



2025 Annual Conference Report

by Molly Williams, Delegate to Annual Conference

The theme of the 2025 Annual Conference was “Unfinished,” recognizing that after five years of uncertainty, including the COVID pandemic and the disaffiliation of some UMC churches, we still have much work to do.

First, the very good news is that Bishop Bard has appointed Pastors Julie Kline and Matt Weiler to our church for another year. In addition to serving our local Kalamazoo church, Pastor Matt has also assumed the co-chairmanship (along with April Gutierrez) of the Anti-Bias Anti-Racism Working Group (ABAR) of the Michigan Conference.

People from Kalamazoo First UMC who attended were Rev. Matt Weiler, Rev. Buff and Lisa Coe, Rev. John and Diane Boley, Molly Williams, Deb Search Willoughby, John Clark, and Andy Vorbrich.

Significant items for our consideration were four constitutional amendments, which had been passed at the 2020/2024 UMC General Conference. They now are being considered by annual conferences around the world. Our votes were taken and held in confidence, to be announced in November after votes from all UMC annual conferences have been aggregated.

The amendments are:

- Regionalization of the UMC, allowing adaptation of parts of the *Book of Discipline* to local cultures across the world.
- Adding “gender” and “ability” to the categories that cannot be used to exclude membership in the UMC.
- Recognizing the church’s role in combating racism, racial inequality, colonialism, white privilege, and white supremacy.
- Clarifying the educational requirements for clergy eligible to vote for General Conference delegates.

Guest speaker Rev. Dr. Jasmine Smothers, lead pastor of First UMC Atlanta, GA, and author of *Blank Slate* told her own congregation’s story of engaging all generations from the Greatest Generation through Boomers, Millennials, to Betas to transform their church to serve their community. Through a collaboration of



church leaders, community partners, and subject matter experts, the church is beginning an affordable housing project on their campus.

Other highlights were:

- Director of Conference Benefits and Coordinator of Human Resources Joel Walther challenging us to stand up and dance for five minutes during breaks in the legislative sessions.
- The Mission Festival with displays by 35 ministry organizations.
- Inclusion of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Bishop Donald Kreiss in the Service of Recognition, Commissioning, and Ordination. Bishop Kreiss described himself as “one of the nice Lutherans.”
- Court Street UMC in Flint, using the gifts of their members to create a culture of hospitality, boosting attendance and engagement.
- Baptism of Sean (Siwon) Kim Paik, son of Rev. YooJin Kim and Rev. Jung Du Paik during opening worship.
- Bishop Bard challenging the American Sign Language signers with big, fancy words like “disapprobation.”
- Presentation of a new stole (created by Deb Search Willoughby and completed just in time during the drive to the conference) to Rev. Kevin Smalls for his work on Anti-Bias Anti-Racism (ABAR).

Bishop Bard closed the conference with the newly adopted vision statement of the United Methodist Church:



The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit, love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.

Bay Shore Day Camp on the Road!

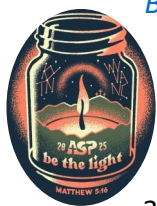
Families of K-5th graders! Mark your calendars for August 11 - 14 for a day camp from 8:30am to 4:30pm. The camp will be located in our church and we are collaborating with our neighbors at First Presbyterian Church. Lunch and two snacks will be included! Activities will include arts and crafts, archery, bible study, wall climbing, games, and water activities. The cost is free, but the spaces are limited, so please register your child/children today! Registration information is in a brochure located at the welcome desk. For help registering or questions, email Ms. Julia at jlibrizzi@umc-kzo.org.

July Mission of the Month

The Outreach Team asks for your assistance in helping Spring Valley Elementary School kids with school supplies. Spring Valley is 90% free and reduced lunches, which means that 90% of the kids are considered lower income. During July we will be collecting new supplies which the teachers will give to their students. The teachers have requested the following: #10 Ticonderoga pencils (the school has requested this brand as they work the best), colored pencils, Crayola crayons, pencil boxes/cases, glue sticks, thin markers, dry erase markers, boxes of tissue, spiral notebooks, composition notebooks, White Out, and colored paper. You may place your supply donations in the large box outside the food pantry. Thank you for helping to make learning a little easier for kids by providing some of the tools they use to learn.



ASP Commissioning & Prayer Partners



"Be the Light, let your light shine before others"

This summer the youth of First United Methodist and Portage Chapel Hill are traveling to **Johnson County, Tennessee from July 19-26** for an Appalachian Service Project. Between the two congregations we have 51 youth and adults that will help to make homes warmer, safer, and drier in a mountainous area of the Blue Ridge Mountains. **Please join us in worship on July 13 to bless and commission our team.** You will have an opportunity to be a prayer partner "light" to one of these volunteers. **Magnets with a picture of one of the volunteers will be available after worship on July 6** (and 13th if there are any left) for you to choose as a prayer partner. As always, we are thankful for your generous support of our ASP ministry and know that the team will be in your thoughts and prayers for their safety. - Rev. Matt Weiler & Dawn Wheaton

FIVE NEW PHOTOS OF CHURCH LIFE are now up on the wall across from the Welcome Center desk. These photos are examples of the talent of photographer Keith Mumma, who weekly dedicates his time to capture the life of our congregation. If you are interested in seeing examples of Keith's photography, you can find a gallery of his images on the [KalamazooArts.org website](http://KalamazooArts.org).

BERNIE FOULK MEMORIAL SERVICE

Sunday, July 6 @ 2pm
First United Methodist Church Sanctuary

OUR SYMPATHY AND PRAYERS TO THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF

Laurabelle Roderick, who died May 10

PLEASE KEEP THESE FRIENDS IN YOUR PRAYERS

Judy Aardema
Nancy Douglas
Robin Entenman
Jan & Tom Kayser
Rev. Gene & Marilyn Lewis
Judy McClelland
Ellie Miller
Mumma Family
Susan Noble
Lois & Jim Richmond
Hank Rohs
Mary Lou Sanderson
Gerry & Tom Schaberg
Michael Seals
Barb Skuza
Sally Stevens
Jacqueline Stilger and family
Marcia Stobie and family
Lori Valkema

PRAYER REQUESTS

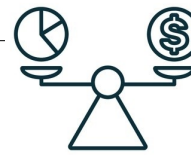
If you would like to share a prayer request with our clergy and prayer ministry team, please visit www.umc-kzo.org/contact-us/prayer-request/ or call the church at (269) 381-6340 and leave a message.

E-MAIL LIST

We also have a weekly E-Newsletter called "Around the Corner." If you would like to be on the church's email list to receive important church news electronically, please contact Jennifer Stupica, jstupica@umc-kzo.org.

JULY ISSUE OF THE FIRST WORD

Articles for the next issue of the First Word newsletter are due on Fri., July 11. Submissions should be emailed to Jennifer Stupica, jstupica@umc-kzo.org. Articles may be edited for space and content.



GENERAL OPERATING BUDGET UPDATE

by Tom Lundquist and Dana Stuart, Finance Team Co-Chairs

Greetings from the Finance Team! We are through 1/3 of our calendar year and want to give a brief update on our finances. This year we brought back snapshot figures to the monthly *First Word*, but thought it would be helpful to provide some more detail from time-to-time. The below chart shows our income and expenses for the general operating budget, which covers the daily needs to run our church. These expenses include staffing, office operations, annual building maintenance (not capital projects), Conference and District Ministry Shares, worship/music ministries, and education, among others. The bulk of the income section is made up of annual member pledges along with general or unpledged gifts to the operating budget, some distributions and transfers from the Trustees, and building rentals. We also have several designated or restricted funds related to missions and outreach which are housed outside of this general budget, and we will provide some more detail on those in another *First Word* edition.

The first two columns of the chart show our results for 2023 and 2024. The blue columns display our 2025 year-to-date information alongside the annual budget approved by Church Council at the beginning of the year. Regarding the budget, you will see that we entered the year projecting a \$50,000 deficit, with the hope that some additional gifts and good expense stewardship will bring us in balance by the end of the year. We should note that the first draft of the budget was a \$150,000 deficit. The Trustees graciously

contributed a one-time additional gift of \$100,000 to our 2025 operations, as we work on new ways to generate the necessary ongoing income to support our church.

Through April, we are off to a very good start. The income and expenses never happen equally over the 12-month year, but so far expenses are right in line with our budget and the income has been slightly higher than expected. Because of the budgeted deficit, the Church Council decided to defer payment of our Conference Ministry Shares until July to ensure we are on solid footing with our cash flow. The plan is to reassess where we stand at that time, with the commitment to having all Ministry Shares paid in full by the end of the year. This has reduced our normal year-to-date expenditures by around \$28,000. On the income side, the Trustees have already funded their additional \$100,000 contribution and we received some fully paid pledges and other general gifts early. So, while it is good news we are at a \$192,683 surplus at April 30, it can be a little deceiving without this additional detail. By the end of the year, we expect the income and expenses to even out, and some additional gifts and expense management will bring us to a balanced year.

If you have any questions about finances or would like to see our reports in more detail, please find either of us on a Sunday morning or contact the church office. Thank you for your continued faithful support of the ministry and life of Kalamazoo First UMC!

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF KALAMAZOO FINANCIAL UPDATE						
	2023	2024	Month Ending 4/30/25	Year to Date 4/30/25	2025 Annual Budget	% of Annual Budget
TOTAL INCOME	1,155,208	1,053,747	68,328	531,930	1,152,334	46.16%
TOTAL EXPENSE	1,118,942	1,166,950	78,661	339,247	1,202,200	28.22%
EXCESS / (DEFICIT)	36,266	(113,203)	(10,333)	192,683	(49,866)	



KLUMP Softball

Come join us for family friendly fun as players or spectators at our Kalamazoo League of United Methodist Players (KLUMP) softball games. Games are on Thursdays, starting June 19 at either 6:15pm or 7:45pm. We play at Pathfinder Church, 8740 S. Westnedge, Portage. This is a co-ed league, ages 13 and up (sometimes way up). All skill levels welcomed and encouraged to participate! Games usually conclude with a trip for ice cream. If you have any questions please contact Jay Gross at (269) 382-0597 or jaynlaura5@gmail.com.



SOFTBALL SCHEDULE

June 19 @ 6:15 vs. Westwood
 June 26 @ 7:45 vs. Pathfinder
 July 3 @ 6:15 vs. Cherry Creek
 July 10 @ 6:15 vs. Westwood
 July 17 @ 7:45 vs. Pathfinder
 July 24 @ 6:15 vs. Cherry Creek
 July 31 @ 6:15 vs. Westwood
 Aug 7 @ 7:45 vs. Pathfinder
 Aug 14 @ 6:15 vs. Cherry Creek

Free Store! Join us for our annual Free Store event on Wednesday, August 20 from 9am to 3pm! We need your help to make this event a success. Please start sorting and saving your gently used clothing, shoes, toys, books, small appliances, and more. Children and teen clothing will be especially in demand as we help families get ready for a new school year. Please note, we cannot accept car seats, cribs, large furniture, or damaged items.
Thank you for your support!

EXPLORING THE “SIMPLIFIED ACCOUNTABLE STRUCTURE” CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Prior to her renewal leave, Pastor Julie wrote the follow article for this month’s First Word to begin teaching the congregation about SAS. This article is the second of three sharing some of the basics of this governance model. While Pastor Julie is away, Pastor Matt will be working with our Church Council co-chairs, Deb Search-Willoughby and Christine Charles, along with the Church Council members, to learn about and to discern a movement towards the SAS model. If you have any questions, you can contact Pastor Matt, Christine, or Deb.

At the end of 2024, Church Council recommended that our congregation study and discuss a new form of governance for our church known as Simplified Accountable Structure (SAS). Throughout 2025, church leadership and the congregation will explore SAS and ultimately will decide if it is a good fit for Kalamazoo First UMC. Quite simply, SAS would move us to one Leadership Board rather than four separate Administrative Committees. This article is the second of several sharing some of the basics of this governance model.

We are often asked about the effectiveness of a simplified accountable structure for the various size churches in the various church settings (rural, suburban, urban). In our experience, this model can and does work in any size church. The primary purposes and benefits of simplified, accountable leadership are:

- Removes bottlenecks in the decision-making process (i.e.; time, energy, resources, multiple committees/ layers, silos, disjointed focus and priorities, etc.).

- Systems, procedures, and policies in place that are flexible and adaptable.
- More people released from leadership roles and available for ministries of the church.
- Leadership Board responsible for church’s faithfulness to the Great Commission (making disciples).
- Leadership Board aligns church resources to the mission and vision.
- Guiding principles in place for efficiency and permission-giving within healthy boundaries.
- Leaders are held accountable at all levels.
- Leadership Board is responsible for focusing on the areas of stewardship, strategic alignment, generative future-focus, and accountable leadership.

By moving to a simplified accountable structure, the Leadership Board has guiding principles to follow and strategic planning is done annually so we can live into the mission of the church.

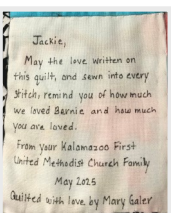
(Excerpt from “Mission Possible: A Simple Structure for Missional Effectiveness,” pp. 12 and 13, Kay Kotan & Blake Bradford

PRAYER QUILT IN MEMORY OF BERNIE FOULK

On Sunday, May 11 our congregation was grieving the loss of Bernie Foulk, our beloved friend and organist, and spouse of Jacqueline Stilger, our Music Director. With aching hearts we invited those present in worship to join in creating a prayer quilt for Jackie. Through the piecing together of squares of fabric with our memories, gratitude, and prayers written upon them, we would create a lasting and sacred gift of love. One hundred thirty individuals created a square.



On Monday the squares were assembled by quilters in our congregation. Over the following days, Mary Galer (a friend of Bernie and Jackie’s through the Kalamazoo Ringers), quilted and completed the prayer quilt. It was a collective effort connecting with those beyond our church community—those present and those there in spirit.



Out of our grief came a new whole—sewn together by the thread of gratitude for Bernie’s life, gifts, and presence in the life of this community. We trust that in the making of this quilt for Jackie, we will become ever more connected to each other in ways that can transform and bring healing to us all. It is our hope that the love written on this quilt, and sewn into every stitch, will remind Jackie of how much we loved Bernie and how much she is loved. - Deb Search Willoughby

NEW BOOKKEEPER

After an extensive search and interview process, the Staff Parrish Relations Committee is pleased to announce the hiring of a new bookkeeper, Cody Collmenter. Cody has a Master of Business Administration (Accounting) from Cedarville University and has broad church management and bookkeeping experience. Welcome to our church staff, Cody! We’re very grateful for Marilyn Storch’s interim contributions as bookkeeper and her assistance transitioning Cody into his new role. - Richard Karnemaat and Kerry Castor, SPRC Co-Chairs



STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

The trustees are working to make improvements to preserve and brighten the windows on the south wall of our sanctuary. These windows hold images of the triune God amongst many ancient images of the Christian faith. In our worship this summer, we’ll draw our attention to the majestic beauty of these windows and how they contribute to a meaningful element in our worship experience on Sundays.