

The Visitor

December 2023
Bethlehem United Church of Christ



Excerpt from the children's book *All is Bright*, by Clay Anderson & Natalie Merheb

*"On the dusty streets of Bethlehem, the sun is fading fast.
An old, dim lantern lights the way. The day has nearly passed.
A starry sky appears above as dark engulfs the night,
and soon the din of day will settle into silent night.
But still, there is a bright, expectant glow that fills the air.*

Like something good might happen here – but when? and what? and where?

A worried couple hurries – there's no room for them in sight.

And yet a sudden peace surrounds them on this holy night.

The city had been full of people hustling all around,

The markets bustling as the census brought the crowds to town.

But now, a quiet night descends just like a healing balm.

The air is still and hushed. And in the moment all is calm.

Down a winding, dusty road – oh, could that be a light?

A place for them to rest where all is warm and all is bright?

There upon the edge of town, an old ramshackle barn

Holds a dirty feeding trough for cattle on the farm.

It's not what they had hoped – a stable seems a little wild! –

Yet here the grace of God surrounds a mother and her child.

And from this humble place, the world will never be the same.

A baby will be born, and everyone will know his name."



Beloved ones, as we embark on this holiday season, let us remember its reason. Let us remember that very first Christmas, when Love came down – as a tiny, blessed infant – not adorned in splendor or the luxury of kings, but in a lowly stable, far from home, amid the turmoil that war and conquest bring. Yet, the young family on that holy night were surrounded by quiet, adoring shepherds (and animals) and a Peace that only Christ can bring.

We too live in anxious times. And the holidays can add to our anxiety and the chaos of life, if we let them. But I think if we focus on giving the gift of Love – not just to family and friends – but to all we know meet, even the grumps and curmudgeons; with friendly smiles, warm "hellos", and perhaps a helping hand; being kinder, gentler, understanding and compassionate, we can reduce the anxiety and chaos that life can bring.

(Continued on page 2)

In This Issue

A Note from Pastor Dawn
Christmas Worship Schedule
BUCC Happenings/Calendar
Budget
Church Clean-up

Pages 1-2
Page 2
Page 3
Page 5
Page 5

Scholarship Winners
Outreach News
Bethlehem Cemetery News
Memorials
Who We Are

Page 5
Page 6
Page 7
Page 7
Page 8

(continued from page 1)

You see, it's not about buying the biggest presents and wrapping them in pretty bows; it's not about preparing and serving the perfect meal, with everything just so. We've been given the greatest gift of all – the Gift of Love – Emmanuel. All we need to do is re-gift that Love, to everyone, everywhere we go.

May the Light of the world, outshine any holiday lights and tinsel for you this season – the Light of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love for all. And may the Peace of Christ and the Love of God fill you to over-flowing, now and always. As Tiny Tim once said, "Merry Christmas and God bless us, everyone."

*Abundant Blessings to you and yours,
Pastor Dawn*

End of Year Contributions

As 2023 comes to a close, please remember that any Qualified Charitable Distributions from your IRA needs to be received by the Church Office no later than **Friday, December 29, 2023**. Thank you very much for considering Bethlehem UCC in your year-end giving. We are truly grateful. Wishing you Christmas Blessings and a Joyous New Year!



**December 21, 2023
@ 6:00 PM**

Let's mark the longest night of the year, by gathering in the warm glow of God's healing love. Many of us have experienced a wide array of losses. In the wake of loss, we carry the weight of grief, sorrow and pain that darken our lives. This solemn service provides sacred space for us to contemplate our losses, and to cry out to God, releasing some of our heavy burdens to God's good care.

Whatever your loss, whatever you are feeling that weighs you down darkening the bright holiday season, come. Come to lean on one another and on God's everlasting arms and find rest for your souls. Come, for healing and comfort. Come and find solace in the Light of Christ – the Light of Hope.

CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICES



**Thursday, December 21
The Longest Night Service
6:00 pm**

**Sunday, December 24
Fourth Sunday of Advent
10:00 am Worship**

Lessons & Carols: a light and fun service for the whole family

**Christmas Eve Worship
7:00 PM**

A Candlelight Service and a musical celebration featuring the Bethlehem Chancel Choir and Bethlehem Hand Bells



Caroling

*"Angels we have heard on high,
sweetly singing o'er the plains,
and BUCC replies echoing their
joyous strains!"*

If you like to sing Christmas carols and would like to brighten the lives of others, join us to sing carols to some of our members who could use some Christmas cheer.

We will meet up in front of the church offices Sunday, December 17th at 1:00 pm and then travel around caroling.

BUCC HAPPENINGS

December 1

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

December 3 Communion Sunday

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am

December 4

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

December 6

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Member Care Ministry Mtg., 3:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 7:00 pm

December 7

- Leadership Council Mtg., Lounge, 6:00 pm

December 10

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am

December 11

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

December 12

- Bethlehem Ladies & Friends Breakfast, Alpha Koney 9:30 am
- Facilities Ministry Mtg., Lounge 3:30 pm

December 13

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

December 17

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour/Cookie Swap, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am

- Caroling, Different Locations, 1:00 pm

December 18

- Facilities Ministry Team Mtg., 3:30 pm, Lounge
- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 6:00 pm

December 20

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 7:00 pm

December 21

- The Longest Night Service, Sanctuary, 6:00 pm

December 24 Christmas Eve

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- Christmas Worship Service, Sanctuary, 7:00 pm

December 27

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 7:00 pm

December 28

- Worship at Brecon Village, 10:00 am

December 31

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- Last Sunday of Radio Broadcast of Worship Service

Outreach News

Bethlehem made donations of \$3491 to each of our partner organizations.

Checks were presented to Alpha House by Mary Jean Raab, Peace Neighborhood Center by Jane Schmerberg, and Food Gatherers by Katie Rowan.

Additionally, our CROP Walk fundraising total was \$1395. Thank you for your generosity!



MITTEN TREE IS HERE!

The Mitten Tree is ready to decorate with mittens, scarves, hats, gloves and socks through Sunday, December 17th All items will be given to local organizations for those in need.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

December 17, 2023 @ 11:15 am following Worship. Member Care is Sponsoring a Cookie Exchange!

Bring a 1 dozen of your favorite holiday inspired cookies to trade for a dozen of someone else's favorites!

If you have any questions please contact Jenny Foster at bucc.membercare@bethlehem-ucc.org



**COLLECTION DATE IS
DECEMBER 24, 2023**

"YOU HAVE STOOD BY ME"

Among the many letters and notes the Pension Boards receives from recipients of gifts made possible by contributions to the Christmas Fund were these words from a retired clergywoman in Kentucky:

"Each year in the face of your unwavering faithfulness it becomes harder to know how to thank you! In such an unpredictable time with not only aging, but Covid and violent world events, faithfulness and something I can count on that brings concrete relief to ease the burden is a blessing.

"You have stood by me and given me financial help when I needed it. It has allowed me to live in a sustainable way where I, too, can show the faithfulness of God to my neighbor and the world. Thank you from the heart!"

Last year, because of your gifts, the Christmas Fund provided over \$1.3 million in pension and health benefits supplementation, emergency grants, and thank-you checks to retired servants of the church and their families. Every cent of that money came from the pockets of people like you. Please give as generously as you are able this year!

In 2022, gifts to the Christmas Fund enabled:

- Monthly pension supplementation for 218 retired clergy and lay employees (\$1,042,726)
- Health benefits supplementation for 86 retired clergy and lay employees (\$181,389)
- Emergency grants for 55 individuals and families (\$138,022)
- Christmas "Thank You" gift checks to 479 retired clergy and lay employees (\$278,500)

THE CHRISTMAS FUND

For the Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund
Give online at www.christmasfund.org.



Church World Service Celebrates Bethlehem United Church of Christ for its Lasting Commitment to Humanitarian Efforts

Ann Arbor, MI—Earlier this month, Church World Service as part of its effort to celebrate legacy congregations across the nation for their commitment to humanitarian causes, honored [Bethlehem United Church of Christ](#) in Ann Arbor. For nearly fifty years, Bethlehem UCC and its congregants have dedicated themselves to aiding CWS in providing sustainable responses to poverty and life-saving disaster response kits to those in need. The congregation is a founding member of the CROP Hunger Walk and has been a leading participant in the fight against hunger since 1975.

"The support of congregations like Bethlehem UCC is the backbone of our work to provide just and sustainable responses to poverty around the world," said **Andrew Gifford, Community Engagement Manager with Church World Service**. "Through organizing community CROP Hunger Walks, coming together to provide emergency response kits to those impacted by disaster, or building a surplus of blankets to those in need, our faith communities sustain our work in a variety of ways. We are thankful for their devotion to our mission."

Bethlehem UCC has been a beacon of justice to the Ann Arbor community for 190 years. CWS' legacy designation comes at a time when the church has been celebrating its own impact, from its role as the oldest German heritage church in Michigan, to the diverse and inclusive congregation it is today.

"By partnering with CWS for ministries like [the annual] CROP Walk," said Reverend Dawn Christensen, of Bethlehem UCC, "We greatly expand the positive impact to assist the 'least of these', who are our brothers and sisters."

This year, CWS has been visiting its Top 75 Lifetime Giving Congregations. During these visits, congregants are presented with a Legacy Plaque in a ceremony honoring their dedication to supporting the mission of CWS. Legacy Congregations have supported a variety of funding programs including the CROP Hunger Walks, CWS Blankets, CWS Kits and CWS Tools. This financial support is vital in supporting in-need populations as they build a sustainable future.

For more information on CWS' effort to honor Lifetime Giving Congregations, contact media@cwsglobal.org.



Bethlehem Veterans & Friends

Monthly Breakfast

Friday December 1,
8:30 am

Alpha Koney Island, 4389
Jackson Rd.

Questions? Contact Tom
Ziesemer



Bethlehem Women & Friends

Monthly Breakfast

Tuesday December 12,
9:30 am Alpha Koney
Island, 4389 Jackson Rd.
Contact Susan Irwin at
734-255-5661 or
siiwin46@gmail.com for
more info.

Calling All Radio Listeners!

Do you listen to the BUCC worship service via WAAM Radio? If so, we want to help you transition to a new service that is just as easy, more affordable, and more portable than the radio broadcast. The last WAAM radio broadcast will be Sunday, December 31.

You have two options with this new phone-based system. Option 1: Call 1-855-669-8965 and listen to the service live or listen to the latest recording any time during the week. **Option 2: The new system will call you just before the service begins.** All we need from you is your name and the phone number the system should call. All you need to do is answer your phone about 5 min before the service begins. The audio portion of the service will run the entire length of the service (it is not limited to 60 min).

This will also allow us to bring the audio of non-Sunday worship services to you such as the Longest Night Service, Christmas Eve service, Good Friday services, etc. With this phone service, you will be able to hear the worship service wherever you are. Our goal is to transition all radio listeners over to this phone service before 12/31. The cost of this new service is a fraction of what the radio service costs us. **Please call the office (734-665-6149) to provide your name and the phone number we should use for Option 2.** We encourage you to share this message with anyone you know who relies on the radio broadcast to follow our worship services. Thank you!

The following individuals received MacKay Educational Scholarship for the 2023-2024 academic year. All of our scholarship winners attend Michigan State University. Congratulations to all the recipients and best of luck in your academic career.

- Abigail Bowers
- Brian Gotham
- John Schenk
- Kaitlyn Schwartz



Thank You to everyone that came
and helped us clean up
the church grounds!
Your hard work is appreciated!

Current Fiscal Year			
October, 2023	MTD	YTD Target	23 /24 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$145,636	\$163,071	\$391,370
Expenses	\$153,354	\$201,482	\$483,556
Net	(\$7,718)	(\$38,411)	(\$92,186)

BUCC OUTREACH

Outreach Holiday Appeals 2023

It's that time of the year when we begin thinking of ways our congregation can "reach out" to our local agencies to help children and families during the Holiday Season. OUTREACH MINISTRY, YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS, and EDUCATION MINISTRY TEAMS are joining together this year to promote these appeals that you can access online. In addition, a box is located in the Sanctuary for gift cards and donations.

Peace

Neighborhood Center



Over the past 50 years, PNC has provided critical services and opportunities to more than 16,000 people. Opportunities to help this year are:

*Amazon Wish List

*Gift Cards

Please visit their website to find out how you can make a difference in the lives of the children and families that are part of the Peace Family.

[PNC Link](#)

Alpha House



Alpha House Shelters between 50-60 families each year. During the holidays, they plan to offer these opportunities to help out:

*Gift Cards

*Shelter Needs

Please visit the link below to find out how you can help.

For Questions please contact:

Zach Crutchfield

zcruthfield@alphahouse-ihn.org

[Alpha House Link](#)

Food Gatherers



Food Gatherers continues to need donations of money and food to help access affordable, healthy food for Washtenaw County.

Last year Food Gatherers distributed 7.3 million pounds of food—the equivalent of 6 million meals—through their network of partner programs.

Our gifts of food and money can help eliminate hunger in Washtenaw County.

Use the link below for financial contributions.

Also, canned foods can be put in the Food Barrel at the church.

[Food Gatherers](#)



Please make sure that the office receives all Refrigerator Page and Email Blast submissions by 12:00 pm Wednesday each week. December 15 is the deadline for items to be included in the January edition of the VISITOR newsletter. Please email submissions to:
churchoffice@bethlehem-ucc.org



MEETING MINUTES

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

month at:

parishadministrator@bethlehem-ucc.org

Thank you all for your service to our church community.

What better way to enjoy the company of your fellow church members than over a good cup of coffee? We are looking for two volunteers a week to adopt-a-coffee hour on Sundays after the 10:00 am worship service in the Fellowship Hall. Volunteers will need to set up, make coffee and clean up. Please click the link [HERE](#) to be taken to the Sign Up Genius website where you can choose your slot. Your willingness to participate in this act of fellowship is sincerely appreciated.



Memorials and Gifts

Gifts Received October 15, 2023 to November 15, 2023

CEMETERY MAINTENANCE FUND

Manfred Hilberer Memorial
Harriett & Kenneth Holzapfel Memorial
Jerry Landers Memorial
Hilda Ward Memorial

Norm & Helen Grob Memorial in honor of what would have been their 76th Wedding Anniversary on September 20 (omitted from September Visitor)

GENERAL MEMORIAL FUND

Virginia Slocum Memorial

RADIO SPONSORSHIP

Oct. 1 – In honor of Roger Hoxie and his family
Oct. 15 – In memory of Frederick and Lela Keppler

Gifts listed were received through
November 15, 2023



Bethlehem Cemetery News

The fall time of the year can mean many things, a few for sure are us planning ahead for Winter, planning forth Advent, planning for end of the year, and planting for the future.

At the cemetery we are planting new trees, doing fall clean up, and planning financially ahead for 2024.

This short article from the Ann Arbor News provides insight into planning and planting. Mr. Laverty had planned ahead with his burial plots, and was planting a shrub the future. The planting was completed two days after his death, 9/21/1964; burial on 9/23/1964

We ask you to please consider Bethlehem Cemetery Ann Arbor in your future. If you have a Required Minimum Distribution to take, consider gifting it to the cemetery. Contact can be made by email us at bucc.cemetery.board@bethlehem-ucc.org or calling us and leaving a message at 734-6665-6149 ext 219.

Thank you and Merry Christmas.

Bethlehem

Cemetery Board

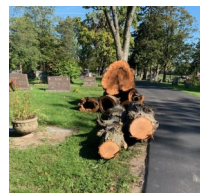
Bethlehem

Cemetery Ann

Arbor is located at

2801 Jackson Rd.

48103.



Collapses, Dies At Grave Plot

A 59-year-old Ann Arbor barber dropped dead yesterday afternoon while planting a shrub on his own cemetery plot.

John E. Laverty, operator of a barber shop at 306 Thompson St., was the victim of a heart attack, Dr. R. Craig Barlow, a deputy medical examiner, ruled.

City police detectives said they learned Laverty purchased a shrub on Sunday and told relatives he wanted to plant it on his cemetery plot in Bethlehem Cemetery on Jackson Ave. at the west edge of the city.

Cemetery workers said they spoke with Laverty about 1 p.m. yesterday when they asked him if he needed help in planting the shrub. However the barber declined their offer of aid and proceeded to dig the hole on the two-grave site, officers learned.

Two hours later the workers discovered Laverty lying on his back on the grave. The hole for the shrub had been dug but the plant had not been placed in it, police said.



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.

Rev. Dawn Christenson	Interim Pastor
revdawnchristenson@gmail.com	
Rev. Diane White	Associate Pastor
pastordiane@bethlehem-ucc.org	
Naki Kripfgans	Music Director / Organist
musicdirector@bethlehem-ucc.org	
Gwenda Mayes	Office Supervisor
parishadministrator@bethlehem-ucc.org	
Jim Rowan	Hand Bell Director
jrowan@umich.edu	
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

Interim Pastor: Rev. Dawn Christenson
 Assoc. Pastor: Rev. Diane White
 Office Supervisor: Gwenda Mayes
 Admin. Assistant: Aimee Winchester
 Director of Music/Organist: Dr. Naki Kripfgans
 Director of Handbells: Jim Rowan
 Video Director: Dan Blakeney
 Maintenance Personnel: Bill Husted

MINISTRY TEAM CHAIRS

Finance: Tom Krell
 Facilities: Steve Darr
 Education: Open Position
 Worship: Open Position
 Member Care: Judy Coucouvanis
 Jenny Foster
 Welcome: Jane Schmerberg
 Outreach: Open Position
 Fellowship: Open Position
 Youth & Young Adult: Katie Rowan
 Bethlehem Cemetery: Mary Jean Raab
 Nominations Committee: Open Position

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

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