

# FIRST WORD

M A R C H

GOD LOVES ALL PEOPLE, SO DO WE

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This is Holy Week. Let us journey together with Christ into the most sacred time of our Christian faith and experience God's story. We begin with the celebration of a palm parade that is both joyous and confusing. This leads to Jesus gathering with his disciples, washing feet, and mandating that his followers must "love one another as he has loved." This meal of beauty and grace quickly turns as Jesus is arrested; his accusers harass and harm him. He is tried, and then the cross of Golgotha looms, and the weeping begins. We rest on Saturday, waiting for dawn to come as we prepare our hearts to receive. On Easter Sunday, we joyously celebrate the resurrection of Christ, lifting our voices in praise of the hope that is ours and the world's. This is our story. This is God's story.

You are encouraged to participate in all the worship, remembering that without the journey of Holy Week, Easter loses its deep meaning.



### **March 24, Palm Sunday Ecumenical Blessing of the Palms in Bronson Park @ 9:45am**

Please gather at 9:30am in the vestibule and hallway in the church at the Academy Street doors. We will hand out palms and bulletins and walk to the park together. You may also join us directly in the park.



### **March 24, Palm Sunday Worship @ 10am**

Palm Sunday holds a special place in our hearts as we recall Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Just like those who hailed Him on that day, we too wave our palm branches, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"



### **March 28, Maundy Thursday Worship @ 7pm**

With water and a basin, we remember that Jesus tells the disciples that He wants to wash their feet. They are bewildered by this gesture of humility and service that reverses all normal roles of authority. In humility, we symbolically wash our hands and hear the call to serve and love.



### **March 29, Good Friday Worship @ 7pm**

Good Friday is the day when we solemnly remember the death of our Savior. In our worship this year, we will listen to the story of Christ's passion from the Gospel of John and sing the hymns of our faith. These hymns reflect on the text of choral anthems that acknowledge Jesus' willingness to go to the cross for the love of the world. In our sanctuary, stripped of all decor, we will witness the cross. We will touch, pray, and meditate at its foot. As we read the reproaches—words of lament written from the perspective of Jesus against a church that nailed Him to the cross—we will leave in silence, carrying the grief of Jesus' death in our hearts.

Yet, even in this solemn moment, we hold onto the hopefulness of Easter resurrection that will come on the third day. Jesus remains with us through our times of suffering; let us stay with Him.



### **March 31, Easter Sunday ~ Christ has Risen! Worship @ 10am**

Christ the Lord is risen! Alleluia. Come, join us for Easter as we sing our praise and raise our joys and triumphs high with brass, choir, organ and timpani declaring that love's redeeming work is done. Easter begins in the dark and moves into our lives as the dawn lights up the sky and our hearts are filled once again with the hope that Christ leads us to a redemptive love. Invite your friends and family to join us for worship as we remember that we rise with the Resurrected One to be renewed, redeemed, and enlivened people who serve the God of Love.



## STAFF PARISH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

The Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) has been hard at work for several months identifying ways that our church staffing model can best serve the current needs of our church. Knowing about Ruth LaMachia's upcoming retirement in February and other staff needs gave us the opportunity to put new ideas into practice. SPRC is grateful for the collaborative work that has brought us to this point and is now carrying us forward. Our church staff is composed of dedicated people who are willing to experiment and grow. They are giving grace to our process and trusting us and each other with their ideas, feedback, and patience. Some staff roles and/or job titles have changed while some remain the same. Three staff members are new employees. Positions range from a few hours to full time and include interns and consultants. Please hold this work in your prayers as we tweak and settle into directions and dreams.

### Clergy

- Rev. Julie Kline - Lead Pastor
- Rev. Dr. Matt Weiler - Pastor of Community Formation

### Lay Staff

\* Denotes a new employee

- Andrew Weare - Building Host
- \*Ava Loncharte - Building Host
- Bernie Foulk - Organist
- Bryan Heany- Audio Technician/Consultant
- Christiane Stakely - Office Assistant
- Christine Landreville - Office Manager
- Debra Lindemann - Nursery Worker
- \*Drew Bolton - Building Superintendent
- \*Drew Eaton - AV Camera Technician
- Jacqueline Stilger - Director of Music
- Jonathan Townley - Youth and Young Adult Intern
- Jose Celorio - Comms Coordinator
- Julia Librizzi - Director of Children and Families Ministries
- Lauren Estep - Choral Scholar
- Michael Lee - Custodian
- Samantha Lee - Nursery Worker
- Sharon Bunker - Nursery Worker
- Thom Victor - Technology Specialist
- Walt Whitfield - Bookkeeper



### Ava Loncharte

Ava is a Biology student at Kalamazoo College. She is from Kalamazoo but spent this past semester abroad in Ecuador. As she wraps up her academic year at school, Ava eagerly looks forward to being a part of our community and staff.

## First Word for April

Articles for the next issue are due no later than April 1, 2024.

Articles submitted to the newsletter should be sent to [jcelorio@umc-kzo.org](mailto:jcelorio@umc-kzo.org). Articles may be edited for space and content.

## Children and Families Ministry

### March 24th:

Children and Families Ministry will have a Palm Parade with the children at the beginning of Palm Sunday and an all church brunch after church on Palm Sunday in Wesley Hall.

On Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday there will not be children's Sunday School after church, but there will be Godly Play after "A Time for the Child in Us All" during worship and childcare available in the nursery.

### Palm Sunday Brunch:

The whole church is invited to a light brunch in Wesley Hall immediately following Palm Sunday worship on March 24, 2024. Many thanks to Donna Duniak for organizing this. There will be baskets by the doors of Wesley Hall to take a goodwill offering for the brunch. We hope you will join us! All are welcome!

### 2024 Bay Shore Camp

First Presbyterian and First United Methodist of Kalamazoo are pleased to bring, "Bay Shore Day Camp on the Road," back this summer. Save the dates for August 12-15, 2024 from 8:30am to 4:30pm here at the church for four days of camp for kindergarten to 5th graders. Registration will begin soon!

## New Youth Council at FUMC

Amidst all the games, prayers, service projects, camping, small groups, confirmation classes, and youth group meetings, there is an overarching framework for our Youth Ministry at First UMC that is IDENTITY, BELONGING, and PURPOSE. It is our intention to help young people ask the core questions of "Who am I in Jesus Christ?" "Where and how do I belong in this church?" and "How is my story a part of God's larger story?" As yet another way to equip our young people to ask and to seek answers to these questions, we have launched a new Youth Council where young people will exercise agency, and develop leadership skills to discern just how they want to grow in their lives of faith together.

The first meeting of the new Youth Council was held on Sunday morning March 10th and in addition to identifying things they hope to learn about and to experience together, we began identifying some specific areas of public leadership that the church will witness in the months to come. Notably, two youth will now serve as representatives on our church council, attending twice annually to share and discuss ways the leadership of the church can best support young people at FUMC. Another two youth have volunteered to tell the story of Youth Ministries in worship every two months. There are more leadership positions on the horizon but those things felt like pretty good accomplishments for a Sunday morning.

## Youth Participate in United Methodist Advocacy Day from Kalamazoo

The second annual United Methodist Advocacy Day was held on March 13 as several hundred United Methodists gathered at the State Capitol in Lansing to advocate for better mental Health Care in Michigan. Specifically, we encouraged our legislators to support House Bill 4707, 5371 and 5372. In short, they ensure out-of-network health care for mental illness, and increased access to mental health care before an individual reaches crisis.

The Youth of Kalamazoo were given the opportunity to put faith into action by participating from a distance in youth group. Over three weeks we discussed Mental Health in the scriptures and how to integrate prayer into our self-care. We spent some time learning about the above mentioned House Bills and what they mean. Finally, youth wrote letters to their senators in support of these House Bills and created Semi-Colon Butterflies that were incorporated into a public witness at the Capitol. The semi-colon represents hope to persons who struggle with mental illness, self-harm, suicide, and addiction. Where an author could have ended a sentence, they chose to continue and instead used a semi-colon. On Advocacy Day, 421 semi-colon butterflies were on display at the capitol as an act of public witness. 421 represents the 421,000 Michiganders in 2022 who had inadequate mental health care. The Youth of FUMC provided 30 butterflies for the display.



## Please keep these friends in your prayers:

- Don Chalker
- Christine
- Lenora Holliday
- Judy McClelland
- Susan Noble
- Anna Rassmussen
- Mary Lou Sanderson
- Barb Skuza
- Tom and Marcia Stobie
- Lori Valkema
- Carol & family
- Jan Search
- Ruth LaMachia
- Sally Stevens
- Hank Rohs
- Bela Lahner
- RuthAnn and Bill Uggen
- Michael Seals
- Willoughby family

## Prayer Requests

If you would like to share a prayer request with our clergy and prayer ministry team, please visit [www.umc-kzo.org/contact-us/prayer-request/](http://www.umc-kzo.org/contact-us/prayer-request/). or, please call the church at **(269) 381-6340** and leave a message. Prayer requests need to be received each **THURSDAY by noon** for inclusion in our weekly list for the prayer ministry team.

## After Worship Coffee Service

Sunday coffee service has resumed at Kalamazoo FUMC. Join us after worship in the Perks area on the first level of the church. We look forward to once again sharing coffee and fellowship with you!

