

The Visitor September 2026

Bethlehem United Church of Christ

Reflections from Pastor Matthew

Beloveds,

When Travis and I moved into the church's parsonage just a few short weeks ago, there were already plenty of tasks on our "move-in" list. There was a plethora of boxes that needed to be organized and emptied. There were rooms that needed to be decorated with our flavor. We also needed to become accustomed to the little quirks of the house. Yet one of the first orders of business on my mind was bird feeders.

This is the first time Travis and I have had a backyard with active wildlife. About a year ago, I got really into birding as a form of self-care. There is something profoundly holy about intentionally tuning your ears away from the noise and choosing to hear the songs and chirps of the birds.

What began as an innocent download of the birding app "Merlin" soon became a new journey for me. As I began using the app, I realized how little I knew about birds. This became especially true as I acquired feeders. At first, I thought you just bought any kind of seed and feeder, hung it up somewhere, and...Boom. I would become Snow White. However, I have learned that birds have preferences.

Before Travis reluctantly "allowed" me to go to the hardware store, I did my homework. I began researching which seeds attract which birds. I knew I wanted more songbirds in the backyard, so I needed larger seeds and nuts with a mix of suet. If I wanted certain kinds of birds, I needed to offer something that would nourish them. I learned that I could not put out only the readily available seed and assume every bird in the neighborhood would flock to my backyard.

As with any profession, there are occupational hazards, and in pastoral ministry, mine is metaphors. Somewhere between listening to birds and meditating, I began to wonder if the same is true for building a church. I wonder if it begins with that kind of attention as well. Before we decide what people ought to want, we become curious about what nourishes them. What if we listened to people's questions, wounds, hopes, schedules, and spiritual hunger? I believe that hospitality cannot hinge on assumptions. True love makes us pay attention.

I have found that birdseed is only one part of the equation; birds also need shelter, safety, and a place to rest. What I'm catching on to is that the seed may, in fact, bring the birds to the backyard, but the environment determines whether the flock will flourish. I believe the church is the same: we must cultivate an ecosystem where people can become more fully alive.

After hanging a bird feeder, there is only so much I can do. I prepare the space, offer nourishment, and wait. I can't schedule the birds to come to my feeder on my Sabbath so that I can enjoy them. I think church building requires that same kind of patience. People may watch from a distance before deciding it's a safe space to land. We fill the feeder. We cultivate the environment. We keep watch.

-Pastor Matthew

In This Issue			
Reflections from Pastor Matthew	Page 1	CROP Walk	Page 4
Message from Pastor Diane	Page 2	Cemetery News	Page 4
Memorials	Page 2	Church Life in Pictures	Page 5
Budget	Page 2	Happenings	Page 6
Calendar	Page 3	Habitat for Humanity	Page 7
Pastor Matthew's Office Hours	Page 3	Bethlehem Brunch Bunch	Page 7
NOW Grant Award	Page 3	Who Are We	Page 8

“Well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matthew 25:21a)

These words of scripture I share today to acknowledge Dindy Haab and her 20 years of faithful, weekly service in publishing information for our Prayer Ministry. Every week Dindy collects prayer needs from all who contact her, types them up and sends them out via email to those who have committed to faithfully pray for everyone on the list. Prayer is powerful, prayer matters, and prayer is answered – in God’s way, which may not be the way we expect. Bethlehem Church and I thank you, Dindy, for your dedication to our prayer ministry for sooooo many years.

Twenty years is a long time, and Dindy has now decided to step back from being the lead person in charge. Therefore, going forward, Pastor Diane will step in and take on the coordination role. Beginning in September, if you have prayer needs, please either call the church office at 734-665-6149 and share your prayer request with the office staff, you can share with Pastor Diane directly at 734-660-1886 (cell), or with Pastor Matthew at 860-249-3576 (cell).

Our prayer ministry team or prayer warriors, as they are sometimes called, commit to hold all prayer requests confidential and do not talk about anything that is shared with them. This is between them and God only. If you think you would like to become one of our prayer warriors, please give Pastor Diane or Pastor Matthew a call.

We thank Dindy for her many years of service as coordinator, and we thank all of who faithfully hold the prayer needs of others in their hearts as they sit in conversation with God. We value your contribution and commitment to the BUCC ministry.

Blessings,

Pastor Diane

Memorials and Gifts

Received July 16 – August 15, 2026

CURRENT FUND

In honor of Marj Alber

BROADCAST FUND

In honor of Marj Alber

OUTREACH FUND

In honor of Marj Alber

SAFETY & SECURITY FUND

In honor of Pastor Dawn Christenson

CEMETERY MAINTENANCE FUND

In memory of Aaron Dylenski

PROPERTY IMPROVEMENT

In memory of Virginia Sivacek

Congratulations to the following recipients of the

McKay Scholarship Awards 2026

Carrie Schwartz - University of Michigan

Abby Bowers - Michigan State University

John Schenk - Michigan State University

Jacob Paton - University of Virginia School of Law



Are you following Bethlehem United Church of Christ on Facebook? Follow our page, interact with posts, and share them with friends to help more people discover what is happening in our church.

You can also support us by leaving a google review about your experience at Bethlehem. A few thoughtful words from you may be the invitation someone else needs to walk through our doors!

Fiscal Year June 1, 2026 to May 31, 2027

June 2026	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Target	2026/2027 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$18,770.00	\$31,168.00	\$374,012.60
Expenses	\$28,710.00	\$40,397.00	\$484,763.76
Net	(\$ 9,940.00)	(\$ 9,229.00)	(\$110,751.16)

September 2026

Sept. 2.

12:00 pm Bethlehem Crafters, Lounge

Sept. 4

8:30 am Veterans & Friends Breakfast, Alpha Koney

Sept. 5.

7:30 pm U of M vs WMU football game

Sept. 6 Communion Sunday

10:00 am Worship, Sanctuary

Sunday School during Worship

11:00 am Community Time, Youth Room

Sept. 7 Labor Day

Sept. 8

9:30 am Ladies Breakfast, Alpha Koney

2:00 pm Worship Ministry Meeting, Lounge

3:30 Facilities Mtg., Lounge

Sept. 9

9:30 am Cemetery Board Mtg., Cemetery

12:00 pm Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge 2

2:30 pm Member Engagement Mtg., Lounge/ZOOM

7:00 pm Choir Practice, Sanctuary

Sept. 12

12:00 pm U of M vs Oklahoma football game

Sept. 13

10:00 am Worship, Sanctuary

Sunday School during Worship

11:00 am Community Time, Youth Room

12:00 pm Bethlehem Brunch Bunch at Sava's

Sept. 16

12:00 pm Bethlehem Crafters, Lounge

7:00 pm Choir Practice, Sanctuary

Sept. 19

3:30 pm U of M vs UTEP football game

Sept. 20

10:00 am Worship, Sanctuary

Sunday School during Worship

11:00 am Community Time, Youth Room

Sept. 23

12:00 pm Bethlehem Crafters, Lounge

7:00 pm Choir Practice, Sanctuary

Sept. 26

TBD U of M vs Iowa football game

Sept. 27

10:00 am Worship, Sanctuary

Sunday School during Worship

11:00 am Community Time, Youth Room

Sept. 30

12:00 pm Bethlehem Crafters, Lounge

7:00 pm Choir Practice, Sanctuary

Pastor Matthew's Office Hours

IF THE PASTOR IS NOT IN DURING THE LISTED HOURS DUE TO A
OBLIGATION PLEASE CALL 860-249-3576 OR E-MAIL
PASTOR@BETHLEHEM-UCC.ORG

MONDAY	SABBATH
TUESDAY	9:30AM-5PM
WEDNESDAY	9:30AM-5PM
THURSDAY	9:30AM-5:30PM
FRIDAY	SABBATH
SATURDAY	REMOTE WORK
SUNDAY	BY APPOINTMENT OR MEETING

NOW Grant Award

We are pleased to announce that Bethlehem has been awarded a **\$1,500 NOW (Need, Opportunity & Witness) Grant** from the Covenant Association. The grant will be used toward the purchase of additional defibrillators for our church, further strengthening our commitment to the safety and well-being of everyone who uses our building.

The grant application was submitted by the **Safety and Security Committee**, with much appreciated assistance from Pastor Dawn.

This is the **third NOW Grant Bethlehem has received in the past four to five years**, demonstrating our continued efforts to address safety needs and make our building a safer place for all.

We extend our sincere thanks to committee members **Ron Dechert, Steve Darr, and Gwenda Mayes** for their work on the grant application and their ongoing commitment to the safety of our church community.



52nd Annual Ann Arbor Area CROP Hunger Walk

Sunday, October 4, 2026



First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor

First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor is hosting our
52nd Ann Arbor Area CROP Hunger Walk, located at
120 S. State St., Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

Registration @1 PM and Outdoor Send-Off @ 2 PM.
Food provided by fedupministries.com

2026 Goal: \$35,000

Each fall, multiple organizations/congregations bear
worked to hunger, locally and globally. Church World
Service [CWS] reminds us, "As we walk to end hunger,
we are building a future where every neighbor has the
dignity, opportunity, and nourishment they deserve.
One thing you can do:

Sign up and pledge on the website Now!

Funds can help CWS to continue their work in feeding
hungry people.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

*Wednesday, September 2nd, 2026
Recruiter Drive-Thru at FUMCAA from 5-6:30 PM

**Sunday, Oct. 4th, 2026

52nd Ann Arbor Area Crop Hunger Walk.

Visit our website: www.crophungerwalk.org/AnnArborMI
www.facebook.com/annarborecrophungerwalk

Help assemble CWS Period Packs on October 4th. All supplies
provided. Help end period poverty. Period.

2026 CROP Team Co-Chairs:

Mary Pratt
Bryan Weinert

First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor Hosts:

Becky and Mike Wong

Treasurer:

Patti Yonka

Route Co-Chairs:

Jen Chapin-Smith
Alex Nemmers

Members:

Barb Fichtenberg
Donald MacGregor
Charles Yonka

CWS Co-Ordinator:

Andrew Gifford

Benefiting: 75% goes to
CWS national/international
communities.

25% of funds will go to:

- Hope Clinic
- SOS Community
Crisis Center
- Peace Neighborhood
Center
- Aid in Milan
- Avalon Housing

CONTACT:

m.pratt33@yahoo.com
734-353-9113

*Bring donations for **Love Thy
Neighbor**. List to follow!

**Bring donations for **Jewish
Family Services**. List to
follow!



Bethlehem Cemetery

Tornado Cleanup and Recovery Continues

The work to recover from the tornado damage in April is continuing, and we are grateful to see steady progress. All 28 fallen trees and their stumps have now been removed, the damaged fence has been restored, and repairs to the building's roof have been completed.

There is still work to be done. Additional tree trimming is needed, and plans are underway for asphalt repairs in areas where fallen tree roots lifted and damaged the pavement, leaving behind broken sections and potholes.

Tree and road maintenance are typically among our largest annual budget expenses. This year, however, the tornado has created additional and unexpected costs, leaving both our tree and road funds depleted.

If you are able, we would be grateful for a monetary donation to help offset these extraordinary expenses and support the continued care and maintenance of our property. Thank you for your generosity and for helping us move forward from this significant storm damage.

Mary Jean, Mary, Jamie, Shannon, Marilyn, and Susan

CROP WALK, October 4

This year's CROP walk is on **Sunday October 4, 2026, at 2 PM** (registration at 1:00) and will be hosted by First United Methodist. You are welcome to join the Bethlehem team, the Pllamas. Sign up is on the CROP Walk website here: [CROP Walk Sign Up](#) You can also donate on this site. Packets will be available in the church office after Sept. 2. You can also **donate via the Bethlehem website donation page** on the CROP Walk line item, or write a check with CROP in the memo and drop it at the church office or in the offering. Let's see if we can beat last year's magnificent donation of \$1772!



Bethlehem Veterans & Friends Monthly Breakfast

September 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

September 8th at 9:30 am

4389 Jackson Rd., Ann Arbor

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



Baptism of both father and daughter into the universal church.



Thank you and farewell Pastor Dawn!



Happy 100th Birthday Marj!



*New Beginnings!
Welcome Pastor Matthew*

BUCC Pretzels!!! Hold the Dates!!!

- Friday, October 8th: Pretzel Dough Making, 9:00 – 11:00 am, Kitchen
- Saturday, October 9th: Pretzel Rolling 9:00 am until done, Fellowship Hall

SignUpGenius link and pre-order details will be announced soon via the Refrigerator page and Friday email blast. Please contact Judy Coucouvanis at: judycouc@gmail.com if you have any questions.



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.



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.

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.

Refrigerator Page and **Email Blast** submissions must be received by **5:00 pm Tuesday each week**.

All Submissions for the **October Visitor** are **due by September 15th**. Please be sure to include all dates, times and pertinent information. Submissions may be edited for clarity and space limitations. Please email submissions to: **churchoffice@bethlehem-ucc.org**

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



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.



Habitat for Humanity Project

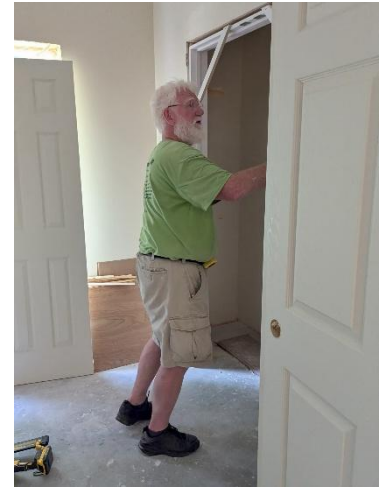
Thank you to Bethlehem volunteers Jane Schmerberg, Karen Clark, Eileen Kaprowski, Bryan Oxender, and Joe Eadie, who joined volunteers from Ann Arbor Community Reformed Church and future homeowners Arielle and Gabe Steele for a productive day of construction at 740 Dorset Ave. in Ypsilanti. Our group painted interior trim and installed cabinets, doors,



and trim. Lunch was generously provided by Jennifer Vasquez and Ron Dechert. Thanks to your generous donations, along with a match from the community benevolence portion of the McKay funds, we were able to send a \$2,072 check to Habitat Huron Valley. A special



thank-you to everyone who fundraising efforts, as well as our Kaprowski, and Katie Rowan. We Team members Jane Schmerberg, and Katie Rowan for organizing project.



generously supported our bakers Jane Schmerberg, Eileen also appreciate Outreach Ministry Eileen Kaprowski, Mary Jean Raab, and promoting this wonderful

Bethlehem
Brunch
Bunch

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13TH
12:00PM

SAVA'S ANN ARBOR
216 S STATE ST, ANN ARBOR,
MI 48104

RSVP via SignUp Genius or Call the office by
September 6th

The “Triple B” — **Bethlehem Brunch Bunch** — is a new monthly gathering centered around good food, relaxed conversation, and building relationships.

We hope this will be a fun opportunity to get to know one another a little better. Once a month, we’ll gather for brunch at a rotating local restaurant, usually after worship. During football season, we’ll meet on a rotating Saturday instead.

There is **no formal agenda and no program**— just a chance to share a meal, enjoy good conversation, and strengthen the connections that make Bethlehem such a special community.

Everyone is welcome! Come hungry, bring your appetite, and be ready for some good food, laughter, and fellowship.

If cost is a barrier to participating, please reach out to Pastor Matthew. We want everyone who would like to join us to feel welcome.



BETHLEHEM UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

PHONE: 734-665-6149

EMAIL: INFO@BETHLEHEM-UCC.ORG

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. Matthew Hogue-Smith Pastor

pastor@bethlehem-ucc.org

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: Teresa Beagle

Treasurer: P.J. Lindemann

Ex Officio: Rev. Matthew Hogue-Smith

Leadership Council

President: Jim Rowan

Vice President: Ron Dechert

Secretary: Teresa Beagle

Treasurer: P.J. Lindemann

Business Ministry: Steve Darr

Member Engagement Ministry:

Judy Coucouvanis /Jenny Foster

Outreach Ministry: Katie Rowan

Worship Ministry: Michelle Loukotka

Education Ministry: Diana Slaughter

Ex officio: Rev. Matthew Hogue-Smith

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: Michelle Loukotka

Pastoral Relations Committee Chair: Kurt Schmerberg

Bethlehem Cemetery Board Members:

President: Mary Jean Raab

Vice-President: Mary Friend

Secretary: Shannon O'Reilly

Treasurer: Jamie Dylenski

Elected Members: Marilyn Pearson & Susan Irwin

Ex officio: Rev. Matthew Hogue-Smith