

# The First Word



March 2026

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

## Holy Week and Easter Worship

### March 29th: Palm Sunday - 10:00 a.m.

- Blessing of the Palms in Bronson Park - 9:45 a.m.  
- Brunch in Wesley Hall at 11:00 + Youth cookie sale

### April 2: Holy Thursday - 7:00 p.m.

Pastor Julie will guide a Labyrinth walk at 6:00 p.m.



### Friday, April 3: Good Friday - 7:00 p.m.

Pastor Julie will guide a Labyrinth walk at 6:00 p.m.

### April 5th: Easter Sunday - 10:00 a.m.

On this joy-filled day, we will celebrate Holy Communion together.

## Front Door Ministries

Alison Ericson & Samantha Lee

*When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you? Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me. ~Matthew 25: 34-36*



FUMC's Front Door Ministries is much more than just building hosts following a set of procedures. The building hosts are the first responders on behalf of the church for our members, friends, and neighbors. We are the first faces people see when they are welcomed into the church. We want everyone who enters

to know that they are welcomed, loved, and safe. For our neighbors in need, we are the first smile or the first glimmer of hope they may have experienced in a while. With love, understanding, and empathy, we are here to help to the very best of our abilities—directing them to resources, food, clothing, and warmth with an open mind and heart. We listen to their stories. Each person who enters the church has their own unique story and set of needs. Our response is always the same. We see you. We hear you. We care.

If we accomplished anything in 2025, it is the establishment of and belief in the above principles that take us into the realm of being a ministry. We are not just building hosts. We are hope. Our goals for 2026 are simple: we aim to build upon these principles, and continue to honor, love, help, and respect all members of our human family who find themselves at our door. None of this would be possible

without the help and support of our pastors, our amazing volunteers, our staff, and all our other ministries.

On Tuesday evenings and Wednesday afternoons, our Front Door Ministry and Loaves and Fishes become one larger ministry during our food pantry hours. We would like to acknowledge Loaves and Fishes, their staff, and all the wonderful volunteers for all they do to help feed those in need in our community. Their efforts include not only stocking and running the food pantry, but also providing emergency food bags that we can hand out to our neighbors at times outside of food pantry hours. Their efforts help further our ability to be successful in our ministry.

We want to thank all of our generous members who have donated to our food pantry efforts. We also want to thank you all for donating any clothing, footwear, blankets, and other items that our neighbors may need. An extra special thank you goes to Barb and Tim Swartz for kickstarting our clothing cart with their generous donation of warm winter clothes this year. Winter 2025/2026 has been extra cold, and your gift has helped many grateful people.

We would like to offer special thanks to our pastors, Julie Kline and Matt Weiler, for their patience, support, understanding, guidance, and willingness to lend an ear when needed; to Chris Stakely and Linda Hamill, who work hard to facilitate and coordinate so much needed support for all of the church's ministries; and to Drew Bolton and Jim Tiffany, who are always there to lend a hand or address any issues impeding the ministry. Thank you all for helping make our Front Door Ministry a reality!!

# Children and Family Ministries Coming Events

Julia Librizzi

**Bay Shore Day Camp on the Road** in partnership with our neighbor, Kalamazoo First Presbyterian Church, is coming back to our church this summer for children entering kindergarten through fifth grade the week of **August 10- August 13**. It's our 4th year with them! Save the date! More information coming soon.



Photos from summer 2025 Bay Shore Day Camp, by Julia Librizzi

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF KALAMAZOO - FINANCIAL UPDATE						
	2024	2025	Month Ending 1/31/26	Year to Date 1/31/26	2026 Annual Budget	% of Annual Budget
Total income (\$)	1,053,747	1,200,362	145,117	145,117	1,116,200	13.00%
Total expense (\$)	1,166,950	1,095,394	103,256	103,256	1,162,100	8.89%
Excess/ (deficit) (\$)	(113,203)	104,968	41,860	41,860	(45,900)	

**Please keep these friends in your prayers:**

- Wayne Conner
- Robin Entenman
- Janet Hanson
- Carol Hurley & family
- Nancy Hyde
- Jan Kayser & family
- Rev. Gene & Marilyn Lewis
- Judy McClelland
- Mumma family
- Sue Paul's family
- Anna Rasmussen
- Hank Rohs
- Marcia Royer
- Mary Lou Sanderson
- Gerry & Tom Schaberg
- Michael Seals
- Barb Skuza
- 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/](http://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 Erika Jones at [ejones@umc-kzo.org](mailto:ejones@umc-kzo.org) to be added to our list.

**Submissions for April 2026 issue of *First Word***

Do you have news items or photos to contribute to the next issue of *First Word*? We'd love to include them! Email submissions to our Communications Coordinator, Erika Jones, at [ejones@umc-kzo.org](mailto:ejones@umc-kzo.org), by **April 1**. Articles may be edited for space and content.

## Youth Ministry Coming Events

Rev. Matt Weiler

### Sunday, March 15

6-7:30pm - Shamrock Shakes & MARIO CART TOURNAMENT

### Thursday, March 19

9am-4pm - Cookie Baking for ASP



### Sunday, March 22

4-7pm - Cookie Decorating for ASP (this will be youth group for the evening) Details to come.



### March 29 - Palm Sunday

Youth to Sell Cookies for ASP following worship  
No evening Youth Group (Spring Break)

### April 5 - Easter Sunday

No Youth Group - Easter Sunday / Spring Break

## MOMS' RETREAT: APRIL 17 - 19

Moms with children at home, please join us **April 17-19, 2026** for a retreat to rest, rejuvenate and build a strong sisterhood of love and loyalty! We are staying near Holland, MI this year.

We will arrive on the evening of Friday April 17th for snacks, introductions and a short devotional. On Saturday April 18th we will have a yoga class in the morning, brunch, a devotional, some downtime, and then share a nice dinner out at restaurant. On Sunday morning we will share breakfast and a prayer and clean up to check out by 11am.

Registration is limited to 12 people with 2 people to a room. To secure your spot, please fill out the online form [HERE](#). You will receive a link to make a payment of \$250 for the weekend, which includes food, crafts, and your stay, except for the dinner out on Saturday night. We hope you can join us for this extra special weekend!

## FUMC Staff Introductions

### Cari Beth Croak - Associate Director of Music



Cari joined us in September of 2025, and in the short time she's been here she's already bringing plenty of harmony—and fun—to our music ministry. You'll usually spot her here on Thursdays and Sundays, working with our choir and bell choir—two groups she says are as talented as they are entertaining!

When Cari isn't making music, she's chasing her goal of golfing in all 50 states with her husband, Ryan (they're at 23 states and counting!). At home, their 7-year-old lab, Birdie, makes sure life stays full of joy and wagging tails. Cari also loves reading, traveling, and binge-watching *Gilmore Girls*—she's practically an honorary Gilmore at this point.

Cari says her favorite part of the job is the family feel of the choir and bell choir and fun they have at rehearsals. We're so glad to have her lively contribution to our music ministry!

### Jim Tiffany - Custodian



You know that moment when you realize the quietest person in the room is also one of the most interesting? Meet Jim Tiffany; our custodian, our secret weapon, and a man of many hats (and Lego mini figures). Since joining us last July, Jim has done far more than keep the building running - he's built connections. A U.S. Army Reserve veteran with a psychology degree, he brings

a unique blend of empathy and precision to his role, valuing the camaraderie and chance to support others.

When not here or hunting for treasures in toy and tool stores, he's at home with partner Alison (one of our hosts!), their two kids and their special needs dog, Poo. From a childhood dream of police work to being the understanding heart of our outreach area, Jim's journey is remarkable! We are so glad his mission led him here!

## Planning for the Future - Part 3

*FUMC Endowment Committee*

Planning for the future is an essential step in ensuring that your loved ones are taken care of, even in the most challenging times. By addressing key financial and legal matters now, you can significantly reduce the stress and uncertainty that survivors may face. Here are some practical steps to help you get your affairs in order and provide peace of mind for yourself and your family.

9. **Discuss funeral plans.** Burial, cremation, body donation, write your own obituary, plan memorial with music, photos, minister, scripture, etc., and columbarium.
10. **Be charitable.** Use Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) instead of taking your Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs), to lower IRA balances and future (RMDs) without any tax consequences on the withdrawals once you reach age 70 ½.
11. **Consolidate IRAs and bank accounts.** This action lowers account maintenance costs and simplifies record keeping.
12. **After retirement,** consider a continuing care retirement community (CCRC) that provides for advanced medical care, lodging, food, transportation, housekeeping, activities, and significant tax advantages, because it is medical expenses paid in advance.
13. **Talk to your kids.** Tell them in detail about where to find important papers, share net worth, discuss legal issues.

## March Mission of the Month

### St. Luke's Diaper Drive

St Luke's Episcopal Church runs a diaper bank weekly to provide free diapers and wipes to those in need. Lack of these items is a public health and social justice issue in our community. The need is great for all sizes, but especially sizes 4, 5, and 6. Donations can be placed in the Mission of the Month box located by the food pantry. Thank you for supporting this important need!

## New Feature: Poetry Corner

*Mary Whittaker Duncan*

Christine VanOstran wrote this poem during the Mosaics of Words and Glass workshop. She then pulled "sacred seeds of laughter" from her poem and wrote it on a copper strip. "Sacred seeds of laughter," along with other inspiring phrases, now hangs from one of the six large mobiles that are now displayed just outside the sanctuary doors.



### **I Wonder** by Christine VanOstran

I wonder if the sacred seeds of justice found laughter.

I wish for the sacred seeds of justice to find laughter.

Do you ask the sacred seeds of justice to find gratitude in their laughter?

I belong to the sacred justice seed and their laughter of gratitude.

I am a wild bunch of sacred seeds and laughter.

I hope you all belong to the sacred seeds of justice, laughter, and gratitude.

Tomorrow, sacred seeds of justice will bring us all laughter of gratitude.

