The Visitor

December 2024 Bethlehem United Church of Christ

The Gift of Love & Faithfulness

Ruth said [to Naomi], "Do not press me to leave you or turn my back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God." (Ruth 1:16)

I cannot help but be in awe of Ruth, for her love, devotion, and faithfulness to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Naomi lost her husband and both of her sons. She was deeply grieving and felt as though she was being punished and abandoned by God. Yet, Ruth would not abandon her. She was faithful to a fault. Ruth is truly a shining example of love and faithfulness for all of us.

But not all women of the bible had such support. Think for a moment of Tamar, who was raped and abused by her brother Amnon. (2 Samuel 13) Think too of the unnamed concubine in Judges 19, who was thrown out of the house by her Levite master into the clutches of violent men, who raped her and beat her to death. At least, Tamar's brother, Absalom, supported her following her trauma and held his brother accountable for his violation of her. But no one was there to save or support the Levite's concubine. And honestly, the Levite's actions toward her, leading up to her tragic end, are a lesson in the cycle of abuse and domestic violence that plagues women today. Both she and Tamar, represent countless women who are brutalized and sexually assaulted every day, sight unseen. It is staggering statistic that one in three women today will be sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. Yet, none of these women need face their trauma alone. There are those who are faithful, like Ruth; those who stand up to protect and support battered, broken women and their children in Washtenaw County – They are the good people of SafeHouse Center.

"We are here to support survivors of Intimate Partner Violence and survivors of Sexual Assault, their families, friends and our community. All of our services are free, confidential and available to all survivors of intimate partner violence and sexual assault, who live, work or were victimized in Washtenaw County." I applaud our Outreach Ministry Team for championing their cause. The Outreach Team recognizes that our support of SafeHouse Center is a gift of love and faithfulness to countless battered women in the greater Ann Arbor community – love and faithfulness like that of Ruth, who just happened to be a distant relative of Jesus.

As we journey through Advent on our way to the birth of our Lord and Savior, let us consider the love and faithfulness embodied in the Christ child. Let us consider the vulnerable among us and in our wider community, for whom there seems to be 'no room in the inn;' who sit alone in their pain; who, like Naomi, feel a heartbreaking sense of divine punishment and abandonment. Let us, like Ruth and Jesus, be the embodiment of God's love and faithfulness for them and for all people. For all are beloved children of God. Let us remind each person, 'You are

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beautiful; you are worthy; you are beloved.' There are many meaningful ways that we can do this – and our support of SafeHouse Center is one of those ways.

If you know of women who are in abusive situations or have been assaulted, the SafeHouse Center 24/7 hotline is 734-995-5444.

Perhaps you would like to become a SafeHouse <u>volunteer</u>. Their next volunteer CORE training is in February, 2025.

You may also make direct financial donations to SafeHouse or contribute in-kind items found on their wishlist.

Lord, help us to BE the Light in our world, embodying the love and faithfulness found in the Christ-child. Amen.

Blessings,

Pastor Dawn

CHRISTMAS SERVICES



Wednesday, December 18 The Longest Night Service 5:30 pm

Tuesday, December 24 Christmas Eve Worship 7:00 pm

A Candlelight Service and a Musical celebration featuring the Bethlehem Chancel Choir

Thank you to all who donated wreaths that decorated our outside windows during this Christmas season. Below are the names of those whose memory and/or honor they were given.

Christmas Wreath Memorials and Honorariums

VIII BUILD THE GUI INCHIN	ilaə an immalulis
In Memory of	Given By
Nancy Austin, Sally Gillies, & Lo	ois Kerr Jennifer Vasquez
Glenn W. Bailey	Judy Bailey
Betty & Richard Bowman	Gotham Family
Arlene Connell	Cathleen Connell
Kennyon Edwards	Violet Edwards & Family
Jay Katz	Jacquie Katz & Family
Cliff & Pat Merryman	Ele Kotowski
Raymond & Elizabeth Lamba	rth Joe & Jan Eadie
Robert & Jeanne Opperman	Coucouvanis Family
Laura, Joe, John, Jean & Jennifer	O'Reilly Pat & Shannon O'Reilly
Chuck Raab	Mary Raab
Our Parents	Rev. Diane & Ron White
In Honor Of	Given By

Mike & Harriette Ehnis

Mike & Harriette Ehnis

Arlene Finkbeiner

Doris Whitlock

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A Question and Answer

Many have often asked me, "Why the pink candle?" And my response has often been simple, "It stands for joy." But why? In my search, I found the following article that tells the wonderful story behind the pink candle of Joy. So, as we travel this Advent journey together from the sparkling flame of the first candle of hope to the *Silent Night* commemorated on Christmas Eve, I pray we take time to live the Advent Wreath by sharing the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love of Jesus Christ.

"In our Advent Wreath, three candles are purple and one is pink. Why the one pink candle?"

Before I answer the specific question, for those who aren't familiar with the church "liturgical" year, let's look at the season of Advent. Advent is the beginning of the church year. The first Sunday of Advent (and the first Sunday of the church year) is the fourth Sunday preceding Christmas day. This year it is December 1, 2024. The church divides the year into seasons, much like our meteorological year. The seasons are Advent, Christmastide, Epiphany, Lent, Eastertide, and finally Pentecost. Although there has been a move in some denominations to remove the seasons of Epiphany and Pentecost and rename them Ordinary Time, my personal belief is there is no "ordinary time" in the church. *All* seasons in the church are extraordinary.

In any event, Advent is a four-Sunday season of preparation in the church (and the world) for the arrival of Christ into the world, both at Christmas and in our lives. An Advent wreath is one of the traditional accessories for the season. The wreath is decorated with greenery and laid upon a stand. A large white candle, called the Christ Candle, stands in the middle of the wreath and four candles are placed into the wreath surrounding the central candle. The four candles may be all blue, all purple, or three purple and one pink. These candles are lit on successive Sundays in Advent, one for each week. The pink one is lit on the third week and the Christ Candle is lit on either Christmas Eve or Christmas day, and on each Sunday during Christmastide.

Now, why the pink candle? In the earliest years of the church the only church season was Lent, the seven weeks prior to Easter. Lent was a season of fasting and prayer as the church commemorated the crucifixion of Jesus. The traditional color of banners in the church during this time was a deep purple, signifying royalty, repentance, and suffering. During Lent the church lit seven candles, one for each week of the solemn season. However solemn the season, the story of Lent also has a twinge of hope and joy since the death of Christ prefigured the resurrection. So, on the third Sunday of Lent, the church was encouraged not to fast, but to feast. In ancient times on this particular Sunday the Pope would honor a citizen with a pink rose, and as time passed the priests wore pink vestments on this day as a reminder of the coming joy.

When the season of Advent was instituted, the church viewed it as a mini-Lent, a time for reflection and repentance (thus the purple). In so doing, the church adopted the first four candles of Lent and changed the third candle of Advent to pink in honor of the Lenten tradition. This is why we have a pink candle in our Advent Wreaths.

To further heighten the sense of anticipation of Christ's coming during Advent, the church named each candle in the wreath -- the first being hope, the second peace, the third joy, and the fourth love (there are a number of other traditional names as well, though these are some of the most ancient).¹

It has always seemed fitting to me that the pink candle is the candle of joy, the one that speaks to us with its happy color. May the coming season of Advent lift you with hope, bring you peace, excite you with joy, and place love in your heart to share.

Merry Christmas to you all,

Pastor Díane

¹https://www.hcna.us/columns/pink advent candle.html

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December 1

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

December 2

• Hand Bell practice, Choir Room 5:30 pm

December 4

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Room, 6:45 pm

December 6

• Veterans and friends breakfast, Alpha Koney 8:30 am

December 8

- Cantata during Worship
- Sunday School during Worship
- Advent Workshop & Potluck, Fellowship Hall 11:15 am

December 9

• Hand Bell practice, Choir Room 5:30 pm

December 10

• Ladies breakfast, Alpha Koney 9:30 am

December 11

- Cemetery Board Mtg., Cemetery 9:30 am
- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Room, 6:45 pm

December 15

- Sunday School during Worship
- Cookie Exchange, Fellowship Hall, 11:15 am
- Caroling for the Homebound, TBD

December 16

• Hand Bell Practice, Choir Room 5:30 pm

December 17

• Facilities Ministry Team, Lounge 3:30 pm

December 18

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Choir Room, 4:45 pm
- Longest Night Service, Sanctuary, 5:30 pm

December 22

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

December 23

• Hand Bell practice, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

December 24

- Choir Practice, Choir Room, 4:00 pm
- Christmas Eve Service, Sanctuary, 7:00 pm

December 25 - Merry Christmas

December 26

Office Closed

December 29

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

December 30

• Hand Bell practice, Choir Rm, 5:30 pm

Advent Devotionals Available

The Member Care Ministry team will have a limited number of Advent devotionals available to members. They will be available on the table in the back of the Sanctuary starting November 24th on a first come, first serve basis.



dec

MITTEN TREE IS COMING!

The Mitten Tree will be ready to decorate with mittens, scarves, hats, gloves, and socks starting Friday November 29th through Sunday, December 15th so we have time to distribute everything in time for

Christmas. All items will be given to local organizations for those in need.



Save the Date Advent Workshop & Potluck

Sunday, December 8 at 11:15. in the Fellowship Hall. Lots of fun crafts will be available for all ages

to create. Bring your favorite main dish, salad, side, or dessert to share at the potluck.

Please sign up on the bulletin board outside the office with what dish you plan to bring.

Plan to attend to enjoy good food, fellowship and crafts.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

December 15, 2024 @ 11:15 am following Worship, Member Care is sponsoring a Cookie Exchange during coffee hour!



Bring one 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.

De-greening the Church - Mark your calendars!

De-greening the church will happen on Saturday, January 4th at 9:00 am. As the Christmas season winds down, it's time to pack up and store away the decorations in the Sanctuary. We will need lots of help to accomplish this again. Thank you for your willingness to participate.



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-acoffee 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.



HOMEBOUND FRIENDS

We have many dear friends who remain homebound and they would love Homebound to see you and/or hear from

you—especially at this time of year.

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

MEMORIALS AND GIFTS

Gifts Received October 16 - November 15

GENERAL MEMORIAL FUND

L. Dean & Evelyn Steinaway

Gifts listed were received through November 15, 2024

Just a reminder: During the winter, we will be following the Ann Arbor Schools Closing Policy. If Ann Arbor Schools are closed due to inclement weather. Bethlehem Offices will be closed as well. Thank you for your understanding

Bethlehem Veterans & Friends **Monthly Breakfast** December 6 @ 8:30 am



Alpha Koney Island, 4389 Jackson Rd. Questions? Contact Tom Ziesemer 734-476-7515 or via email at: ziesemerth@gmail.com



Bethlehem Women & Friends Monthly Breakfast December 10 at 9:30 am

Alpha Koney Island, 4389 Jackson Rd. Contact Susan Irwin at 734-255-5661 or siiwin46@gmail.com for more info.



Refrigerator Page and Email Blast DON'T MISS submissions must be received by 5:00 pm the DEADLINE Tuesday each week. There will be a combined January/February Visitor.

submissions for this edition are due by December 30. Please be sure to include all dates, times and pertinent information. Please email submissions to:

churchoffice@bethlehem-ucc.org

End of Year Contributions

As 2024 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 **December 31, 2024.** 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!

Current Fiscal Year

October 2024	Year to Date Actual	YTD Target	23 /24 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$168,973	\$175,833	\$422,000
Expenses	\$178,228	\$217,732	\$522,557
Net	(\$ 9,255)	(\$41,899)	(\$100,557)

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Bethlehem Cemetery

From your Bethlehem Cemetery Association

Greetings! As 2024 comes to a close, we are asking you to consider a donation to Bethlehem Cemetery.

Donations can be made:

By credit card on the Cemetery website: bethlehemcemetery.org/donate/

By credit card on the church website and designated, Cemetery at: www.bethlehm-ucc.org/giving/

Checks made out to Bethlehem Cemetery and mailed to 423 S. Fourth Ave., Ann Arbor. MI 48104.

Or from your IRA as a distribution. You may leave a message on the cemetery voicemail at (734) 665-6149 ext. 219 and a board member will call you back with more information on how to set this up with your financial institution.

Donations can be designated or undesignated. The three designated funds currently in place are:

Trees and Shrubs

Road repair/replacement

Monument repair

There are other ways to give, or set up giving, through legacy gifts, endowments, or trusts.

We have exciting news to share. Barbara Cope designated through her trust that BUCC will be establishing the Lutz/Vogel Fund in honor of her grandparents, L. Johanna Lutz Vogel and Gustav J. This fund is for the cemetery to use for Vogel. maintenance support with consideration for historic preservation. The cemetery board is very pleased to be entrusted with this permanent endowment fund.

In closing, we wish you a blessed Advent season, and Merry Christmas.

Jamie Dylenski, Mary Friend, Susan Irwin, Shannon O'Reilly, Marilyn Pearson, Mary Jean Raab

The Christmas Fund Offering

"... THE GLORY OF GOD SHONE AROUND THEM ... "



Christmas Fund 2024

"And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them..." —Luke 2:9

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees.

United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

To donate by mail to the Christmas Fund, send a check payable to "The Christmas Fund."

Mail to:

The Pension Boards-United Church of Christ, Inc.

Christmas Fund

75 Remittance Dr., Suite 1637

Chicago, IL 60675-1637

You may also donate online by clicking the link HERE and donating directly to the Christmas Fund via the PBUCC website. Thank you and God Bless You and Yours this Holy Season.

Beautify Our Sanctuary with Flowers

There are many opportunities for you to donate flowers yet this year to beautify the sanctuary in honor or memory of your loved ones or in recognition of a special event! 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 the church office at: churchoffice@bethlehem-ucc.org



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Transitional Workshops

We will be hosting 6 transitional workshops January - March 2025 in the Youth Room after Worship from 12:00-2:00 pm. The following are the dates and brief descriptions of the upcoming workshops. Please mark your calendars now so that you can plan to attend some or all the workshops.

January 5, 2025 - Wall of Wonder

This is a fun exercise where participants are asked to insert themselves, family and events into the big-picture timeline in the history of the church shown on a full-wall paper banner. These things may include when they joined the church, baptisms, marriages, and so much more. This always leads to new and unexpected discoveries about and appreciation for each other.

January 26, 2025 - Who are We?

This is an important exercise to deeply explore who BUCC is believed to be today, especially given current members. Many perspectives, history and hope will be shared by those present. This is always an eye-opening experience.

February 9, 2025 - Who is Our Neighbor?

This exercise explores physical, ecumenical, service agencies, and more (not necessarily as obvious as you might think). We will be looking for opportunities for ministerial partners, as well as perceived "threats". We will think about how we might want to or are called to engage with some of these neighbors in new ways.

February 23, 2025 - Asset Mapping

This exercise will help us identify all of BUCC's assets, as well as those needed or desired; ranking/prioritizing them. Information generated through this exercise is of paramount importance for the next visioning workshop.

March 2, 2025 - I Can See Clearly

This is one of the most exciting workshops in which we will engage! This is where we will consider all of the information discerned to date and further discern who God is calling BUCC to be and what God is calling BUCC to do. This is where we develop the vision for the future of BUCC.

March 16, 2025 - Shepherding 101

This is the last big discernment piece, in which we will determine the qualities needed and desired in the next settled pastor for BUCC, in relation to the future vision of the church.

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Totenfest















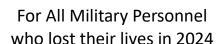




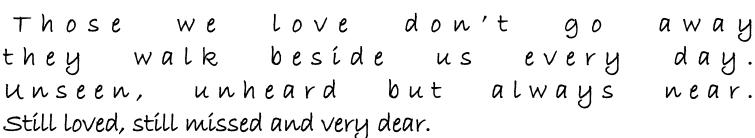
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November 3, 2024









Outreach Holiday Appeals 2024

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. The **OUTREACH MINISTRY** and **EDUCATION MINISTRY TEAMS** are joining together to promote these appeals that you can access online. In addition, a box is located in the Sanctuary for **Meijer**, **Kroger**, and **Target** gift cards and donations.

Please make all donations by December 15.

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

Please visit their website to find out how you can make a difference in the lives of the children and families

*Gift Cards

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 zcrutchfield@alphahouseihn.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

Safe House Center



The SafeHouse Center provides safety, advocacy and resources for survivors of domestic violence/sexual assault and their children. They are also trying to help end domestic violence and sexual assault in Washtenaw County.

Their 24/7 helpline is 734-995-5444.

Safe House

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Outreach Volunteer Opportunities

In addition to monetary donations, Bethlehem members support our partner organizations by volunteering. If you would like to be involved in this way, there are multiple opportunities.

Peace Neighborhood Center Food Distribution

Fridays 8:30 - 12:00

Peace Food Distribution Sign Up







Various shifts are available for signup at the Carrot Way warehouse sorting produce, or at the Delonis Center Community

[12] Repert Various shifts are available for signup at the Carrot Way warehouse sorting produce, or at the Delonis Center Community

[13] Repert Various shifts are available for signup at the Carrot Way warehouse sorting produce, or at the Delonis Center Community

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[15] Repert Various shifts are available for signup at the Carrot Way warehouse sorting produce, or at the Delonis Center Community

[16] Repert Various shifts are available for signup at the Carrot Way warehouse sorting produce, or at the Delonis Center Community

[17] Repert Various shifts are available for signup at the Carrot Way warehouse sorting produce, or at the Delonis Center Community

[18] Repert Various shifts are available for signup at the Carrot Way warehouse sorting produce, or at the Carrot Way warehouse sorting produce sorting

Food Gatherers SignUp

Outreach News

Bethlehem made donations to each of our partner organizations. Checks were presented to Alpha House (\$3000) by Mary Jean Raab, Peace Neighborhood Center (\$3000) by Jane Schmerberg, and Food Gatherers (\$3000) and SafeHouse Center (\$1474) by Katie Rowan. Your pledges to the BUCC budget made these donations possible. Thank you for your generosity!









FOOD DRIVE food gatherers



Fight hunger where we live with Food Gatherers, the food bank & food rescue program serving Washtenaw County.



MOST NEEDED ITEMS

Please no glass

- ✓ Hearty soups
- Canned meats
- ✓ Canned vegetables
- ✓ Packaged pasta & rice
- ✓ Whole-grain cereal & oatmeal
- ✓ Baking & cooking supplies
- ✓ Condiments

- ✓ Nut butters & jelly
- ✓ Kid-friendly snacks
- ✓ Baby food & formula
- ✓ Nutritional supplement drinks
- ✓ Personal care items:
 - soap & shampoo
 - dental hygiene kits
 - disposable razors



Scan this code to make a donation online.

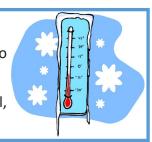
Your donation benefits 140+ community programs serving our neighbors in need of food.

Food Gatherers | 734-761-2796 | www.foodgatherers.org

BRRRR!!!!

As the temperature drops, we invite those who are able to walk, to park a bit further away to allow those who aren't able to walk a parking space in the church lot.

There is free parking available on 4th and 5th Ave on Sunday as well as at Muehling Chapel, the doctor's office next door and the parking structure at the corner of 4th and Williams.



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BETHLEHEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

423 S. Fourth Avenue, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104
Phone 734-665-6149 Fax 734-665-3399



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



www.bethlehem-ucc.org www.facebook.com/bethlehemuccA2

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

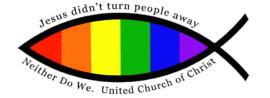
Gwenda Mayes Church Administrator parishadministrator@bethlehem-ucc.org

Jim Rowan Hand Bell Director

jrowan@umich.edu

Lisa Reach 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

Church Administrator: Gwenda Mayes

Admin. Assistant: Lisa Reach

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: Eileen Koprowski Worship: Open Position

Member Care: Judy Coucouvanis

Jenny Foster

Welcome: Open Position Outreach: Katie Rowan Fellowship: Open Position

Youth & Young Adult: Open Position Bethlehem Cemetery: Mary Jean Raab Nominations Committee: Open Position

LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

President: Jim Rowan

Vice President: Open Position

Secretary: Barbara Schenk

Treasurer: P.J. Lindemann

At-Large Members:

Teresa Beagle

Open Position

Ex Officio: Rev. Dawn Christenson