



December, 2023

Embracing people at every age and every stage of life, helping them to become the most loving version of themselves possible.

First Congregational United Church of Christ

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Church Service: Sunday, 10 am



Pastor's Submission – December, 2023

Pastor's Column – December 2023

"A Weary World Rejoices"

I don't know about you, but I cannot believe that Christmas is about a month away! Advent starts December 3 and concludes in our morning worship on December 24 (yes, we will have worship Sunday morning, December 24 as well as the Christmas Eve service at 5pm that evening). Our theme this year comes from a group called *Sanctified Art*. They will not only offer us a compelling theme this year, but some beautiful artwork and an in-depth look at the book of Luke.

The theme *How does a weary world rejoice?* is based on the familiar song "O Holy Night". It all began with the creators of the series asking one another, "What is the message we need to hear this season?" Here's what Sarah Speed, one of the creative partners wrote:

~Continued~

How does a weary world rejoice?

I would guess

soul by soul

and day by day.

But if you ask me,

I bet most of it counts.

A lot of people are having a hard time rejoicing this year. Seems that is often the case in our world. And yet, on that first Christmas, the world was in equally, if not worse shape than we are in today. But the angels sang, and the shepherds rejoiced, and the wise ones came from the east. It seemed all of creation was in song.

But the singing didn't begin on Christmas. No, it began with the birth of John, continued through the Magnificat of Mary, and... You are invited to come and share in the story this advent. I hope that it will help you, in this weary world, find a way to rejoice.

Have a blessed Christmas season

DECEMBER

Gratitude Group, 6 AM

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

Nov. 26

27

28

29

Gratitude Group, 6 AM

30

Bible Study, 11 AM
Choir, 4 PM

1

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
Community Meal, 4 PM
Talking Circle, 7-9 PM

2

Fellowship Hall in use for private event.

3

Worship 10 AM



Advent

4

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
Reaching In, 12 PM
2:30 - 4:30 Fellowship Hall in use

5

6

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
2:30 - 4:30 Fellowship Hall in use
5 - 7 PM Fellowship Hall in use (AAUW)

7

Bible Study, 11 AM
Womens' Fellowship 12:15 PM
Choir, 4 PM

8

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
Community Meal, 4 PM
Talking Circle, 7-9 PM

9

10

Worship 10 AM
Christmas Potluck



11

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
2:30 - 4:30 Fellowship Hall in use

12

13

Gratitude Group, 6 AM

14

Bible Study, 11 AM
Choir, 4 PM

15

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
Community Meal, 4 PM
Talking Circle, 7-9 PM

16

17

Worship 10 AM

18

Gratitude Group, 6 AM

19

20

Gratitude Group, 6 AM

21

Longest Night service, Peace Lutheran, 7PM

22

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
NO Community Meal
Talking Circle, 7-9 PM

23

24

Special service, 10 AM
Christmas Eve service, 5 PM

25

Merry Christmas

26

27

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
Church Book Club, 1 Pm

28

Bible Study, 11 AM
Choir, 4 PM

29

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
NO Community Meal
Talking Circle, 7-9 PM

30

31

Worship 10 AM

January 1

Gratitude Group, 6 AM

2

3

Gratitude Group, 6 AM

4

Bible Study, 11 AM
Choir, 4 PM

5

Gratitude Group, 6 AM
NO Community Meal
Talking Circle, 7-9 PM

6

2:30 - 4:30 PM Fellowship Hall in use

TALKING CIRCLE TO MEET IN FELLOWSHIP HALL

Starting in November, a local group called a "talking circle" will meet in our fellowship hall. This is a Native American group of about 10-20 people. The TRADITIONAL "TALKING---CIRCLE" is a very old way of bringing NATIVE PEOPLE of all ages together in a quiet, respectful manner for the purposes of TEACHING, LISTENING, LEARNING, SHARING. When approached in the proper way, the circle can be a very powerful means of touching or bringing some degree of HEALING to the MIND, the HEART, the BODY, or the SPIRIT. One could call it a very effective form of NATIVE GROUP THERAPY.

Traditionally, the group meets outdoors, but given our Northern Michigan winters, they have requested to meet indoors through the cold months (November - May, depending on weather). They will meet from 7pm until likely 9pm each Friday night. They have said that people are welcome to attend, but please understand this is sacred space so please be respectful. This is also true if you happen to stop by during a meeting.

The Trustees have welcomed this historically underserved group of spiritual people seeking healing and wholeness to use our facility. If you have questions, please speak with Pastor Greg or a member of Trustees.





Looking Ahead

- **12/2 & 3: Little Traverse Choral Society Concerts**
- **12/3: 1st Sunday of Advent**
- **12/9: Community Christmas Concert (Choir & Orchestra)**
- **12/10: Christmas Potluck**
- **12/21: Longest Night Service, Peace Lutheran**
- **12/24: Special worship @ 10 AM and Christmas Eve service @ 5 PM**



Committee Rosters, 2024

Position	Name	Term	Year
Moderator	Maggie Wallin	2	1
Asst. Moderator			
Financial Secretary	Margaret Hafner	2	1
Treasurer	Mary Fox		
Council (must have 5 members, but may have up to 3 add'l)			
Position	Name	Term	Year
Moderator	Maggie Wallin	2	1
Reaching in Rep.	Sallie Anderson	1	1
Reaching Out Rep.	Cathy Otto	2	1
Trustees Rep.	David Schopp	2	1
At large	Laura Hotelling	3	1
At large	Margaret Hellenberg	1	2
At large	Jeanine Wambold	1	2
At large	Helen Mate	3	1
Trustees (must have 3-5 members, in addition to Treasurer and Financial Secretary)			
Position	Name	Term	Year
Chair	Dave Schopp	2	1
Liaison to community Meal and Women's Fellowship	Vicky Rigney	3	1
Trustee Representative	Dave Schopp	2	1
Financial Secretary	Margaret Hafner	2	1
Treasurer	Mary Fox	3	2
Assistant Financial Secretary		1	1
At large	Paul Balliet	1	1
At large	Ken Wade	1	1
At large	Becky Trendera		
Reaching Out (3-5 members)			
Position	Name	Term	Year
Chair	Kathy Menkes	2	1
	Stephanie Kalember	1	1
	Cathy Otto	2	1
	Cindy Goller	2	1
Reaching In (3-5 members)			
Position	Name	Term	Year
Chair	Sallie Anderson	2	2
	Rokko Jans	2	2
	Maggie Wallin	2	2
	Mona Viviano	1	1
	Sharon Wade	1	1
Pastor Parish			
Position	Name	Term	Year
	Cathy Otto		
	Joe Wambold		
	Maggie Wallin		
	Mary Fox		

CROP HUNGER WALK

ENDING HUNGER ONE STEP AT A TIME

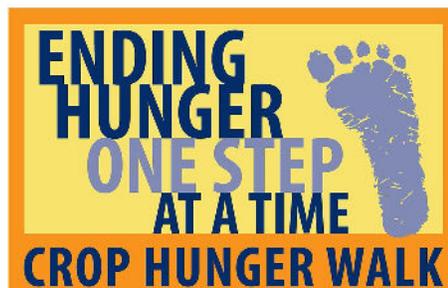


CROP WALK FOR HUNGER 2023 OTSEGO COUNTY

THANK YOU EVERYONE: To those who participated in the Walk or in the giving, you deserve a huge round of applause. This year's walk netted \$9,526.00 25% of this amount will be donated to the Otsego County Food Pantry...approximately \$2300.00. This is an amazing gift to our community and to the lives of those who are dealing with hunger on a daily basis.

First Congregational Church UCC, Gaylord, raised \$1285.00. We have our dedicated walkers and those who reach out to others to contribute. We acknowledge the tireless efforts of Margaret Hellenberg who continues to solicit the largest amount of donations. We all love and appreciate Margaret and her ceaseless efforts to help others.

Thanks again to our amazing, caring, giving church....





To equip, empower, encourage and connect the churches of the Michigan Conference

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Our Michigan Miracle

by Lillian Daniel
Michigan Conference Minister

At our first in-person Michigan Conference Annual Meeting in years, we beat our pre-pandemic registrations and literally packed the place. In what will heretofore be referred to in church history as the “Michigan Miracle,” we ended the business session ten minutes early.

Getting to preach at worship, hearing everybody sing, and eating lunch in a noisy social hall are all blessings that I do not take for granted. I’m so grateful to the Planning Team, Conference Staff, Michigan Conference UCC Board of Directors, and our hosts at Plymouth United Church of Christ, but most of all I’m grateful to God that we didn’t have to do another Annual Meeting sitting at a screen.



Of course, screens have their place when it comes to connectivity and catching up. On **our website**, you’ll find my sermon from the Annual Meeting and the recording of our Keynote. On our **YouTube channel**, you can view last month’s lively Leadership Lunch with Bishop Will Willimon whose take on Advent preaching was both holy and hilarious. I hope these recorded resources inspire you to register for the live ones. Our **December 6 Zoom** at lunch time will feature Still Speaking Daily Devotional author Quinn Caldwell. His Advent devotional book *All I Really Want: Readings for a Modern Christmas* made him my first choice to boost the spirits of our clergy and church members during this Advent Season.

Before we get to December, let’s take a moment to acknowledge the November holiday that precedes it. Yes, I am well aware that most nations around the globe do not acknowledge the occasion. Even in our country, it is a day that is not celebrated by all people, a day with a complex history, a day that some increasingly choose to ignore and others denounce outright. But the fact is November 18 is still my birthday and I won’t condemn anyone who celebrates it with a [gift](#) to the Friends of the Michigan Conference.

In all seriousness, my heart is filled with prayers of thanksgiving for you all. In a culture of crass commercialism, consumerism, colonialism, and conflict, our brave Michigan UCC churches stand up and stand out as a lighthouse to the spiritually ship-wrecked. I know of UCC pastors who are not invited to their town's clergy meetings because they have defended the local library's mission to include all authors, all readers and to invite free speech. I know of UCC church members who are told by other so-called Christians at the grocery store that our search for salvation does not count because it is not exclusive enough, as if cruelty will be our ticket into heaven. I know of UCC youth who are shocked to discover that their loving local church nest hangs on one of the smaller branches of the ancient Christian family tree, a thin branch that cares about Trans Day of Remembrance, that takes unpopular stances long before the rest of Christianity catches up. I know it's not easy out there. I know that there are times when you feel alone. You are not alone. God is still speaking and the Spirit knits us together.

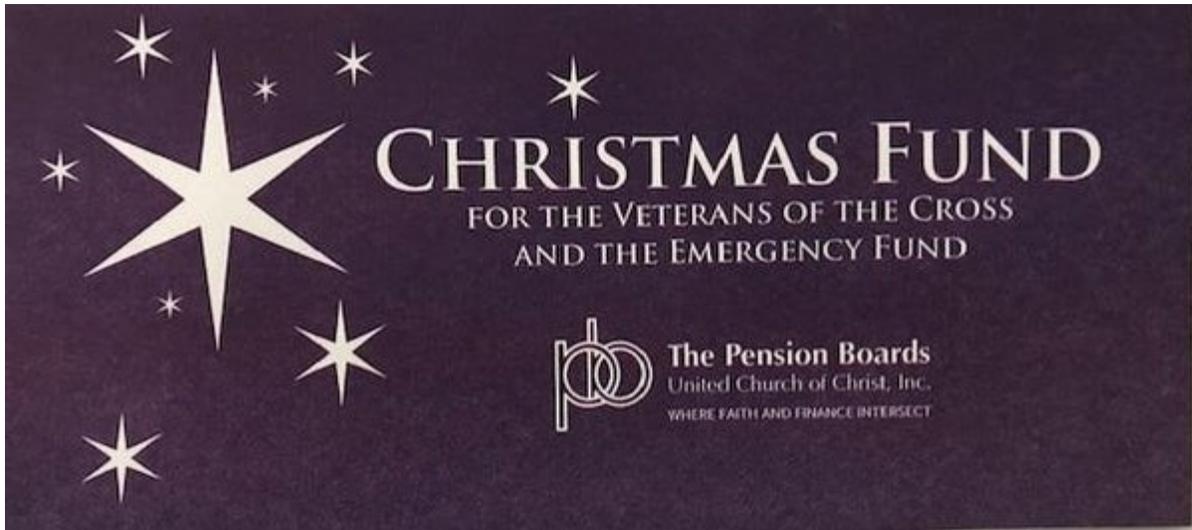
By now each Michigan Conference UCC local church should have received a personal letter, thanking you for what you have shared over the years in the Basic Support of Our Church's Wider Mission. Those Basic Support dollars are as precious and essential to us at the Michigan Conference as the donations of church members are to the local church, especially in these tough economic times.

In the United Church of Christ, we are connected, not by commandment but by covenant. We give, not because we must but because we may. I pray that the Michigan Conference provides the momentum for many more moments like our Annual Meeting when the ministry we do together reminds us that we are never alone.

Feel free to use or share this message to serve and uplift the church.

Please Provide 2023 Annual Meeting Feedback

Click [here](#) to access the form where you can anonymously provide feedback regarding the 2023 Annual Meeting (takes less than 3 minutes).



The Christmas Fund for the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund

“Grace upon Grace.” John 1:16

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas “Thank You” gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

How funds are used:

Last year: Thank You Checks- to retired clergy/lay employees, \$278,500 went to 479 retired clergy/lay employees.

Pension supplement checks-\$1,042,726 to 218 retired clergy/lay employees

Health Benifets-\$181,389 to 86 retired clergy/lay employees

Emergency grants- \$1, 38,022 to 55 retired clergy/lay employees

United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

We will be collecting the Christmas Fund through the month of December.



Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays:

- 1 Ryan Watling**
- 3 Terry House**
- 4 Travis House**
- 5 Cindy Goller**
- 5 Sandra Soderberg**
- 14 Mike Dockery**
- 16 Ian Hotelling**
- 19 Paul Kaczanowski**
- 25 Ilah Weaver**

Anniversaries:

- 22 George & Carol Lienerth**
- 22 Paul & Jane Balliet**

~ *In Our Prayers* ~

During the month of December, the UNA is holding the
Cadillac First Congregational UCC in prayer.

Bo and Carol Leser – as Bo will be moved to a rehab center to recover from a recent infection.

David Black – as he is at Munson Hospital, TC, being treated for cancer.

Gloria House's son, Gary, as he is having open heart surgery on the 12th of December. He has a defibrillator and a leaking valve that needs replacing.

Jason Peterman - as he has been having some health problems.

MarySue Evans' son Jerry, who had ear drum replacement surgery and a tumor removed from the ear.

English Family – as Jordan & Jeffrey's dad, Michael, passed away. Prayers for the boys and Natassja as they grieve his loss. Prayers for the entire family as they struggle to regain custody of Max.

Leona, Jason Peterman's stepmom – as she has had a stroke and is nearing the end of her life.

Sarah Brummel – as she awaits further tests and a possible pacemaker.

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

Gloria House's granddaughter, Madison Crawford – as she suffers from cataplexy in narcolepsy along with other neurological struggles. She is at home and adjusting to new medication, which seems to be helping, but Madison is still in need of prayers.

Ariah House – as she is finally home but still in need of prayers. She will be traveling to Grand Rapids for monthly infusions.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prayer Cards: In the pews, you will find prayer concern cards. When possible, to ensure accuracy in the bulletin and newsletter, please use the new cards

Potluck sign-up – The Christmas potluck is next week. Please sign up for a dish to pass, if you choose to bring one.

Directory – If at any time you have changes, please forward them. You can access the most up-to-date directory via our weekly eblast or stop in the office for a copy. I appreciate your continued input.

Advent Candles – There is a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall for the lighting of advent candles. We are looking for 12/17 and someone for the 5 PM Christmas Eve service.

Food Pantry – needs a few more volunteers. Please contact Don Storing if interested.





2023 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.*





5 for 5

from your Reaching Out Team

OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission)

Basic support for the Michigan Conference and National Settings.

Collected on an ongoing basis

Received to date: \$482

One Great Hour of Sharing

Supports partners in countries with ministries that fund health, education and agricultural development, emergency relief, refugee ministries and both international and domestic response.

Collected in March

Received to date: \$220

Strengthen the Church

Supports church growth, pastoral and lay leadership development, young and young adult ministers within conferences.

Collected around Pentecost

Received to date: \$75 (2023)

Neighbors in Need

One third supports Council for American Indian Ministry and two-thirds is administered to Justice and Witness Ministers to support a variety projects. Due to Covid-19 the elected UCC officers have deemed this to be a priority.

Collected in October

Received to date: \$255 (2022)

Christmas Fund

Provides direct financial assistance to retired UCC ministers and lay employees and spouses.

Collected in December

Received to date: \$565 (2022)

As of April, our donations to Blanket Sunday totaled \$509





Current Meeting Times

All are welcome to “attend” these meetings except where noted otherwise.

Reaching In* will meet the first Monday of each month at noon:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84945686588>

Reaching Out will meet the third Monday of each month at 7 PM:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83640729481>

Council will meet the after worship. Check monthly calendar for Specific dates.:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85297662581>

Trustees will meet the third Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83432888287>

Bible Study meets Thursdays at 11am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84612895017>