

The Visitor

January / February 2024

Bethlehem United Church of Christ

*"Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." (Isaiah 60:1)*



Beloved ones!

Have you seen?! Have you heard?! A great light shined on Bethlehem, pointing to a tiny, helpless, poor child, born in a barn – our Savior, Jesus Christ, the Lord. And a light still shines, on Bethlehem United Church of Christ! And the glory and grace of God envelops us! I know that some of you are worried about Bethlehem. Yes, as Ron pointed out in his message, there is much work that lies ahead. All true. Yet, I remind you that God is with us AND with God all things are possible! Bethlehem is a blessed community of faith. Look around ... the veil has lifted; dark clouds have parted, letting God's glorious light shine in. I am witnessing the transformative power of the Spirit in our midst, with palpable renewed energy and joy; return of prodigals; and receipt of new members. So, sound the trumpets! For (paraphrasing the prophet Joel) the Spirit of the Lord shall be poured out on us; our people will prophesy, and we shall dream dreams and see visions! Yes, there is work ahead! Glorious work! – God's work for us, to figure out who Bethlehem is called to be and do for God's kingdom. We are thrilled to announce that Leadership Council has given their blessing, for the newly formed Ad Hoc Bylaws committee. Our review will begin this month. We look forward to this important step in our journey together. I am so excited, I could just squeal! Soon and very soon, our path forward will be revealed, step by step, with the Lord by our side. Oh, 2024 is going to be AMAZING! Blessings of a HAPPY New Year, to you, good people of Bethlehem!

Pastor Dawn

*"And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."
Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"
(Revelations 21:5)*

God's mercies are new each and every day. Every morning when we wake up, we have before us unlimited opportunities to do God's will in the world. There are moments for us to make a difference one interaction, one relationship at a time. Perhaps a call to someone who is lonely or a note that will arrive at just the right time when someone needs it. Maybe it's a kind word to a stranger or a helping hand when one wasn't expected. Or as we clean out some of all the good things God has given us, we donate them to a wonderful cause. Perhaps we volunteer to help at church or a charity. We are the instruments of God creating peace in the world. God is making all things new – in us and through us every day. "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Blessings,
Pastor Diane

In This Issue

Messages from Pastors Dawn & Diane	Page 1	BUCC Family	Page 7
A Message from the Council President	Pages 2 & 4	Advent Photos	Page 8
Member Care	Page 2	Christmas Celebration	Page 9
From the Cemetery Board	Page 3	Broadcast Support	Page 10
BUCC Happenings/Calendar	Page 4	Budget	Page 10
Ni Une Mas/Honorariums	Page 5	Outreach	Page 11
Memorials	Page 6	Who We Are	Page 12

Looking ahead...



Dear Bethlehem members,

As we move into the new calendar year (and second half of our church year), it is a good opportunity to reflect on what may lie ahead of us. Pastor Dawn has been a part of us now for six months. During that time, she has worked closely with our church Council, Ministry teams, office staff, committees and you, our members to get a feel for the current needs and condition of our congregation. It has been a pleasure to work with her on mapping a way forward in the coming months.

During this same period I and others on Council have heard comments from our members questioning if Bethlehem can or should continue to exist as a church body.

"The building is too big for our current congregation."

"We have no money."

"We have lost too many of our members."

There is some truth to all of these comments. The building is too big for our current congregation, so we must continue to find opportunities to allow more expanded use by our community friends. Our finances are difficult which means we must do what we can to reduce expenses and maximize all sources of revenue while continuing to meet our ministry mission in our communities, State, Nation and world. We have lost many members over the past years. Friends and loved ones have passed away, moved away, or moved on in search of a new church family. Others have simply chosen to step back from being involved in the day-to-day activities of Bethlehem. Whatever the reason for their absence, all are missed. However, there are many members who continue to deeply love and care for this grand old church of ours. Some are gradually returning to the life of the church. Our regular in-person attendance has stabilized although down from pre-pandemic levels. Yet, we have regular followers online. And we have begun to grow, by receiving a new member last month. Our ministry teams, Council members, staff, and volunteers, continue to support, as best they can, our operational needs. We struggle but yet we move forward, choosing to look ahead rather than behind.

We have a difficult path that lies ahead of us. There will be many challenges we still must face. It will not be easy but with God's grace and guidance and our shared involvement and support...Bethlehem will survive and prosper. We have for 190 years, through even greater difficulties. Bethlehem will need your help. You can support Bethlehem in many ways. First, volunteer. Don't wait to be asked. Let Council or Pastor Dawn know that you would like to help on any of our ministry teams, our Council, our committees. Second, talk to people about Bethlehem. Let them know that all are welcomed inside our building and our congregation. Third, to the best of your ability support Bethlehem through your giving. Fourth, regardless if you attend in-person or through our live streaming, continue to provide feedback on how our programs and worship experiences might be improved.

In the coming months, Pastor Dawn will be working with Council and members of our congregation to review and modify our by-laws to make them more practical for the operational management of our church. She will be guiding the congregation, to help us discern who we are and who God is calling us to be. Ultimately, a search committee will be formed to write our church's profile and initiate a search to find a new senior pastor.

I wish everyone the best for the coming year. It will be a time of progress and renewal. A time of building and healing. God bless you all and may God's grace bless each and every one.

Love and peace,
Ron Dechert-President

Member Care News

Thank You

Member Care Ministry wishes to thank everyone who participated in the Cookie Exchange during Advent! It was a huge success. Delicious cookies were enjoyed by all and not a single pound was gained. 😊

*A limited number
of Lenten
Devotionals will
be available*

in the Sanctuary during Lent.



From the Cemetery Board



Dear members and friends of Bethlehem Cemetery,

We thank you for all of your various help and assistance. Your Church cemetery located at 2801 Jackson Rd., Ann Arbor 48103 requires many resources to operate well. Donations are very important, and we thank you for all the donations made in 2023.

There were two large projects completed in the past year, those were, resurfacing the winding drive through the cemetery, and a large amount of tree maintenance.

Further donations for the continued upkeep of our Bethlehem Cemetery can be made through the regular church giving, by writing, *cemetery*, in the memo line of your donation check, or a donation can even be made online by clicking this link: [DONATION](#)

Our cemetery staff is also very important, and, as 2023 we are saying so long, to a valued Bethlehem Cemetery staff person. Betty Clark. Betty has done the financial work of the cemetery for more than 10 years. We thank Betty for her outstanding work, professionalism, and leadership. Betty and her husband Lewis, continue to live in Ann Arbor.

Happy New Year

Bethlehem Cemetery Board

734-665-6149. Ext 219

WHAT'S COOKING?

Dear Bethlehem,

Several of you took notice of a sandwich sign set-up at our 5th Avenue entrance last week. The sign advertised Gai's Kitchen. I am writing to give you background pertaining to this sign. Several months ago, Michelle Loukotka was viewing the web based communication page **Next Door**. She saw a posting from a woman looking for kitchen space to rent for a new start-up business. Michelle contacted me and I asked Michelle to have the person contact our church if interested.

The woman (Xiao Feng) is from China who came to Ann Arbor to attend the Ross School of Business. In my conversations with Xiao, she was lamenting the lack of "authentic" Chinese cuisine in Ann Arbor and dreamed of starting her own business to address this issue. After getting all of the licensing and health department approvals to use our kitchen for food preparation and distribution (carry-out), Xiao started a "soft-opening" in December to work out the issues of her menu, hours of operation, and days of service. This remains a work in progress.

Xiao has now launched her business under the name of Gai's kitchen (www.gaiskitchen.com). Although her menu is still being finalized and her hours of service flexible, I wanted to answer the basic question that came up last Sunday..."What is going on in the kitchen?" Currently, Xiao's business is carry-out, pre-order only. Customers can place an order for pick-up at the church.

If you want to learn a little more about Gai's kitchen please copy the link listed above to your browser. Please be aware that there is a Gai's Kitchen on the web in New York City. Using the link listed above takes you to the correct webpage.

If you have any questions, please contact me (rdechert@umich.edu).

God Bless,

Ron Dechert-President



Bethlehem Veterans & Friends Monthly Breakfast

Friday January 5 & February 2,
8:30 am

Alpha Koney Island, 4389 Jackson Rd.

Questions? Contact Tom Ziesemer

Bethlehem Women & Friends Monthly Breakfast

Tuesday January 9 & February 13, 9:30
am Alpha Koney Island, 4389 Jackson Rd. Contact Susan
Irwin at 734-255-5661 or
siiwin46@gmail.com for more info.



BUCC HAPPENINGS



January 3 Communion Sunday

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 6:45 pm

January 5

- Bethlehem Veteran's and Friends Monthly Breakfast, Alpha Koney, 8:30 am

January 6

- Degreening the Church, Church Property, 9:00 am

January 7

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

January 8

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

January 9

- Bethlehem Ladies & Friends Breakfast, Alpha Koney 9:30 am

January 10

- Cemetery Board Mtg., Cemetery, 9:30 am
- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Member Care Mtg., Lounge, 4:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 6:45 pm

January 14

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

January 15

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

January 16

- Facilities Ministry Team Mtg., 3:30 pm, Lounge

January 17

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 6:45 pm

January 21

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

January 22

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

January 24

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 6:45 pm

January 25

- Leadership Council Mtg., 6:00 pm
- Worship at Brecon Village, 10:00 am

January 28

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

January 29

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

January 31

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Gustavus Choir Performance, Sanctuary 7:00 pm

February 1

- Leadership Council, via ZOOM, 5:30 pm

February 2

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

February 4 Communion Sunday

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- Chili Cook-Off & Potluck, Fellowship Hall 11:30 am

February 5

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

February 7

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Member Care Ministry Mtg., 4:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 6:45 pm

February 11

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

February 12

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

February 14

- Cemetery Board Mtg., Cemetery, 9:30 am
- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 6:45 pm

February 18

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

February 19

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

February 20

- Facilities Ministry Team Mtg., 3:30 pm, Lounge

February 21

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 6:45 pm

February 22

- Leadership Council Mtg., Lounge 6:00 pm

February 25

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

February 26

- Hand Bell Rehearsal, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

February 28

- Busy Christian Hands, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Rm., 6:45 pm





**BETHLEHEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IS PROUD
TO HOST THE FOLLOWING EVENT:**

A trailblazing world premiere production, **“Ni une más”** braids music, theatre, and dance to tell survivors’ stories of growing agency. From the tender “Te recuerdo” (I remember you) to the rumbling subway sounds of “Metro Asfixia;” from the ironic rap, “This Doesn’t Happen in Michigan,” to the foot-stomping chorus, “It’s Not My Fault,” this audience-engaging production is both mesmerizing and memorable.

Our production team—led by GRAMMY-nominated artistic director and composer Pamela Ruiter-Feenstra and award-winning journalists Ana Ávila and María Arce – partnered with survivors to co-create **“Ni une más.”** The title is based on a slogan used in many Latin American countries to stand up to domestic violence and femicide. As gender-based violence is a local and global health crisis, we move this often-silenced topic to the spotlight to transform trauma into healing power through the arts.

Content warning. This show is survivor-centered, and features all true stories. We deliberately avoid giving the spotlight to perpetrators, and avoid depicting the violence. Instead, we focus on the survivors' agency and path to healing. That said, our survivors report brief contextualizing moments of the trauma and silencing tactics, and these stories may evoke strong emotions in audience members. Ultimately, the survivors claim their own voices and agency and reveal how they heal by developing survivor-supporter communities and by engaging in the arts. It is precisely due to the suffering, silencing, and institutional betrayals that we choose to stand up to the violence and call for action to prevent future violence. We invite you to take care of yourself, and to step out if you need to take a break. We will have trauma-trained advocates available in private rooms, and an audience discussion after the show.

Both Shows start at 7:30 PM
Secure your free tickets here for
[March 15, 2024](#) and/or [March 16, 2024](#).

GUSTAVUS CHOIR

Brandon Dean, conductor


A large group of approximately 60 choir members, both men and women, are posed on a wide staircase. They are all wearing matching maroon robes with white collars. The group is arranged in many rows, filling the width of the stairs. The background is a bright, slightly overexposed interior space with white walls and railings.

2024 REGIONAL TOUR OF THE MIDWEST

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2024 | 7 P.M.

BETHLEHEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST | ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

Open to the public. A freewill donation will be accepted.

GUSTAVUS 
GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

2023-24 TEAM USA

FAITH AND FAMILY NIGHT

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Friday, March 1, 2024

**vs**

To Purchase Tickets

[CLICK HERE](#)
CALL (734)-453-0818
or
SCAN THE QR CODE BELOW

\$15/person
\$3 per ticket supports
International Justice Movement

Schedule
5:15 pm - Doors Open
5:30 pm - Guest Speakers
Red Wings Goalie James Reimer
7 pm - Puck Drop



 SCAN ME

FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT
Erika Hansen | Senior Consultant, Sales & Services
erika.hansen@usahockey.org | 734.453.0818

BUCC FAMILY

ADVENT WORKSHOP AND POT LUCK



Many thanks from the Mitten Tree

The Education and Outreach Ministry Teams would like to thank our congregation for the generous holiday donations. Our children took down the mitten tree contributions and we were able to distribute several bags each to Alpha House and Peace Neighborhood Center. There were dozens of handmade knitted hats, mittens, and scarves as well as much needed purchased items. We also collected over \$600 in gift cards from the donation box for the agencies to distribute. Meijer cards were especially appreciated for the folks at Alpha House. Thank you Bethlehem!



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 November 16 – December 15, 2023

CEMETERY MAINTENANCE FUND

In honor of Jane Santoro

CEMETERY FUND

Norm & Helen Grob Memorial

CEMETERY ROADS MAINTENANCE FUND

Hilda Ward Memorial

CURRENT FUND

Christine Weglowski Memorial

BROADCAST SPONSORSHIP

Dedicated to all sponsors and listeners since 1955. this ministry has provided our family, our Church family, and the community with a way to be included in live worship when it was not possible otherwise.

Gifts listed were received through
December 15, 2023



A



*to our
Newest Member!*



Children's Moment



Meet Some of Our Very Talented Musical Guests



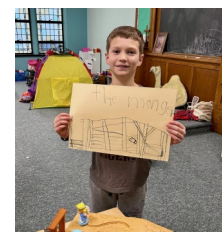
The Bethlehem Bell Choir and The Ringing of the Bells



The Bethlehem Choir



Fun and Learning at Sunday School



Advent and the Lighting of the Candles



Fourth Sunday of Advent



CHRISTMAS EVE 2023



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.

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. 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!

Food Gatherers Volunteer Day

Bethlehem will have a volunteer day at the Food Gatherers warehouse on Saturday February 17, 1:00 - 3:00 PM.

You can sign up on [SignUp Genius](#), or here: [Sign Up](#)



Please make sure that the office receives all Refrigerator Page and Email Blast submissions by 12:00 pm Wednesday each week. 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**

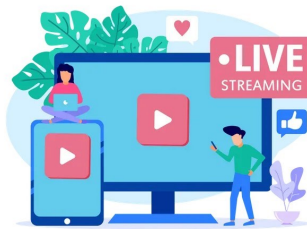


MEETING MINUTES

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.



BROADCAST SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP

We are pleased to be able to provide live-streaming and a new phone streaming service of the weekly 10 o'clock worship service. Many of our members are unable to attend in person and this provides a way for them to feel connected.

This program is funded by weekly broadcast sponsorships, memorials, and special donations.

Have you sponsored a Broadcast lately?

Are you looking for a way to honor or remember a friend or family member? A weekly Broadcast Sponsorship is \$250. 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.

Current Fiscal Year

November, 2023	Year to Date	YTD Target	23 /24 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$174,774	\$195,685	\$391,370
Expenses	\$187,458	\$241,778	\$483,556
Net	(\$12,684)	(\$46,093)	(\$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](#)



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