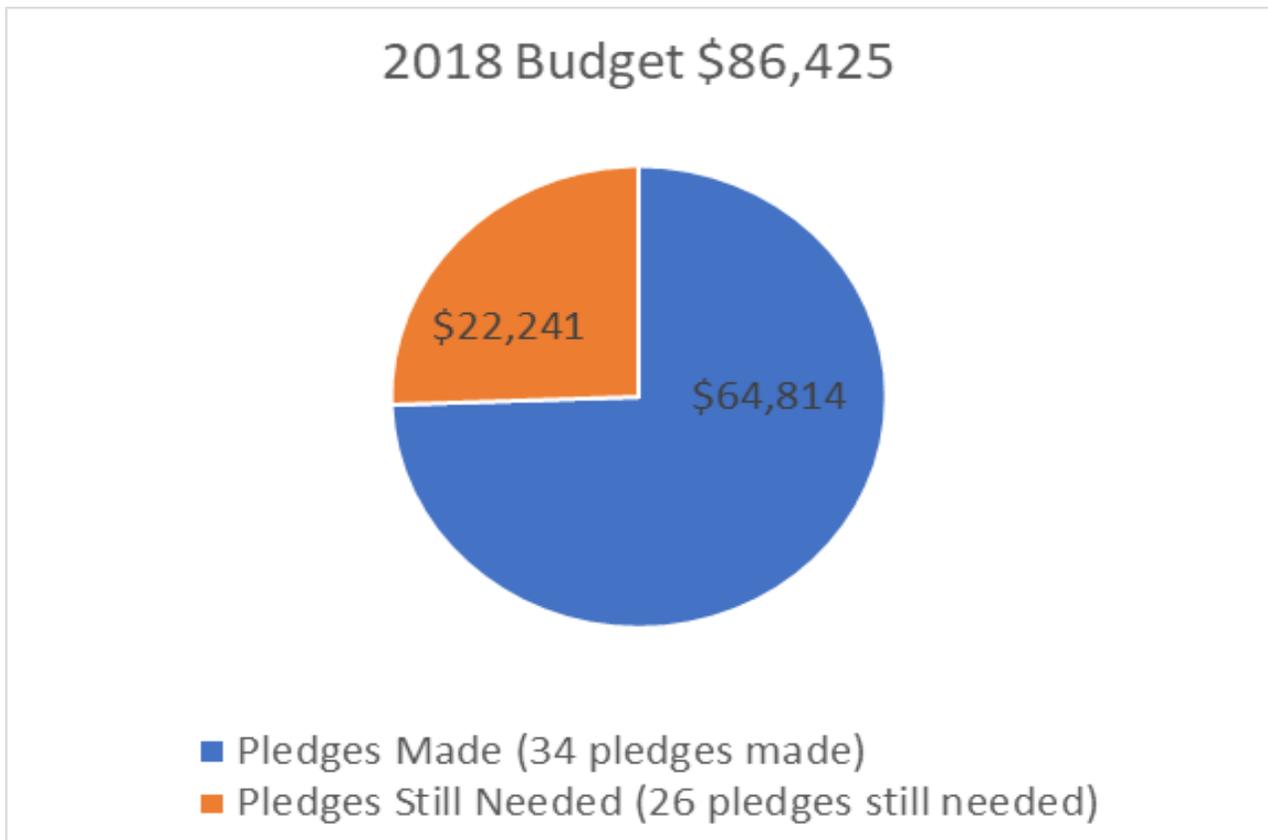
Thank you for all of your support. It means so much to have a church family that really cares about the younger group at our church.

-Brenda Brummel



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From your Trustees...



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## January Schedule

DATE	LITURGIST	USHER/GREETER	COFFEE HOUR
January 7	NEEDED	NEEDED	Gloria House & Evelyn Pratt
January 14	NEEDED	NEEDED	Alex Shirley, Lori Ferguson, Doreen Dobosy
January 21	NEEDED	NEEDED	Helen Mate & Mary Evans
January 28	NEEDED	NEEDED	George Lienerth & Louanne Spearman

## January Birthdays

- 7 Diane House
- 7 Eloise Jones
- 9 Jill Brazelton
- 18 Joanna Morse
- 18 Laurie Andrew
- 22 Jeff Kalember
- 27 Olive Grabow
- 27 Rokko Jans



# JANUARY

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 New Year's Day!	2	3	4 Bible Study, 11am	5 Community Meal, 5pm	6
7	8	9	10	11 Trustees, 9:30am Bible Study, 11am	12 Community Meal, 5pm	13 UNA Meeting, 10am
14 Reaching Out, 11:30am	15 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	16	17 Church Book Club, 1pm	18 Bible Study, 11am Reaching In, 12:15pm	19 Community Meal, 5pm	20
21	22	23	24	25 Council, 9:30am Bible Study, 11am	26 Community Meal, 5pm	27
28	29	30	31			