

The Visitor

January / February 2026

Bethlehem United Church of Christ



In the story of the Magi, found in Matthew 2:9-10, it is written: *“When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the [Christ] child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.”*

Friends, like the Magi, we find ourselves on a journey filled with excitement and apprehension, wonder and uncertainty. That, as they say, is life. A new year has been thrust upon us and we have no idea what it will bring. As you journey into the new year, what is guiding you? I suggest that you do what the Magi did and look to the star of Bethlehem. That’s right, the light that guided them to the Christ child – the Light of Christ – his light is there to guide us too. Jesus is the light of the world that no amount of darkness can ever overcome.

Spoiler alert: his light is within you. So, I pray that the star of Bethlehem will guide you to your own light – *his* light within you. Let it light your path in the new year ahead. Let it shine bright, to help you see moments filled with wonder in God’s amazing creation. Let it shine bright, to dispel the shadows of our world and illuminate the places and people that need help and hope. Let it shine bright like a raging campfire, to warm the hearts of those in need of God’s love. Let it shine bright and dance like a lightning bug, to bring joy to you and those around you.

So what if we have no idea what lies ahead in 2026? All we need to do is follow the light, moment to moment, one day at a time, and we too will be overwhelmed with joy that only Christ can bring. As the refrain to hymn NCH #160 states: *“We will follow the light, beautiful light, come where the dewdrops of mercy are bright, shine all around us by day and by night, Jesus, the light of the world.”* His light will never steer us wrong.

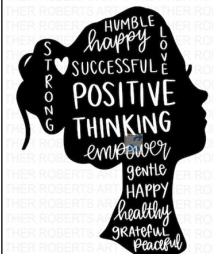
Shine on, my friends, shine on!

Blessings for the New Year,

Pastor Dawn

In This Issue

From Pastor Dawn	Page 1	Member Engagement Christmas Luncheon Picture	Page 4
Pastor Diane	Page 2	Advent Services / Workshop Pictures	Page 5
Ash Wednesday Ecumenical Service	Page 2	Mitten Tree / Caroling/ Cookie Exchange Pictures	Page 6
Budget	Page 2	Christmas Eve Services Pictures	Page 6
January/February Calendar	Page 3	Rotating Shelter SignUp Genius	Page 7
Memorials	Page 4	Who Are We	Page 8



As I write this, the end of 2025 is fast approaching and I'm wondering where the year went. I'm actually glad to be done with 2025 and to move forward...each of us are challenged to do so to the best of our abilities. Where will 2026 take us? What will we learn? How will we change? What can we do to share God's love in the world?

As I thought about this past year, my mind traveled to all I have experienced and learned. I remembered reading the following quote from Maya Angelou that seems to capture a lifetime of learning with lessons we (I) need for today. While reading I found myself saying, "YES!" in agreement with each new revelation. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.


I've learned that, no matter what happens, how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow. I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights. I've learned that, regardless of your relationship with your parents, you'll miss them when they're gone from your life.

I've learned that making a "living" is not the same thing as making a "life." I've learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands. You need to be able to throw something back.

I've learned that if you pursue happiness, it will elude you. But, if you focus on your family, your friends, the needs of others, your work and doing the very best you can, happiness will find you. I've learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision.

I've learned that even when I have pains, I don't have to be one. I've learned that every day, you should reach out and touch someone. People love that human touch -- holding hands, a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back. I've learned that I still have a lot to learn!"

Christ's Peace,
Pastor Diane




Ecumenical

Ash Wednesday

Service Bethlehem UCC

February 18, 2026

at 7:00 pm



IMPORTANT MESSAGE

NOTE:

When contributing to a special fund or collection, please use a separate envelope. Using your current fund or any other fund envelope, without indicating on that envelope what the funds are to be used for, may result in your contribution being applied incorrectly. We appreciate your cooperation in this matter.

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.



Current Fiscal Year June 1, 2025 to May 31, 2026			
November 2025	Year to Date Actual	YTD Target	25/26 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$196,687	\$217,885	\$435,770
Expenses	\$207,970	\$233,147	\$466,293
Net	(\$11,283)	(\$15,262)	(\$30,523)

January / February Calendar

January 11

- Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am
- Outreach Ministry Meeting, Library 11:30 am

January 12

- Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am

January 13

- Ladies Breakfast, Alpha Koney 9:30 am

January 14

- Cemetery Board Meeting, Lounge 9:30 am
- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm
- Member Engagement Meeting, Lounge 3:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Sanctuary 7:00 pm

January 18

- Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am

January 19 Office Closed

- Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am

January 20

- Facilities Meeting, Lounge 3:30 pm

January 21

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Sanctuary 7:00 pm

January 22

- Executive Committee Meeting 6:00 pm via ZOOM

January 25

- Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am

January 26 Office Closed

- Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am

January 28

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Sanctuary 7:00 pm

FEBRUARY

February 1- Communion Sunday

- Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time 11:00 am

February 2 Office Closed

- Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am

February 4

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Sanctuary 7:00 pm

February 6

- Veterans and Friends Breakfast, Alpha Koney 8:30 am

February 8

- Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am

February 9

- Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am

February 10

- Ladies Breakfast, Alpha Koney 9:30 am

February 11

- Cemetery Board Meeting, Lounge 9:30 am
- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Sanctuary 7:00 pm

February 15

- Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am

February 16 Office Closed

- Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am

February 17

- Facilities Meeting, Lounge 3:30 pm

February 18 - Ash Wednesday

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Ecumenical Ash Wednesday Service, Sanctuary, 7:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Sanctuary, 8:00 pm

February 22

- Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am

February 23 Office Closed

- Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am

February 25

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge, 12:00 pm
- Member Engagement Mtg., Lounge, 3:00 pm
- Choir Practice, Sanctuary 7:00 pm

February 26

- Executive Committee Mtg. via Zoom, 6:00 pm



HOMEBOUND FRIENDS

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

If you would like names and contact information, please reach out to the church office at (734) 665-6149.

Reminder:

Bethlehem follows the Ann Arbor Schools Closing Policy. If Ann Arbor Schools are closed due to weather conditions, Bethlehem offices will most likely be closed as well. Thank you for your understanding



Memorials and Gifts Received November 16 - December 31, 2025

GENERAL MEMORIAL FUND

Jan Burnham
George Perros

PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT

Arlene Connell
Wilbert, Betty, and Glen Diuble

CEMETERY MAINTENANCE FUND

Frederick, Lela and Hugh Keppler

Great News!

The Bethlehem website has been updated to include easy access to sign up for opportunities here at church.

On the front page, at the bottom, are one click buttons that take you to sign up sheets.

You can add your name to be a

[Liturgist](#), provide [Flowers for Sunday Worship](#), [Community Time Host](#), or [Sponsor a Live Broadcast](#).

If you do not have access to a computer or need assistance please call the church office at 734-665-6149

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



Member Engagement Christmas Luncheon

Member Engagement team at our annual Christmas luncheon at the Venue. Pictured are Pastor Diane, Dindy, Nan, Teresa, Judy, Jenny Cathleen and Jacquie. Absent: Mary Jean



Bethlehem Women & Friends Monthly Breakfast

January 13 & February 10 at 9:30 am

Alpha Koney Island, 4389 Jackson Rd.
Contact Susan Irwin at 734-255-5661 or
siirwin46@gmail.com for more info.

Bethlehem Veterans & Friends Monthly Breakfast February 6 at 8:30 am

Alpha Koney Island, 4389 Jackson Rd.

Questions? Contact Tom Ziesemer
734-476-7515 or via email at: ziesemerth@gmail.com



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.



Building Room Requests

Our building has many lovely spaces to use for meetings and workshops. We also have a demand for rental of these spaces.

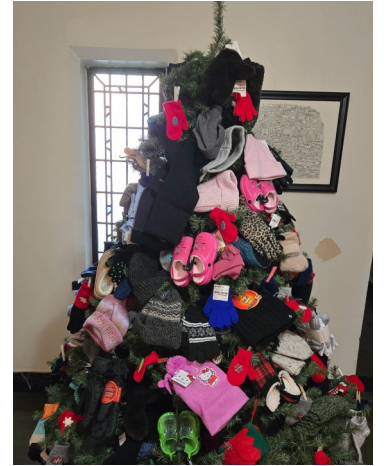
PRIOR to planning an event, please contact office staff to verify room availability and to have your event scheduled on the calendar.

(734) 655-6149 or info@bethlehem-ucc.org

Advent Services and Workshop 2026



Mitten Tree, Cookie Exchange and Caroling



Christmas Eve 2025





**BETHLEHEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST WILL HOST
THE ROTATING SHELTER PROGRAM
MARCH 23 - 30, 2026**

We are seeking to enlist 4 volunteers for each night who will stay overnight, provide information on where restrooms are, and answer other questions.

The time period for volunteers will be 7:00 pm until approximately 7:00 am the next morning.

If you are able to volunteer, you will receive additional information prior to the dates of the program.

We are also asking for donations of 25 homemade or purchased individually wrapped sandwiches per night, and 25 granola bars or other individually wrapped snacks per night.

Please use the link **SignUpGenius Rotating Shelter** below to sign up. If you would like to sign up without using the link, please call or email one of the contact people below to facilitate your sign up.

Katie Rowan: rowank55@gmail.com, 734-846-2160

Mary Jean Raab, raabmj@aol.com, 734-395-5589

[SignUpGenius Rotating Shelter](https://www.signupgenius.com/go/6080A4FA4AF2BA1FD0-61141040-rotating#/)

www.signupgenius.com/go/6080A4FA4AF2BA1FD0-61141040-rotating#/



BETHLEHEM
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



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	Church Administrator
parishadministrator@bethlehem-ucc.org	
Jim Rowan	Hand Bell Director
jrowan@umich.edu	
Lisa Reach	Administrative Assistant
churchoffice@bethlehem-ucc.org	
Bill Husted	Maintenance
Dan Blakeney	Video Director

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

Executive Committee, Leadership Council, and Ministry Team Chairs

Executive Committee

President: Jim Rowan
Vice President: Ron Dechert
Secretary : Sally Elmiger
Treasurer: P.J. Lindemann
Ex Officio: Rev. Dawn Christenson

Leadership Council

President: Jim Rowan
Vice President: Ron Dechert
Secretary: Sally Elmiger
Treasurer: P.J. Lindemann
Business Ministry: Steve Darr
Member Engagement Ministry:
 Judy Coucouvanis /Jenny Foster
Outreach Ministry: Katie Rowan
Worship Ministry: OPEN
Education Ministry: Diana Slaughter
Ex officio: Rev. Dawn Christenson

Ministry Team Chairs

Business Ministry Team Chairs:
Finance Sub Committee: P.J. Lindemann
Facilities Sub Committee Steve Darr
Personnel Sub Committee: Ron Dechert
Education Ministry Team Chair: Diana Slaughter
Member Engagement Ministry Team Co Chairs:
 Jenny Foster & Judy Coucouvanis
Outreach Ministry Team Chair: Katie Rowan
Worship Ministry Team: OPEN
Pastoral Relations Committee Chair: Kurt Schmerberg
Bethlehem Cemetery Board Members:
President: Mary Jean Raab
Vice-President: Mary Friend
Secretary: Shannon O'Reilly
Treasurer: Jaime Dylenski
Elected Members: Marilyn Pearson & Susan Irwin
Ex officio: Rev. Dawn Christenson