



The Visitor

July / August 2020

Bethlehem United Church of Christ



Parables, God's Kingdom Is Like By Rev. John Kennedy

"Jesus, told another story. "God's kingdom is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. That night, while his hired men were asleep, his enemy sowed thistles all through the wheat and slipped away before dawn. When the first green shoots appeared and the grain began to form, the thistles showed up, too. "The farmhands came to the farmer and said, 'Master, that was clean seed you planted, wasn't it? Where did these thistles come from?' "He answered, 'Some enemy did this.' "The farmhands asked, 'Should we weed out the thistles?' "He said, 'No, if you weed the thistles, you'll pull up the wheat, too. Let them grow together until harvest time. Then I'll instruct the harvesters to pull up the thistles and tie them in bundles for the fire, then gather the wheat and put it in the barn.'" Matthew 13:24-30

The Greek word for parable (para-bole, is **Para** = alongside and **bole** = throwing or casting) and means "something cast beside, to explain or clarify". Jesus, used this rhetorical style to help explain, by comparing. Theologian, Dr. Eugen Boring, explains that "the point of each parable is eschatological (the presence of the kingdom on earth), not a general moralism. This kingdom is in the process of becoming, and that understanding the kingdom in Jesus' message is both "already and "not yet".

In the Parable of the Wheat and the Thistles, Jesus is explaining that God's kingdom is already planted and at work but the process is still ongoing. Recently, Karen and I planted a garden, and also worked to prepare the lawn from winter salt damage. In both the raised bed garden boxes and the lawn we had to add rich topsoil, till, and then plant. After planting we spread straw to help keep the moisture in and the weeds out. In a matter of a few weeks, our plants (and lawn) were growing, but intermixed with the plants were many weeds or strands of straw

(continued on page 2)

**Deadline for the
September Visitor is
Monday, August 31**



In This Issue

Pastor John	Page 1-2	Vacation Bible School	Page 8
Roof Repair Pictures	Page 3	Mission Trip Update	Page 8
Cemetery	Page 3	SG&D Opportunities	Page 8
Time & Talent	Page 3	Crop Walk	Page 9
From the President	Page 4	Member Care Update	Page 10
Highlights from Leadership	Page 5	COVID-19 Emergency Fund	Page 11
Standing Against Racism	Page 6-7	Who We Are	Page 12



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Office Hours

Due to the
COVID-19
Pandemic, the
office is currently
closed.

(continued from page 1)

growing. One day, I was pulling weeds and my wife, Karen, said, "be careful John, you are going to pull up my marigolds". A few weeks later the marigolds and other vegetable plants had grown enough to tell the difference between the weeds and the desired plants.

Perhaps, that is how God is working. We are born in the image of God, and our being (seed) comes from God. We live, and grow, in this world as children of God, and yet we are constantly being presented with choices as we navigate obstacles and thorns, that creep in around us.

Our natural desire is to try to uproot and remove things that we feel are a threat to our vitality.

I wonder sometimes if each of us is considered a thistle or weed to another person or agenda, and a blessing to another. It gives me great hope that God, is patient and slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and forgiveness. Its good news that God doesn't pull us up by the root at the first sign that we are going astray. Even the bloom of a rose is surrounded by thorns.

I believe that God, removes the thistles, thorns, and weeds of our lives with the precision of a surgeon. Perhaps rather than uprooting every one of us who sins and then casting us into the fire, God instead only removes the thorns. Perhaps, God sees the beauty and potential in us (like a rose) and only removes the thorns from the stems of our lives while retaining the rose?

Last week, I watched a 2016 documentary about Daryl Davis called, "Accidental Courtesy: Daryl Davis, Race & America." Daryl Davis is an African American [R&B](#) and [blues](#) musician, activist, author, actor and bandleader, and a Christian. Davis infiltrated the [Ku Klux Klan](#) (KKK), and convinced Klansmen to leave and denounce the KKK. Davis eventually went on to befriend over 20 members of the KKK, and claims to have been directly responsible for between 40 and 60, and indirectly over 200 people leaving the Klan. He found that the Klansmen had many misconceptions about blacks, which stem mostly from intense conditioning in their youth. When they got to know him, Davis claims, it was more difficult for them to maintain their prejudices. Davis recounts his experiences in his 1998 book, *Klan-destine Relationships: A Black Man's Odyssey in the Ku Klux Klan*. Davis has played with such musicians as Elvis Presley, [Chuck Berry](#), [Jerry Lee Lewis](#), [B. B. King](#) and [Bruce Hornsby](#). Davis is a [Christian](#).

I encourage you to watch a short 15 minute portion of this video at: <https://www.facebook.com/LikeLouisScott/videos/953458125130069>. It will perhaps restore your hope for this world, ourselves and the power of God's grace.

"God's light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never put it out" —John 1:5

God loves us ALL with no take-backs!

Pastor John

WEEDS!!!



We have a lot of weeds accumulating around our beautiful church property. If you have a few minutes of time to share, Facilities would appreciate some help. Thank you! —Tom Z.

Save your Cans & Bottles!

The Education Ministry Team will continue raising money for [Easy Water for Everyone](#). Please keep collecting your coins for when we're back together in church. Until then, we ask you to consider savings your bottles and cans (and the deposits when you're able to get them) for this effort!



Roof Repair Update

Grunwell-Cashero is continuing its work on repairing the roof and decaying mortar. Gwen, our newest staff member, took a few minutes to check on their progress (practicing social distancing, of course!)



FROM THE BETHLEHEM CEMETERY BOARD

At its last meeting, the Bethlehem Cemetery Board elected the following officers:

President	Sue Buday
Vice President	Marty Seyfried
Secretary	Sallie Stadel
Treasurer	Jim Lutz

An addition to the Cemetery Rules and Regulations has been added. It states "No artificial flowers, wind chimes, bird feeders/houses, flags or decorations/objects of any kind are to be hung from the branches of Cemetery trees." Copies of the Cemetery Rules and Regulations are available by contacting the Bethlehem Church office.

As a reminder, no bushes, shrubs or trees are to be planted at the cemetery without prior Board approval.



Share Your
Time & Talents

TIME AND TALENT SURVEYS

From office volunteers to Sunday school teachers to knitters to greeters, Bethlehem is blessed to have so many in this community of faith who give so generously of their time and talents. No matter what your time and talents, there is a place for you.

Please sign up soon so we can get you connected with a group!

Click [HERE](#) to view or fill out a paper copy at home.

Click [HERE](#) for the online version. SPECIAL NOTE: The online version is easiest to use on a laptop or desktop computer. If you view it on a smart phone you will need take an extra step to view the entire survey. Follow the instructions below.

If you click this link on your phone, you will need to:

- Click on these 3 lines
- Click on "Full Site"

Then you will be able to view all the sign up pages.

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From Your President's Desk



Singing has always held a fascination for me. Doing it well is hard: rhythms, notes, timing, lyrics—all have to come together correctly. Coordinating it with others increases the difficulty. Over many years in choirs, I've come to realize the person up front waving their arms helps! I once heard a singer comment to a director that without the former, the latter made no sound.

I've missed being part of the choir during the pandemic: the comradery, the cooperation, the shared experience of producing a result truly "greater than the sum of its parts." I was aghast when I heard of a choir in Mt Vernon WA near the beginning of the pandemic which became a hotspot by singing together: **not** a joyful noise.

As with so many things, choral music has (in my experience, at least) moved onto the internet. Some ambitious individuals have gathered together electronically and produced very sweet music. Watching them all, in their individual boxes, singing their parts in a work master-minded not by someone waving their arms up front, but by a techno-music maven, is doubly striking (when done well!) both for the music and the knowledge that putting it together is a remarkable feat.

I've chuckled watching an on-line megachurch's choir during Covid: each choir member has one screen in an array on the front wall with the "conductor" standing in front, waving his hands. I may be wrong, but I don't believe it's all "in real time!" (They don't stay for the sermon!)

My hat's off to Sarah Herwick for her efforts in wrangling the "BUCCuleles" and other BUCC musicians in Bruno Mars' "Count on me." I hope you saw it ([it's still available on line through BUCC's website](#).) While my singing is easily overlooked (that's a good thing!) the experience was humbling. While singing one's part, one would listen to the main track using headphone (to avoid each singer re-recording the main track.) While I sung, it seemed to be going reasonably well, but when I played back what I recorded (only myself), there was no hiding the mediocrity!

Glutton for punishment that I am, I repeated the experience later by recording myself singing a hymn along to organ accompaniment. The organ covers a host of sins. The solo recording: not so much! As my father used to say, "I've got a lot to be modest about!"

My point? Sometimes we have to avoid doing something we enjoy for the greater good: ours and others. We need each other. The strengths of some compensate for others' weaknesses. Maybe the director **is** an important component! And maybe after having sung our songs, we should more time listening to others.

John Samford, President
July, 2020

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LEADERSHIP

Leadership Council's first official fiscal year 2021 meeting took place exactly six months before Christmas (June 25). We welcomed two new members (Tim Authier, Secretary for one year, and Dindy Haab, member at large) and expressed appreciation to those leaving Council. For a church which is "closed," we had a great deal of business!



- **Covid 19** reopening plans were presented by Ron Dechert, lead of the Task Force for Re-opening (also Pastor John Kennedy, Pastor Lily Tinker Fortel, Parish Administrator Julie Rhodes.) The plan identified 4 stages – we're in the 1st, most restrictive: both in the number of people and the areas where they can be. In this first stage, only the office, Groundcover News, the sanctuary and Fellowship Hall are open to groups of up to ten, taking proper mitigation measures: disinfectant wiping, rooms and surfaces sprayed using an electrostatic sprayer which BUCC has acquired using a non-toxic agent, beyond the usual custodial cleaning. Only the 4th Ave entrance is to be used. Closed areas include first floor rooms (chapel, nursery, Schmale Lounge, Gallery, Landing Spot) the 2nd floor and basement areas (beyond Ground Cover and Fellowship Hall). Groups using open areas must practice social distancing, wear masks and self-assure they are not symptomatic.

Opening currently closed areas will comply with CDC and State of Michigan guidelines. Group size limit is expected to expand to ≤ 50 . When approved by the Governor, we will allow groups up to the new limit under phase 1 re-opening. When the state's limit is raised to 100, BUCC will move to phase 2, when worship in the main sanctuary can resume with social distancing, no singing, no papers nor other shared objects and live streaming available.

Phase 3 begins when the state announces schools are open for in-person education. Nursery and church school will resume at that time along with the Coffee Connection. The Youth Room will reopen: all with proper restrictions. Phase 4, when BUCC resumes all activities and is fully open, will occur when all restrictions are removed and/or vaccine is available for general public.

- One of the biggest financial hits we took developing the newly approved austerity budget was no revenue from rentals and parking. It occurred to me I could put up a sign by the parking lot entrance in late July offering discount Art Fair parking, but more realistically we actually **do** have a couple rental opportunities. The University of Michigan Nurses' COPD study which has leased space in the past on an on-going basis could resume as early as August! As one would imagine, they developed a comprehensive plan to use our space in a responsible way and are awaiting final approval from the UM Office of Research. (The gym remains closed, per state guidelines.) A more complex opportunity being discussed with Ann Arbor Public Schools would use a great deal of BUCC space for small classes meeting off-site of public schools, to keep class size low. Such an arrangement requires a much effort, both to prepare and to go forward. We must wait until AAPS develops three models for fall school before negotiations can proceed in late July.
- **The 1st Quarterly Financial Report** to the congregation will follow worship Sunday September 13 (the first quarter ends August 31.) While this will **not** be a Congregational Meeting, (no business will be transacted) it should give insight into how BUCC did financially during the first quarter, under a very tight budget.
- **The Stewardship Campaign** continues! We thank all those who submitted pledges: over 100 pledging units committed to donate over \$245,000. Leadership Council authorized the Stewardship group to reach out again to those who have not yet pledged (but have within the past few years) and to those who still consider themselves to be associated with BUCC (building on the work the Member Care Ministry Team conducts to keep our role book up-to-date.)
- **Roof area work:** repairing leaks, flashing, falling stones and mortar, has been completed, well under the \$60,000 budget approved by the congregation in April. Even with about \$5,000 of extra work discovered during the work, which Leadership Council approved, the total is close to \$50,000. (No, we don't have ten grand burning a hole in our pockets!)

Standing Agenda

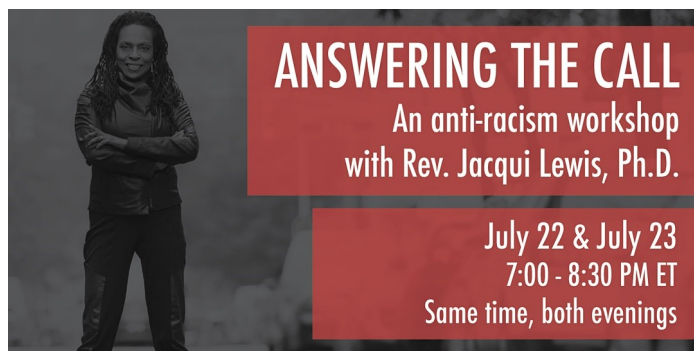
Ibram X. Kendi Virtual Lecture July 20, 7-8pm



"2019 Guggenheim Fellow and New York Times bestselling author Ibram X. Kendi will discuss his renowned book "How to Be an Antiracist" on Monday, July 20 at 7:00 p.m. with Dr. Charlene M. Dukes, president of Prince George's Community College. Dr. Dukes is the first African-American woman to serve as president of the College and has 30 years of progressive leadership experience and administrative responsibility in higher education. The conversation will be streamed live online on Crowdcast, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter/Periscope, and will air on PGCC TV on a later date."

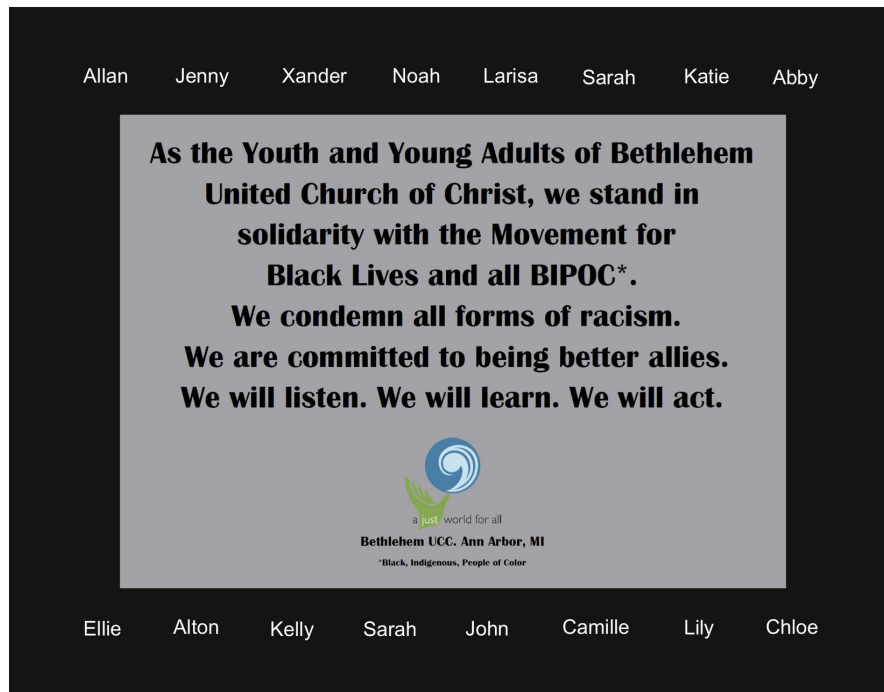
Online Antiracism Training with Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis July 22 & 23, 7-8:30pm

In June, 15 Bethlehem members participated in the Call of This Moment, an Anti-Racism workshop with Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis of Middle Collegiate Church in Manhattan. The cost for July's workshop is \$20; you can register at eventbrite.com. Please let Lily know if you plan to register or have questions. *"Addressing racism in one's personal life and community is a multi-layered process. After becoming aware of systemic racism, it is common to feel "stuck: and to wonder "What now?" Overwhelm is normal, but change requires resilience, dedication, and patience to excavate the biases that haunt our every day lives. Building on the popular Call of This Moment antiracism workshop, this class will focus on concrete practices to foster antiracist community."*



ainst Racism

"As the Youth and Young Adults of Bethlehem United Church of Christ, we stand in solidarity with the Movement for Black Lives and all Black, Indigenous, People of Color. We condemn all forms of racism. We are committed to being better allies. We will listen. We will learn. We will act." Signed: Allan, Jenny, Xander, Noah, Larisa, Sarah, Katie, Abby, Ellie, Alton, Kelly, Sarah, John, Camille, Lily, Chloe.



We invite individual members, Ministry Teams, and the Leadership Council to sign on to this statement by commenting on the post on Facebook or contacting Chloe or Lily.



WHITE PRIVILEGE
let's talk
A Resource for Transformational Dialogue

Let's Learn Together.

Beginning in September (dates/times TBD), Bethlehem members are invited to join in a 6-week study of the UCC's White Privilege Let's Talk: A Resource for Transformational Dialogue. If you are interested in knowing more about this opportunity, please talk with Sue Wortman, Tim Authier, or Lily.

Virtual**Vacation Bible School****Sundays in August**

Get excited as BUCC Vacation Bible School is going virtual this summer! This year's theme is Compassion Camp with stories and themes from Luke, Mark, Deuteronomy, Ruth, and Leviticus. In July, VBS kits will be going out to youth and children (stay tuned for updates) and we will be continuing our weekly check-in chats with Ms. Kelsey Sundays after the service. In August, each Sunday from 11am-noon we will convene to discuss our themes, play games, show-off our crafts, and have a bunch of fun together! Attention Bethlehem Kids and Youth: We hope you'll join us for Compassion Camp VBS with Ms. Kelsey in August! We'll send you fun activity packs to use each week; then, we'll meet on Zoom Sundays after church. Please email Kelsey at kmpostle@umich.edu if you plan to participate or with any questions.

**Mission Trip Update**

Thank you to everyone who bought quilt raffle tickets to support our 2020 Mission Trip to Washington UCC's youth summer program in Cincinnati! We raised a total of \$590 through your generous ticket purchases. Special thanks to Crystal Wilcox, who sought donations. Congratulations to Paul and Barb Marshall who won the quilt, and to Sue and Roy, Nadia, Kurt, Sally, Shannon, and Laura, who won the various tool prizes (we'll deliver them when we can!).

Sadly, Washington UCC cancelled their summer youth program due to COVID - 19. They will still provide meals for children during the summer months and we have donated the \$590 we raised toward this program.

We would like to invite the congregation to make additional donations to support this much needed meal program. If you would like to do this, please send your check to the church by August 15 with "Washington UCC Summer Program" in the memo line. Alternately, you can donate through Bethlehem's Online giving page by selecting the *Service Trips: Washington UCC Cincinnati Summer Programs*.

Virtual Spiritual Growth & Development Opportunities during the COVID-19 Outbreak

Pastor Lily Tinker Fortel - Minister of Spiritual Growth and Development

Sundays

- Fellowship Hour + Connect with Kelsey. Sundays from 11:00-11:30 am.
All ages invited. Kids and youth will have an opportunity to connect with Kelsey during the Fellowship Hour.

Tuesdays

- Roundtable Pulpit. Tuesdays 12:00-1:30 pm.
Pastor John and Pastor Lily will continue to host the roundtable pulpit via Zoom. Join us to explore the scripture reading for the upcoming Sunday.
- Yoga on Zoom. Tuesdays 5:30-6:00 pm.
Join us for a very meditative practice via Zoom.

Wednesdays

- Bethlehem Zoom Cafe/Happy Hour. Wednesdays 5-6 pm.
This is an informal community check-in opportunity. Drop in to say hi and see friendly faces. Stay for as long (or short!) as you want.

Thursdays

- First Thursdays: Prayer Circle. 12:00-12:30 pm Join us for our monthly prayer circle.
- Youth Group. 6:30-8:00 pm. (some Thursdays) Youth will receive information via email.

Fridays

- BUCCuleles Live Practice Session 4:00 pm. Check out our most recent video lessons: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLn9QnTKbYLMHNcdnbktUWplk1xV2izlip>



Crop Walk Goes Virtual

Bethlehem was scheduled to host this year's CROP Walk but due to COVID-19, this year's walk will be virtual (no in-person component at Bethlehem). We're still participating in virtual CROP Walk! In the coming months, we'll provide information about how we can find creative ways to raise money for this important cause. **To start: Please join the Bethlehem Pllamas** using our CROP Walk page! <https://www.crophungerwalk.org/annarbormi/pllamas> (scroll down to the 'Join Our Team' button on the right side to register).

Member Care Corner

We miss you! Since we can't be together in person, that does not mean we can't still be connected. This may be a lonely time for many of you! Member Care wants to know how we can best care for and support you! We invite input on how we can do a better job of caring for people during this time. Feel free to contact anyone on our Ministry team with ideas on how to stay connected!



- Jenny Foster
- Mary Jean Raab
- Julie Seitz
- Judy Coucouvanis

Need Help with viewing the Worship Service on Facebook? Never joined a Zoom meeting before? Let us help! Our team will connect you with a fellow member who can help you navigate this world of technology! Email us membercare@bethlehem-ucc.org or call Jenny Foster to get started!

How to Join a Zoom Meeting 101

By Pastor Lily



EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FUND



COVID-19 Emergency Fund

The impact of Coronavirus is ongoing and our neighbors will need ongoing support as we move toward collective recovery.

Bethlehem is raising money to support community agencies helping those most in need in our community. Money raised will be distributed to organizations Bethlehem has ongoing relationships with. These agencies include Food Gatherers (Warehouse, and Community Kitchen at Delonis), Peace Neighborhood Center, Alpha House, and Groundcover News.

Funds may also be distributed to other agencies serving the community as needs arise.

Who: All of us. Bethlehem! Endorsed by Leadership Council.

What: COVID-19 Emergency Fund. We've set a goal of \$10,000.

When: Ongoing

How:

* Donate online at <https://bit.ly/bucc-donate> select "COVID-19 Emergency Fund"

* Mail a check to the church office with "COVID-19 Emergency Fund" in the memo line.

Why: Support our neighbors in need! Initial support & relief will decrease, but needs continues.



RADIO BROADCAST SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP

Please remember that a lot of folks count on the weekly Radio Broadcast of our 10 o'clock worship service. This program is funded by weekly radio sponsorships, memorials, and special donations.

Have you sponsored a Radio Broadcast lately?

Are you looking for a way to honor or remember a friend or family member? A weekly Radio Sponsorship is \$230. In addition, general donations of any amount are appreciated. Thank you for supporting this important ministry.

- Click [here](#) to go to Sign-Up Genius and choose a date, and how you want your sponsorship to read.
- You can donate online at: bethlehem-ucc.org or leave a message at the church office (734) 665-6149 and someone will get back with you.



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.

Our Core Values

- ♦ **Growing** spiritually in our faith journey together.
- ♦ **Worshipping** together to seek and share God's love.
- ♦ **Connecting** with God and each other in a supportive, nurturing way.
- ♦ **Reaching out** to our members, community, country, and the world through support and service.

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.

Bethlehem United Church of Christ

Staff, Ministry Team Chairs, and Leadership Council

<u>STAFF</u>	<u>MINISTRY TEAM CHAIRS</u>	<u>LEADERSHIP COUNCIL</u>
Pastor: Rev. John Kennedy	Finance: Karen Samford	President: John Samford
Pastor Emeritus: Rev. Orval L.E. Willimann	Facilities: Tom Ziesemer	Vice President: Ron Dechert
Minister of Spiritual Growth and Development: Pastor Lily Tinker Fortel	Education: Eileen Koprowski	Secretary: Tim Authier
Financial Administrator: Betty Clark	Worship: Jennifer Vasquez	Treasurer: Jim Rowan
Parish Administrator: Julie Rhodes	Member Care: Jenny Foster	At-Large Members:
Administrative Assistant: Gwenda Mayes	Welcome: Jane Schmerberg	Dindy Haab
Director of Music: David Hahn	Outreach: Sue Muir/Roy Muir	Pat Huibregtse
Organist: Gail Jennings	Fellowship: Jan Eadie	Pam Rutledge
Director of Handbells: Jim Rowan	Youth & Young Adult: Katie Rowan	Ex Officio: Rev. John Kennedy
Sunday School Nursery Teacher: Kelsey Postler	Bethlehem Cemetery: Sue Buday	
	Nominations Committee: Cresson Slotten	