

Bethlehem
United Church of Christ

The **Visitor**
May 2016

an invitation to grow in spirit and serve with joy



“Graduating through Grace”

Rev. John L. Kennedy

On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean."

Acts 10:28-29

Graduation! Do you remember yours? Where and when was your significant graduation? Was it high school, college, trade school, military boot camp? Do you remember when you first started the journey and how you felt to be a freshman or a recruit? Did

the task seem so far away and as if it would never arrive? Did you some days have doubts if you would make it through successfully? And when you did graduate, were you feeling a sense of accomplishment, pride, and relief? Do you remember if your relatives and parents felt proud of you and relieved?

I never quite got the knack of high school. I was not focused or disciplined with my studies. When my older sister graduated from high school, she graduated "summa cum laude." I graduated "thank you, Lord-y." The summer after graduation I completed "boot camp" for the U.S. Army Reserve in 1980, at Ft. Knox, and off I went to a state university. My first year of college was so

bad that I took a couple of years off and worked in power-line construction. I finally found my way to junior college. I worked full-time and went to school 3/4 time. I started to "get" the school thing and did better. I spent the next 12 years as a cop in Austin, Texas. So many twist and turns and so many kinds of graduations, college at age 37, and then seminary at age 42. There are always new challenges and adventures to be faced and experienced. Life is full of many kinds of graduations: confirmation, marriage, parenting, grandparenting, promotions, training, etc.

The etymology of *graduation* is from the Latin "gradus," meaning "a step or degree."

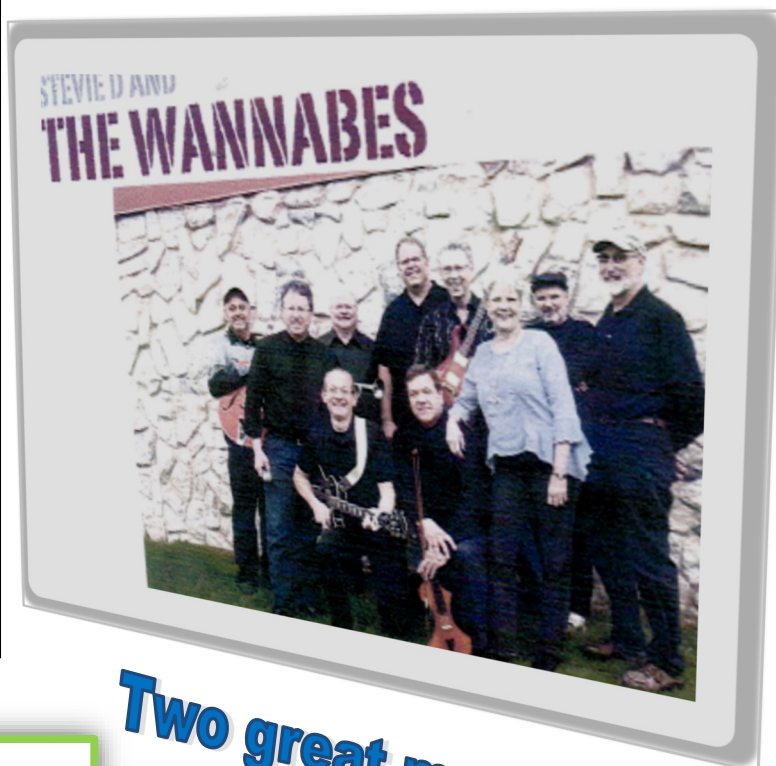
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**A Benefit for
Groundcover News
Friday, May 6, 7-10 pm**

**Club Above
at the Heidelberg (18+)
215 N. Main St., Ann Arbor
Suggested donation: \$10
Tickets sold at the door
or in advance at
groundcovernews@gmail.com.**



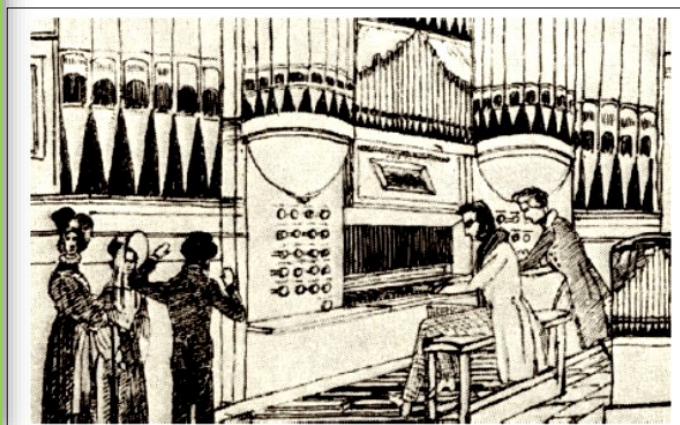
**Two great music events
featuring our own
Bethlehem musicians!**

**Mendelssohn Sonatas
Gail and Andrew Jennings**



Bethlehem United Church
423 S 4th Ave. Ann Arbor
Sunday, May 15 2016 at 4 pm

Organ Sonata #1 in F minor,
Sonata #2 in C minor (arranged for violin & Organ)
Sonata for violin and Piano in F major
Organ Sonata #6 in D minor



June Visitor deadline



**Deadline
May 25**

**To be printed
June 1**

BETHLEHEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
423 S. Fourth Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104
Phone 734-665-6149 Fax 734-665-3399

www.bethlehem-ucc.org



www.facebook.com/bethlehemucca2



www.pinterest.com/bethlehemucca2



www.youtube.com/user/BethlehemChurchA2

There are some great Community Outreach Opportunities coming up. Please see page 11 for full details.

WHAT IS ISLAM ALL ABOUT

Monday, May 23, 7pm & Tuesday, May 24, 1 pm

Please join Pastor Greg for this discussion about Islam and Christianity, in the Schmale Lounge.

Gardening Angels
Breakfast and Planting
Friday, May 20, 9 - 12



Please join us as we enjoy a light breakfast together and plant the beautiful flowers that were donated as **Mother's Day Memorials and Honorariums**. Together, let us celebrate Spring by bringing new life to our church grounds for all to enjoy!

Sunday, May 22
After the 10 am service,
in the Sanctuary.



A Congregational Meeting will be taking place to vote on the **Covenant of Welcome** and to designate Bethlehem an open and Affirming congregation. (see page 8 for more details)

Sunday, June 5

From Fellowship/Education Ministry



An end of Sunday School picnic in the backyard

+

Graduate Recognition Sunday

(Please contact the office with graduate names)

(see page 7 for more details)



CONFIRMATION CLASS 2016

Saturday, May 14

The 2016 Confirmation Class will present their Statements of Faith

May 15

Confirmation Sunday

(see page 7 for more details)

Armed Forces Veterans' Luncheon

Wednesday, May 25

11:30 am in the Fellowship Hall

(sponsored by the

Fellowship Ministry Team)

If you have not already signed up and wish to attend, contact

Tom Ziesemer at

ziesemern@gmail.com.



May Pretzels



May 14/15

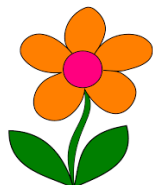
Holy Roller Pretzel sales, 10:30 - 12 and Sunday after each service

May 27

Parking Lot Pretzels sales, 11-2

Come on out and be a Pretzel Roller!!

Call the office to place a pretzel order.



Mary Martha Bible Study
May 10, 10:00

Auxiliary/Mother's Study

May 18, 1:00

Celebrating birthdays with a salad potluck



2016 BETHLEHEM CHURCH TIGERS OUTING

Sunday, July 17

Reservations are now being taken.

We have a block of excellent seats reserved for the Sunday, July 17, Tigers game against the defending World Champion Kansas City Royals. Scheduled game time is 1:10 p.m.

We plan to depart from Bethlehem following the 10:00 a.m. worship and return to the church right after the game. Your \$46 gets you a ride to and from Comerica Park in a luxury coach, your game ticket, lunch and beverages aboard the bus on the way to the game, other surprise items, and great fellowship.



Contact Brian Paton to make your reservation:

734.635.9204 or bapaton@hotmail.com.

The bus has 52 available seats.

Your payment reserves your seat.

“Graduating through Grace” by Pastor John (Continued from page 1)

It is further defined as “a tempering, a refining of something to a certain degree.” God is continuously refining and working for good in all situations and in spite of bad ones. Where is God calling you to new graduations? According to Scripture, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and Samson all graduated into new understandings and walked in new light. “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature”; God enlightened Jesus along the way. The same was true for the disciples (*disciple* means *student, learner of a teacher*). They started out as ordinary men and women who followed Jesus in the faith. They followed, observed, learned, practiced, bumbled, stumbled, denied, and ran away. But Jesus was never sorry for having chosen them because he believed in God and believed in them.

In the Scripture from Acts 10, we hear the story of how the disciples began doing the very things they saw Jesus do. Where they once ran, they now stuck. Where they once just watched and learned, they were now healing, teaching, and transforming lives. Yet their lives continued to be shaped by new challenges and new revelations that helped them graduate to a new level closer to “The Way” of Jesus.

In this story, Peter (the same Peter who denied he even knew Christ) is doing the things that Jesus taught, and yet, he still has more to learn. Peter had been summoned to go to the house of Cornelius, a Roman Army official and a gentile. As a good Jew, Peter knew what the Bible said about not associating with people and things that were considered unclean. That night Peter had a dream/vision. In that dream, God revealed to Peter all manner of foods forbidden by many Scriptures. God tells Peter to eat and Peter says, “No, Scripture tells me I cannot.” God says, “Do not call something unclean if God has made it clean” (Acts 10:15-16). In other words, God is saying, “I’m telling you, there is a new understanding of Scripture that negates the old.” There is a new learning curve to graduate into. (Many times Jesus said, “You have seen it written in Scripture...but I tell

you do this...instead,” such as when Jesus says, “You have heard it said an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I tell you, love your enemies, do not take vengeance into your own hands.”)

In Acts, the disciples had graduated to a new level of understanding and faithfulness. When Peter goes to Cornelius’s home, Cornelius bows on the floor, considering himself unclean and unworthy. Peter says,

“You know it is against our laws [scripture] for a Jewish man to enter a Gentile home like this or to associate with you. But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean.” (Acts 10:28)

Where is God calling you to grow by degree and graduate to a new level of understanding? Where is God calling the people of Bethlehem UCC to grow and graduate into the new fresh thing that God is doing in and through our congregation? There are many new, meaningful, and exciting things God is already graduating us into. And I mean many things!

On May 22, 2016, our congregation will meet to prayerfully discern where God is leading us in our vote to become an “Open and Affirming” congregation. Each of us must discern prayerfully what God would have us choose. I hear Peter, “But God has shown me that I should no longer think of anyone as impure or unclean” (Acts 10:28), as we graduate in grace and through God’s grace, “All the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people.”

“And each day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

“So the churches were strengthened in faith and grew daily in numbers” (Acts 16:5).

God’s blessings and love,

Pastor John

WORSHIP MINISTRY TEAM

Harriette Ehnis

Our ministry team is still rejoicing in our glorious Easter resurrection services. Led by our pastors, many hands helped to prepare our worship spaces to be beautiful and meaningful. Aside from our regularly scheduled planning meetings, our ministry team held a focus group to start exploring creative ways to worship our God. We began our first session probing this question: What do you hope to experience during worship? The following are just a few descriptive words that evoked a great deal of discussion:



- ◆ something to remember, carry through the week
- ◆ singular, repeated message
- ◆ participation by the congregation
- ◆ connection

The Creative Worship Focus Group plans on meeting again and would encourage others who might be interested (all ages) to consider participating. Current participants are Pastor John, Arianne Abela, Sarah Herwick, Matt McCoy, Tom Ziesemer, Jane Ziesemer, and E.J. Vasquez.

Please contact Harriette Ehnis for future meeting dates and details.

CPR UPDATE

Marion Caswell and Harriette Ehnis

Our ministry teams were very pleased that 30 people responded to our invitation to learn or review their “Hands-Only CPR” skills. Staff, ushers, volunteers, and several youth had “fun” honing their skills. Julie Sigda from the Red Cross gave information in a very succinct way.

The purpose of the program was to prepare attendees to function in church, at home, and in our community when an emergency cardiac response is required.

REMEMBER:

Anyone can be helpful by calling 911 and directing EMS to the emergency situation.

If the emergency occurs on our church property, immediately obtain the Automatic Emergency Defibrillator (AED) after carrying out the first two steps.

The AED is located on the first floor by the drinking fountain across from the library.



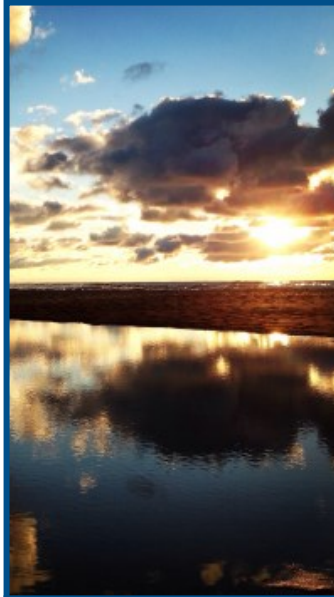
Going Beyond One Person's Vision

By Pastor Greg Briggs

This past weekend our Confirmation class had its spring retreat at Tower Hill Camp and Retreat Center. Of course, I can't speak for the youth, but I found it to be a powerful experience. It always is. I feel blessed to be able to be with people as they wrestle with powerful questions about their faith. This year, the focus question was "what do you believe in so much you are willing to stand up for it?" I hope everyone makes an effort to be with our confirmands on May 15 when they become full members of the church and takes time to read their testimonies.

However, this article isn't about our confirmands, but where we went on retreat. Before I came to Bethlehem, I was the interim Site Manager at Tower Hill. I spent almost three years at the camp during a period of transition. To sum up a lot of complex issues quickly, Tower Hill and its governing body, the Outdoor Ministries of the Illinois conference of the UCC, were wrestling with how to improve its summer camp experience while also growing into becoming a year-round retreat center for a wide range of groups: youth and adult, as well as faith-based and secular groups. It was a time of strong opinions and some serious decisions. I am proud of the work we and I did during this time, but not everyone would agree.

I've been back to Tower Hill multiple times since I finished working there. It has been long enough for changes to happen but frequent enough that I've been able to see a progression of changes instead of everything happening all at once. Some of the changes were ones that I'd helped initiate. The two that stick out in my mind are the camp's tag line "Out of the Ordinary, into the Sacred" and the development of the conservation easement that protected the



*Out of the Ordinary
Into the Sacred*

hiking trails, established a capital improvements fund, and created a series of signs on the hiking trails telling the natural and spiritual history of the protected space.

This time at Tower Hill was the first time that the improvements had gone beyond what I had imagined. I realized I no longer knew what was coming next, and so I was able to be pleasantly surprised again and again. I was impressed by new and vibrant signs on the grounds, the changes in the building we stayed in, and the vast improvements in the dining hall. When I was working there, we were debating whether the dining hall should be renovated or replaced, because the number of improvements needed were getting so large. Well, the dining hall was renovated, and the renovations were

spectacular. The décor, the lights, and the fans were all greatly improved. The tables were now set with cloth table covers and full-place settings versus the plastic checkered table cloths and picking up dishes at the front of the buffet line. Also, the mess hall was open 24 hours a day if a person needed coffee, juice, or a light snack. It didn't feel like a summer camp mess hall, but a casual dining establishment. I am quite impressed. What impresses me goes beyond the physical changes into the thoughts, prayers, and spirit that I perceive factoring into these improvements.

These improvements said to me that Tower Hill continues to be a place that always tries to be more welcoming and continues to be a place that is intentionally different from everyday life—a sacred place. I feel the improvements to the dining hall made it much more accessible to two groups that had not felt as welcomed before: adult-aged groups and first time groups.

(Continued on page 7)

"Going Beyond One Person's Vision"

by Pastor Greg

(Continued from page 6)

The signs on the hiking trail combined nature-focused information about specific plants and local ecology with quotes from the Bible and conservationists about the sacredness of nature. In addition, at the various entrances to the hiking trails, there were stone boulders with plaques that marked the area as a conservation easement, accessible to all. It worked well for our group hike, as well as for an individual walk.

This is the same thing that I enjoy seeing here at Bethlehem and want to encourage more and more. I love seeing the spirit move us to changes that go beyond us as individuals. Although camps, retreat centers, and churches all have slightly different focuses, much of the spiritual goals are the same, including being welcoming and a different, sacred, space. The changes that bring in this spirit can be large and small. I think of the focus we are putting into our bathrooms, including adding changing tables for our youngest visitors and members. I think of the work our ministry teams are doing to live into the new goals given in our bylaws. I think of the work that our leadership council is doing with visioning for the church overall. Most important, I think of the ways each of us, as individual members of this body of Christ, create ways to make this church community be an expression of Christ's love, welcome, sacrifice, healing, and resurrection.

So, how have you seen this congregation go beyond your own vision for Christ's kin-dom?



Education Ministry Team News

Heartfelt thanks to all of you who contributed to our Veterans Mission Project. We were able to put together 45 snack kits to bring to the VA Administration. We also collected more than 40 undershirts and 40 boxers/briefs.

We raised \$400 from our Palm Sunday cookie sales. Thank you for all the help with cookie frosting, decorating, and sales. We had youth from ages 3 to adults in their 60s who helped. We even had Pastor John helping with frosting and boxing. A special thanks to Paul and Barb Marshall who donated the supplies and spent an afternoon baking to get the cookies ready for us.

We plan to use our money toward our next project: garden fencing for the Saline Evangelical Home. Diana Slaughter has been coordinating the Youth Mission projects this year and is working with the Evangelical Home to see how we can best assist. Stay tuned for more information.

Confirmation is coming up soon. Our youth will plan to have their Statements of Faith on Saturday, May 14, at 5:00 p.m. followed by a dinner with their families and church officers. The youth will be confirmed on Sunday, May 15, at the 10:00 service. May 15 is Pentecost. Come celebrate with our new confirmands!

Adult education classes just finished up with Pastor John leading two sessions of a course called *Living the Questions*. He plans to have more classes in the fall and is open to suggestions for classes and topics.

We will be celebrating the end of the Sunday School year with a hot dog/veggie dog lunch in the backyard on Sunday, June 5. The Fellowship Ministry will help provide the food, and we will help provide fun and games. Pray for nice weather!

Jane Schmerberg, Education Ministry Team Chair

FROM BETHLEHEM'S OPEN AND AFFIRMING TASK FORCE



Open and Affirming Vote to Take Place May 22

The Open and Affirming (ONA) Task Force is excited to announce that we will soon vote on whether to accept our new Covenant of Welcome and designate Bethlehem an openly welcoming church to our LGBTQ friends and families.

We have engaged the congregation over the past year and a half with:

- a film/discussion series
- “LGBTQ 101” with staff from the U-M Spectrum Center
- Bible studies on the so-called clobber passages
- group and individual conversation and question sessions
- an informative and moving panel discussion
- Visitor articles
- a bulletin board by the 4th Ave. entrance

We created a Covenant of Welcome that was presented to the Leadership Council on March 8, 2016, and unanimously approved to go to the congregation for a vote. Here is the Covenant of Welcome:

We, at Bethlehem United Church of Christ, declare ourselves an Open and Affirming congregation where we celebrate Christ's extravagant love. We covenant with God and one another to welcome the diverse tapestry of all people, no matter their age, race, nationality, ethnicity, economic circumstance, marital or family status, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. We invite everyone—believers and questioners, seekers and skeptics—to share their gifts in the life, leadership, ministry, fellowship, worship, sacraments, responsibilities, and blessings of our congregation.

On May 22, immediately following the 10 o'clock service, President Sue Buday and the Leadership Council will oversee the voting process. The vote is open to any member of Bethlehem Church, and you are encouraged to attend. The task force is willing and anxious to still hold conversations and answer any questions you may have.

If the vote to accept the Covenant of Welcome and officially become Open and Affirming is approved, we will have a celebration the following Sunday, May 29.

We pray for continued love and respect for one another.

The ONA Task Force: Co-chairs Jessica Joslin and Cresson Slotten, along with Sue Wortman, Jamie Dylenski, Harriette Ehnis, Jane Schmerberg, Kurt Schmerberg, Nancy Nicholson, Jennifer Vasquez, Mary Jean Raab, Tim Mummaw, and Patti Maki

**COMING
SOON
TO
BETHLEHEM**

★

**A NEW
PICTORIAL
DIRECTORY**

Bethlehem's
Member
Care Team
is excited to
announce that
plans for a new
Bethlehem
Pictorial
Directory
are now in place.

Lifetouch Studio
photographers
will be coming to
Bethlehem
June 1,2,3,6,7

You will be able
to sign up for
your picture day
starting May 8.

***Looking forward
to seeing
your smiles!***

PRESERVE YOUR MEMORIES

Printed professional portraits endure for generations

**Be a part of our upcoming
photography event.**

Be yourself. Classic,
casual, musical, sporty, fun...
it's up to you!

Make it special. Bring
meaningful items and
special people too!

Share your story with family
and friends. Portraits make
great gifts.

**Schedule your portrait session
today! Details in the bulletin.**



Each family receives a complimentary 8x10
and a free directory for participating!
You will have the opportunity to purchase
additional portraits for yourself, family and friends.



Lifetouch®

Connecting You through
Family Photography

300-01621
Rev 9/15



MEMORIALS & GIFTS

HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Norman Haeussler Memorial

PARSONAGE RENOVATION FUND

John & Gertie Fischer 63rd Wedding Anniversary
Honorarium

PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT FUND

Margaret Deverick Memorial

Martha Ebinger Memorial

Al Paul Memorial

RADIO SPONSORSHIPS

April 3 In loving memory of **Henry and Ida Finkbeiner** from her daughters **Caroline and Joyce**.

April 10 In loving memory of **Frederick and Lela Keppler** on what would have been Dad's 100th birthday on April 11, with love **from the family**.

April 17 In loving memory of **Reid Helbig** for his April 14th birthday with love from his mother, **Alethea Helbig**

April 24 In loving memory of **Harold R. Helbig** in remembrance of his birthday on April 23 by his widow, **Alethea Helbig**.

*Gifts listed were received through
April 30, 2016*



PARISH RECORDS

MARRIAGES

Tim Mummaw and Matt McCoy

April 2, 2016

EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS

2016/2017

DEADLINE IS MAY 29

Scholarship



Members of Bethlehem are eligible for Educational Scholarships. These are open to any qualified member attending full-time at an approved accredited University, College or Seminary for work on either the undergraduate or graduate level.

Application forms may be obtained in the Church Office, downloaded from the website, or by emailing Carol Leyshock at: CarolLeyshock@Bethlehem-UCC.org

Giving Envelopes Versus Online Giving

*If you are **not receiving** the Bethlehem giving envelopes in the mail and would like to, please call the church office: 734-665-6149.*

*If your major giving is done electronically and you would like to **opt out** of receiving the personal offering envelopes in the mail, please let us know and we would be glad to take you off the list.*

Thank you for supporting Bethlehem financially!



Ongoing Outreach Opportunities at Bethlehem Church

Please consider joining in!
Sign-up sheets are in the office hallway.



ALPHA HOUSE OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY Thursday June 9, 5:30 and 6:45

Volunteers are needed to make dishes and serve dinner to families using Alpha House for temporary shelter, food and support services.

5:30 - Dinner

6:45 - After dinner kid's activities

Please email Stacey Stites at
rickandstace@comcast.net if you can help out.

FOOD GATHERERS COMMUNITY KITCHEN

**Next two dates are May 1 and June 5
(First Sunday of the Month)**

Please sign up in the office hallway.

Cook 12-2:30, Clean 2:30-5

PEACE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER Next date is May 24

(4th Tuesday, during school year)

AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM 2:30 - 4:30

Serve nutritious snacks for kids in
after school tutoring.

Plus Fresh Food Distribution Fridays, from 9-12

FOOD GATHERERS FOOD BARREL

Bring non-perishable items at any time, and
place them in the food barrel in the library.

OUTREACH

Outreach Ministry Grants Awarded for 2016

This year Outreach was able to divide \$14,000 between several organizations. Each organization received a grant of \$1,750 for the year. Bethlehem has long-standing relationships with these organizations. The grants went to:

**Alpha House
Food Gatherers
Friends in Deed
Hope Clinic
Peace Neighborhood Center
Safe House
Shelter Association
St. Vincent DePaul**

If you would like to get involved with any of these organizations, please contact Monique Hunter (734) 429-7490.

UCC Justice and Advocacy *Monique Hunter, Outreach ministry*

Did you know that the United Church of Christ is involved in justice and advocacy? I did not know this until someone from outside the church mentioned that the UCC has a lot of fantastic information on the website. UCC has been involved in justice since the 1960's with the Civil Rights Movement.

Go to www.ucc.org. The middle of the page has a section called advocate for justice. Click on "get involved". This takes you to the advocate for justice page. You can see what UCC is involved in if you click on Understanding the Issues. Issues range from education and environmental to civil and human rights, economic justice, health and much more.

Also, on the Advocate for Justice page you can subscribe to the Justice and Peace Action Network. (JPAN) Then you will receive alerts periodically. It is a great way to get involved!

Peace Neighborhood Center Outreach 2015-16



As the 2015-16 school year draws to a close, I want to thank all of the Bethlehem volunteers who volunteered at Peace Neighborhood Center this year.

The After-School Program volunteers were:

Jacquie Katz
Judi Tappe
Myrna Pancost
Kathy Warner
Cheryl Grant
Harriette & Mike Ehnis
Carole Katz
Pam Widmayer
Pat O'Reilly
Caroline Wright
Kelly, Kathryn & Lauren Wilkie

Four members of our congregation faithfully volunteered on every Friday morning they were available for the Fresh Produce Distribution Program at Peace. They were:

Kathy Warner
Dave Gilmore
Robyn Warner Lachman
Diann Pytlak

Thank you again to all of these volunteers! Your commitments to our outreach ministries in our community are commendable. Later in August, I will begin posting information for the 2016-17 school year opportunities at Peace Neighborhood Center

Sue Muir



Did you know that Bethlehem is a 5 for 5 church?

Being **5 for 5** is one sign of congregational vitality in UCC churches that fully support Our Church's Wider Mission.

5 for 5 churches give to these 5 UCC Offerings:

1. **Basic Support** (year round)
2. **One Great Hour of Sharing** took place March 6, 2016
3. **Strengthen the Church** will take place May 15, 2016
4. **Neighbors in Need** will take place October 2, 2016
5. **The Christmas Fund** will take place Dec. 18, 2016

Thank you for your support!

Bethlehem's Ministry Team

Rev. John Kennedy	Pastor
Rev. Greg Briggs	Associate Pastor
Rev. Orval L.E. Willimann	Pastor Emeritus
Carol Leyshock	Parish Administrator
Betty Clark	Financial Administrator
Donna Whitney	Office Support Specialist
Arianne Abela	Director of Music
Gail Jennings	Organist
Jim Rowan	Director of Handbells

The *Visitor*

is printed 12 times a year

Our Mission

To worship God,
To learn and live the Word of God,
To engage in Christian fellowship and service,
To invite others to join us on our faith journey in the ministry of Jesus Christ.