

The Visitor

June / July 2026

Bethlehem United Church of Christ

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.” [Hebrews 12:1-2]

Beloved ones,

You are about to embark on a new fiscal year and, very likely, a year with your newly called pastor. It will be a year filled with excitement and trepidation, joys and sorrows, mountain-top moments and deep-valley lows, and without a doubt *change*. That sounds like a description of life itself, doesn't it? Life, by its very nature, is ever-changing. We have a choice to roll with changes that come our way or to resist change. The former leads to growth, whereas the latter leads to stagnation and frustration. The choice is ours. As Karen Kaiser Clark once wrote, “Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely.” Growth – personally, professionally, and communally – is important. “Only in growth,” Anne Morrow Lindbergh wrote, “reform, and change, paradoxically enough, is true security to be found.”

If you keep moving forward, relying on the grace of God, Bethlehem can and will rest secure. Think about it, for the past 193 years, the cloud of witnesses who were and are the good people of Bethlehem have made choices and changes – some good, some not-so-great, and all of them leading to growth. Perseverance is a hallmark of this community of faith. I believe it will be an enduring characteristic, as you move forward into the unknown that is your future. Unlike those without faith, you have the chief-cornerstone to lean on: Jesus Christ, our Lord, the author and perfecter of our faith. Because of your faith in him, you are resilient. With Jesus as your guide, you are Bound for Greater Things.

Truly, as the song says, you are bound for greater things, bound to walk the higher road, drawn by dreams and led by visions, you will know the grace of God. Yes, you will leave the past behind, and you will fly with eagle's wings; you will run the race before you, because you are bound for greater things. Remember that the One who makes the golden morning, the One who gives your spirits wings, and has given you hands to help each other, on your way to greater things. So my friends, lean on God and each other, through thick and thin; faithfully live the gospel of Christ – the gospel of love – and you will continue to leave a lasting legacy for God's kingdom that is found in Bethlehem United Church of Christ.

Abundant Blessings,

Pastor Dawn

In This Issue

From Pastor Dawn	Page 1	Time & Talent Volunteer Form	Page 4
Ponderings from Pastor Diane	Page 2	BUCC Habitat for Humanity Volunteer Day	Page 5
Budget	Page 2	Meet the O'Brien-Rodriguez Family	Page 5
Calendar	Page 3	Safety & Security Update: First Aid Kits	Page 6
Memorials	Page 3	Food Gatherers Volunteer Day	Page 6
Annual Congregation Mtg.-Save the Date	Page 4	Evangelical Homes of MI Presentation	Page 6
Art Fair Fundraiser Parking Volunteers Needed	Page 4	Pretzel Making Pictures	Page 7
McKay Scholarship Application 2026/27	Page 4	Who Are We	Page 8



Pastor Ponderings....

Back in 2011, while still in seminary I took a class called “Traditions and Trends in Ministry.” I wrote the following in a paper at that time. When I came across it recently during my move it made me stop, think and question. I offer it up to you in this time and place for reflection. What do you think? Do you have blinders on that may need to be removed? Are you taking care of the “sick” and being the compassionate model for the world around you? Are we, “the church,” blinded by our history and what has always been for 193 years? *(As you read, remember I, a woman, wrote this from my perspective.)*

Remembering, Going Forward...

Women have made vast contributions to ministry in the history of the church. God has called women to be strong, to speak out with the truth and to be healers of souls. It is important for me to remember, my ministry is not about me – it is about God’s mission for me and God’s purpose through me. The same goes for each of us.

Caring for the sick is a ministry for the entire church. We are all “sick” in some way. Of course there are those who are unhealthy with illness and disease, but there are also the sick at heart, those burdened with guilt, the lonely, and the fearful. Each of us can minister to the other and we can also pay it forward. I cannot be “all things” for all people, but I can be compassionate and empathetic and model, as best any human can, the constant love I receive from my Lord. I can be the open vessel available to receive God and others.

Those who believe and who have faith were healed in the Gospel. Jesus shed the light on the darkness of the world and only those whose eyes were opened were able to see. I need to realize what blinders I have on and work to remove them so the truth of a situation can come into light. When I can do this, so often my direction becomes clear. This is true of the church as well. What historical blinders does the church keep in place and hold onto? What keeps it from moving forward in peace, justice and love for all people? I think these questions are important for me to continuously ask. We are all conditioned and often just accept what is written as fact. Only by asking the tough questions will we ever find the truth.


I wrote this so long ago and I’m still asking the questions today. As we are on the cusp of calling a new pastor to Bethlehem, it may be a good time for us all to ask some important questions like: What blinders might I have in place based on experience with new pastors? What have I learned that will help me take my blinders off? How can I help move forward in peace, justice, and love?

Christ’s Peace,
Pastor Diane

Works Cited

Ormerod,Neil. “System, History and a Theology of Ministry” Article provided by Dr. Anneliese Sinnott for PM 5002 Traditions and Trends in Ministry.
White, Diane. “Thoughts on Formation of Ministry...” April 3, 2011

Bethlehem Veterans & Friends
Monthly Breakfast
June 5th & July 3rd 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
June 9th & July 14th @ Alpha Koney
 Contact Susan Irwin at 734-255-5661
 siirwin46@gmail.com for more info.



Current Fiscal Year June 1, 2025 to May 31, 2026			
April 2026	Year to Date Actual	YTD Target	25/26 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$342,191	\$399,456	\$435,770
Expenses	\$410,097	\$427,435	\$466,293
Net	(\$67,906)	(\$27,979)	(\$30,523)

June/July 2026

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, 9:00 am

June 7 Communion Sunday

- Worship, Sanctuary 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time, Sanctuary 11:00 am
- Annual Congregational Mtg., Sanctuary 11:15 am

June 9

- Ladies Breakfast, Alpha Koney 9:30 am

June 10

- Cemetery Board Meeting, Cemetery 9:30 am
- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge :12:00 pm
- Member Engagement Meeting, Lounge/ZOOM

June 13

- Pastoral Search Committee Meet & Greet, Fellowship Hall 3:00—5:00 pm

June 14

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

June 15

- Kitchen Clean Out, FH Kitchen 9:00 am

June 16

- Facilities Meeting, Lounge 3:30 pm

June 17

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm

June 21 Candidacy Sunday / Father's Day

- Worship, Sanctuary 10:00 am
- Sunday School during Worship
- Community Time, Sanctuary 11:00 am
- Congregational Mtg. to Vote on New Pastor, Sanctuary 11:15 am
- Kitchen Cleaning 7:00 pm

June 22

- Kitchen Cleaning 7:00 pm

June 23

- Kitchen Cleaning 7:00 pm

June 24

- Bethlehem Community Crafters Lounge :12:00 pm
- Kitchen Cleaning 7:00 pm

June 24

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm
- Kitchen Cleaning 7:00 pm

June 25

- Leadership Council Meeting, 6:00 pm, ZOOM
- Kitchen Cleaning 7:00 pm

June 26

- Kitchen Cleaning 7:00 pm

June 28

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

July 1

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm

July 3 OFFICE CLOSED-JULY 4TH OBSERVED

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

July 5

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

July 8

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

July 12

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

July 14

- Ladies Breakfast, Alpha Koney,9:30 am

July 15

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm

July 16 Office Closed - Ann Arbor Art Fair/Parking

July 17 Office Closed - Ann Arbor Art Fair/Parking

July 18 Office Closed - Ann Arbor Art Fair/Parking

July 19

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

July 21

- Facilities Meeting, Lounge, 3:30 pm

July 22

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm

July 23

- Executive Committee Meeting., ZOOM

July 24

- Wedding Rehearsal, Sanctuary 6:00 pm

July 25

- Anderson/Sumer Wedding, Sanctuary 3:30 pm

July 26

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

July 29

- Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 12:00 pm

Memorials and Gifts Received

April 16—May 31, 2026

GENERAL MEMORIAL FUND
Arlene Finkbeiner

CEMETERY MAINTENANCE
Norma Crouch
Frederick, Lela & Hugh Keppler

Please plan to attend the

Pastoral Search Committee Meet & Greet

Saturday June 13, 2026 in the Fellowship Hall from 3:00-5:00 pm



IMPORTANT MESSAGE CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Dear Bethlehem,

The annual congregational meeting will be held on **Sunday, June 7, 2026**. The meeting will start immediately following our Sunday service. The planned agenda items will be sent out, via email, in advance of the meeting. Printed copies will be available in the church office. As in years past, **we need 25 members in attendance to have a quorum**. Please add this date to your schedule. I hope to see you all at the meeting.

God Bless,
Jim Rowan

EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS

The Bethlehem 2026-2027 Scholarship Application is available now on our website.

Deadline for filing is June 30.

Members of Bethlehem are eligible to apply for educational scholarships. Application is open to any qualified member attending full-time at an accredited college or university at the undergraduate or graduate level.

Application form may be obtained by emailing: parishadministrator@bethlehem-ucc.org. It can also be downloaded from the website by clicking the link below.

[Scholarship Application](#)



Art Fair Parking Fundraiser

HELP NEEDED!!!

******* July 16 17 & 18*******

Adults and youth needed for each shift:

9:00 am - 12:00 pm

12:00 pm - 3:00 pm

3:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Click [HERE](#) to sign up!

Your Gifts Matter — Please Complete Your Time & Talent Form!

Dear Friends,

Every one of you has something irreplaceable to offer — whether it's a gift for hospitality, a love of music, or simply a willing heart. Our church is richer because of you, and we'd love to put your talents to work!

If you haven't already, please take a few minutes to complete your **Time & Talent Form**. This simple survey helps us match your gifts and interests with the ministry teams that need them most, ensuring no gift goes unnoticed and no ministry goes unsupported.

To submit your form:

Pick up a paper copy at the church office or at Community Time. You may also download a form online by clicking [here](#).

Turn the form into the office or place in the offering plate during the worship service.

If you're unsure where you fit, check a few areas that interest you — we'll help find the right spot for you!

Thank you for being such an important part of our church family.

With gratitude and blessings, The Member Engagement Ministry Team

Questions? Contact Jenny Foster: jen.foster@comcast.net or Judy Coucouvanis: judycouc@gmail.com.

Calling all Liturgists!

It's easy being a liturgist, everything is already written; all you have to do is read aloud.



Please use the [LITURGIST SIGNUP](#) link to volunteer.

You may also contact Pastors Dawn or Diane or call the office at (734) 665-6149.



BUCC Volunteer Day for Habitat for Humanity Huron Valley

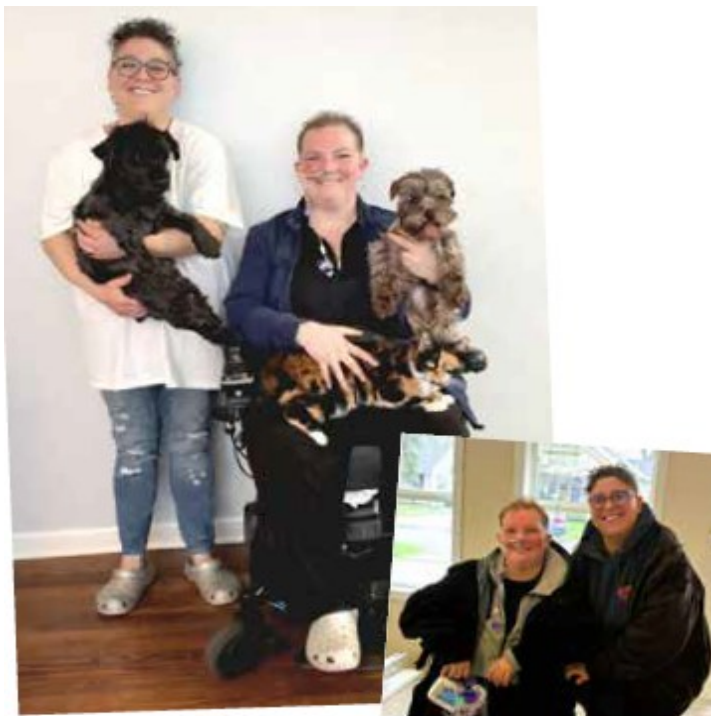
Once again, Bethlehem is committed to local affordable housing and building strength, stability and new lives through our local Habitat for Humanity. Our volunteer day is scheduled for Saturday August 8, 9:00 - 3:00.

Four volunteers are needed. BUCC, along with other area churches and community volunteers, are revitalizing the house at 432 Ainsworth Ave. in Ypsilanti. For more details and a sign up link, please see the House of Faith flyer in this Visitor. To sign up, you may also click here: [Habitat Sign Up](#) Use the access code: Bethlehem.

We are also looking for a volunteer to provide lunch for 10-12 people on our build day. Please contact Katie (rowank55@gmail.com) if you would like to donate and deliver lunch.

We hope to give a generous donation towards the costs of the project. You can contribute on the Bethlehem website: www.bethlehem-ucc.org where there is a line item for Habit Huron Valley.) Or drop a check at the church office or in the Sunday offering with Habitat Huron Valley in the memo.

Thank you for helping build new lives with affordable housing in our community.



Meet the O'Brien- Rodriguez Family:

We are Ashlee and Rosa- best friends, partners in life, and grounded in love! We are positive problem-solvers learning to manage all the unexpected things life throws at us. Rosa has worked in healthcare for over 15 years, and Ashlee was a Chef and Manager in her professional career. Our crew includes Laycee, a retired support animal who now does whatever she wants, as she should! Remedee, the very enthusiastic apprentice who greets everyone with a full-butt wiggle! And our cat Cookee, who supervises everything while expecting chin scratches in return!

Over the past few years, our journey has been difficult. When Ashlee became ill, it set off a domino effect that deeply impacted our stability. As her health challenges grew, maintaining consistent housing near her healthcare team became increasingly difficult. We found ourselves navigating a cycle of uncertainty and vulnerability. We've been living in survival mode for a longtime. And the truth is, it's hard to heal when you're always just trying to get through the day.

This opportunity isn't just meaningful to us, it is, quite literally, life-changing and life-saving. Ashlee will have accessible entry to the home, and Rosa will be closer to her employer. While being in a community they both cherish.

Habitat is laying the foundation beneath us, so we can finally rebuild without the ground giving out again. Habitat supports creating housing access in a way that reflects our values, commitment, community, and integrity while working to achieve something meaningful and educating us along the way! For the first time, we'll be able to have real stability. A place where we can breathe, worry less, and focus on healing instead of constantly bracing for what's next. We didn't think homeownership was possible for us. But now that it is, we're ready to stop just surviving and finally start thriving!

Thank you Habitat for Humanity and everyone who poured love into our home."

Where the ground once gave away, Through open hands, a steadier way. From holding on day by day,

To something built so we can stay.

-Ashlee and Rosa

Bethlehem Safety and Security Committee

The Safety and Security Committee recently had all First Aid Kits in the church collected and refreshed or replaced

Kits are located in the following locations:

The Office, copier room

The Sanctuary, North Narthex (includes AED)

The Kitchenette off the Lounge

(AED located in the hallway)

The Salad Kitchen and the Main Kitchen.

This area includes 2 fire extinguishers & an eye wash.

The Art Room

The Sunday School Rooms

The Gym

The Youth Room

The Choir Room



Please familiarize yourself with these kits when using a room so you can access them quickly if needed.

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.

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

Food Gatherers Volunteer Day

On May 9, 2026 six Bethlehem volunteers worked at the Carrot Way warehouse and processed 974 pounds of food!



Bethlehem has another volunteer day at the Food Gatherers Warehouse at 1 Carrot Way:

Sat June 6, 1:00 - 3:00 PM

You can sign up here:

[Food Gatherers Signup](#)

This is a fun way to work alongside fellow Bethlehem members to combat hunger in Washtenaw County. Join us!!

Evangelical Homes of Michigan Presentation and Luncheon

Kari Renner, President and CEO of Evangelical Homes of Michigan, gave an informative presentation after church on April 26. She was joined by Jodi Hilberer, Foundation Director, who presented information about the EHM Foundation. Bethlehem has a long history with EHM which provides health care and an array of housing and home-based services to older adults in the community. The Foundation provides stewardship of donor resources. BUCC member Marilyn Person is on the Board of Directors, and Mary Jean Raab is an EHM Ambassador. The Outreach Ministry Team sponsored this event and presented a check for \$1,474.



Pretzel Making and Fellowship





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