



Merry Christmas

Wishing you joy and peace this holiday season



From our families to yours, the staff wishes you a blessed Christmas and New Year!

*With hope in our hearts, we pray.
With hope in our hearts, we gather.
With hope in our hearts, we begin again.*

*Meet us here on Christmas Eve.
Allow this joyful evening of worship
be the start of something new.*

*With joy and hope, we weave our voices
together in prayer and song.
We light a candle to remember the star
that guided the shepherds and the wise men
to the baby ...*

Adapted from a prayer by Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed |
A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org.

Join us for a special evening of Candlelight Christmas Eve Services

4pm - Family & Children worship

Designed for children and families. Children will participate in music solos and recreate the Christmas Story. Costumes and props will be available at the door so the children can choose their character. We will sing favorite Christmas carols, light candles while singing *Silent Night* and conclude with *Joy to the World!*

7pm - Lessons and Carols

(Livestreamed, childcare will be available)

Throughout Advent, we have lit candles of hope, peace, joy, and love. This evening, we light the Christ candle to honor that Christ is our Light. We will raise collective voices to sing Christmas carols accompanied by brass instruments and the Chancel Singers Choir. The service concludes with the tender tradition of transforming our sanctuary into a heavenly hearth by lighting candles while singing *Silent Night*.

11pm - Lessons and Communion

In a quieter spirit, we will sing carols, listen to beautiful handbell music, and gather at the communion table to receive the bread of life and the cup of blessing. If weather permits, we will take our candles to the front steps and sing *Silent Night* as a call for peace and goodwill for all.

CHILDREN & FAMILIES MINISTRIES *by Julia Librizzi*

Save these dates for our Family Fun Events!

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

Faith Milestones (Grades 3-5) Events!

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

Saturday, April 12 from 6-7:30pm - Lent

Friday, May 16 from 6-8pm – scavenger hunt downtown

Mom's Night: Favorite Things Party

Saturday, January 11, 2025 from 6-9pm. Moms with children at home, please join us as we gather at 10220 S 10th St Schoolcraft MI, 49087. Bring a dish to share and drinks for yourself. Buy three of your favorite things (each around \$25) and bring them wrapped. We will draw names and everyone leaves with three new fun things. Please RSVP to jlibrizzi@umc-kzo.org so we know how many to expect.

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 11-13. 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.



4PM CHRISTMAS EVE MUSICIANS!



Children are invited to share instrumental solos for the prelude at the 4pm Christmas Eve Service! Director of Music, Jackie Stilger, and Director of Children and Families Ministries, Julia Librizzi, invite the children in 8th grade and younger to consider sharing a

musical piece (solo) on their instrument.

If your child would like to play something live for the prelude on Christmas Eve, please email Ms. Jackie at jstilger@umc-kzo.org with the title and composer/arranger by Tuesday, December 17 so that we can include it in the bulletin. Please contact Ms. Julia, jlibrizzi@umc-kzo.org or Ms. Jackie, jstilger@umc-kzo.org with any questions!

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

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

FIRST WORD FOR DECEMBER

Articles for the next issue are due on Friday, Jan. 10, 2025. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be emailed to Interim Communications Coordinator, Jennifer Stupica, at jstupica@umc-kzo.org. Articles may be edited for space and content.

Please lift up the Bert Hybels family in your prayers. Bert passed away in Florida on November 2. Bert leaves his wife Helen, six children, and nine grandchildren. If you would like to share your condolences or memories to the family, Bert's daughter Polly's address is: 11230 Avimore Ct., Zionsville, IN 46077

WINTER WEATHER POLICY

The church will always be open for worship on Sunday. Please use discretion in deciding

BUILDING UPDATES

by Drew Bolton

Many projects around the church have been completed or are very close to completion. These include the Building Restoration, Inc. project. They cleaned the exterior, tuckpointed numerous joints, fixed the cross high above our entrance, secured many slate tiles, added copper flashing in several areas, replaced approximately 1500 square feet of concrete and re-caulked our front steps. A huge thanks to the Building and Grounds Team, especially Mitch Wilson and Tom Schaberg, for coordinating these repairs with Building Restoration.

In addition, about half of our flat roofs have been replaced and should be set for the next 30 years. The front doors are looking good again with fresh paint and shining bronze hardware. The "antique" streetlight in front of the tower doors has been updated to a new and more efficient LED-style fixture. The light pole has also been straightened after years of sagging.

'Tis the season for decorating! A big thanks to Deb and Rich Karnemaat, Deb Search Willoughby, and all the many helpers who showed up on Monday, November 25 to decorate the building for the holidays. It looks amazing!

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

by Jackie Stilger



Calling all little sheep, oxen, and angels! We would love to include



your little one in our annual Christmas

Pageant on Sunday, Dec. 22 during worship. *The Inn* tells the story of Joseph, Mary, and the Shepherds' trials and tribulations as they journey to Bethlehem. If your preschooler through 2nd grader would like to participate in our pageant, please reach out to Jacqueline Stilger at jstilger@umc-kzo.org or Julie Librizzi, jlibrizzi@umc-kzo.org or sign up in the Arches. There will be a rehearsal on Saturday, Dec. 21 from 10am - noon in the sanctuary. Preschoolers will be done by 11:00. We look forward to including your child in this special re-telling of the birth of the Savior!



FINANCE COMMITTEE NEWS

by Tom Lundquist and Dana Stuart, Co-chairs Finance Committee

The past year has been a transition in staffing and responsibilities surrounding our finances. During this time, we engaged an outside resource to do a thorough review and reconciliation of our books. That project has concluded and the end result will improve overall efficiency for our staff and speed up the timeliness of our financial reporting.

We are now preparing the 2025 budget. Through October, our giving totaled \$879K and our expenses totaled \$961K; thus, we currently have a year-to-date operating deficit of \$82K. Although this is within the 2024 budget (which was approved as a deficit of \$129K), and we do have reserves to cover this year's shortfall, we will be unable to continue to operate at a deficit moving forward. Therefore, please remain faithful in your end-of-year giving as we hope to finish as positively as possible, and submit your intended giving for 2025, if you have not done so. Thank you!

LEADERSHIP TEAM: HOUSE MEETINGS

by Rev. Matt Weiler

Thank you to all those who served as hosts, facilitators, note-takers, and everyone who participated in our house meeting campaign this fall. The purpose of our house meetings was to deepen connections and relationships among the people of FUMC, and to gain information and insights that will help our 2025 strategic planning process. In review, there was consensus that we are a people who value connection and deep relationships. We hope to lean further into our work of justice and inclusion, as we seek more collaborative partnerships in our community. Also voiced was the need to find rest and restoration so that we may grow in love and knowledge of God.

ADVENT LABYRINTH: A PRAYER PRACTICE

Labyrinth walking is an ancient practice used by many faiths for spiritual centering, contemplation, and prayer. Pastor Julie will lead a time of devotions and walking the labyrinth that is set-up in Wesley Hall on Dec. 15 and 22 after worship. You are also invited to walk the labyrinth Monday -Thursday between 9am and 4pm. To enhance your time of prayer and contemplation, there are four prayer stations located outside the labyrinth. If you have never walked a labyrinth, we hope you will try this practice to quiet your mind, center yourself, and allow your spirit to be in prayer, curiosity, and expectation.



YOUTH MINISTRIES NEWS

by Rev. Matt Weiler

At the end of every youth gathering, I ask the youth to provide a one-word reflection for how they felt about the night. I find this practice to be a threshold moment that helps each of us to process what we have experienced, to take stock of how we feel as we enter into another week, and to evaluate the meaning of the evening's experience. If there is a particularly unique answer, I will turn to that youth and ask them, "Say more about that?"

As I reflect on our youth ministries this fall my word is SUSTAINING. "Say more about that..." you say? Sustaining because it has been a place that is developing a sustaining faith life within our young people—and honestly, in the lives of our leaders as well. Sustaining because it is a sustainable youth ministry. We consistently have a solid number of middle and high schoolers, as well as a reliable crew of adult leaders. Sustaining because I have witnessed friendships forged from memories made among young people who attend different schools and prioritize their Sunday nights together. Sustaining as students with busy fall schedules are always right back with us when the soccer...or volleyball...or the Academically Talented Youth Program comes to an end.

As always, I am grateful to this congregation for supporting a sustaining youth ministry. The financial gifts you give to this church provide for the leadership, the space, and the opportunities for young people to experience joy and friendship through Jesus Christ and with one another.

Youth Group Schedule in the New Year

Jan. 5 Youth Group in the Youth Lounge, 6-7:30 - Game Night

Jan. 12 Youth Group in the Youth Lounge, 6-7:30 - Small Groups: "Who do you say that I am?"

Jan. 19 Youth Group in the Youth Lounge 6-7:30 "Cooking and Eating Together"

Jan. 26 Youth Group in the Youth Lounge 6-7:30 Surprise

Feb. 2 Ice Skating with Families, 3pm

Feb. 9 Super Bowl Party in the Youth Lounge, 6pm through the end of the half-time show and potluck

DOWNTOWN OUTREACH CHURCHES' COLLABORATION

Each of our collaborating churches in the DOCC ministry are busy with holiday events! Please pick up a brochure at the Welcome Center that highlights these events. In 2025, the churches plan to implement different models of ministry so that they can work together on outreach to the community.



Enjoy your lunch hour on Thursdays during Advent with uplifting music. These 50-minute concerts are open to the public. Take a moment to meet the musicians and share in refreshments after the concert. Free will offerings accepted.

Dec. 12, Noon

Soprano Sara Emerson McGarvey
singing holiday favorites

Dec. 19, Noon

Inisheer
Kalamazoo's newest Irish band

AN ENDOWMENT COMMITTEE REMINDER

Remember, if you have no will or trust, state laws will determine who will inherit your property at your death. State laws do not include your church or any other charity as a beneficiary. The end of the year is an ideal time to review your estate plan and make updates to ensure your family's financials and beneficiaries are in order.

NEW YEAR'S EVE FEST



First Church will again be part of the downtown Kalamazoo New Year's celebration with entertainers in the sanctuary and Wesley Hall. This year we will be hosting **Zion Lion**

(playing music from the Caribbean and African diasporas), **Ventriloquist Richard Paul, and magician Alan Smola**. Volunteers are needed for 2-hour shifts to help throughout the evening. Everyone who volunteers will receive a free pass to attend other shows around the park. To volunteer, sign-up in the Perks area on Sunday mornings or email Sharon and Dan Bunker at djbunker@charter.net.