

# "Is 'The End' Near?"

#### Rev. John Kennedy

"However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. And since you don't know when they will happen, stay alert and keep watch." Mark 13:32-33

NASA reported that "on Monday, August 21, 2017, all of North America will be treated to a total eclipse of the sun. Anyone within the <u>path of totality</u> will be able to see one of nature's most aweinspiring sights—a total solar eclipse." The last time there was a total eclipse of the sun across the entire U.S. was in 1918. There was a partial solar eclipse in 1970 (and 1979). Some of us remember making viewers (made of cardboard boxes and

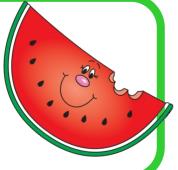
small mirrors) in school so we could watch the event. It was an exciting time to learn about something interesting and rare. Only a year before, in 1969, Neil Armstrong had landed on the moon, and anything having to do with space was a big attraction.

As I was reading about the upcoming solar eclipse on the internet, a link popped up warning that the solar eclipse was "a warning from God of impending doom." This website noted that in 2024 there will be another total solar eclipse crossing the U.S. It stated that where the paths of the eclipses intersect (seven years apart) is the key to the prophecy of the coming wrath of God. On the page there were many incoherent and bizarre comments. Most of the Scriptural passages are ones that have been used for years and always clearly out of context. I found many other websites claiming similar knowledge and visions straight from God.

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Our Faith and Food Garden is growing well.



Tree trimming at the 4th Ave. house



#### **Bethlehem's Tree of Life**



If you are looking for a personal and meaningful gift for a special occasion or person(s), please consider the purchase of a leaf on our Tree of Life, located in the lobby of the 4th Avenue canopy entrance of Bethlehem.

Your leaf will commemorate what is important in your life and the lives of those you love and care about. It will also create a history of our times together here at Bethlehem and help to fund special projects and needs.

Order forms are available in the church office, at the 4th Avenue Welcome Center, or by emailing info@bethlehem-ucc.org.

#### **September Visitor Deadline**



Deadline to submit articles and photos is August 28.

#### 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

# **Upcoming Events & Information (not listed elsewhere)**

#### **CONGREGATIONAL MEETING - August 13**

Plan to stay after the 10:00 service for a Congregational Meeting in the sanctuary. The purpose of this meeting is to approve funds to pay for foundation repairs.

Outreach Events are on pages 8-9

#### The church office will be closed Monday Sept. 4 for Labor Day



After a nice long summer break, pretzel season will soon be here again.



HOLY ROLLER PRETZELS - September 9 Sept. 9 - rolling 9 am, sales 10:30-12 Sept. 10 (Sunday) - sales after each service

Bethlehem Veterans'
Monthly Breakfast
Sept. 1, at 8:30 a.m.
Classic Cup Café, Jackson Rd.



#### **COFFEE CONNECTION**

The Coffee Connection is at 9:15 a.m., **between services**, in the Schmale Lounge now through **September 3**.



#### **GOLF OUTING – SEPTEMBER 10**

Tom Ziesemer

The Bethlehem Fellowship Golf Outing will again take place at Brookside Golf Course in Saline on Sunday, September 10.



Tee off is at 2:30 p.m. The cost is \$30 per golfer and \$10 if you are not golfing but would like to join us for dinner. The team sign-up will be posted outside of the church office on August 20. Please sign up as a twosome or foursome, or just sign up as an individual and you will be placed on a team. All teams will have 4 golfers.



### SUMMER SUNDAY SCHOOL now through August 27

Youth of all ages are welcome to join us for our one-room Sunday school through August 27.

#### FELLOWSHIP MINISTRY TEAM NEWS by Jane Ziesemer

#### COFFEE CONNECTION

Bethlehem Church is a great place to connect with friends, so we are now calling our coffee hour the "Coffee Connection." We hope you like this change and will continue to gather with members and friends for this time of fellowship.

We probably don't want to think about fall yet, but the Fellowship Ministry Team has some fun events planned, so mark your calendars. *Details will follow regarding all of these events.* 

Friday, October 6 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Oktoberfest, 6-9 p.m. (sign-up begins in September) Wednesday, November 1 All Saints Day: Hops and Hallelujahs at Conor O'Neill's, 6-9 p.m.

Sunday, November 12 Veterans' Lunch after church

Friday, December 1 Living Nativity at Bethlehem (see below)

Saturday, December 2 Church Christmas Decorating

Thursday, December 7 Women's Advent Evening, 6:00–8:30 p.m. (see page 11)

#### **Living Nativity** by Tom Ziesemer

Get ready, Bethlehem, to usher in Advent this year with a Living Nativity on Friday, December 1! There will be live animals, Wise Men, the baby Jesus, shepherds, and more. We will be looking for volunteers to sing, narrate, act out parts, and help in other ways. Please plan to join in the fun and excitement as we reenact Christ's birth!



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# EDUCATION MINISTRY TEAM, YOUTH GROUP

## Mark Your Calendars - Football Parking!

Calling all Bethlehem members to help with this important fundraiser! Please sign up on the bulletin board outside the church office to help park cars for Michigan football home games:

Sept 9 at noon (vs. Cincinnati)
Sept 16 at noon (vs. Air Force)
Oct 7 TBA (vs. Michigan State)
Oct 28 at noon (vs. Rutgers) - Homecoming
Nov 4 TBA (vs. Minnesota)
Nov 25 at noon (vs. Ohio State)



#### 21-Day Meditation Experience

Congratulations to the group of Bethlehem members who are participating in the 21-Day Meditation Experience with Oprah and Deepak Chopra! The meditation experience began on July 17 and will conclude August 6. The individuals in the group have practiced meditation individually on a (mostly) daily basis, and the group has communicated through emails and check-in calls. On July 26, we had a yummy potluck at Bethlehem! We're looking into some sort of continuation of this group. Please contact Lily if you'd like to get involved.





#### **Prayer Circle**

Thanks to all who joined the Thursday prayer circles in July!

All are invited to join the Bethlehem Prayer Circle on Thursday, August 10, and Thursday, August 24, at 11:30 a.m. in Schmale Lounge.

If you can't join in person, please join in spirit.

#### Youth group

We've had a relaxed month with youth group! Easy-going BBQs, a visit to Washtenaw Dairy for ice cream, and lots of cards and board games! Thanks for coming out for the fun!



In August, we'll keep it easy-going. In addition to a couple of Ann Arbor activities, we're looking forward to a trip to Cedar Point. Please let Lily know if you're interested in going on this trip!



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# & SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT Lily Tinker Fortel

#### ART FAIR PARKING THANK-YOU

Lily Tinker Fortel

A huge THANK-YOU to everyone who helped with the Art Fair fundraiser in July! We had a big crew making this year a success: Jesse, Alex, Camille, Chloe, Jan, Katie, Abby, Jim, Sallie, Mike, Dindy, Karen, John, Jennifer, Jamie, Jenny, Dan, Erin, John, Karen, John, Barb, Donna, Carol, Tom, and anybody I've missed!! Thank you!



#### Looking Forward - Mark Your Calendars!

Sundays in September

Sunday, September 10: Faith Formation

Sunday -

**Sunday School Kickoff!** 

Details TBA, but mark your calendars for our annual Rally day!



Sunday, September 17:
Habitat Trip report-back
and Cake Auction
fundraiser.

After the 10 a.m. service.

Details to come.



#### Sunday, September 24:

Visit to the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo
Jamie Dylenski has arranged for Bethlehem members to join her class for a



visit to the Toledo Islamic Center! We'll leave Bethlehem around noon; in Toledo, there will be a prayer service, lunch, and a lecture by Dr. Fatima Agha Al-Hayani. More information to come. If you're interested, please sign up outside the church office. This will help us begin planning. There will be a charge for lunch, but don't let that deter you from signing up. Contact Lily for more information.

### August Spiritual Practices Series with Lily

Let's learn together! All are invited to join this easy-going exploration of spiritual practices throughout the month of August.



The series will take place on Wednesdays: August 9, 16, 23, and 30, from 5:30–7:00 p.m.

Come for any or all of the sessions!

A sign-up sheet is located outside the church office. Please let Lily know if you have questions, are planning to participate, or would like to be on the group email list.

#### **Habitat Trip to Flint**

A group of six Bethlehem members are heading to Flint August 6-8. We'll work with the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan and Genesee County Habitat for Humanity.



Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers as we seek to serve the Flint community and build meaningful relationships there. We look forward to reporting on the trip to the broader congregation in September.

#### **Welcoming College Students to Bethlehem**



We're exploring creative ways of welcoming area college students to Bethlehem this fall. Might you be willing to host 2-3 college students for dinner at your home 1-2 times during the fall semester? If this sounds like something you might be interested in or if you'd like more information, please call or email Lily.

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## "Is the end near?" Rev. John Kennedy (Continued from page 1)

I remember many of these same predictions of doom as we approached the year 2000, when the new millennium brought the "Y2K" scare. People hoarded food, water, guns, and ammunition—most were fundamentalist Christians. In 1000 A.C.E., Christians believed that the world would end at the new millennium. When it didn't happen, new cathedrals sprang up all across Europe as a sign of hope. Faith replaced fear.

You may also remember when American Christian radio host Harold Camping stated that the Rapture and Judgment Day would take place on May 21, 2011, and that the end of the world would take place five months later on October 21, 2011. The Rapture, in a specific tradition of premillennial theology, is the taking up into heaven of God's elect people. Camping, who was then president of the Family Radio network, claimed the Bible as his source and said May 21 would be the date of the Rapture and the Day of Judgment "beyond the shadow of a doubt." Across the nation people again hoarded supplies and ammunition, but the event never happened. Popular religious writers such as Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye made hundreds of millions of dollars selling works of fiction predicting the end times. People forgot these books were in the fiction section of every library and believed them to be Biblical, which they were not.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus tells us to do two things: "stay alert" and "keep watch." Let's mention what we should *not* choose to do with end-time predictions. Staying alert and keeping watch is *not* a call to act like survivalists who are in self-preservation mode. Christ calls us to be self-*less* not self-*ish*, which means less of the self and more of others. We are called to deny ourselves and take up our own crosses and follow in "the Way" of Christ. Christ's "Way" was to not flee or fight. "She who tries to save their life will lose it, and she who loses their life for my sake and the sake of the Gospel will find it."

Christ's death paradoxically facilitates his resurrection and newness of life. His way was to be a healing presence in solidarity with others. Christ's love

had no boundaries and no exclusions. So don't flee, fight, hide, become suspicious, or stock up on food and ammunition. This is contrary to what Jesus Christ lived, taught, and expects of us.

Let's mention how we do choose to become followers of "the Way" of Christ. Listen to Christ's words, "No one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows." So the predictions are all bunk, and the motivation is not well meaning but manipulative. Choose not to waste a minute of your time or energy listening to apocalyptic predictions. Instead, choose to hear Jesus and the angels when they express, "Fear not, I bring you good news." No one knows or will know but God, and God alone.

Finally, in Matthew 25:31-40, Jesus tells us what the rock-bottom yardstick is to be faithful followers:

When the Son of Man comes again in all his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate them as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. Then the King will say to those on the right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me." Then these righteous ones will reply, "Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will tell them, "I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!" — Matthew 25:31-40

So choose this day whom/what you will serve. Let us reject fear and the toxic anxiety it creates. Let us choose faith, hope, and love! Enjoy the eclipse!

God loves us all with no take-backs, Pastor John

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#### **FLU VACCINATION CLINIC**

Harriette Ehnis

It doesn't seem possible that it's time to think about flu shots. However, Evangelical Homes of Michigan will offer flu vaccinations at Bethlehem Church on Sunday, September 10, from 7:45–10:30 a.m.

There will be two (2) types of vaccine available: the Standard Tri-valent vaccine and the High-Dose Tri-valent. The Standard Tri-valent vaccine is suitable for anyone age 18 and above. This vaccine protects against the three influenza viruses that research indicates will be most common during the upcoming season. The most common side effects include: soreness, tenderness, and redness and/or swelling at the injection site. Sometimes, headache, muscle aches, fever, nausea, and tiredness occur.

The High-Dose Tri-valent contains 4 times the amount of antigen as the regular vaccine and is only approved for those 65 or older. Whereas it creates a stronger immune response, stronger side effects may occur.

#### **IMPORTANT POINTS**

- It is *essential* that individuals desiring the High-Dose vaccine sign up by September 3 so that an adequate supply will be available. A sign-up sheet will be provided outside the church office.
- Sign-up is not required for the Standard vaccine.
- Bring your Medicare or Medicare Advantage card.
- If you are not eligible for Medicare, a donation of \$15 is suggested; however, no one will be turned away for inability to pay.

Bethlehem Church truly appreciates this opportunity provided by the EHM staff. Encourage your family and friends to take advantage of this convenient clinic on Sunday, September 10.

For further information or questions, please contact Harriette Ehnis.

## VETERANS' MONTHLY BREAKFAST AND NATIONAL VETERANS AWARENESS RIDE

Tom Ziesemer

The Bethlehem veterans' breakfast continues to be a success as we average 14–18 in attendance at the Classic Cup Café on Jackson Road on the first Friday of each month at 8:30 a.m. It is a great time to share stories of the past and present.



Buzz Neeb shared with us his participation in this year's National Veterans Awareness Ride. Each year, bikers from around the country take part in a 10-day ride across America from Sacramento, California, to Washington, D.C. During this ride, they visit veterans' hospitals and homes to spend time with vets and thank them for their service. We thank Buzz for sharing with us this inspirational annual event.



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#### **OUTREACH MINISTRY TEAM**

Laura Seyfried

Bethlehem UCC has a solid history of charity and hands-on volunteering, both locally and beyond. In fact, it is written in our church's core values:

"Reaching out to our members, community, country, and the world through support and service."

Earlier this year, I began my role as the newly elected Outreach Ministry Team chairperson by meeting with our church leadership not only to learn about the history of the ministry, but also to gain insight and input for the near future of Outreach at Bethlehem. We set a goal of concentrating our energy and deepening our impact. One important factor in determining where to focus our energies and monies was to better understand the current needs in our wider community. Outside of spiritual guidance, what are those in need seeking most from our church? Shelter? Food? Safety? How are we able to best meet those needs with the limited resources on hand? Directly funding individuals as they come forth asking for financial aid to cover their needs? Or better yet, connecting the individuals (and families in some cases) with our longtime agency partners already providing the appropriate services? In answer to these questions, we identified four local organizations to

Bethlehem's 2017 "Community Partner Organizations" are:

- \* Alpha House/Interfaith Hospitality Network
- \* Food Gatherers

partner with this year.

- \* Peace Neighborhood Center
- \* SafeHouse Center

These agencies are included on our church's "short list" of contacts for assisting those who enter our house of worship seeking emergency help with access to food, shelter, and safety resources, as well as many other human-service-related needs.

Bethlehem's Outreach Ministry Team is fortunate

to have been entrusted with sharing a portion of our dedicated Outreach funds for many years. We are pleased to announce that each of the four above-mentioned organizations will be sharing in our blessings and will be gifted a one-time contribution of \$3,500 during the calendar year to help support the programming and services the community (and Bethlehem UCC) so confidently relies on.



food gatherers

fighting hunger where we live

furnishings, home building, etc.), and we continue to support them in other

We also recognize there are many other deserving causes (social justice, donations of clothing and

etc.), and we continue to support them in other ways: individual and group R volunteering, special projects, and individual and group fundraisers. The Outreach Ministry Team commends all of the BUCC ministries for their dedication to helping in those in need.



This year we hope that, by selecting fewer partner organizations to work with, the Outreach Ministry Team

will be able to focus our available volunteers' energy to better match our church's beliefs and meet the needs of our surrounding neighborhood.

Identifying the current lead volunteers for our selected partner agencies was the first step in engaging ministry team members (in spirit if not in person). (Continued on page 9)

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#### **Outreach Ministry Team**

(continued from page 8)

**Sue and Roy Muir** are longtime volunteers with Peace Neighborhood Center. Tom Ziesemer (Faith & Food Garden at Bethlehem Cemetery), Mike Haab (produce and nonperishable food collections), and Jamie Dylenski and Ron and Alice Dechert (Community Kitchen volunteers) all are dedicated to the various supported volunteer activities with Food **Outreach Ministry** As the current leader of Bethlehem's unteers) all are dedicated to the various Gatherers. Additional team members include liaisons from other ministry groups including **Sue Wortman** from Leadership Council, as well as staff members Pastor John and Lily Tinker Fortel and engaged congregants like Mary Jean Raab. Of course, there is still plenty of

One way to learn more about opportunities to get involved in the Outreach Ministry is through our web page on the new BUCC website. We are working on getting it completely updated, and we soon hope to highlight all of Bethlehem's outreach work

room for more volunteers to join!

and provide online sign-up sheets for regular volunteer engagement like the upcoming Alpha House/Interfaith Hospitality Network meal program and special events like the annual CROP Walk. The Outreach Ministry Team is also working to bring representatives from each of our funded agencies to share with our congregation a Mission

Moment or short presentation about their work.

Outreach Ministry Team, I invite you to contact me or any other team

member directly with questions or comments about our activities and opportunities. We hope that you will join us in "Reaching out to our members, community, country, and the world through support and service."

Laura Seyfried, 2017 Outreach Ministry Team Chairperson

Team Members: Jamie Dylenski, Lily Tinker Fortel, Pastor John Kennedy, Roy Muir, Sue Muir, Mary Jean Raab, and Sue Wortman.

**Bethlehem Church Ongoing Outreach Opportunities** Please consider joining in! Sign-up sheets are in the office hallway.



#### FOOD GATHERERS COMMUNITY KITCHEN

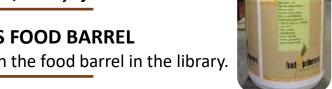
August 6 and September 3 (first Sunday of each month)

Please sign up in the office hallway. Cook 12–2:30, clean 2:30–5.

PEACE NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER (111 N. Maple Rd.) Fresh Produce distribution, Fridays from 9–12.

#### FOOD GATHERERS FOOD BARREL

Place nonperishable food items in the food barrel in the library.



gatherers

#### **ALPHA HOUSE OUTREACH**

August 10 and October 1, 5:30 (dinner) & 6:45 (after-dinner kids' activities)

Make dinner and help with activities for families who are using Alpha House for temporary shelter, food, and support services.



# MEMORIALS & GIFTS

#### **GENERAL MEMORIAL FUND**

Waldemar & Marianne Pollee Memorial

#### PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT FUND

Ron Gentner Memorial

Gifts listed were received through July 31, 2017

#### PARISH RECORDS

#### **DEATHS**

Eunice Koch July 28, 2017

#### **BAPTISMS**

Logan Wilk-Krell July 16, 2017

# RADIO BROADCAST SPONSORSHIPS

#### July 2

This Radio Broadcast was sponsored in memory of Lois M. Haeussler's birthday, July 4, 1931, from her loving family and friends.

#### **CEMETERY** by Sallie Stadel

Have you seen our new website?

WOW!



**Go to www.bethlehemcemetery.net and check it out!** Carl Waltjen generously spent untold hours and lent his expertise to updating the map of the cemetery and generating a computer program to help locate grave sites more efficiently. This was an immense effort and is an improvement toward the cemetery administration, and we thank him.

To get the website organized and online, Karen and John Samford worked with parish secretary Donna Whitney. Their efforts resulted in an easy-to-use website designed with the user in mind. Along with the website, a new brochure was designed by Paul Marshall and Marilyn Pearson to introduce our cemetery. Many hours were donated to these efforts, and the Bethlehem Cemetery Board appreciates all of these contributions.

One of the best ways everyone can thank these people for their efforts is to visit the website. Click on "Find a Grave," and enter the name of a friend or family member. You will find where your loved one is interred. And if you don't find the person, please be sure to let us know!

We hope you will utilize this resource to find friends and family members at Bethlehem Cemetery. If you have any questions, please let one of the Cemetery Board members know. **BethlehemCemetery.net** 

# A bit of history through Easter cards.

The church office recently received the following note:

To Bethlehem Church: My mother was the genealogist of our family, and when she passed away, I found these Easter cards from your church. My father's family was from the Ann Arbor area, and they are buried in the church's cemetery. Our family names are Henne, Jenter, and Shellenberger.

I thought you might be interested in these Easter cards dated 1909 and 1910.

Sincerely, Susan Henne Margle.

(Continued on page 11)



### **WOMEN'S ADVENT EVENING**

We are making plans for our 4th Women's Advent Evening on Thursday, December 7, 6:00–8:00 p.m. For those who have never attended one of these, it is an evening of fellowship, good food, and inspiration. You'll enjoy sitting at a beautifully decorated table, and we'll enjoy a nice selection of appetizers and desserts followed by a short inspirational program.

We'd like to encourage all women to attend. However, to accommodate everyone, we are looking for women to host a table of six. This year, we are catering the event and will sell tickets. Table hosts will only be responsible for their table setting. Tickets will be placed in a hat and guests will then be assigned a table as their name is drawn, starting with

table #1 and so on. It will be fun to get to know members of our church, but you may request to sit at a specific table.



We have 11 committed table hosts at this point, but that will only accommodate 66 women. If you are interested in hosting, please see or contact **Jane Ziesemer**, Fellowship Chair. Her contact information is in the church directory. What a wonderful way to start the Advent season by taking some time to pause and reflect on the days ahead.

#### "A Bit of History Through Easter Cards"

(Continued from page 10)

# Below and on page 10 are the two cards which were sent to us. Many thanks to John Schmale for the German to English translations!

#### Card with orange flowers.

#### Front

Joyful Easter!

#### Inside

Oh joyful blessed Eastertime! O buds and sprouts far and wide! O secret rain in the heart! The lark is already singing under a blue sky and the violets are already giving forth a sweet aroma for us. Goodbye to cares and sorrows! Goodbye to all the cares which press upon us. The bonds are loosened and the shackles are broken! The heart and the voice are lifted up! The little flowers and the little birds never get tired of singing a song of Resurrection! Everything is striving upward! M. Schweikher

#### Back

From Bethlehem Sunday School, Easter 1909

#### Card with blue flowers and cross.

#### **Front**

Blessed Easter!

#### Inside

Rise up, bring to God your song of praise, bring to Him honor, bring to Him thanksgiving! As we sing in this time of Easter full of joy "Christ is risen"

Jesus lives! Hallelujah! God has awakened Jesus from the dead and has given Him Glory. (1 Peter)

#### **Back**

From Bethlehem Sunday School, Easter, March 27, 1910





#### **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.



Photo by Eileen Koprowski

#### **Bethlehem's Ministry Team**

Rev. John Kennedy Pastor

Rev. Orval L.E. Willimann Pastor Emeritus

Lily Tinker Fortel Minister of Spiritual Growth

and Development

Carol Leyshock Parish Administrator

Financial Administrator

Donna Whitney Parish Secretary

Arianne Abela Director of Music

Gail Jennings Organist

**Betty Clark** 

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.