



"Star of Bethlehem"

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**Advent 2024**

# Love is our beginning

*As you journey through this season, may you find words for belovedness and hope. May you find words for beginning again. For no matter what you are facing, no matter what this new day brings, love is our beginning.*

The calendar year comes to a close, yet a new church year begins. Christ's birth ushers us into new ways of living and loving; and yet, the world as we know it spins madly on. In many ways, pregnant Mary was surrounded by endings—large and small, personal and political. But Mary proclaimed hope in a God who was and is making all things new. Christ's birth offered a beautiful new beginning for shepherds and Magi alike—all the while, King Herod tried to bring Christ's story to an end. When we ourselves navigate seasons filled with endings and beginnings, we need reminders. We need words that can feel like steady ground, like a path for our feet to find as we step forward into the unknown. Love is our beginning.

This is our steady ground, no matter what this new day brings.

**Invite your relatives, friends, and neighbors as we prepare our hearts this Advent!**

**First Sunday of Advent, December 1 @ 10 a.m.** - You Are a Blessing

*"I have called you by name, you are mine."* Isaiah 43: 1b

**Second Sunday of Advent, December 8 @ 10 a.m.** - We Can't Go Alone

*"A three-fold cord is not quickly broken."* Ecclesiastes 4: 12b

**Third Sunday of Advent, December 15 @ 10 a.m.** - Do the Good That is Yours to Do

*"You shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of street to live in."* Isaiah 58b

**Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 22 @ 10 a.m.** - Hope is Worth the Risk

*"For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name."* Luke 1: 49

Children's Christmas Pageant, "The Inn"

**Christmas Eve, December 24 @ 4, 7, and 11 p.m.** - Love Knows Your Name

*"For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Peace of Peace."* Isaiah 9: 6

# CHILDREN & FAMILIES MINISTRIES *by Julia Librizzi*

## Save these dates for our Family Fun Events!

- Friday, Dec. 6 – Christmas Gingerbread Houses, 6-8pm in Wesley Hall
- Sunday, Dec. 15 – Christmas Caroling with youth and Manna, 5pm
- Friday, Jan. 24 – Swimming at Borgess Fitness Center
- Sunday, Feb. 2 – Ice Skating at Wings West
- Friday, Mar. 14 – Bowling at Airway Lanes

## Mark your calendars for upcoming Faith Milestones (Grades 3-5) events!

- Friday, Dec. 6 from 6-8pm – join us at the Family Fun Event for gingerbread house making in Wesley Hall
- Sunday, Jan. 26 from 6-7:30pm – communion
- Sunday, Feb. 16 from 6-7:30pm – back stage tour of church
- Sunday, Mar. 16 from 6-7:30pm – baptism and confirmation

## Mom’s Night Out Freezer Meal Prep/Exchange Party

Please join us on Nov. 22, 2024 in Wesley Hall (lower level) from 6-9pm. We will be cooking in the church kitchen and exchanging meals to stock your freezer. You will need to select a recipe that serves 4 or more people and bring supplies to make 4 batches of that recipe. Each person will go home with four freezer meals. Please email Julia at [jlibrizzi@umc-kzo.org](mailto:jlibrizzi@umc-kzo.org) to RSVP to this event and for more information about what to bring.

## Spring Mom’s Retreat

April 25-27 2025 in Ludington. More details to come soon!

## Family Camping at Lake Michigan Campground

Next summer’s family camp will be in Pentwater, MI from July 13-15. Please join us! We have a group of sites blocked off for our group under “First UMC of Kalamazoo Katy McGinnis.” Full hook-up sites, electric and water sites, and platform tent sites are available. Call the campground at (231) 869-5627 to reserve your family’s site **before January 1**. A one-night deposit is required, or you can pay in full.



# CHILDREN’S CHRISTMAS PAGEANT *by Jackie Stilger*

The children’s Christmas pageant is Sunday, December 22 during worship, and is called “The Inn.” This year’s musical drama speaks of God’s incarnate love for all of us, even in times of darkness and despair. If your preschooler through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade child would like to participate, they can sign-up during the Sunday school time and more info will be forthcoming. If a child

is in 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and would like to have a bigger role, please contact Music Director Jackie Stilger for more information. She can be reached at [jstilger@umc-kzo.org](mailto:jstilger@umc-kzo.org).



## Please keep these friends in your prayers:

- Lenora Holiday
- Judy McClelland
- Susan Noble
- Anna Rasmussen
- Mary Lou Sanderson
- Barb Skuza
- Tom and Marcia Stobie
- Lori Valkema
- Sally Stevens
- Hank Rohs
- Gerry & Tom Schaberg
- Dick Shilts
- Judy Sims
- RuthAnn & Bill Uggen
- Michael Seals
- Britnee & Brandon Warzybok & Family

**Please lift up the Warzybok family in your prayers** to celebrate the birth of Hugo Anthony and to mourn the death of Henrik Edward on October 16, 2024. We hold these identical twin baby boys in our hearts and prayers with their parents, Brandon and Britnee Warzybok; their big sister, Vera; and big brother, Thaddeus.

## 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 call the church at (269) 381-6340 and leave a message.

## FIRST WORD FOR DECEMBER

Articles for the next issue are due no later than Friday, Dec. 6, 2024. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be emailed to Interim Communications Coordinator, Jennifer Stupica, at [jstupica@umc-kzo.org](mailto:jstupica@umc-kzo.org). Articles may be edited for space and content.

## HON SUSPENDS OPERATIONS

by Deb Search-Willoughby

It is with great sadness that the church’s Helping Our Neighbors Team will be suspending efforts to serve those in our community who request funds to avoid eviction and utility shutoff. With rising numbers of requests, we find we can no longer sustain this ministry with adequate funding or volunteers. In 2024, HON paid \$59,558 in rent and utility assistance for 442 people.

It is now time to re-imagine how to serve our community as costs for housing and utilities will not be declining any time soon. HON will be working with the Outreach Team and church leaders to find ways to collaborate with our community to address these needs. Pastor Julie reminded us, “... I do not want you to lose sight of the love you all have poured into the world, one phone call at a time, one bill, one worry, one reassurance at a time.”

We would also add that this ministry could not have happened without the generosity of this congregation. Thank you for your prayers and gifts! We invite you to consider joining in the process of re-imagination.

## IMMIGRATION LAW & JUSTICE

by Ann Sweany

The Immigration Law & Justice Team is planning a naturalization clinic on Wednesday, Dec. 4. Intake volunteers have signed up already; but they could use a bit of help with hospitality. Please contact Ann Sweany by emailing her at [rasweany@iljmi.org](mailto:rasweany@iljmi.org) if you can help with food or greeting.



Ray and Susan Eden displaying their support for immigrants in front of the church

To promote our ILJ ministry during October, ILJ volunteers displayed signs in support of immigrants at the corner of S. Park and South Streets to many waves, thumbs up, and honks. In addition, Ann Sweany has joined the ILJ-MI state board, where she hopes to work productively with a Kalamazoo perspective.

## 2025 GIVING CAMPAIGN UPDATE by Carol Hodges

The Generosity Team is pleased to report that as of Nov. 7, 123 estimate-of-giving cards have been turned in for a total of \$701,794 pledged for next year’s operating budget. This compares to 126 pledges a year ago for \$684,285.

If you have not yet turned in your estimate-of-giving card, please put it in the offering plate during Sunday worship or mail it to the church office. You may also use the electronic giving form on the church’s website: <https://www.umc-kzo.org/generosity/annual-estimate-of-giving/>

## SPLENDID SUPPERS FOR SEVEN

by Mary Duncan & Vickie Seals

This is a great chance to get to know people in our congregation that you may not have met before! We have four hosts welcoming you into their homes in December, but spots are filling quickly! As of Nov. 12, there are only two hosts with spots still available. As your supper date approaches, you will receive a postcard in the mail that will include your host’s name, address, and phone number—as well as food sensitivities to keep in mind as you prepare your dish to pass. Past participants report great food, engaging conversation, and lots of laughter!

## NOVEMBER/DECEMBER MISSION OF THE MONTH by Donna Dunyak

Please help us support the Salvation Army’s Angel Tree program that helps provide Christmas gifts for hundreds of children in the Kalamazoo community! Tags are located on the tree in the Perks area. **Please return gifts unwrapped, with the gift tag attached, to the church by Sunday, December 15.** Gift cards should be placed in the lock box located in the office beside Chris Stakely’s desk.



### AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

You are invited to follow along with our Advent Sermon Series by picking up a “Words for the Beginning” devotional at the Welcome Center beginning Dec. 1.

# YOUTH MINISTRIES NEWS

by Rev. Matt Weiler

**"Friendship and Joy in Jesus Christ."** These are the words that best describe what our youth ministry is all about.

This fall at the request of the Church Council, our youth completed a **S.O.A.R** (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results) analysis. I noticed in their feedback that our young people didn't aspire for our youth group to be much more than what it is currently. There were no big dreams (though we did tease the idea of some day going on an international mission trip), no notable changes requested, no tweaks in format or content. So I asked them, "Are you really tired tonight or are you content with how youth group is going?" They were tired for sure, but what teenager isn't? Quickly they all affirmed my curiosity of contentment. *"This is a place where we are free to be ourselves."* *"This is our people, our community."* *"We know it's going to be the same, or close to the same every time, and that's important to us."* *"It's consistent, it is always here."* *"Youth Group is a safe place and a courageous place."*

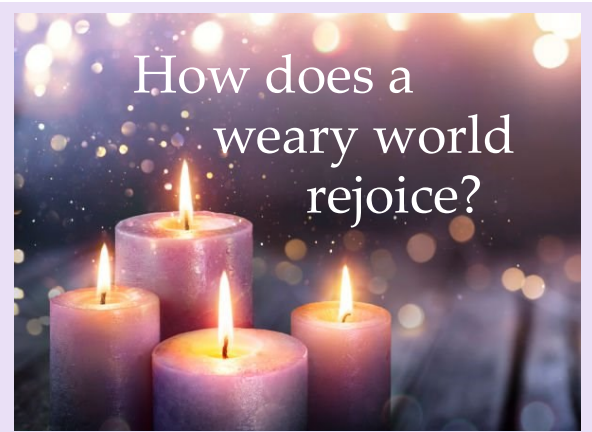
This conversation reminded me of something theologian Stanley Hauerwas has written about, that "we should never strive to make the church more than the church, because if it becomes more than the church, then it is no longer the church." Dietrich Bonhoeffer said something similar in Life Together, writing that if we dream about the church being more than a fellowship of Christians, we will idolize the dream and never be content with the reality.

I'm wondering if our youth might just be on to something that the rest of us would benefit from hearing. That perhaps everywhere they go in the world there are expectations to compete, to perform, to wear metaphorical masks. In youth group none of those things matter. It's simply a place to be who they are—to find friendship and joy with one another and with Jesus Christ. If you, or a youth you are connected to, wants to be a part of this community, find me after worship or send me an email at [mweiler@umc-kzo.org](mailto:mweiler@umc-kzo.org). Or show up on a Sunday evening at 6pm in the lower level youth lounge. There will be a place for you!

## November and December Youth Ministries Schedule

Youth Group will gather in the youth lounge at 6pm on Sundays, Nov. 17, 24, and Dec 8. We are off on Dec. 1 for the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, and we are Christmas caroling with the Children & Families and Manna on Sunday, Dec. 15 at 5pm.

**\*\*Youth Group is open to all youth 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Adults are welcome to volunteer after attending worship for 6 months and completing our SafeGatherings Abuse Prevention Training\*\***



With music that will uplift your soul, creating a peaceful ambiance filled with the spirit of hope and love

## Advent Concerts

Enjoy your lunch hour on Thursdays during Advent for our annual Advent Concert Series in the sanctuary. These 50-minute concerts will present uplifting music of the Christmas season. Concerts are always open to the public. Take a moment to meet the musicians and share in refreshments after the concert. Free will offering.

### Dec. 5, Noon

The Frank Silva Jazz Trio presents tunes of the season

### Dec. 12, Noon

Soprano Sara Emerson McGarvey singing holiday favorites

### Dec. 19, Noon

The Snowy Path by Kalamazoo's newest Irish band



## HELP US DECK THE HALLS!

Volunteers are needed to help us get ready for Advent! We will be putting up trees, wreaths, garland and more on Monday, Nov. 25 at 9:30 a.m. Coffee and donuts will be served. Please contact Deb Karnemaat at (269) 330-0375 or email [dskar@charter.net](mailto:dskar@charter.net) if you would like to help!