

The Visitor

February 2023
Bethlehem United Church of Christ

January 10, 2023

The Congregation of Bethlehem U.C.C.
413 S. Fourth Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104

Dr. Ron Dechert, President, Bethlehem Leadership Council

From: Rev. John Kennedy
Pastor, Bethlehem UCC

Dear Beloved Members, Elected officers, Friends, and Staff of Bethlehem UCC,

After much prayer and discernment, I have chosen to submit my letter of resignation as the Pastor/Head of Staff of Bethlehem UCC. This February 8th, Karen and I would have begun our 9th year in ministry with Bethlehem. During these past 3 months away on medical leave (while utilizing earned sabbatical time), I had the opportunity to reflect and discuss with Karen, my family, and my mentors about where God is leading me next. I believe the answer is, God is leading my family and I to a new ministry setting where my gifts are most helpful.

I know God will continue to guide Bethlehem as you discern afresh where God is leading you in all ways, including discovering the kind of leadership that will be most faithful and effective while Bethlehem continues its 190-year journey in mission and ministry. I am thankful the Leadership Council has graciously granted my family and I the next few months to focus my time and energy on seeking my next calling as a parish pastor. In order to focus on this process, my role as your pastor will officially end effective on January 14th. It is proper for an outgoing pastor to limit communications so that the Church and its Leadership can focus on all that is necessary during this transition. I send my best wishes and blessings to your President, Ron Dechert and the elected leadership during this time of discernment and transition.

My family and I will continue to celebrate and cherish the wonderful relationships and memories that we have shared with so many of you these past 8-years. I thank you for the privilege I have had to serve as your pastor and please know we love you all with no take-backs!

I know the Leadership Council is arranging a time for us to celebrate our years together in mission, ministry, and fellowship with a Service of Farewell. I look forward to saying goodbye to as many of you as possible during that time. Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel, our new Michigan Conference Minister will be present to lead the Service of Farewell in solidarity with your Associate Pastor, Rev. Diane White.

Thank you again for the privilege of serving with you in mission and ministry!

God loves us All with no take-backs ever!

Rev. John Kennedy

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A Note from the Associate Pastor

Do you ever think about immense questions? You know, the really huge ones like, “Why am I here?” or “What is the meaning of life?” or “What am I meant to do?” or “How am I ever going to pull through this?” or “Where did I leave my keys?” Well, maybe that last one is only a big question for me, but you get the idea. I’m talking about questions that have puzzled human kind forever and so often defy human answers. How do we make sense of this crazy, challenging life?

Today, my largest question is, “What am I going to write about this month in the newsletter since Aimee needs to get this out soon. Now, I suppose I could sit around and stew about this and I have to admit I did do a little concerned stewing. But then, I realized I do not have to do this on my own. I decided to PRAY! Paul tells the community in Thessalonica, “Pray without ceasing,” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Jesus tells us, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). So, I prayed and do you know what came back to me? “PRAYER.” That’s it!

Prayer! Pastor John has discerned a new path and is leaving Bethlehem. We must honor God’s call for him with prayer for him and his family as they take a new path and find their purpose in new ways and places. Pray always for Pastor John’s health and wellbeing in all that he takes on in life.

Prayer! We too, Bethlehem Church, are in a time of transition now. A time to look at who we are as the church of Jesus Christ and who we are to serve. A time to discern God’s purpose for us. To do that, we all must be in prayer. Prayers for the church and each other. Prayers for direction for the future and the path to get there. Prayers of forgiveness and prayers of compassion. Prayers to lift up all of God’s children.

There is power in the Lord and I believe our prayers are answered – maybe not how we imagine – but they are answered. Such a simple thing, prayer, and yet so often we forget to call on our Helpmate. “The LORD is near to all who call on him in truth” (Psalm 145:18). Remember to pray always.

Thank you God, Amen.

Pastor Diane



December, 2022	Year to Date	YTD Target	22 /23 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$218,822	\$233,345	\$400,020
Expenses	\$278,608	\$311,575	\$534,128
Net	(\$59,786)	(\$78,230)	(\$134,108)



Farewell Service Announcement February 19, 2023

Dear Bethlehem members and friends,

Please join us for a special service on Feb 19th to commemorate the time and talents of Pastor John Kennedy. Reverend Lilian Daniel, President of Michigan UCC conference, will join Pastor Diane White in leading us in a farewell worship for Pastor John. Pastor John served as the spiritual leader at Bethlehem for the past eight years.

Council invites everyone to attend this special service of farewell. If you would like to submit a card, a special picture, or a gift for Pastor John, please turn those into the church office before Feb 19th. We will collect them and give them to Pastor John during this event.

We hope to see everyone in person, Sunday Feb 19th. God bless you and also Pastor John and his family.

God's Grace and Peace to All,

Ron Dechert-President



Next Up: Lent

The season of Lent will soon be upon us beginning with Ash Wednesday, February 22. Our worship service will be in the sanctuary at 7:30PM.

Throughout Lent we will focus on the story of the Passion of Christ which is filled with vivid characters, each of whom played an important role on that fateful day. We will use a series of interviews titled "They Were There" written by Elise Seyfried. The five characters we will meet are: Judas, Barabbas, Pilate, Pilate's Wife, and Peter. Each will be asked about their lives, what led them to that tragic event, and what they would say to us in the 21st century. With all of this in mind, I am looking for volunteers to play the characters. There is no memorization – just expressive reading. If you are interested, give me a call – Pastor Diane: 734-660-1886.

Holy Week will be as follows:

Palm Sunday, we will have a special music you will not want to miss.

Maundy Thursday, we are planning to have a Soup and Service time in the fellowship hall – time TBD.

Good Friday services will be observed at noon and 7:30PM.

Easter Worship will be only at the 10:00PM service. (Sorry, we will not have a sunrise service at the cemetery this year due to my physical limitations in the cold weather.)



Thank You!

Sincere thanks to everyone who helped take down our church Christmas decorations on the 9th. Many hands accomplished this task in a short amount of time.

John Irwin

Tom Ziesemer

Bob Loukotka

Nan Lefton

Pam Widmayer

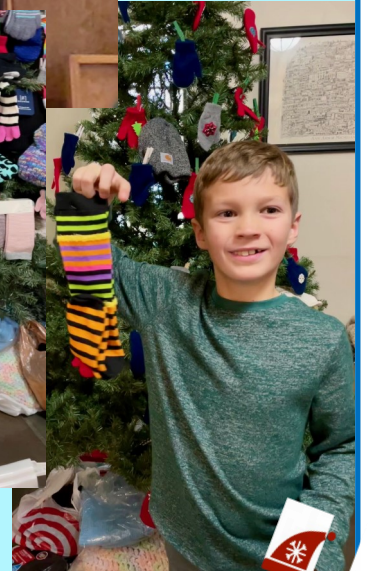
Fred Castenholz

Jim and Sallie Stadel

Ron and Alice Dechert

Joe and Jan Eadie

BUCC FAMILY



BUCC FELLOWSHIP

Bethlehem Women's Monthly Breakfast

Changes in location, day of the week and time of our gatherings!

The Bethlehem Women's Breakfast Group is meeting the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the Alpha Koney Restaurant (previously the Classic Cup), 4389 Jackson Road, at 9:30 am. Upcoming dates are February 14th and March 14.

For more information and to RSVP, please contact **Susan Irwin at 734-255-5661 or siirwin46@gmail.com**. We hope to see you there!



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Bethlehem Veterans & Friends Monthly Breakfast

Friday, February 6th, 8:30 am
Alpha Restaurant,
4389 Jackson Rd.

Questions? Contact Tom Ziesemer

Hear ye, hear ye! Bethlehem Choir is starting once again!

It's not too late to join the choir! Please join us on **Wednesdays from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m!** We will sing one or two anthems for the 10 a.m. worship service on Sundays with a run-through morning rehearsal at 9:15 a.m. **EVERYONE** is welcome to participate in this music ministry, to enjoy fellowship, and to experience God's love and grace in our lives through the gift of music. Please email me at: musicdirector@bethlehem-ucc.org.



~Naki Kripfgans

HOMEBOUND FRIENDS



We have many dear friends who remain home-bound and they would love to see you and/or hear from you.

If you would like names and contact information, please reach out to Pastor Diane who can share that with you.



MEETING MINUTES

Minutes from all Ministry Team Meetings are due to Gwen by the 1st of every

month at:

gwenda_mayes@bethlehem-ucc.org

Thank you all for your service to our church community.

YOUTH GROUP



All Bethlehem Youth, 6th grade through high school, are invited to Youth Group!

We meet :

Sundays, 11:30 am—1:00 pm, every other week.

Our upcoming Youth Group meeting dates are:

February 5th
February 18th

Looking forward to seeing all of you!

BETHLEHEM CEMETERY ASSOCIATION

LOCATED AT: 2801 JACKSON AVENUE, ANN ARBOR, MI 48103

PHONE: 734-761-6878 (VOICE MAIL)

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE: BETHLEHEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

423 S. 4TH AVENUE, ANN ARBOR, MI 48104

PHONE: 734-665-6149



BUCC HAPPENINGS



Sundays, Worship Service in-person
and via live stream and radio
broadcast (WAAM 1600 am) 10:00 am
February 2023

February 1

- Busy Christian Hands, Schmale Lounge, 12:00 noon
- Choir Practice, Choir RM, 7:00 pm

February 3

- Bethlehem Veterans & Friends Monthly Breakfast at Alpha Restaurant, 8:30 am

February 5

- Worship Team Mtg., Library 11:00 am-1:00 pm
- Youth Group, Youth Group RM 11:30 am-1:00 pm

February 6

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir RM, 6:00 pm

February 8

- Cemetery Board Mtg., Lounge 9:30 am
- Busy Christian Hands, Schmale Lounge, 12:00 noon
- Choir Practice, Choir RM, 7:00 pm

February 13

- Hand bell Rehearsal, Choir RM, 6:00 pm

February 14

- Bethlehem Ladies Breakfast, Alpha Coney, 9:30 am
- Facilities Ministry Team, Lounge, 7:00 pm

February 15

- Busy Christian Hands, Schmale Lounge, 12:00 noon
- Member Care Ministry Mtg., Lounge, 4:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir RM, 7:00 pm

February 19

- Farewell Service for Pastor John, 10:00 am

February 20

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir RM, 6:00 pm

February 22 - **ASH WEDNESDAY**

- Busy Christian Hands, Schmale Lounge, 12:00 noon
- Choir Call, Sanctuary, 6:45 pm (*note time*)
- Distribution of Ashes, Sanctuary, 7:30 pm

February 23

- Worship at Brecon Village, 10:00 am
- Leadership Council, Schmale Lounge, 6:00 pm

February 26

- Youth Group, Youth RM 11:30 am

February 27

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir RM, 6:00 pm



There are many opportunities for you to donate flowers yet this year to beautify the sanctuary. If you are interested, please sign up either on the board in the hallway in front of the office or by SignUp Genius. If you have questions, please contact Gwenda Mayes at:

gwenda_mayes@bethlehem-ucc.org



REMINDER!!!

February 15 is the deadline for items to be included in the **March** edition of the VISITOR newsletter.

Please email submissions to:

churchoffice@bethlehem-ucc.org

RADIO BROADCAST SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIPS



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!

1. **Pick a date you want to sponsor.**
2. **Sign up on the bulletin board in the office hallway, or call the office at 734-665-6149.**
3. **You can even donate online at bethlehem-ucc.org.**
4. **Tell the office how you want your sponsorship listed in the bulletin and read on-air.**



We are getting closer to our goal of raising \$10,000 for the Ukrainian Crisis Relief Fund.

To date we have received a total of \$7,070. We are only \$2,930 from reaching our goal!

Please consider making a gift to this important outreach needed in Ukraine.

**Donate online on our church website's Ukraine Crisis Fund:
www.bethlehem-ucc.org**

Checks are also welcome made out to Bethlehem United Church of Christ - Ukraine Fund



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

Office Hours

Tuesday - Friday
 9:00 am - 2:00 pm
*(the office is closed
 on Mondays)*

Staff E-Mail Addresses

The following is a list of our current staff at Bethlehem and their email addresses. Please utilize these email addresses for all communications.

Diane White Associate Pastor of Pastoral Ministry
 pastordiane@bethlehem-ucc.org

Naki Kripfgans Dir. of Music Ministry
 musicdirector@Bethlehem-ucc.org

Gail Jennings Organist
 gailpiano@yahoo.com

Jim Rowan Hand Bell Director
 jrowan@umich.edu

Gwenda Mayes Office Supervisor
 gwenda_mayes@bethlehem-ucc.org

Aimee Winchester Administrative Assistant
 churchoffice@bethlehem-ucc.org

Our Core Values

- ◆ Growing spiritually in our faith journey together.
- ◆ Worshiping 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

STAFF

Pastor:
 Assoc. Pastor: Diane White
 Pastor Emeritus: Rev. Orval L.E. Willimann
 Office Supervisor: Gwenda Mayes
 Administrative Assistant: Aimee Winchester
 Director of Music: Naki Kripfgans
 Organist: Gail Jennings
 Director of Handbells: Jim Rowan
 Video Director: Dan Blakeney
 Maintenance Personnel: Bill Husted

MINISTRY TEAM CHAIRS

Finance: Tom Krell
 Facilities: Steve Darr
 Education: Eileen Koprowski
 Worship: Jennifer Vasquez
 Member Care: Beth Wenner
 Welcome: Jane Schmerberg
 Outreach: Sue Muir/Roy Muir
 Fellowship:
 Youth & Young Adult: Katie Rowan
 Bethlehem Cemetery: Sue Buday
 Nominations Committee:

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

President: Ron Dechert
 Vice President: Jim Rowan
 Secretary: P.J. Lindemann
 Treasurer: Pete Hendershot
 At-Large Members:
 Dindy Haab
 Pat Huibregtse
 Barbara Schenk
 Ex Officio: