

The Visitor

March 2024

Bethlehem United Church of Christ

Three Churches, Eight Locked Doors

By Lillian Daniel

Michigan Conference Minister

One recent wintry weekend, I decided to visit a random church in my neighborhood, and just for a change of pace, since I spend so much time visiting our Michigan UCC churches, I thought I'd go to another denomination.

I tried to forget that I was a pastor and professional church visitor, so I looked for a church the way normal people do - online, at the last minute, haphazardly and on a day with bad weather. I plugged three nearby churches into google maps and drove toward the one that looked to be starting soon but hadn't started yet.

I circled around looking for parking, and then I circled around again, and by the time I finally parked somewhere semi-legal, my frustration was high, as I slipped on icy sidewalks toward the entrance. I'll admit it. I was now late and coming in hot.

I know enough about historic church buildings to know that the front door they built a hundred years ago is almost never going to be the front door today, so I went to a modern office door near a staff parking area, but it was locked, and on the door was a paper sign that said something unhelpful like, "Please enter through the north narthex courtyard office staff side main entrance" and included a map of the church's architectural blueprint with a few illegible squiggles. So I slipped along the sidewalk to a side door, also locked, and finally up the unsalted stairs to the grand gothic door, amazed that the main entrance was actually going to be the main entrance but of course it wasn't. Pasted to that door was the same mysterious sign I had seen on all the other doors, so I circled back to door number one, which was at least made of glass and knocked on the window, and finally reluctantly pressed what might be a doorbell, that I prayed didn't ring straight to the pulpit.

After a few minutes a uniformed security guard opened the door just a crack to ask me why I was there.

"I'm here for church," I said.

"You're late," she said.

"Your doors are locked," I said.

"We have signs," she said.

"I tried four doors with the same sign before coming back to this first one."

"You should have rung the doorbell," she said.

"I just did," I said.

"You can come in, but it's almost over," she said, and sure enough, church must have ended early that day (I'll guess they hadn't invited the Conference Minister to preach.) The one dark hallway into the sanctuary was now as crowded as a cattle chute, full of people leaving just as I was coming in. I just turned myself around and followed the crowd out, ready to try church number two.

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At the next church, a few blocks away, I was ready to be locked out a few times, and was, but I was pleasantly surprised when the actual entrance proved to be the entrance. The tall door opened into a gathering space, which was empty, but I could understand that, because once again, I was late, and I was just grateful to step in from the cold. Next step was to locate the sanctuary, but when I tried to open the double doors as quietly as I could, I realized I needn't have bothered because the church was also empty. Was I in the wrong building? Was this even a church? Or was I trespassing? A man walked toward me, wearing a badge that made me nervous until I saw that it said, "Usher" and he had a friendly smile.

"You probably expected to find a bunch of people here, and not an empty narthex, but we're all actually downstairs in the basement if you'd like to join us. Welcome!" he said cheerfully.

I thanked him, apologized for being late, and then went into a long story he had not asked to hear, about this being the fifth entrance I'd tried in a vain attempt to break into locked churches I had found on the internet earlier that morning. "Can you please direct me to the church service," I asked, "So that I can just slip in?"

Yet once again, my questions as a church visitor did not seem to have an obvious answer. "We have a charming tradition here at our church," the usher explained, "That whenever there is a fifth Sunday of the month, we cancel worship and have breakfast instead in the basement. Would you like to join us?"

"No offense but I wasn't looking for breakfast." I said. "I was just hoping to go to church somewhere." Back in my cold car, I rechecked this church's website and worship times and nowhere was there anything about fifth Sundays, breakfast and other charming traditions.

The third church service I tried was now well under way, probably almost over, so I had no time to waste. By now I knew to look for the least obvious entrance architecturally, find it locked, but by I had now learned the doorbell ringing trick and I had even mastered my pitch speech for yet another guard who sure enough questioned me about my reasons for wanting to come in. "I know that church is almost over," I said, "I'm just trying to get in for the end." Perhaps he thought I was referencing the End as in eternity for he relented and walked me to a side door off a hallway I never would have found myself. Finally, I was going to get into a church! But did I ever. This backstage entrance popped me into what felt like the center stage of the chancel. No slipping in late at the back for me, in order to find a pew in which to be quiet. I was going to have to walk in front of everyone, like a pageant contestant, which I did, for the sake of world peace, and then I sat down.

All around me, people read and sang out loud from a lengthy printed paper program that I did not have a copy of and no one around me seemed willing to part with their own. When it came time to sing as a group, they looked at me curiously because I was not singing but no one seemed to understand that I was literally missing the memo, which was the printed material they held in their hot little hands. As no one offered to share, I pretended to have no need of their help, making up and mouthing words to songs I pretended to sing. As they wrapped up communion, I jumped into line, which probably looked like cutting, and then tried to mimic the behavior of the people in front of me at the altar. I returned to my seat, fed in the body of Christ, but also exhausted and eager to leave more anonymously than I had come in. But that was not meant to be, for the only exit was yet another cow chute that ended with the one thing I was not in the mood to do by then.

The line to shake the pastor's hand was interminable, as parishioners chatted with the pastor, while others waited patiently, tossing the bulletins they had refused to part with minutes before straight into the recycling. But I could see there was no getting around any of this. The only way out was through. I shook the pastor's hand, shook the dust from my feet and high tailed it home.

So thus concludes my story of three churches, eight locked doors, two security guards, multiple faded paper signs with instructions that made no sense, entrances and exits with no escape, ice, cold, frost and some bad weather to boot. Even to me as a professional pastor, the entry code was hard to crack. I imagined how hard it would be for someone who has been away from church for years, someone who carries wounds or a sense of rejection.

Now, I trust that all three of these churches are warm and welcoming, and not only because they had blanketed themselves with signs and banners to that effect. I trust that they really are loving people but their logistics told a different story.



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Friends, if your doors are locked after worship starts, please add signs to every locked door that explain how visitors can still get in without feeling embarrassed, but then be prepared for them to still feel discouraged and leave. It takes a lot of courage to come to worship somewhere for the first time, and our churches need to be ready and welcoming, for real. Update everything you have online to make it clear what time you worship, and post publicly when you don't, because that may be the very day you get a visitor. The most important person in the church is the one who has not yet arrived.

We can hang as many welcome signs as we want telling the world how open we are, but if the stranger can't find their way in, late, tired and unprepared, what is the point?

Peace and Blessings,

Lillian Daniel

Michigan Conference Minister



*Note: No actual UCC churches were harmed or observed in the production of this newsletter.

Distinction Between Fasting and Feasting

During this season of Lent, I thought this writing from an unknown author to be most relevant. It is something we can learn from and it is important enough to take with us throughout the year as it explains the distinction between fasting and feasting when it comes to our relationship with God.

Fast from judging others; feast on Christ dwelling in you.

Fast from looking for differences; feast on the unity and harmony in life.

Fast from words that pollute; feast on words that uplift, praise and support.

Fast from anger; feast on patience.

Fast from pessimism; feast on optimism.

Fast from worry; feast on trusting God's promises.

Fast from complaining; feast on appreciation.

Fast from unrelenting pressures; feast on unceasing prayer.

Fast from bitterness; feast on forgiveness.

Fast from concern for self; feast on compassion for others.

Fast from discouragement; feast on hope.

Fast from suspicion; feast on truth.

Fast from thoughts that weaken; feast on promises that inspire.

Fast from idle gossip; feast on purposeful silence.

Fast from overwhelming problems; feast on prayer that provides support.

Lenten Blessings,
Pastor Diane



Lenten Blessings,
Pastor Diane

Transgender Day of Visibility
Sunday, March 31st

Join us for the Lenten Bible Study
on Lament

Sundays in Lent,

12:00 pm— 1:00 pm



Easter falls on the 31st of March this year and that day is approaching fast! Don't forget to order your flowers. The deadline for flower orders is March 8. Please have your order to the Bethlehem Church office by then.





1845 Church

amazingly beautiful church and celebrate the rich history of our church in serving the Ann Arbor community.

The afternoon begins with building tours from 3:00-4:30 pm where you will be able to visit our awe-inspiring sanctuary and hear a brief presentation of its history and view the incredible stained glass windows. Tour leaders will guide you throughout the building to learn about the diverse community programs we support at Bethlehem.



Present Day Church

Bethlehem UCC has been serving downtown Ann Arbor for over 190 years. We invite the public to come and see this

Following the tours, you are invited to return to the sanctuary to enjoy a short concert. The afternoon will conclude with light refreshments in our Fellowship Hall. This wonderful event is free of charge and all tour areas are accessible to those who require mobility assistance.

We look forward to your visit. Please contact the church office (734-665-6149) if you have any questions.

*"Bethlehem Church - Built Upon Legacies of the Past
To Create in the Present a Future"*

190th Anniversary Open House

Bethlehem United Church of Christ

423 S Fourth Avenue, Ann Arbor

April 20, 2024

3:00 pm - 5:30 pm



Palm Sunday Service will be held at Bethlehem at 10:00 am on Sunday, March 24, followed by a **Palm Sunday Brunch** at 11:15 am in the Fellowship Hall.

Maundy Thursday Service will be held at First Congregational Church, 608 E. William St., Ann Arbor on Thursday, March 28. **A gathering with food** will take place at 6:30 pm, followed by **the Tenebrae with communion** at 7:00 pm.

Good Friday Service will be held at Bethlehem at 7:00 pm on March 29. There will also be a 12:00 pm service at First United Methodist Church, 120 S. State St., Ann Arbor.

Easter Sunday Service, will be held at Bethlehem at 10:00 am on Sunday, March 31.

All are encouraged and invited to participate in these community services. Please watch the refrigerator page for more information.





March 1

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

March 3 Communion Sunday

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- New Member Information Meeting, Library, 11:30 am
- Lenten Bible Study, Lounge, 12:30 pm

March 4

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

March 6

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

March 10

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- Lenten Bible Study, Lounge, 12:30 pm

March 11

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

March 12

- Bethlehem Women and Friends Monthly Breakfast, Alpha Koney, 9:30 am

March 13

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

March 15

- Ni Une Mas Production, Sanctuary, 7:30 pm-10:00 pm

March 16

- Ni Une Mas Production, Sanctuary, 7:30 pm-10:00 pm

March 17

- New Member Reception, during Worship
- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- Lenten Bible Study, Lounge, 12:30 pm

March 18

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

March 19

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

March 20

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

March 24

- Sunday School, during Worship
- Coffee Hour, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- Palm Sunday Brunch, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- Lenten Bible Study, Lounge, 12:30 pm

March 25

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

March 27

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

March 28 Maundy Thursday

- Leadership Council Mtg., Lounge 6:00 pm
- Ecumenical Maundy Thursday Service at First Congregational Church, 6:30 pm followed by the Tenebrae at 7:30 pm

March 29 Good Friday

- Ecumenical Good Friday Service, FUMC, 12:00 pm
- Ecumenical Good Friday Service, Sanctuary, 7:00 pm

March 31 Easter Sunday

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



New Member Class

Sunday, March 3, 2024

11:30 am — 12:30 pm

Bethlehem Women & Friends
Monthly Breakfast

Tuesday March 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 Liturgists!

It's easy being a liturgist, everything is already written; all you have to do is read aloud. Sign up in the Google doc using this link [LITURGIST SIGNUP](#), or contact Pastors Dawn or Diane, or call the office at 665-6149

BUCC HAPPENINGS



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

A trailblazing world premiere production, “**Ni una 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 una 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 Live Performances start at 7:30 PM
In Bethlehem’s Sanctuary
Secure your free tickets here for
[March 15, 2024](#) and/or [March 16, 2024](#).

2024 Easter Flowers Order Form

Deadline
for orders:
Friday
March 8

Make checks payable to
Bethlehem Church
(write “Easter donation” in memo)



FLOWER OR FUND	# OF PLANTS	\$ AMOUNT
Daffodil \$13.00		
Hyacinth \$13.00		
Easter Lily (7.5" two stem) \$23.00		
Tulip \$13.00		
Memorial Fund of your choice: _____		
TOTAL DOLLARS ENCLOSED →		

In memory of ☐ In honor of ☐

From: _____

Your name and phone number/email _____

Any money left over after flower and delivery charges are paid
will be placed in the General Fund

All Church Palm Sunday Brunch Come join us to celebrate: Palm Sunday on March 24th at 11:15 am in the Fellowship Dining Hall.

Please sign up to bring a main dish, side dish, salad or baked goods for everyone to enjoy. A free-will offering with the funds going to the Heifer Project will be available

Heifer International works with local farmers in 19 countries around the world to provide training to help end hunger and poverty.

The money we raise will go to purchase animals such as goats, chickens, sheep, heifers and water buffalo for this years Lenten Project.

Please email Jan
 Eadie jee21152@gmail.com
 for more information.



Covenant Association Annual Meeting

Saturday, April 27, 2024

9:30-11:30 AM on Zoom

Register today!

Registration link: [ZOOM REGISTRATION](#)

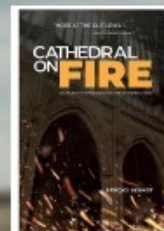
Keynote Speaker, Rev. Dr. Brooks Berndt
Minister for Environmental Justice
United Church of Christ, National Ministries

Author of: *CATHEDRAL ON FIRE: a church handbook for the climate crisis*

Reading ahead recommended

Order your copy today! \$6.95 each or \$25.00 for a pack of 5.

Order link: [CATHEDRAL ON FIRE](#)



Friday Afternoon Organ Recitals during Lent

at FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH of ANN ARBOR
120 S. State Street, Ann Arbor (*at Huron*)

beginning at 12:15 p.m. each Friday

February 23 Paul Haebig

First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor

March 1 Sarah Simko

Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Detroit

**March 8 Gail Jennings, organ &
Andrew Jennings, violin**

March 15 Gale Kramer

March 22 Timothy Huth

First Congregational Church of Ann Arbor

*Series co-sponsored by First United Methodist Church and
the Ann Arbor Chapter of the American Guild of Organists*

EDGEWOOD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TRUMAN MORRISON LECTURE SERIES

THE REV. DR. LILLIAN DANIEL

Conference Minister,
Michigan UCC Conference

*Author of When Spiritual but Not
Religious Is Not Enough*

“A Post-Pandemic
Church Parable”

MARCH 17, 2024

10 AM: WORSHIP,
LILLIAN DANIEL PREACHING

1 PM: LECTURE & RECEPTION



Memorials and Gifts

Gifts Received December 15, 2023 - February 15, 2024

BROADCAST FUND

Joseph & Laura O'Reilly Memorial

CEMETERY MAINTENANCE FUND

Joyce Finkbeiner Memorial

Annabelle & Doug Mensch Memorial

Earl Mensch Honorarium

John Schulenberg Memorial

PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT

Bill Fellenberger Memorial

Hilda McLaughlin Memorial

CURRENT FUND

John Schulenberg Memorial

GENERAL MEMORIAL FUND

Joyce Finkbeiner 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
February 15, 2024**



Please make sure that the office receives all Refrigerator Page and Email Blast submissions by 12:00 pm Wednesday each week. March 15 is the deadline for items to be included in the April 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.



Current Fiscal Year

January 2024	Year to Date	YTD Target	23 /24 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$236,596	\$260,913	\$391,370
Expenses	\$256,376	\$322,371	\$483,556
Net	(\$19,780)	(\$61,457)	(\$92,186)

Current Fiscal Year

December, 2023	Year to Date	YTD Target	23 /24 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$216,854	\$228,299	\$391,370
Expenses	\$219,715	\$282,074	\$483,556
Net	(\$2,861)	(\$53,775)	(\$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