

The Visitor

October 2026

Bethlehem United Church of Christ

Reflections from Pastor Matthew

Beloveds,

Can you believe that we are on the heels of fall!? I am not complaining because fall is one of my favorite seasons. What is there not to love about fall? The air becomes cooler, and we can open the windows to air out the stagnant air. Also, there is something about pumpkin rolls that soothes something within my soul.

One of my favorite fall pastimes is a little childish, but oh so satisfying. I am quite good at finding and stepping on crunchy leaves. If I get an inkling of a crunchy leaf on the sidewalk, you can bet that I am going out of my way to step on it. I mention this because when we are younger, no one has to tell us how to play or use our imagination. We were able to create games out of ordinary objects like leaves and allow our imaginations to run wild.

As we get older, society views seriousness as a sign of maturity. We become so focused on being responsible, productive, and useful that we forget there are things worth doing simply because they bring us joy.

Our calendars are going to begin to fill. We will gather and go through the motions that will lead us towards Advent. There will be important work for us to do as a community, but I also hope we will remember to play. I hope we will laugh together and try new things. I pray that we leave room for moments that accomplish absolutely nothing except helping us enjoy one another.

A community does not only grow through serious conversations. Sometimes it grows while playing. Jesus told his followers that the kingdom of God belongs to those who receive it like a child. Maybe part of that invitation is to recover the curiosity and playfulness that adulthood tries to train out of us.

This fall, may we do the work placed before us, but may we also remember that life is more than the work we accomplish. May we notice the changing colors, laugh, and never become too grown-up to go out of our way to step on a crunchy leaf.

-Pastor Matthew

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Dear Friends,

The Safety and Security Committee is continuing its work to improve the safety and security of our church building and grounds for all members, staff, visitors, and groups who use our facilities. As a result of our ongoing review of the building and grounds, several improvements are being initiated:

1. **First Aid Supplies** – All first-aid boxes throughout the church have been restocked and brought up to date.
2. **Fire Blankets** – New fire blankets will be purchased and placed alongside the fire extinguishers throughout the building to provide an additional safety resource in the event of a fire.
3. **AED Devices** – Three additional automated external defibrillators (AEDs) will be purchased and deployed, with an AED located on each floor of the building for quicker access in a medical emergency.
4. **Parking Lot Lighting** – New lighting will be installed near the **4th Avenue entrance to the parking lot** to eliminate the existing dark area and improve visibility and safety, particularly during evening activities.
5. **Anchored Flower Boxes** – Anchored flower boxes will be placed outside the **5th Avenue and 4th Avenue entrances**. In addition to enhancing the appearance of the entrances, these will help provide an additional physical safety measure around the building entrances.

These projects represent practical steps toward making Bethlehem UCC a safer and more welcoming place for everyone. We have received \$3000 in NOW grants from the Convenient Association to help offset the expense for these improvements. We appreciate the congregation's support as we continue to identify and address safety concerns throughout our building and grounds.

In addition, Bethlehem will be hosting the Houses of Faith security meeting next month. This involves many of the downtown churches who have decided to meet several times a year to share our individual efforts to improve safety at all houses of faith. The meeting is tentatively set for Wednesday October 21 from 3-5pm. The agenda for the meeting is still being developed. Bethlehem, as host, is expected to provide light refreshments and a few greeters to help direct everyone to the youth room. Members of Bethlehem are invited to attend if interested. More information will be sent out by the end of the month.

Safety is everyone's responsibility, and we are committed to doing what we can to protect our members, staff, visitors, and the many groups who use our facilities.

Please contact your Safety and Security Committee leads (Pastor Matthew, Ron Dechert, Gwen Mayes, Steve Darr) if you have any questions or feedback.

God bless you,

BUCC Safety and Security Chair
Ron Dechert

Fiscal Year June 1, 2026 to May 31, 2027			
July 2026	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Target	2026/2027 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$40,911	\$62,335	\$374,013
Expenses	\$54,168	\$80,794	\$484,764
Net	(\$13,257)	(\$18,459)	(\$110,751)
August 2026	Year to Date Actual	Year to Date Target	2026/2027 Budget
Offerings and Income	\$72,438	\$ 93,503	\$374,013
Expenses	\$87,207	\$121,191	\$484,764
Net	(\$14,769)	(\$27,688)	(\$110,751)

**Oct. 2**

8:30 am Veterans & Friends Breakfast, Alpha Koney

Oct. 4 Communion Sunday

10:00 am Worship, Sanctuary

Sunday School during Worship

11:00 am Community Time, Youth Room

2:00 pm CROP Hunger Walk, FUMC, Ann Arbor

Oct. 7

12:00 pm Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge

7:00 pm Choir Practice, Choir Room

Oct. 9

9:00 am Pretzel Baking, Kitchen and Fellowship Hall

Oct. 10

9:00 am Pretzel Baking, Kitchen and Fellowship Hall

Oct. 11

10:00 am Worship, Sanctuary

Sunday School during Worship

11:00 am Community Time, Youth Room

Oct. 13

9:30 am Ladies Breakfast, Alpha Koney

Oct. 14

12:00 pm Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge

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

7:00 pm Choir Practice, Choir Room

Oct. 17

TBD Football Game, U of M v Penn St.

Oct 18

10:00 am Worship, Sanctuary

Sunday School during Worship

11:00 am Community Time, Youth Room

Oct. 20

2:00 pm Worship Ministry Meeting, Lounge

3:30 pm Facilities Mtg., Lounge

Oct 21

12:00 pm Bethlehem Community Crafters, Lounge

3:00 pm Sacred Spaces Safety Mtg., Youth Room

7:00 pm Choir Practice, Sanctuary

Oct. 22

6:00 pm Executive Committee Mtg., ZOOM

Oct. 24

TBD Football Game, U of M v Indiana

Oct. 25

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

Oct. 28

12:00 pm Bethlehem Crafters, Lounge

7:00 pm Choir Practice, Choir Room

Pastor Matthew's Office Hours

Monday Sabbath

Tuesday 9:30 am- 5:00 pm

Wednesday 9:30 am- 5:00 pm

Thursday 9:30 am- 5:30 pm

Friday Sabbath

Saturday Remote work

Sunday By appointment

If the Pastor is not in during the stated hours,
please call 860-249-3576 or

email: pastor@bethlehem-ucc.org

Memorials and Gifts

Received August 16 – September 15, 2026

General Memorial Fund

Jan Burnham

Bethlehem Veterans & Friends**Monthly Breakfast**

October 2nd 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**

October 13th at 9:30 am

4389 Jackson Rd., Ann Arbor

Contact Susan Irwin at 734-255-5661 or

siirwin46@gmail.com for more info.

Community Time

Every Sunday after Worship in the Youth Room. Hosts and Treat Providers Needed. Please use [SignUpGenius](https://www.signupgenius.com) to sign up to help or bring a treat.

**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.





Direct Financial Support for Tornado Cleanup

Goal: \$50,000

On April 15, 2026, a tornado began near Bethlehem Cemetery at 2801 Jackson Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48103, and the adjacent Jackson Avenue roadway. It then traveled through the Maple Village shopping center and Veterans Memorial Park.

The City of Ann Arbor requested support from FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency), and we were hopeful that recovery funds would be available. However, during a meeting with FEMA representatives on August 17, 2026, we learned that no funding would be provided to either nonprofit or for-profit organizations. This is why we are undertaking this specific fundraising effort.

Bethlehem Cemetery has lost 28 large, historic trees—many estimated to be 150 to 200 years old. Uprooted and fallen trees had to be removed promptly to ensure safety and maintain access to the cemetery. The damage and loss were heartbreaking at our sacred burial grounds; the aftermath was documented in video submitted to the National Weather Service.

In addition to the loss of trees, the storm damaged fencing, blacktop, and several ground monuments. Because these unexpected expenses place a significant strain on our long-term resources, we are seeking to raise \$50,000. Your contribution will help us restore and preserve Bethlehem Cemetery for the future.

Please consider supporting the cleanup and recovery effort by mailing a check payable to:

Bethlehem Cemetery
c/o Bethlehem UCC Church
423 S. Fourth Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

You may also donate by credit card at:

<https://bethlehemcemeteryaa.org/donate/>

Comments, questions, and suggestions are welcome at Bethlehemcemeteryaa@gmail.org.

With sincere thanks and appreciation,

Bethlehem Cemetery Board of Directors

Jamie Dylenski, Treasurer
Mary Friend, Vice President
Susan Irwin, Member
Shannon O'Reilly, Secretary
Marilyn Pearson, Member
Mary Jean Raab, President

Pretzel Making

Come and join us on Friday, October 9th or Saturday, October 10th to continue the Bethlehem tradition of creating fresh German pretzels. Sign up to mix the dough on Friday and/or to roll the dough on Saturday. Kitchen helpers and volunteers to clean up are also needed on Saturday. We will begin at 9 AM on both days. Come when you can and leave when you must. No experience is necessary. Lunch will be provided on Saturday.

If you have any questions, please contact Judy Coucouvanis. Thank you!



Pretzel Orders

You can place your order for pretzels by filling out the form below and returning it to the office. Additional forms are located outside the church office or you can call during business hours, Tues.- Fri. 9 am to 2 pm, to place an order.

Orders are taken on a first come basis. A limit of 80 dozen pretzels will be made.

Payment is collected at pick up. \$15 per dozen (limit 6 dozen), \$8 per half dozen. Office # 734-665-6149.

BUCC PRETZEL ORDER FORM 2026

Order date: _____

Name: _____

Telephone #: _____

Email: _____

_____ Dozen Pretzels: \$15 (limit 6)

_____ Half Dozen Pretzels: \$8:00

Pick-up preference: PLEASE CHECK BELOW - we need to know how to handle the order

☐

**Will pick up on baking day
October 10, 11:00- 12:00 pm
in Fellowship Hall**

☐

**Will pick up Sunday
October 11, 11:15- 12:15 pm
in Youth Room**

We strongly encourage you to pre-order. 80 dozen pretzels will be available for purchase. Once we have received orders for 80 dozen pretzels, no further orders can be accepted. You will be notified if your order cannot be completed.

Orders must be received by Tuesday October 6th at noon.

Office Use Only Below This Line

Order taken by: _____



**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 Weiner

**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!

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 Pillamas. Sign up is on
the CROP Walk website here: [CROP Walk
Sign Up](http://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!



Rotating Shelter Update

Dawn Gemler from the Shelter Association of
Washtenaw County presented to the Outreach
Ministry Team recent changes to the county's plan for
sheltering individuals during the winter months. **The
Rotating Shelter program has been paused for this
winter.** Instead, there will be two overnight sites at
Ypsilanti churches with increased capacity (40 instead
of 25) for men and women as a replacement. In
addition, there will be two sites serving as Daytime
Warming Centers, one at the Delonis Center and one
at St. Lukes Episcopal in Ypsilanti. These overnight and
daytime sites are two components of a comprehensive
plan still being developed to address the needs of the
unhoused in our county.

Churches who have previously served as Rotating
Shelter sites are now being asked to support in a
different way. Please watch for details to come on how
Bethlehem will join this effort.



Outreach Volunteer Opportunities

In addition to providing financial support, Bethlehem members also support our partner
organizations through volunteering. If you would like to get involved, there are several
opportunities available.



Peace Neighborhood Center Food Distribution

Fridays 8:30 - 11:30 AM

Peace
Neighborhood
Center

[Peace Food Distribution Sign Up Fall 2026](#)



Food Gatherers

Various shifts are available for individuals to sign up at the Carrot Way
warehouse sorting produce, or at the Delonis Center Community Kitchen
preparing and serving meals.



In addition to individual sign up, Bethlehem will have
opportunities for group volunteer days.

[Food Gatherers Individual Sign Up](#)



Hope Clinic, Ypsilanti

Volunteer Opportunities at Hope Clinic

Many opportunities are available including:

- Farm Stand Distribution
- Farm Stand Behind the Scenes Work
- Food Pantry Distribution
- Diaper Pantry Packing, Distribution
- Food Pantry Stocking, Organizing, Cleaning
- Grocery Packing
- Dining Room Host
- Data Entry
- Cleaning
- Yardwork



For individual sign up information, please contact Katie Rowan at: rowank55@gmail.com.

In addition to individual volunteer opportunities, Bethlehem will also offer group volunteer
days.

Refrigerator Page and **Email Blast** submissions must be received by **5:00 pm Tuesday each week**. All Submissions for the **November Visitor** are **due by October 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

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.

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

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.



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.



Are you following Bethlehem United Church of Christ on Facebook? Follow our page:

[facebook.com/bethlehemuccA2](https://www.facebook.com/bethlehemuccA2)

Interact with posts and share them with friends to help more people discover what is happening in our church.



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