



December, 2024

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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Gaylord, MI 49735
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Church Service: Sunday, 10 am



Pastor's Column – December 2024

“Now What?”

The story of the birth of Jesus and his early days is similar to many stories in our Bible. There are moments of great joy, of surprise and setback, of fear and faithfulness. Throughout the narrative, I can imagine Mary and Joseph often saying, "Now what?" Many of us have felt the same way following our recent election. I wonder what our answers will be to the same question.

In the birth narrative, Mary is "found" to be with child. This presents an opportunity for joy, except that Mary is engaged to be married and Joseph is not the father. Mary is left with the question, "now what?", but Joseph even more so. Before he can answer the question, he must deal with his own feelings about what has happened. In his case, the Bible tells us he was visited by an angel and told what to do. I don't know if we will be visited by angels, but maybe in our dreams we will come up with some answers.

In Luke's gospel, Mary and Joseph then have to travel due to the census. In the well-known story, I can imagine when Mary gets the news she gets to travel, first-century style, a significant distance when she is nearing birth of her child. "Now what?" How would they make this journey?

Then, of course, they get to Bethlehem and there is no room for them in the inn. "Now what?" Can you imagine what must have been going through their minds as so many things have been happening to them? Some of them were wonderful, but others far more difficult.

Perhaps worst of all, their lives were at stake (Jesus' life for sure) as Matthew tells us that Herod resolved to kill the children that were born about the same time as he had been told Jesus was born. "Now what?" Mary and Joseph must flee to save the baby's life and perhaps their own. After a time, they are told to return to the land of Israel.

So many things happened in our scripture stories in Jesus' first years. Mary and Joseph met with all kinds of trouble, turmoil, travel, and tribulation. All along the way they had to have been asking themselves, "now what?" I don't know how long it took them to make decisions. The Bible makes it sound like it was right away. Maybe it was. Nevertheless, they had to take stock of the situation, assess their feelings, gather their resources and ultimately make a decision and take action.

Perhaps these stories of our ancestors give you hope that no matter what is in front of us, we too can make faithful decisions. These stories all have in common that Mary and Joseph had to be open to the leadings of God, honest about their feelings, and they had to take some risk. In the end, because of their actions, the whole world was changed. Love not only survived, but thrived.

May it be so in our time as well. May you find peace and purpose in this Christmas season. Blessings to all of you.

In Christ,
Pastor Greg

December

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>1</p>  <p>Advent</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p> <p>Reaching In, 12 PM</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>4</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Bible Study, 11 AM</p> <p>Women's Fellowship 12:15-1:15 PM</p> <p>Choir, 4 PM</p>	<p>6</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p> <p>Community Meal, 4 PM</p> <p>Talking Circle, 7-9 PM</p>	<p>7</p>
<p>8</p> <p>Worship 10 AM</p> <p>Snowbird Zoom, 11:15-12:15 PM</p>	<p>9</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p>	<p>10</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p>	<p>12</p> <p>Bible Study, 11 AM</p> <p>Choir, 4 PM</p>	<p>13</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p> <p>Community Meal, 4 PM</p> <p>Talking Circle, 7-9 PM</p>	<p>14</p>
<p>15</p> <p>Worship 10 AM</p> <p>Christmas Potluck following worship</p> <p>Christmas Caroling, 12 PM</p>	<p>16</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p> <p>Reaching Out Canceled</p>	<p>17</p> <p>Lunch Group @ Big Buck, 12 PM</p>	<p>18</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p>	<p>19</p> <p>Bible Study, 11 AM</p> <p>Choir, 4 PM</p>	<p>20</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p> <p>Community Meal, 4 pm</p> <p>Talking Circle, 7-9 PM</p>	<p>21</p>  <p>Longest Night service, Peace Lutheran, 7PM</p>
<p>22</p> <p>Worship 10 AM</p>	<p>23</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p>	<p>24</p>  <p>Christmas Eve service, 5 PM</p>	<p>25</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p> <p>Merry Christmas</p> <p>Church Office Closed</p>	<p>26</p> <p>Bible Study, 11 AM</p> <p>Choir, 4 PM</p>	<p>27</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p> <p>NO Community Meal</p> <p>Talking Circle, 7-9 PM</p>	<p>28</p>
<p>29</p> <p>Worship 10 AM</p>	<p>30</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p>	<p>31</p>	<p>January 1</p> <p>Happy New Year</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Bible Study, 11 AM</p> <p>Choir, 4 PM</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Gratitude Group, 6 AM</p> <p>NO Community Meal</p> <p>Talking Circle, 7-9 PM</p>	

2024



Thank you to Helen Crandall and Sallie Anderson for heading up the Crop Walk.

Gaylord First Congregational United Church of Christ raised \$1,552.00 . That total combined with monies raised by other churches and organizations totaled \$9,140.00. The Otsego County CROP Hunger Walk made a big difference this year!

United Northern Association Michigan Conference UCC
Fall Meeting – November 1, 2024 – 3:00pm
Crystal Mountain Resort, Thompsonville, Michigan

- ~Rev. Vaughn Peterson, Moderator, called the meeting to order at 3:18pm
- ~Rev. Jeffrey Rhodes opened with a prayer by St. Teresa of Avila, who was a woman contemplative spirit and a church reformer.
- ~Registrar, Rev. Alison Young, called the Roll. There were seven (7) churches represented; nine (9) Clergy; Nine (9) delegates; Eleven (11) Guests and Three (3) Youth.
- ~Moderator Peterson handed out Certificates of Recognition for Ordination Anniversaries. The ones of those not present will be mailed.
- ~An All-Saints worship and candle lighting service was conducted by Rev. Patty Higgins and Rev. Alison Young.
- ~The Business meeting continued as follows:

Conference Board of Directors Report: Rev. Jeff Rhodes presented this first as he had to attend another meeting. He commended Rev. Liz Larrivee, President of the Board, for her leadership as the new chair of their meetings. Currently the Board is working on personnel policy renewal. The policies were last updated in 2011. The Board voted to keep 90% of OCWM money in the state and to only send 10% to the National setting. He encouraged all UNA churches to send information about events and programs to him to funnel them to Jenn Ringgold to be included in the Michigan Conference Monthly newsletter.

Minutes of the Spring Meeting: Eric Becks moved and Helen Crandall seconded Approval of the minutes, PASSED.

Treasurer's Report: Dave Engel presented the Treasurer's Report. There should be \$330 per capita dues added to that line item. We were close in revenue and well under in expenses. The question was asked as to how long our Association is committed to the support of the New Waves new church start. This question was referred to the executive committee. We will have General Synod expenses in 2025 and then it will be three years until the next Synod. Dave will send statements out next week to the churches.

Committee on Ministry: Kristine A. Hahn's ecclesiastical council is set for Sunday, November 17th at 3pm at the Benzonia UCC. At the first of the year the committee is shifting their focus from MID's, who have all been successfully shepherded through the system, to periodic vocational support conversations with clergy.

ACM Report: Rev. Richardson was not present.

Moderator's Report: As presented.

UNA Fall 2024 Meeting Minutes – Page 2

Patty Higgins moved and Liz Hoy seconded the acceptance of all reports as presented. PASSED.

2025 Budget: The 2025 Proposed Budget was reviewed. It was moved by Carol Rackow and seconded by Helen Crandall to approve the 2025 Budget as Presented. PASSED.

2025 Nomination Report: The Nominating Report was presented. Since the UNA no longer has a UCC Women of Northern Michigan (as noted in the minutes of the Spring meeting), Carol Rackow was nominated to fill the 3 year at-large term on the Executive Committee. No more nominations to fill the four other vacancies were heard from the floor. Corrections: Patty Higgins is serving the 3rd year of her 2nd Term, and Tom Orth is from the Gaylord church. With these additions and corrections to the report, it was moved by Rev. John Doud and seconded by Rev. Tom Orth to accept the slate as amended. PASSED. (See Attached)

As a point of information, current Treasurer, Dave Engel, and newly elected Treasurer, Catherine Clifford, announced that they would be taking care of transferring the books of the Association in the next couple of weeks.

Moderator, Rev. Vaughn Peterson adjourned the meeting at 4:25pm/

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Alison Andrea Young
Registrar/Secretary



Snowbird Zoom Coffee Hour!



Beginning in December, we will host a zoom coffee hour so that all of us can stay in touch with our snowbirds, and people who are unable to travel to church! Anyone can join! For those of us at the church, we will set up a computer in Fellowship Hall just as fellowship starts and have a chance to check in with our snowbirds.

This will occur on the second of the month (starting December 8 through April 12) at about 11AM Eastern Time.

The zoom link will always be: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81144435007>

We hope you'll join us! The link will be shared in the weekly eblast in case you misplace it.

THE REFUGE

We received the following thank-you card from The Refuge:



Pastor Sue, Vicky, Cathy and all
the good people of First Congregational
Thank you for all your help -
facility use, donations, books, Sunday
Communications & delicious P&S
Sandwiches & apples. You are
wonderful and your flexible and
ever present desire to help is
appreciated. Our awareness campaign
was good in part because of
caring & caring people like you.
Thank you in behalf of The Refuge
and the Laminated Book Project



Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays:

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

Anniversaries:

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

RISE TOGETHER

Maamwi gaabwedaa ji ne-nishing kina gego

Let's rise together and bring an end to domestic abuse.
Reach out, speak up, and support those affected.



Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians
Survivor Outreach Services

Call Monday through Friday 8-5: 231-242-1620
24/7 StrongHearts Native Helpline: 1-844-762-8483
ltbbodawa-nsn.gov



Women's Resource Center of Northern Michigan
Advocacy • Counseling • Support • Safe Home

24-Hour Help and Information Line:
231-347-0082 or 1-800-275-1995
wrcnm.org

Less than 1% of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians Survivor Outreach Services Family Violence Prevention and Services Assistance Grant will be financing this project; total Family Violence Prevention and Services Act Grant: 360,824; and 0% 50 non-federal sources utilized.



2024 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.*

~ In Our Prayers ~

During the month of December the UNA is holding the [First](#) Congregational UCC in Manistee in prayer.

Cheboygan First Congregational UCC – as, due to budget shortfalls, they may be looking at closing their church permanently in the coming months.

Mary Peterman – as she undergoes some medical testing.

George Dunn – as he is recovering from recent surgery and is currently at McReynolds Hall.

Jim, Vicky Rigney's brother – as he recently had emergency heart surgery.

Stacy Wright – Stacy has been facing metastatic breast cancer. She has begun a new chemotherapy cycle. All prayers are appreciated.

Trish Jachym – Prayers for healing, as she is dealing with some health concerns and will be returning to her home soon.

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

Gloria House's granddaughter, Madison Crawford – as she suffers from cataplexy in narcolepsy along with other neurological struggles. Additionally, they have discovered that she has white blood cells in her cornea, which results in pain and swelling. It will also affect her vision. She is still in need of our prayers.

Laura Bantens' partner, Chris Crumbaugh – continued prayers for Laura and Chris as they adapt to the new medical issues Chris is facing.

Ariah House – (from Diane House) Ariah had her last in-hospital treatment in December 2023. She is doing great. I have to take her back to DeVos in March for the next step, providing she doesn't relapse. With this OMAS disease, there is a 50% - 75% chance of relapse. We are only going to focus on the wins. ☒ Keep the prayers coming. God Bless you all. We really miss our church families.

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

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



Thankful to be the Church in a Purple State

By Lillian Daniel

Michigan Conference Minister

To any pastors or church members struggling to love each other in a politically diverse church, I want to tell you that this may be the most important ministry you ever do. God is still speaking and you never know who God will speak through next.

After the election, I hosted a reflection for our pastors and church members. There wasn't much shock about the results—after all, we live in Michigan, where the country's division is our local reality, embedded in our towns and within our churches. But there were a few pastors feeling surprised, scared, and rewriting their sermons for that Sunday.

My heart went out to them because they reminded me of myself, back in 2016, as a pastor who had recently moved to Dubuque, Iowa, from Illinois and was also truly shocked at those 2016 election results. Little did I know that, in the weeks that followed, I would discover my new Iowa congregation was much more politically diverse than I'd imagined. My carefully planned 2016 post-election sermon, as well as my long-scheduled, pastorally sensitive "drop-in" hours the day after the election, were all based on the idea that I would be comforting Republicans—not the other way around!

I had nothing to give at that post-election drop-in other than some soggy donuts (I'd probably been crying over them in the car) and the deeper struggle within myself: if I could have been so wrong about predicting the election results in Iowa and about understanding the deeply held views of my church members, was I equally wrong about my call from God to serve there? I think I basically told them all that in my sermon that week, which may have been way too much information for some church members who told me "We really didn't want to hear who you voted for, Pastor!" There were a few lonely moments that winter of 2016 when I thought about packing my bags, but I'm so glad I didn't. That purple congregation in the swing state of Iowa ended up being my sweetheart church. Pastors, you know what I'm talking about.

Eight years later, I'm now living in my second swing state and I am so grateful to be your Michigan Conference Minister, a pastor to pastors, responsible for the care of our congregations. I came here with my eyes open, thanks to a plain-spoken search committee who helped me to understand that despite a national news cycle full of unavoidable stories about Michigan militias and pandemic pandemonium, this complicated and diverse swing state is a very special place to be.

So after this recent election, I don't feel shocked and therefore perhaps not as much pain or disappointment as others do in the United Church of Christ family. I am blessed to be here for such a time as this.

I am not shocked because two years into my conference ministry here in Michigan, I've spent many weekends visiting churches in a variety of struggling urban, rural, and suburban areas where the economic lives of the working poor and unemployed haven't been uplifted by either political party. And I've also visited scenic towns suddenly "booming and prosperous" for tourists and those with vacation homes they insist on calling "simple cottages" or "rustic cabins."

In these areas, rents have doubled, and owning even one home has become unaffordable for so many locals that some literally move into tents for the summer to rent out their trailers and scrape by on tips from serving the “simple cottage” people. These folks can sit on the lake and say with a straight face that the economy is in good shape, based on mega-statistics, because their lake lives aren’t devastated by the cost of cars or groceries. So, this election result comes as no surprise to me. The day after the election didn’t feel too different from the day before. Which is not to say it doesn’t matter.

If anything, I feel like I’ve been pre-grieving this expected result for the last two years, steeling myself to lead in Christ’s church—a church whose power does not depend on whatever mediocrity comes next from a two-party political system that persistently betrays and destroys the hopes of the struggling while assuaging the guilt of the greedy, all from two platforms crafted to appear different yet ultimately two sides of the same stage where powers and principalities perform an outdated play for their own amusement. While I do wish the other team had won, I’ll never be a fan of this theater. Nor will I look to it for my salvation.

The Sunday after the election, I worshipped with Fellowship Chapel that has literally built a village in the city of Detroit. Rev. Wendell Anthony gave an inspiring message that put our current moment in the context of decades of history and progress. And when I brought my own greetings to that church from the wider United Church of Christ, I told them that the weekend before the election, we hosted our annual meeting up in Northern Michigan where our keynote speaker was the first black woman General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson

So now that I go back and read what I wrote where this post began, I realize I’m feeling more than I initially thought. Beneath my professional commitments as your Michigan Conference Minister, lie personal and more tender reflections. I am the parent of a trans child who is currently trying to plan their wedding at a church camp in rural Illinois. Like many of you who love the church and live in the public square, I’m a mix of “I saw it all coming” and “I feel everything,” in a moment where churches are one of the few places that people who have differing views on politics actually sit together and worship something other than themselves.

Keep at it, Michiganders. I’m thankful for you all.

Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel
Michigan Conference Minister

Thank you!



Thank you to each and every one of you who helped get the church ready for the Community Thanksgiving service as well as preparing our sanctuary for the Christmas season shortly thereafter. A special thanks to Mary Sanders for bringing in her Thanksgiving figurines. What a beautiful contribution!



The Christmas Fund (also called the Veterans of the Cross) is one of the 5 special offerings our church supports each year. We will receive this offering throughout the month of December.

For over one hundred years, The Christmas Fund has provided direct financial assistance to the healers in all our lives: retired and active UCC ministers, church workers, and their families. You are part of the community of The Christmas Fund, whether you donate at Christmastime, benefit directly from our grant or leadership programs, or simply believe in our mission to help secure the financial foundation of those engaged in the life of the church.

The Christmas Fund was here for them. And regardless of who you are or what brought you to the United Church of Christ, The Christmas Fund is here for you. Your gift is more than just a testament to your belief in the values of the United Church of Christ, it is a critical lifeline for those who depend on our grant programs for care and support.

Please consider donating today to ensure more healers receive the loving support of the Church in their moment of deepest need. Your contributions to the Christmas Fund can be made by:

- using the QR code below
- by noting Christmas Fund on your check or envelope that's sent to the church
- Or by going online to the church's website firstuccgaylord.org and clicking the "Donate Now" button at the very bottom of the home page.

This Christmas, celebrate the blessings in your life by making a gift to our ministers, church workers, and their families.

Visit christmasfund.org to learn more and donate online.



Donate Online Here!

Thank you again for your generosity.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Christmas Potluck— This year's Christmas potluck is scheduled for December 15th, immediately following worship.. Sign up in Fellowship Hall.

Christmas Caroling—Christmas caroling will happen after the potluck on December 15th. All are welcome.

Christmas Season – The Christmas season is in full swing. If you are interested in lighting the advent candle, please sign up in Fellowship Hall.

Snowbird Coffee Hour Zoom: The first Snowbird coffee hour will take place this Sunday at 11:15 AM from December 8th to April 12th. This Zoom link will not change. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81144435007>

Shoes, shoes, shoes! North Ohio Elementary School's shoe fundraiser is underway and the box is in Fellowship Hall. This program is just one month long, so the sooner we can fill boxes, the better! Thank you for considering this opportunity to help.

Estimate of Giving forms – remaining forms can be turned in to the office.

Snow Removal – We need people to help with the sidewalks throughout the winter. If you are interested in helping or have questions about what

this work entails, please see Pastor Greg.

Join us for lunch! – a group of people from our church family meet for

lunch on the third Tuesday of each month. Everyone is welcome! Please

join us. The next scheduled lunch is this Tuesday, December 17th, at the Big Buck. Sign up in Fellowship Hall if you would like to attend.

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.

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.

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

Reaching Out meeting link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83640729481>





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: \$378 (2024)

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: \$495 (2024)

Strengthen the Church

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

Collected around Pentecost

Received to date: \$329

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: \$256 (2023)

Christmas Fund

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

Collected in December

Received to date: \$694 (2023)

Blanket Sunday, 2024

Received to date: \$936





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>