



The First Word



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Love Boldly: A Report on Annual Conference 2026

From May 28–May 31, our clergy and lay delegates from First UMC–Kalamazoo attended the Michigan Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church in Traverse City. All have returned with official reassurance that Pastor Julie and Pastor Matt will continue to be in ministry through



Left to right: Julia Librizzi, Buff and Lisa Coe, Cara Weiler, Julie Kline, Diane Owen-Rogers, Phoenix Bouse, Deb Search Willoughby, Lori Owen-Rogers, Andy Vorbrich, Molly Williams, Matt Weiler, John Clark (not pictured but also attending were John Boley and Doug Vernon)

their appointments here—though unlike in the old days, we really did not have to worry at this point. Also, Deacon Cara will continue to call First UMC–Kalamazoo her charge conference.

Under the theme “Love Boldly,” we worshiped, experienced ABAR (Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist) training, attended to legislation and business of the conference, and heard about budget and conference staffing adjustments that will be needed due to declining membership and numbers of congregations in Michigan.

One addition to an already full schedule was added for early Saturday morning as a result of the cancellation of ABAR training at the Clergy Session on Thursday. The full

conference body pushed back against this cancellation and then decided to add it back in by including clergy AND laity in this training. Thank you to Diane Owen-Rogers and Pastor Matt for your leadership on this.

We completed work on all legislative items that were before Annual Conference this year. Six of our resolutions were justice-themed; ABAR work, immigration and racial profiling concerns, advocacy for responsible Pentagon spending and humanitarian aid for Gaza, and support for the people of Ukraine. Other legislation involved updating various policies, including clergy sexual ethics and clergy compensation, housing allowance, parsonage guidelines, etc.

One reality was evident in the presentation of the Conference Budget and Legislation around reducing the number of districts in Michigan. We voted to approve a flat budget with no increase from 2026, though one point of hope is that Ministry Share payments have improved across the Conference this year. Another point of hope is that the Michigan Conference Congregations were recognized for continuing to lead the denomination in giving to missions in 2025. We also approved reducing the number of districts in Michigan from 7 to 4. First UMC–Kalamazoo will remain in the Greater Southwest District, with the number of congregations within the District increasing. Our District Superintendent will continue to be Rev. Dean Prentiss.

In addition to ABAR training, we had opportunities to learn about Engage MI ministry partners at a ministry fair. We also had breakout sessions on social principles and justice topics: Creation in Peril; Food Justice; Racism, Ethnocentrism, and Tribalism; and Universal Accessibility. A highlight was our Conference Speaker, Dr. Ashley Boggan (General Secretary of the Commission on Archivers and History). Her engaging talks on Saturday and Sunday introduced us to little-known facts about our heritage from the Wesley brothers and encouraged us to understand our past as United Methodists in order to imagine a more equitable future for all. Stay tuned to hear more about how we may Love Boldly, Serve Joyfully and Lead Courageously with ministry opportunities here at First UMC–Kalamazoo and beyond.

“Q” is for Quilt - Head Start Visits the First Stitchers

by Linda Lueth

Q: What is a Head Start teacher to do when the “letter of the day” is “Q”?

A: Head downstairs to the Fellowship Room on a Thursday morning to see how QUILTS are made!

This spring the three Head Start classrooms at FUMC visited the First Stitchers to learn about quilts. They saw the multi-colored squares and how they were sewn together; piece by piece and row by row and finished with a beautiful coordinating backing. Being able to watch the sewing machine was a big hit!

Then the teachers had the children pick out their favorite squares and they wrote their names on them. Miss Ellen (Portis) sewed each classroom’s named squares together, finished off the edges, and attached a ribbon so these quilt squares can be hung in each classroom.



This is the second year Head Start has visited the First Stitchers for “Q Day” and we look forward to having them visit again next year!



Please keep these friends in your prayers:

- Jan Baker
- Wanda Boekhout’s family
- Wayne Conner
- Bill Dimond & family
- 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/ 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 to be added to our list.

Submissions for July FW issue:

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, by **July 1**. Articles may be edited for space and content.

Don’t forget to submit your poems for Poetry Corner!

May-June Special Events Photo Gallery



Many hands pitched in at the All Youth Group Day of Service at the Sunnyside UMC Community Garden on May 17th, 2026.



Dramatic staged reading of "Making a Pivot in the Midst of Life's Whirlwind" on May 31

First Beats performing their musical "Storms," Sun., June 7

KLUMP Softball Has Begun!

KLUMP (Kalamazoo League United Methodist Players) Softball is open to all who would like to play in a very noncompetitive atmosphere. This is a co-ed league for anyone 13 and older (for some of us WAY older). Come play or just cheer us on then join us for ice cream after the game. All games are played at Pathfinder Church, 8740 S. Westnedge Ave., Portage. For more information, contact Jay Gross at jaynlaura5@gmail.com.



Teams:

1. Westwood UMC
2. Cherry Creek
3. Portage Pathfinder
4. FUMC

Thursday evenings at Pathfinder Church in Portage

2026 KLUMP SOFTBALL SCHEDULE

Thursday	6:15 pm	7:45 pm
June 18	4-1	3-2
June 25	4-2	3-4
July 2	1-4	3-1
July 9	2-1	4-3
July 16	2-4	1-3
July 23	4-1	2-3
July 30	1-2	3-4
August 6	4-2	3-1
August 13	1-4	2-3

Note: Home team is always listed last.

Immigration Law & Justice News

by Ann Sweany

At our May board meeting, we learned about a new memo regarding immigration that may become a regulation. This memo, if it becomes a regulation, requires immigrants who entered the U.S. under certain visas and are applying for permanent residency to return to their home countries to file the appropriate application from there. Understandably, this could cause serious delay, at the very least, and in other cases, high safety risks. My understanding is that clients are still applying for change in status, but face a higher risk of applications being rejected. So, at this point, until and unless the memo is instated officially, we are seeing a partial turn of the immigration screw.

June 13, ILJ will share information about our services at a rally in Bronson Park supporting healthcare accessibility as offered by rural and smaller hospitals, which is facing federal funding cuts.

FUMC Staff Introductions

Julia Librizzi - Director of Children & Family Ministries

Let's shine the spotlight on Julia Librizzi, the mastermind and the heart behind our Children and Family Ministries since 2019! When asked about what she loves most about her job, Julia's answer is pure and simple: experiencing and sharing God's love with children and families. And she does it in the most wonderful ways. Case in point? This past year she didn't just supervise the fun — she dove right in! Her highlight was gently coaxing a shy 4-year-old into the bouncy house and down the slide into a pool of bubbles



(we've now added that to the official job description: "Bubble Ambassador & Joy Distributor").

When not at church, Julia loves singing, puzzling, and movie nights snuggling on the couch. She's also a talented baker, especially when it comes to crafting extra special birthday cakes for her daughters each year. At home, she's joined by a wonderful crew: her husband, Jim; daughters Carolyn (16) and Penelope (14); and their adorable basset hound, Irma.

We're so grateful to have Julia's warmth, creativity, and faith lighting up our church family!

Poetry Corner

Special Delivery

by Becky Lawson



Knock, knock.
 Special delivery for Gratitude, I announce loudly.
 Good morning, Gratitude,
 I know you are in there.
 You are always home.
 Sometimes you reside in the basement,
 and are more difficult to arouse.
 I desire to communicate with you.
 Please come to the door and open up.
 Let's talk and reminisce.
 I need your perspectives, your encouragement,
 your reminders,
 your uplifting thoughts and words.
 I long for you to answer my knocking at your door.
 I have a "Special Delivery" letter for you.

June 2025

My Dearest Gratitude,
 My soul thirsts for your **G**race.
 I realize sometimes I need a **R**eminder
 that you are always **A**ccessible
 to accompany me throughout my day.
 Your presence provides **T**ransforming power.
 You have the ability to **I**nspire me to action.
 You instill in me a heart of compassion, empathy,
 and thankfulness.
Thank you for
Uplifting me when I am down.
 You are already **D**edicated to me, and with practice,
 I can become more dedicated to you.
 I am truly thankful for your **E**ternal presence.
 In appreciation and with the utmost sincerity,
 Becky Lawson



FREE STORE

June 17, 2026

9am - 3pm

with hot dog lunch

Donation drop-off times

Sun., June 14, 9:30am - 1:00 pm

Mon. June 15, 9:00am - 4:00pm

Tues., June 16, 9:00am - 2:00pm









There are sign-up sheets at the large welcome desk for volunteers. Your generosity makes this event possible!