

First Congregational United Church of Christ

218 W. Second Street, Gaylord, Michigan 49735
www.firstuccgaylord.org

APRIL 2025 Newsletter



Our mission is to embrace people of every age and stage of life and help them become the most loving version of themselves possible.

Pastor's Column

“Finding Balance”

I've been thinking a lot about balance lately. How to balance my employments, my volunteer hours, my responsibilities to the community and family, etc. Perhaps you have these same needs to find balance. This topic has also come up as part of our Lenten series, everything [in] between. They have deliberately taken two polarities and invited us to consider what happens in between.

We are caught between a lot of things right now. There is anxiety in our nation and our world and the constant struggle to figure out our role in solving these problems. There is economic anxiety as we wonder whether we will enter recession, what our job status will be,

or the status of our income regardless of its source. There is anxiety in our health as many of us are considering medical treatments, or about to undergo them, or have just recently finished surgeries. There is so much on our mind, in our hearts, and in our spirits.

As part of preparation for the March 23 service, I have been reading a lot this week about rest and growth. The most interesting comments have been about the need for rest, including being introduced to a woman named Tricia Hersey, who has coined herself the “Nap Bishop”. She has started a nap ministry, which is interesting in and of itself. But even more interesting, she speaks of our constant drive to produce having many negative effects. In her case, being an African American woman, she says that this drive finds its roots in slavery for people like her (her article called “The Nap Bishop Is Spreading the Good Word: Rest” is from the October 23, 2022 issue of the New York Times).

Without going into the whole article and other things you’ll hear in that sermon, a good friend of mine, Rosangela Berbert (Executive Director of Samaritan, a counseling center in Appleton, WI) wrote a great article about seeds and roots. This springtime seems to be a good time to think about roots, seeds and plants as soon we’ll be planting. She asks in that article, “What are you tending?” She also asks, “What needs more care?” And thirdly, “What is already growing strong?”

These are important questions as we consider our various roles in the world. You can’t give what you don’t have, and you can’t grow without tending, care, rest and nurturing. Many of us are action people, but constant action can lead to burnout or even worse.

What is ours to do? What do we need in order to do it?

In Christ,

Pastor Greg

GOOD FRIDAY WORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

On Good Friday, we are invited to participate in two services. You can come either or both as your schedule allows. The first service will be at St. Andrew Episcopal Church at noon and will include a community choir made up of each of the four participating churches. It will be a reflective service with scripture reading, music, and silent time.

The 7 PM service, at Peace Lutheran, will be a traditional Tenebrae service. Tenebrae is the Latin term for *shadows*. It is a service of lessons accompanied by the gradual extinguishing of lights as scriptures recounting the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus are shared.

Holy Week Opportunity

Seder Meal

On Maundy Thursday--April 17, 2025--at 5:30 PM, your Reaching In Committee invites you to participate in a very special symbolic Seder Meal with a soup and bread supper to follow.

This is an opportunity to experience the symbolical tradition of Passover, which recalls the Exodus--God's rescue of the Jews from their slavery in Egypt. Additionally, on this night, Christians remember the Jewish tradition when Jesus sat at table with his disciples, blessed and broke bread, poured and blessed wine, before his arrest and crucifixion on Friday – the beginning of the tradition of The Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

Pastor Greg will lead us through the traditions, explaining as we go what all the pieces and parts are. We hope to have some special music as well.

Please make plans now to join us for this very special event. Sign up in Fellowship Hall.

RICHARD ROHR'S DAILY MEDITATIONS:
WELCOMING STRANGERS IN SCRIPTURE

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Biblical scholar Ched Myers writes of the prominence of immigrants in the Scriptures.

Torah and the Prophets warned Israel not to discriminate against economic or political refugees, since in YHWH's eyes even the chosen people were "but aliens and tenants" (Leviticus 25:23). Instead, they were to treat the "sojourners in your midst" with dignity and justice (Deuteronomy 24:14). This fundamental regard for the resident alien, and call to solidarity with the "outsider," came to full realization in the teaching and practice of Jesus of Nazareth. An oft-cited verse that captures this is Matthew's last-judgment parable, in which Jesus commends those who welcome him in the guise of a stranger—and condemns those who do not (Matthew 25:35–46).^[1]

Three archetypally vulnerable groups are commonly named in almost formulaic fashion: widows, orphans, and *strangers*. Because YHWH "watches over" them (Psalm 146:9), they have intrinsic rights to sustenance (Deuteronomy 14:29, 24:19–21, 26:12–13) and to human rights (Deuteronomy 27:19; Psalm 94:6). And the prophets measure the health of the nation by how widows, orphans, and strangers are treated (Jeremiah 7:6, 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5).

But there is another, theologically startling characteristic of scripture: from beginning to end, *God too* is portrayed entering our world in the guise of a stranger in need of hospitality. One of the first divine epiphanies is YHWH's mysterious appearance in the form of "three guests" (Genesis 18:1–8). Abraham and Sarah offer them food, drink, and shelter, and their hospitality occasions the great promise of progeny that launches the salvation story of an entire people (Genesis 18:9–10).

We can go further: the God of the Bible is consistently portrayed

as “stateless,” and we can reasonably add *undocumented*. This is in stark contrast to the patron-gods of the empires that surrounded Israel, who lived comfortably in the temples of the king. In the Exodus tradition, the wilderness God doesn’t even have a *name*, much less “papers”: the moniker YHWH means “I will be whoever I will be” (Exodus 3:14). God’s voice summons Moses into a conspiracy for freedom from a burning bush *outside* the borders of, and in opposition to, Pharaoh’s political and economic system. Inspired and led by this God, the Hebrews flee Egypt “in haste” (Exodus 12:33), and wander in the desert as a people with no legal status—as political refugees still must do.

The Gospel writers portray Jesus as a refugee in need of hospitality:

The Second Testament continues in this tradition. The gospel story begins with Jesus’ family fleeing violence as political refugees, pushed around Palestine by the imperial forces of Caesar and Herod (Matthew 2; Luke 2). The adult Jesus not only characterizes himself as homeless (“the Human One has nowhere to lay his head,” Luke 9:58), but *stateless*. “My kingdom is not of this world,” he says before the Roman procurator (John 18:36). The evangelists also portray Jesus as a constant recipient of hospitality who sometimes even “invites himself in” (see, for example, Luke 19:5). ^[2]

^[1] Ched Myers and Matthew Colwell, *Our God Is Undocumented: Biblical Faith and Immigrant Justice* (Orbis, 2012), 5.

^[2] Myers, *Our God*, 57–58.

Blanket Sunday - May 11

Each year on Mother’s Day, we celebrate Blanket Sunday. When you buy a paper heart, you provide money toward the purchase of a blanket while recognizing someone important in your life. Each

paper heart purchased is pinned to the blanket at the front of the church and the money raised goes toward disaster relief.

Blankets are \$10 each, but all donations are gratefully accepted. Offering dates run from April 27-May 11. See Pastor Greg or Margaret Hellenberg with any questions.

Please use your heart, take a heart, and know in your heart you have helped someone in the name of LOVE.

~ In Our Prayers ~

During April, the UNA is holding Cadillac First Congregational UCC Church in prayer.

Rick Boughner – as he recovers from recent surgery for a detached retina.

Mary Peterman – while she undergoes medical testing.

Jason Peterman – who is dealing with a variety of health issues.

Madison Crawford – as she suffers from neurological and vision issues.

Chris Crumbaugh – continued prayers Chris and Laura Bantens as they adapt to Chris' medical issues.

The English Family – as they manage medical and family challenges.

Vicky Rigney – Vicky is recovering after a fall and subsequent surgery.



Prayer requests are received by the church office. Names will appear on the list for two months. Please let the office know if this time needs to be extended, or if it is time to remove a name.

Prayer Requests

April Birthdays

1	Anna Kalember
2	Avery Ball
3	Doreen Dohosy
3	Kathy Arnold
4	Duncan Palmer
7	Jenna Andrews
8	Paige Kassuba
9	Jane Balliet
16	Cathy Otto
19	Aaron Hotelling
19	Caroline Compton

April Anniversaries

20	Alan & Becky Trenda
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Announcements

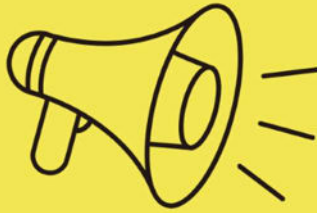
- Four choir members are singing with **The Little Traverse Choral Society** on April 12 at 7:30 PM at Zion Lutheran Church in Petoskey and on April 13 at 3 PM at First Presbyterian Church in Harbor Springs. Adult tickets are \$15, student tickets are \$5, and children under 12 are FREE
- Join us for a **Seder Meal** April 17 @5:30 PM
- Our choir joins three others in the **Good Friday ecumenical worship** at noon. St. Andrew Episcopal Church celebrates this year's Good Friday noon service.
- Peace Lutheran Church will have a 7 PM **Tenebrae Service on Good Friday**
- **Food Pantry Volunteers** are needed – call Don Storing
- Buy your paper heart for **Blanket Sunday** between April 27 and May 11
- We are **fundraising for Community Meal** through bracelet sales in Fellowship Hall
- Watch the eblasts for how to share your memories of **Stacy Wright** with her family
- If you have **prayer concerns, joys, announcements, or news to share**, contact Liz at office@firstuccgaylord.org or Pastor Greg at pastorg@firstuccgaylord.org



APRIL 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude	3 11 AM Bible Study 12:15 AM Women's Fellowship 4 PM Choir	4 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude 4 PM Community Meal	5
6 10 AM Worship	7 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude 6 PM Compassionate Friends	8	9 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude	10 11 AM Bible Study 3 PM Reaching In 4 PM Choir	11 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude 4 PM Community Meal	12 10 AM UNA Meeting 3 PM AA 7:30 PM Hear America Singing (Petoskey)
13 PALM SUNDAY 10 AM Worship 3 PM Hear America Singing (Harbor Springs)	14 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude	15 TAX DAY 12 PM Lunch Group	16 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude 7 PM Trustees	17 MAUNDY THURSDAY 11 AM Bible Study 4 PM Choir 5:30 PM Seder Meal	18 GOOD FRIDAY 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude 12 PM St. Andrews Service 7 PM Tenebrae Service @ Peace Lutheran	19 HOLY SATURDAY
20 EASTER 10 AM Worship	21 NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS DUE 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude 7 PM Reaching Out	22 EARTH DAY	23 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude 1 PM Church Book Club	24 11 AM Bible Study 4 PM Choir	25 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude 4 PM Community Meal	26
27 10 AM Worship	28 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude	29	30 6 AM Gaylord Gratitude			

Updated



Meeting Links

Zoom Link for Trustees:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84006659065>

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Reaching Out Zoom Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86904855449>

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2025 Flower Schedule

January: *Margaret Hafner and Dave Henson*

February: *Margaret Hellenberg*

March: *Jeannine Wambold*

April: Cathy Otto

May: *Mary Evans*

June: *Joanie Sietsema*

July: *Helen Mate*

August: *Evelyn Pratt*

September: *Sallie Anderson*

October: *Vicky Rigney*

November: *Louanne Spearman*

December: *Christian Ed.*