

The Visitor

May 2026

Bethlehem United Church of Christ



RISE UP!

Ah, May in Michigan! The warm spring weather, singing birds, and beautiful flowers remind us of renewal, rebirth, and resilience. From their frozen tombs, plants and little creatures arise. I find the resiliency of nature astounding. Just look at this wild violet, defying the asphalt of our driveway at home. It is as if it is saying, ‘Look at me. Look at my surroundings. And yet, I rise!’ For me, it serves as a reminder of all Christ overcame for our sakes, when he arose on Easter morning. Think about that, as we continue through this Easter season and you see new life flourishing around you this spring.

Remember too, that the Easter story does not end with Jesus’ resurrection that first Easter morning. Our risen Savior lives on in and through us, as his hands and feet in the world. His story and our stories are woven together into a beautiful tapestry of renewal, rebirth and resilience. Yes, some of us have challenges to overcome, like that little violet. Believe in God. Believe in yourself. With the help of God, you can do it! Rise up! As the Beatles once sang, “Oh, I’ll get by with a little help from my friends...Ooh, I’m gonna try with a little help from my friends.” Remember that we, with Christ, are in this together. How can we help one another overcome life’s challenges? How can we raise each other up, so that together we all flourish? Let’s rise up, together! That’s what friends are for.

As we approach a new fiscal year and the elections and invitations of service in Bethlehem’s leadership, prayerfully consider how you might rise up to meet Christ’s call to service. What role might suit you best? What gap might you be able to fill? You’re not being asked to take on the world alone – just a small portion of the life of Bethlehem United Church of Christ. Again, I say: We’re in this together. That’s why “United” is in our name. If we each contribute a small part to the whole, we all rise up and flourish together!

If your curious about or interested in leadership opportunities for the coming year, contact Judy Coucouvanis (judycouc@gmail.com) or Jenny Foster (Jen.foster@comcast.net) to learn more. I’ll be rising up to serve the Covenant Association as their Registrar. Tag – you’re it! How will you rise up to serve Bethlehem?

Grace & Peace,

Pastor Dawn

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May 2026


- May 1**
 - Pretzel Making, Kitchen, 8:00 am
 - Veterans & Friends Breakfast, Alpha Koney, 8:30 am
- May 2**
 - Pretzel Making, Kitchen/Fellowship Hall, 8:00am
- May 3 Communion Sunday**
 - Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
 - Sunday School during Worship
 - Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am
- May 4 Office Closed**
 - Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am
- May 6**
 - Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm
 - Choir Practice, Choir Room 7:00 pm
- May 9**
 - Food Gatherers Volunteer Day, 1 Carrot Way 9:00 am
- May 10- Mother's Day**
 - Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
 - Sunday School during Worship
 - Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am
- May 11 Office Closed**
 - Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am
- May 12**
 - Ladies Breakfast, Alpha Koney 9:30 am
- May 13**
 - Cemetery Board Meeting, Cemetery, 9:30 am
 - Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm
 - Member Engagement Mtg., Lounge/ZOOM
- May 17**
 - Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
 - Sunday School during Worship
 - Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am

- May 18 Office Closed**
 - Handbell Practice, Choir Room 11:00 am
- May 19**
 - Facilities Meeting, Lounge 3:30 pm
- May 20**
 - Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm
- May 24**
 - Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
 - Sunday School during Worship
 - Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am
- May 25- Memorial Day Office Closed**
- May 27-**
 - Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm
- May 28**
 - Executive Committee Mtg., via ZOOM
- May 31**
 - Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
 - Sunday School during Worship
 - Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am
- June 1 Office Closed**
- June 3**
 - Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm
- June 5**
 - Veterans & Friends Breakfast, Alpha Koney, 8:30 am
- June 6**
 - Food Gatherers Volunteers Day, 1 Carrot Way, 9:00am
 - Vocal Recital, Sanctuary, 1:30 pm
- June 7 Communion Sunday**
 - Worship, Sanctuary, 10:00 am
 - Sunday School during Worship
 - Community Time, Youth Room 11:00 am
 - Annual Congregational Mtg., Sanctuary, 11:15 am

Memorials and Gifts Received
March 16-April 15 2026

EASTER
Carole Katz

PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT
Douglas Mensch



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.

Current Fiscal Year June 1, 2025 to May 31, 2026			
March 2026	Year to Date Actual	YTD Target	25/26 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$313,242	\$363,142	\$435,770
Expenses	\$370,241	\$388,578	\$466,293
Net	(\$56,999)	(\$25,436)	(\$30,523)

Bethlehem Safety and Security Committee

Dear Friends in Christ,

We are writing to share an important step forward in caring for our church community. These are unsettling times where houses of worship, across all denominations and faith traditions, are receiving threats and coming under physical attack. A Safety and Security Committee was formed at Bethlehem last fall to help ensure that our congregation, staff, and visitors can gather, worship, and serve in a safe and welcoming environment.

The committee's first action has been to conduct a self-assessment of our church facilities and practices. This assessment is a valuable tool that helps us identify both our strengths and areas where we can improve. It allows us to be thoughtful and proactive in addressing potential risks, while remaining faithful to our identity as an open and hospitable congregation.

Safety and security are not about limiting our welcome, but about sustaining it, making sure that all who enter our doors can do so with confidence and peace of mind. This work reflects our shared commitment to stewardship of our people and our physical space.

The committee is now continuing its work by prioritizing areas where improvements can be made, especially focusing on practical, low-cost measures that can enhance safety and security in meaningful ways. Some examples of low-cost, high-impact actions include the following:

- locking exterior access doors shortly after the start of any service or activity
- labeling of all exterior and interior doors with large, visible letters and numbers to aid first responders in locating any safety threats
- mapping of all safety equipment in the building and distributing those maps throughout the facility
- developing action plans for emergency evacuation and shelter-in-place plans
- rehearsing at least annually those emergency plans with full congregation involvement

As these priorities are clarified, updates and recommendations will be shared with the congregation.

The current members serving of this important committee are Pastor Dawn, Ron Dechert, Steve Darr, and Gwen Mayes. We are grateful for the members who have stepped forward to serve in this important ministry and for your continued support as we seek to care for one another in all aspects of our life together.

Please contact any member of this committee if you have questions, concerns, or would like to be included in serving on this committee. We pray that our plans will never need to be executed and hope that if needed, we have planned and rehearsed appropriately to minimize harm and maximize safety for all who worship or visit us at Bethlehem.

Submitted on behalf of the Bethlehem Safety and Security Committee

Grace and peace.

Ron Dechert

OUTREACH MINISTRY TEAM

Rotating Shelter Program - March 23-30, 2026

Bethlehem Church believes **“Whoever you are and wherever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”**

In conjunction with Ann Arbor Shelter Association, Bethlehem participated in sheltering approximately 23 men per evening in our building. The men slept on pallets in the Youth Room while the volunteer overnight hosts stayed in the Choir Room. There were 3-4 volunteer hosts per night. The men were greeted each evening with coffee/tea/hot chocolate and sandwiches and snacks generously donated by the congregation. Bethlehem was one of 20 area churches taking part this year.

We want to thank Leadership Council for endorsing this endeavor and for our Ministry Teams for supporting this effort. In order to secure enough volunteer hosts, we are grateful to Groundcover News and Church of the Good Shepherd for providing six volunteers.

We would like to thank the following persons who stayed overnight as hosts: Alex Granbar, Diana Slaughter, Diane White, Nan Lefton, Eileen Koprowski, Jane Schmerberg, Jessilyn Averill, Jim Rowan, Jim Judson, Jim Stadel, Joe Woods, Joe Eadie, John Irwin, Kurt Schmerberg, Lindsay Calka, Ben Foster, Mary Pratt, Mike Haab, Shannon O’Reilly, Steve Bowers, John Schenk, and Alex Roopas.

We are also grateful for the following people who donated sandwiches or snacks: Audrey Keppler, Ele Kotowski, Nan Lefton, Shannon O’Reilly, Jacqui Katz, Jan Eadie, Judy Coucouvanis, Mary Friend, Sue Buday, Barb Schenk, Lisa Reach, Katie Rowan, and Mary Jean Raab.

We want to thank Steve Darr and the Facilities Ministry Team, and our maintenance staff person, Bill, for the extra time spent with set up and additional cleaning. We are grateful to our office staff, Gwen and Lisa, for help coordinating all the details associated with this project.

Thanks to Pastor Dawn and Pastor Diane for supporting this effort and promoting it every Sunday. Thanks to Diana Slaughter, the Education Ministry Team and Sunday School children for their Lenten Project which provided a week’s worth of bagged lunches for the men.

We are happy that Bethlehem was able to be part of the Rotating Shelter Program this year, continuing our longtime history with this effort after not participating in it for several years. We hope that our congregation continues to support this important outreach for our community.

Katie Rowan and Mary Jean Raab

Co-Chairs of Bethlehem’s Rotating Shelter Program 2026



2026 Youth Lenten Project

Lunches for the Rotating Shelter Guests

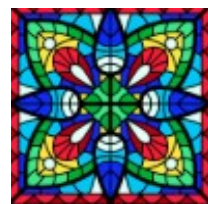


Please Mark your Calendars

The annual BUCC congregational meeting will be on June 7, 2026
Immediately after service in the Sanctuary

Communion Offered

There will now be an offering of communion after Service on the third Sunday of each month.



Community Time Volunteers Needed

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-Community Time on Sundays after the 10:00 am worship service in the Youth Room. 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.

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

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Covenant Association Annual Meeting

Saturday, May 2, 2026

9:30am on Zoom

Keynote speaker: Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel

Click [HERE](#) to register for the ZOOM link

Use of Church Spaces

Using the various rooms around the church is welcomed. Please remember that we do not have 24 hour custodial care and that there may be a renter or other group using the space immediately after you. The expectation is that you leave the room as you found it.

- **Return all items to their original location including items borrowed from other floors.**
- **Wipe tables and pick up refuse.**
- **Take trash to the outside bins**
- **Please vacuum or sweep floors if needed.**
- **Replace furniture as it was found**

Everyone’s cooperation is sincerely appreciated as we endeavor to be supportive of one another and keep our lovely building looking its best. Thank you.



HOMEBOUND FRIENDS

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

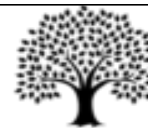
If you would like names and contact information, please reach out to the church office at (734) 665-6149.

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



Bethlehem Cemetery

Springtime is springing and that means that summer projects are in the planning stages at the cemetery.

The month of May has special days to honor/remember mothers (Mothers Day) and also deceased Veterans/Loved ones (Memorial Day/Decoration Day

With these days in mind, please consider making a monetary donation towards the cost of our major summer projects of Tree trimming/replacement and road maintenance.

Donations can be made by 1) by IRA distributions, Qualified Charitable Distribution, or personal checks made out to Bethlehem Cemetery and mailed/dropped off at the church office or 2) by credit card on the cemetery website at:

Bethlehemcemeteryaa.org/donate.

Please know that donations of any size are greatly appreciated.

Many thanks from your Cemetery Board,
Mary, Mary Jean, Jamie, Marilyn, Shannon & Susan

Bethlehem Veterans & Friends
Monthly Breakfast
May 1st at 8:30 am



Alpha Koney Island, 4389 Jackson Rd.

Questions? Contact Tom Ziesemer

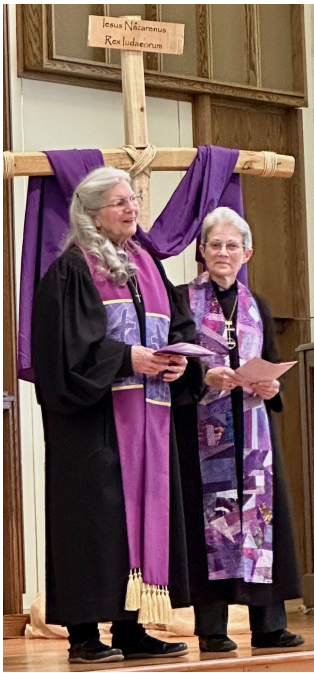
734-476-7515 or via email at: ziesemerth@gmail.com



Bethlehem Women & Friends
Monthly Breakfast
May 12 th 4389 Jackson Rd.

Contact Susan Irwin at 734-255-5661 or siirwin46@gmail.com for more info.

Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday Services





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