

# First Congregational United Church of Christ

218 W. Second Street, Gaylord, Michigan 49735

[www.firstuccgaylord.org](http://www.firstuccgaylord.org)

(989) 732-5726

*April 2026 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.*

## Just Love

by Richard Rohr, ***Daily Meditations***

Center for Action and Contemplation, March 1, 2026

As we read the Bible, God does not change as much as our knowledge of God evolves. I certainly recognize there are many biblical passages that present God as punitive and retributive, but we must stay with the text—and observe how we gradually let God grow up. Focusing on divine retribution leads to an ego-satisfying and eventually unworkable image of

God, which situates us inside of a very unsafe and dangerous universe. Both Jesus and Paul observed the human tendency toward retribution and spoke strongly about the limitations of the law.

The biblical notion of justice, beginning in the Hebrew Scriptures with the Jewish prophets—especially Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea—is quite different. If we read carefully and honestly, we will see that God’s justice is *restorative*. In each case, after the prophet chastises the Israelites for their transgressions against Yahweh, the prophet continues by saying, in effect, “And here’s what Yahweh will do for you: God will now love you more than ever! God will love you into wholeness. God will pour upon you a gratuitous, unbelievable, unaccountable, irrefutable love that you will finally be unable to resist.”

*God “punishes” us by loving us more!* How else could divine love be supreme and victorious? Check out this theme for yourself: Read passages such as Isaiah 29:13–24, Hosea 6:1–6, Ezekiel 16 (especially verses 59–63), and so many of the Psalms. God’s justice is fully successful when God can legitimate and validate human beings in their original and total identity! God wins by making sure we win—just as any loving human parent does.

Love is the only thing that transforms the human heart. In the Gospels, we see Jesus fully revealing this divine wisdom. Love takes the shape and symbolism of healing and radical forgiveness—which is just about all that Jesus does. Jesus, who represents God, usually transforms people at the moments when they most hate themselves, when they most feel shame or guilt, or want to punish themselves. Look at Jesus’s interaction with the tax collector Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). He doesn’t belittle or punish Zacchaeus; instead, Jesus goes to his home, shares a meal with him, and treats him like a friend. Zacchaeus’s heart is opened and transformed. Only then does Zacchaeus commit to making reparations for the harm he has done.

As Isaiah says of God, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways” (Isaiah 55:8). Yet I am afraid we largely pulled God down into “our thoughts.” We think fear, anger, divine intimidation, threat, and punishment are going to lead people to love. We cannot lead people to the highest level of motivation by teaching them the lowest. God always and forever models the highest, and our task is merely to “imitate God” (Ephesians 5:1).

## April Birthdays and Anniversaries

### Birthdays:

- 1 Anna Kalember
- 3 Kathy Arnold  
Doreen Dobosy
- 4 Duncan Palmer
- 7 Jenna Andrews
- 8 Paige Kassuba
- 9 Jane Hanck
- 16 Cathy Otto
- 19 Caroline Compton  
Aaron Hotelling

### Anniversaries:

- 20 Alan & Becky Trender

### *Office Hours*

- **Pastor Greg** will be out of the country from April 6-10. We will also have Helen Crandall preaching on April 19.



# INAUGURAL CONFERENCE



## **BELONG**

NORTHERN MICHIGAN IMMIGRANT  
INCLUSION NETWORK

We work as a collaborative network to make Michigan's Northern Lower Peninsula a welcoming, inclusive region for immigrants and refugees by educating communities, supporting newcomers and service institutions, and advocating for culturally appropriate solutions.

**JOIN US!**

**FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2026**

**9AM - 5PM**

### **Location**

Treetops Resort  
3962 Wilkinson Rd.  
Gaylord, MI

### **Registration**

Click [here](#) or scan the QR Code to Register today!

### **Investment**

\$40/Person  
For fee waiver, please contact **Bridgitte**  
at [Belong-Info@strangersnolonger.org](mailto:Belong-Info@strangersnolonger.org)



**For more information about Belong and to register, contact Carolina Tábora after 4:30 pm weekdays and on weekends at 231-882-6225, which is her cell phone.**

# 2026 Spring Meeting of The United Northern Association



**SUNDAY, APRIL 12TH**

**3:00PM TO 5:00pm**



**Gaylord First Congregational UCC**

- A light lunch will be provided as we gather:  
Sandwiches, Finger Foods, Fruit, Cookies and Coffee
- The meeting will include: Keynote Speaker, Rev. Cheryl Burke, Associate Conf. Min. of Clergy Care & Formation
- Awarding of the "Seeds for Service" Grants
- Election of candidates for open positions
- Discussion of the Unified Committee on Ministry proposal

**NO REGISTRATION FEE**

218 W. Second Street

Gaylord, MI 49735

Telephone: 989-732-5726

FMI: Alison at 802-829-3211

## Holy Week

Work is underway for Holy Week activities. Details are forthcoming, but the schedule will be:

- Sunday, March 29 **Palm Sunday** worship 10am; Convergence learning session, 11:30am
- Thursday, April 2, **Maundy Thursday** worship, 5:30pm for the service, with a simple meal to follow at 6:15pm in Fellowship Hall.
- Friday, April 3, **Good Friday** Community Worship Service, Noon at St. Andrew Episcopal Church with community choir. All are invited to participate. Practice is at 11am at St. Andrew.
- Friday, April 3, **Good Friday** Tenebrae service, 7pm at First Presbyterian Church. A special candelabra is used during Tenebrae, which usually has fifteen candles. After each reading, whether from the Psalms or gospels, a candle is extinguished until one is left. By the end of the service, the church is cast into darkness, except for the continual light of the Christ candle.
- Sunday, April 5, **Easter Sunday** Celebration of the Resurrection with communion, 10 am

## Announcements

- In 2026, **Church Council** will meet on the third Thursdays at 5PM both in-person and via Zoom. The link is: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84173125831>
- **Confirmation** meets on the 12th. ***We will celebrate our confirmands in a confirmation service on May 31.*** Stay tuned for more details!
- Please **update your meetings** with Liz for next month **by the Newsletter Deadline (Monday after the Council Meeting)** so our church calendar is accurate.
- Salad luncheons will begin again in May.



The Gaylord Rotary Club and The Gaylord Eagles

Are Pleased to Host the



## Otsego County Community



**Thursday, April 16, 2026**

**4:30 pm – 7 pm – Everyone Welcome!**

Enjoy sample menu items from

Pine Squirrel, Michaywe Inn the Woods, Gaylord Eagles,

Rafi's Hibachi & Sushi Bar, Iron Pig

and other local eateries to be announced.

Tickets are \$15 per adult, \$5 for children ages 2 – 17 or \$40 for a family pass.

**Cash Bar • Food • Raffles • Live & Silent Auctions \*  
Entertainment • Face Painting**

\*Cash or checks only for Auction purchases.

**BONUS DOOR PRIZE!**

Bring \$10 or more worth of shelf stable grocery items and help us **JAM THE VAN !**

At the Gaylord Eagles Hall, on Wisconsin by the water tower.

For sponsorship opportunities or more information contact Diane Pompei, 989 390 3790.

**All Proceeds Benefit The Otsego County Food Pantry**

3/10/2026

## Otsego County Food Pantry

From an email from Gaylord Area Chamber of Commerce

Hunger is not seasonal and not an event, but an ongoing battle for people within our county that happens every single day. The Otsego County Food Pantry is working hard to respond to that need. The OCFP motto is simple:

“We feed people.” The pantry is grateful for all the support it receives but needs help from the community to continue to make that happen.

The Otsego County Food Pantry is a 100% volunteer effort. The pantry programs are entirely funded through donations, grant-writing, and fundraisers. All donations are used for the purchase of food or personal care items.

We feed people Monday through Friday during daily distribution, providing at least two weeks’ worth of shelf-stable, fresh, and frozen foods. The OCFP also arranges delivery for those who are homebound or without transportation. In 2025, the pantry had nearly 6000 visits by 1400 different families during daily distribution.

With the cooperation of area schools, we feed students through the Backpack Program, providing weekend food bags containing meals and snacks to ~ 400 students. In 2025, the OCFP provided over 48,000 meals for youth.

We feed people through Saturday Free Food Truck Distributions April through November. In 2025, the OCFP hosted 11 truck distributions that provided over 201,000 pounds or 100 tons of food!

We feed people monthly by being a Senior Commodities Box Distribution site for the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan helping 40-60 seniors each month. Additionally, the OCFP supports area pantries, mini pantries in senior facilities, and at the GHS Wellness Center.

The OCFP, in partnership with PoWeR! Books, the Community Crafters and the Otsego County Library, support literacy, arts and creative play through our “Strong Start Books and Art” program providing books, art supplies, library coupons and crafted toys to children 10 and under whose families come to the pantry.

We are so grateful for all our volunteers and for being a part of a caring community. We appreciate the business partnerships we continue to build, the grants we receive, those who support fundraising efforts, and the people who give generously of their time and means. Stay tuned to our Facebook page and website, and the Chamber emails for upcoming OCFP events! Call if you, your business, or your organization would like to be more involved!

# UCC WOMEN OF MICHIGAN

**Registration OPEN NOW  
For Spring Gathering 2026**  
“Early Bird” discount due by March 25th!

**JUNE 5-7, 2026**

Friday evening thru Sunday morning

**THEME: “Fortified in Faith, Clothed in Strength!”**

Scriptures: Proverbs 31; Acts 16: 14-16



## ABOUT OUR KEYNOTE SPEAKER & PREACHER

### **The Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel**

The Michigan Conference Minister is responsible for the spiritual care of our clergy and 140 congregations. Since starting July 1, 2022, the Rev. Dr. Daniel has focused on encouraging, equipping and connecting our Michigan churches in Christ's love and justice. Lillian is based in Grand Rapids and travels most weekends to worship with folks in the Michigan Conference.

**We are excited to announce the 2026 Gathering event at The Lake Huron Retreat Center Located at 8794 Lakeshore Rd, Burtchville Twp, MI**

**JOIN US FOR OUR CONTINUING ADVENTURE!**

**REGISTRATION BROCHURE AVAILABLE NOW!**

**Watch for it in your email, ON THE UCC WOMEN OF MI FACEBOOK PAGE, or the MI Conference UCC e-newsletter & website.**

Co-Chairs: Penny Lowes	248-762-5551	revpen73@gmail.com
April Reh	586-291-8827	a.rehofcolor@gmail.com
Kristen Rieder	231-818-3831	k3teacher@hotmail.com
Registrar: Shari Hoppe	614-403-2364	sfhoppe@gmail.com

## ~In Our Prayers~

### ***In April, the UNA will pray for Atlanta Congregational UCC.***

**Laura Bantens**, who requests prayers for employment and finding where she belongs. Her mother, **Connie**, needs prayers for the same. Connie's house is on the market—prayers for a quick sale at a great price.

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

**Chris Crubaugh** – who has medical issues. Continued prayers for Chris and Laura Bantens as they adapt.

**The English Family** –Joe is now back at home. Please pray for Joe to healing and adjustment and for the English family.

**Mary Sue Evans** requests prayers for her husband as he goes through health issues.

**Maggie Shanahan Menkes (Kathy's daughter-in-law)** has had good news that her treatment seems to be working. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers for strength.

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



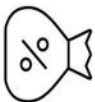
Prayer requests are received by the church office. Names will appear on the list for two months. Please let the office know if this time needs to be extended, or if it is time to remove a name.

**Check out our meeting minutes, linked to the MailChimp mailing. Contact Liz for hard copies at 989-732-5726 or [office@firstuccgaylord.org](mailto:office@firstuccgaylord.org).**

## Ten Tips for an Eco-Friendly Easter

1. Use reusable Easter eggs. Eco Eggs are colorful, refillable, and made from plants. At the end of their lives, you can compost them.
2. Dye hardboiled eggs using old silk ties or vegetable dyes instead of food coloring. Turmeric makes yellow, red cabbage turns blue, beet juice dyes things pink, red onions create jade green, grape juice becomes lavender, for a red, try paprika, and onion skins provide a warm brown.
3. When you fill eggs, swap out plastic-wrapped candies and cheap plastic toys for healthy homemade treats, reusable toys, money, or organic seeds.
4. Don't buy single use Easter baskets—use your imagination with paper bags, small containers from your house, or something a child can reuse like a bucket or backpack. Alternatively, thrift a basket!
5. Easter “grass” is not very green. Using shredded paper, leftover fabric, or even mulch is a great way to incorporate a more planet-friendly option at Easter.
6. Give organic cotton or recycled socks!
7. Incorporate a green activity—think scavenger hunt, reading a special Easter book, baking carrot muffins, or planting a flower to take home in a small pot.
8. Sustainably-produced chocolate is delicious!
9. Adopt a tree from the Orangutan Project or provide animals that feed people through the Heifer Project.
10. Compost your egg shells. This can only be done if you have used eco-friendly dyes! Egg shells contain nitrogen and are carbon rich, so they make great compost.

# April



## 2026

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<p>UNA Prayers for Atlanta First Congregational UCC</p> <p><b>Easter Sunday</b> 5</p> <p>10a Worship/Communion</p>	<p>Flowers provided by Cathy Otto</p> <p>Rev. Greg in Mexico 6</p> <p>6a Gaylord Gratitude NOON Reaching in Friends</p>	<p>Liz at UMW Rummage Sale Apr 28-Apr 30</p> <p>greg in Mexico 7</p> <p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group</p>	<p><b>Passover Begins</b> 1</p> <p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group</p>	<p><b>Maundy Thursday</b> 2</p> <p>9:30a White Breakfast @ Methodist Church</p> <p>11a Bible Study 4p Choir</p> <p>5:30p Service &amp; Dinner</p> <p><b>Passover Ends</b> Greg in Mexico 9</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude NOON Good Friday Service @ St. Andrew's 6p Talking Circle</p> <p>7p Tenbrae Good Friday Service @ 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian</p> <p>Greg in Mexico 10</p>	<p>8:30a Pet Partners</p>
<p>10a Worship 11:30a Confirmation 3p UNA Meeting</p> <p>12</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude</p> <p>13</p>	<p>greg in Mexico 7</p> <p>14</p> <p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group 7p Trustees</p> <p><b>Tax Day</b> 15</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group</p> <p>11a Bible Study 4p Choir</p> <p>4:30p Otsego County Food Drive @ Eagles</p> <p>5p Church Council</p> <p>16</p>	<p>11a Bible Study 4p Choir</p> <p>4:30p Otsego County Food Drive @ Eagles</p> <p>5p Church Council</p> <p>16</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle</p> <p>17</p>	<p>18</p>
<p>10a Worship - Helen Crandall preaching</p> <p>19</p>	<p><b>Newsletter Deadline</b> 20</p> <p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 7p Reaching Out</p>	<p>NOON Lunch Group @ Big Buck</p> <p>21</p> <p><b>Earth Day</b> 22</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 1p Church Book Club 5p Ukelele Group</p> <p>11a Bible Study 4p Choir</p> <p>23</p>	<p>11a Bible Study 4p Choir</p> <p>23</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 9a Belong Immigrant Inclusion @ Treetops 4p Community Meal 6p Talking Circle</p> <p>24</p>	<p>25</p>
<p>10a Worship</p> <p>26</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude</p> <p>27</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group</p> <p>28</p>	<p>6a Gaylord Gratitude 5p Ukelele Group</p> <p>29</p>	<p>11a Bible Study 4p Choir</p> <p>30</p>		