

*Welcome to
Bethlehem United Church of Christ*



*July 26, 2026
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost*



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.

Welcome to Bethlehem!

We are so glad that you are joining your voice with ours in worship today!
Everyone, please sign our green friendship pads, found at the end of each pew.
If you like, a comfortable space for families is available under the balcony.

God put the wiggle in children, and we welcome them in worship!
Children are also welcome to participate in Sunday school, if they prefer.
All are invited to stand, as you are able, for sections marked with a cross (†);
Congregational responses are in bold text.

Prayer Requests

Fill out a prayer request card found in the pews.
You may give it to one of the pastors before the service
or to an usher during the Hymn of Response.



Happy Birthday to Bethlehem members, **Evelyn Goetz**, who turns 95 on July 30th and
Marjorie Alber, who turns 100 on July 31st.

FLOWERS

The flowers today are in honor of **Pastor Dawn**
from Pastor Diane.



CHURCH LIFE

Bethlehem member, **Gwen Fellenberger**, is in the hospital.
Please pray for her speedy recovery.

ATTENDANCE FOR LAST SUNDAY

Total: 62 (In Person: 44, YouTube:16, Phone: 2)

Worship is available in the sanctuary, via Phone Streaming and Livestream to access the
Livestream go to our website: <https://www.bethlehem-ucc.org>. To join the Phone Stream, call 855-
669-8965 prior to the start of worship. You may sign up to be called by the Phone Stream by
contacting the church office during regular business hours. (You will be called about 5 minutes
before worship begins.)

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

RINGING OF THE BELLS

WELCOME AND SHARING CHURCH LIFE

CENTERING MUSIC

The Gift to Be Simple
Naki Kripfgans, organ

- arr. Dale Wood

OPENING WORSHIP

† CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Psalm 105)

One: Give thanks to the Lord for God's marvelous works in our congregation!

All: Let us give thanks, indeed, to God our source of strength!

Let us lift every voice and sing praises to the Lord, whose love and faithfulness endure forever!

† OPENING HYMN

CH # 53

Morning Has Broken

Please see insert

† OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Glorious God, on this brand-new day, we rejoice that we are made new creations in Your image. Let us never forget all You do for us on a daily basis. Sustain us with hope and let us bask in the glow of Your love, reminding us to show that same generosity to everyone we meet. In Jesus' Name. Amen

† PASSING OF THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you!

All: And also with you!

PROCLAIMING THE WORD

MESSAGE IN MUSIC

Bound for Greater Things
Kel Anders, contralto; Naki Kripfgans, piano

Ken Medema

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

MUSICAL RESPONSE **NCH # 4 v.1** *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You*
Joyful, joyful, we adore you, God of glory, God of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before you, opening to the sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the storms of doubt away;
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

From the Letters: **Romans 8:24-29 & 35-39**
From the Gospel: **Matthew 13:31-33 & 44-53**

Leader: The Gospel of the Lord, for the people of God!

All: Thanks be to God! Amen.

MESSAGE

High hopes

Pastor Dawn

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

† HYMN OF REFLECTION **NCH # 459** *Come, O Fount of Every Blessing*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Joys & Concerns

Silent Prayer & Sung Petition *Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying*

Lord, listen to your children praying; Lord, send your Spirit in this place;

**Lord, listen to your children praying, send us love, send us pow'r,
send us grace.**

Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Please use these words or those most familiar to you.

**Our God in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come; your
will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. And lead
us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the
kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation to give

Offertory

My Lord! What a Morning!
Naki Kripfgans, organ

- arr. Joe Utterback

† Hymn of Thanksgiving NCH # 780 *Doxology*

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ and Spirit, One. Amen.**

† Prayer of Dedication (unison)

Gracious God, all good gifts come from you. We thank you and praise you, for we and all of Creation are fearfully and wonderfully made by your hand. Bless our hands in service to you. Bless our time, talent and treasure, given in gratitude to you. Bless all that we offer such that it may bless others too. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

MESSAGE OF APPRECIATION

Jim Rowan

LITANY OF RELEASE

PREAMBLE

Rev. Dr. Lawrence Richardson

RECOGNITION OF THE END

Conference Leader: On July 2, 2023, Bethlehem United Church of Christ called the Rev. Dawn Christenson to serve as its Intentional Interim Minister. Pastor Dawn, what words do you have to offer to this community of faith?

Pastor Dawn: I thank you, the good and faithful people of Bethlehem, for the love, kindness and support shown to me over the past three years. We have shared much during our time together. I ask your forgiveness for the mistakes that I have made. I am grateful to you, for the ways that my leadership and guidance have been accepted and followed. As I leave, I take with me the little lamb that has marked our time together. I also carry with me all of our shared memories and all that I have learned from you on this journey. And I offer you abundant blessings for your future with Pastor Matthew.

Congregation: We receive your gratitude and blessings, offer our forgiveness, and accept that your time with us has come to an end. We thank you for your time among us. We ask your forgiveness for our mistakes. We acknowledge that your wisdom and influence will carry on into the future of our community of faith.

Pastor Dawn: I forgive you and accept your gratitude with a glad and full heart.

COVENANT OF RELEASE

Conference Leader: Do you, Pastor Dawn, release Bethlehem United Church of Christ from turning to you and depending on you?

Pastor Dawn: I do, with the help of God.

Leader: Do you offer your encouragement and prayers, for the continued ministry of this church, and for the building of their relationship with the pastor they have called to serve after you, including your pledge to forego any contact with them for at least one year?

Pastor Dawn: I do, with the help of God.

Leader: Do you, the people of Bethlehem United Church of Christ, release Pastor Dawn from her ministerial service to this congregation, including your pledge to forego any contact with her for at least one year?

† People: We do, with the help of God.

Leader: Do you offer your encouragement and prayers for Pastor Dawn, for her continued journey of faith and ministry?

† People: We do, with the help of God.

Leader: On behalf of the Covenant Association, and the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ, I bear witness to the words spoken here today – words of gratitude, forgiveness, and release. The member churches and clergy of the Covenant Association hold all of you in prayer. And we pledge our support to you, in the transitions signified here today and for those that lay ahead.

† All: Thanks be to God.

† CLOSING PRAYER (unison)

Gracious God, we give thanks for your boundless love and everlasting faithfulness. We thank you for the blessed time that we have shared together in our common life of faith and ministry, filled with cherished memories of sorrow and laughter, disappointment and hope, uncertainty and clarity. We entrust our future to you, O Lord. By your Spirit, guide us we pray. And as we depart from one another, bind our hearts of one accord – standing firm in faith, bearing witness to your amazing love in all we say and do, and walking with you in devoted service to others. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

GOING FORTH TO SERVE

† CLOSING HYMN

NCH # 81

God Be with You

WORDS OF SENDING

POSTLUDE

The Blessing - arr. Heather Sorenson
Kel Anders, contralto; Naki Kripfgans, piano

OUR TEAM:

Interim Pastor: Rev. Dawn Christenson

Associate Pastor: Rev. Diane White

Guest Pastor: Rev. Dr. Lawrence Richardson

Associate Conference Minister, Michigan Conference, UCC

Ministers: All the people

Director of Music & Organist: Dr. Naki Sung Kripfgans

Director of Handbells: Jim Rowan

Soloist: Kel Anders

Liturgist: Joe Eadie

Sound Technician: Dennis Huibregtse

Videographer: Dan Blakeney

Streaming Technician: Jennifer Vasquez

Security Volunteer: Steve Darr

Community Time Host: Sue Buday

Reach out to us:

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