

The First Word

September 2025



Vol. 40, No. 9

First United Methodist Church • 212 S. Park Street • Kalamazoo, MI 49007 • (269) 381-6340 • www.umc-kzo.org

How Firm a Foundation Abounding Hope

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith ~"K" in Rippon's A Selection of Hymns

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ~Romans 15:13

Welcome to this year's Generosity Campaign throughout the month of October. We are filled with gratitude for those who have laid the groundwork for us to nurture hope in these difficult times. As a Christ-centered community, we are called to support our church through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Our ministries and outreach efforts reflect our shared commitment to uplifting others, as we extend God's love to all around us. As we begin this fall campaign, let's commit to financially supporting these crucial efforts. Every contribution, no matter how modest, embodies our collective hope for our church and community, as we live our values of love, inclusion, community, and justice. Our spirit of generosity embodies our faith in the transformative power of love, uniting us as we fulfill our mission.

The Generosity Team will share email devotions, and individuals will recount their experiences during worship.



You are invited to join us on October 26 for Consecration Sunday at 10 AM to celebrate our shared hope and offer our pledges to God.

Sunday, October 5, 2025

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Guard the treasure entrusted to you

Sunday, October 12, 2025

Luke 17:11-19

Giving thanks to Jesus

Sunday, October 19, 2025

Luke 18:1-8

A persistent faith

Sunday, October 26, 2025 – Consecration Sunday

Romans 15: 4-13

Psalms 65

An abounding hope

New Membership Opportunity

As we worship together, we frequently refer to the vow of faithfully participating in the congregation through your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service, and your witness. This is one of the vows that is made as persons are received into our community of faith. Another profession of faith that is regularly used as a part of our communal prayer life is that we accept the freedom and the power given by God to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. A membership class will begin on **October 19, 2025, through November 9**, with the reception of new members in worship on November 16th. If you would like to



explore further the commitment and joy of membership in The United Methodist Church, please contact Pastor Julie at jkline@umc-kzo.org.

Children and Family Ministries News

by Julia Librizzi

Family Fun Night at The Backyard of Kalamazoo

Bring the whole family and join us for appetizers, dinner, drinks, yard games and conversation to The Backyard of Kalamazoo, located at 10441 Stadium Drive Kalamazoo, MI, Saturday, October 4, 2025 at 5:00pm. Entry fee of \$3/person (under 1 year olds are free,) plus bring money for any food you would like to purchase while there.

Faith Milestones

Faith Milestones are those firsts as we grow in our faith. This is a youth group style meeting for our 3rd grade through 5th grade children that meets once a month the same time as Youth Group, from 6:00pm to 7:30pm. Save the dates for our next meetings!



The Faith Milestones children competing in red solo cup Olympics!

Sunday, October 5, 2025
Sunday, November 16, 2025

Fall Sunday Morning Schedule for Children

During worship after, "A Time for the Child Within Us All," children 4 years old to 6th grade are invited to join us for their own kind of worship on the 2nd floor in room 200 called, "Godly Play." We hear and see one of God's stories and wonder about what it might mean together. Children will be returned to their families before the end of worship.

After church there is Sunday School for children 4 years old through 5th grade in room 206. Thank you to Ms. Anne Sherfield, Ms. Lisa Coe, Ms. Jane Barnes and Ms. Joyce Moore for taking turns to lead Sunday School this year! There is also fellowship time and coffee for parents in the room 209.

Every Sunday there is nursery care for infants through 4 years old in room 208 during the 10:00am worship service and for the Sunday School hour after worship until 12:30pm. Thank you to Ms. Sharon, Ms. Deb and Ms. Sam for leading the nursery each week.

First United Methodist Church of Kalamazoo - Financial Update						
	2023	2024	Month ending 8/31/25	Year-to-date 8/31/25	2025 Annual budget	% of Annual budget
TOTAL INCOME (\$)	1,155,208	1,053,747	67,615	815,967	1,152,334	70.81
TOTAL EXPENSE (\$)	1,118,942	1,166,950	77,602	703,389	1,202,200	58.51
EXCESS/ (DEFICIT) (\$)	36,266	(113,203)	(9,987)	112,578	(49,866)	

Recently baptized in worship:

Benjamin Cramer-Erbes

Our sympathy and prayers to the family and friends of:

Tom Kayser, who died Sept. 14

Please keep these friends in your prayers:

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

New 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.

Email List

Would you like to stay up-to-date on our latest news and events? Sign up to receive *Around the Corner*, FUMC's weekly email newsletter. Contact Christiane Stakely at cstakely@umc-kzo.org to be added to our list.

First Word for October

Submissions for the next issue of *First Word* should be emailed to our new Communications Coordinator, **Erika Jones**, at ejones@umc-kzo.org, by October 15. Articles may be edited for space and content.

Northside Ministerial Alliance Anti-Gun Violence Carnival

by Donna Oudersluys

On August 23, several thousand Kalamazoo residents enjoyed an amazing day of free food, rides, entertainment and fellowship at the 5th annual Northside Ministerial Alliance Anti Gun Violence Carnival. FUMC along with the other 8 downtown churches who are part of DOCC once again helped to sponsor the event.



In this 50th year of the NMA, sponsorships support not only the carnival but the prayer breakfast that will take place on October 21 and the NMA events throughout the upcoming year. This year, DOCC contributed over \$2,800 as Platinum level sponsors.

We hope that many of you will attend this event next year and meanwhile, be on the lookout for the many ways in which to shine the light of Christ in our community with our DOCC partnering churches.

- Ann Sweany, Donna Oudersluys, and Matt Weiler,
DOCC participants representing FUMC

First Stitchers

by Julia Librizzi, Director of Children and Family Ministries

Thank you to First Stitchers! For more than a year now, First Stitchers has been providing every family with a quilt or a blanket for children being baptized or confirmed. These beautiful quilts and blankets are made with love as a token of our congregation's support and care for the families and children of our church. Each quilt has a small blessing stitched in the corner that says, "God loves you, so do we!"



For a baptism of a baby each family gets to choose from a small selection of recently made quilts, and when I am running low, I just email First Stitchers or meet them downstairs on a Thursday morning and pick out some more. For older children being baptized, and for older siblings of children being baptized, First Stitchers makes flannel tie blankets. When a youth is confirmed, First Stitchers takes the time to make a flannel tie blanket that reflects each youth.

What a thoughtful gift and what a meaningful ministry we have at church! We're so grateful for First Stitchers and for their care and love for our families, children and youth!

Mission of the Month

Salvation Army

'Share the Warmth' Coat Drive



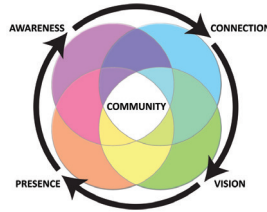
Again this year, FUMC will be participating in the Salvation Army 'Share the Warmth' coat drive. Cardboard boxes will be available near the Park Street entrance for winter coat collection during the month of October. Gently used and new coats, hats, gloves or mittens, scarves and boots are greatly appreciated and will help to keep those in need warmer this winter!

Thank you!
The Outreach Team

“Our Story is Never Over” Project

Discovering Pieces that Make a New Whole

Inspired by *The Four Pivots: Reimagining Justice, Reimagining Ourselves* by Dr. Shawn Ginwright, the “Our Story is Never Over” Project will continue to offer a series of creative opportunities to “pivot” over the course of nine months. As Dr. Ginwright teaches, “a pivot involves renewing our sense of possibility, transforming how we see the world, and shifting the values of our culture. A pivot means that we need to dream higher about the future we want to create.”



Each of the four pivots, individually and in combination, can nudge us into new ways of thinking about ourselves, our work, our relationships, our sense of justice—and our church community.

So far, we have experienced the following:

PIVOT 1: AWARENESS

We began by considering how we might change our ways of seeing ourselves and others. What happens if we shift from lens to mirror, or from an external focus that limits our perception to one of honest self-reflection?

PIVOT 2: CONNECTION

Shifting from transactional to transformative relationships: How can we move from a relationship that gets us what we want (even if it seems like we’re solving a problem) to a relationship that, instead, cultivates a genuine sense of belonging?

John Boley and other retired clergy are currently offering a series called “A Potluck of Hot Potatoes,” looking at some controversial topics of our faith life. Of particular interest to the “Our Story is Never Over” Project is the session on Process Theology, scheduled for October 5th.

PIVOT 3: VISION

In November, we will pivot to VISION and reimagine how we think and act by shifting from “problem fixing” to “possibility creating.” Stay tuned for details, dates, and opportunities! Meanwhile, note the following:

1. Read *The Four Pivots* and then pass it on to someone else who is interested.
2. Watch Dr. Ginwright’s key-note speech at this link: youtube.com/watch?v=R3skV1fAw08.
3. Watch an interview of Dr. Ginwright by Brené Brown at this link: brenebrown.com/podcast/the-four-pivots-reimagining-justice-reimagining-ourselves.

The Center for Transformation

by Andrew Lehman



The Center for Transformation is a small nonprofit organization that has been working with male and female citizens in this community who have returned from jail or prison. Somebody told me last week we are the best-kept secret in town; unfortunately, that may be true! You may not know that CFT started here in this church and that Chuck Wilson was, and in many ways still is, our guiding light. At age 59, Chuck visited a man in prison, and that experience changed the remaining 30 years of his life. He learned that 98 percent of people who go into prison will one day come out, and that mentoring those who desire it will greatly increase their chances of succeeding in re-entering a world that has changed greatly since they went in.

We offer two group mentoring meetings per week and 1-1 mentoring opportunities that the participants can schedule at their convenience. Some of these relationships have been going on for many years, to the benefit of each person. The word “family” is used frequently, and it is accurate, as many former inmates have lost their actual family ties.

We have received local foundation support in the past, which has allowed us to hire a part-time staffer who handles a lot of the loose ends from our volunteer efforts. But due to greatly increased competition for those grants, we and many other fine organizations were recently denied renewals. The Kalamazoo Community Foundation and the Gilmore Foundation did renew their funding, but we are now operating with only half the funds we had previously. Honestly, we are in financial trouble, as you can well imagine!

I approached Pastor Julie about our situation, and she suggested I write this plea for help. We have worked with many people over the years and have had a lot of success stories! Two weeks ago, an unhoused man came to our Tuesday morning meeting and had very little going for him at the time. By Thursday evening he had a place to stay, a job, a cell phone, and transportation to work starting on Monday. It doesn’t happen at that pace all the time, of course.

So, if you feel an urge to give a hand financially, we at CFT would greatly appreciate it. Or if you know someone who you think would be open to hearing our story, please get in touch with me at 382-0481. I’d be happy to answer any questions you may have about CFT.

Thank you,
Andrew Lehman