



Preserving the Legacy of Our Historic Building

by Mitch Wilson

Have you had the opportunity recently to walk around our building and admire its beauty? How about sitting in the sanctuary and enjoying the peaceful serenity of the streaming sunlight through our magnificent stained glass windows? Our church's exterior facade is famous for its intricate stone masonry and towering, grand presence. Over the years, maintaining the integrity of this massive bedford stone envelope has required meticulous care. You may recall back in 2019 a piece of our facade facing Park Street fell to the sidewalk below. Fortunately, no one was injured. We contracted with Building Restoration (BRI) to repair the facade, but as it turns out, this was just the tip of the iceberg.

Later in 2019, the Trustees along with the Building and Grounds committee had BRI conduct a full-scale inspection of the entire building exterior. As you might expect, with a building the age of ours along with our Michigan weather, there were many repairs identified that had accumulated over time. These facade improvements focused heavily on long-term preservation and seamless integration of the limestone, brick, and mortar joints. Crafting these enhancements demanded specialized masonry methods, which were very labor-intensive, to blend new sections with the original 1929 architecture. We partnered with BRI to complete this work over five phases from 2019 to 2024 at a total cost of \$434,000.

Window Protection and Coverings

The beautiful stained-glass windows are a defining characteristic of our church. Originally designed to illuminate the sanctuary with rich, symbolic light, these delicate windows require constant protection from environmental wear, UV damage, and physical impacts. Many years ago, the windows were covered in plexiglas. The good news was the windows were relatively protected; the bad news was that over time the plexiglas became quite cloudy, and we discovered they were not vented correctly. After an extensive vendor search, we partnered with Glass Traditions and its owner, Bo Felt, to address these vulnerabilities directly. Key updates to the window systems include:

- **The replacement of outdated Plexiglas shields**, which historically caused heat buildup and yellowing, with high-clarity, ventilated, glass protective coverings.



First United Methodist Church before and after renovation

- **Enhanced exterior framing installations** engineered to match the original Gothic arch lines through digital templating, offering rigid support against high winds while remaining visually unobtrusive.
- **Repair** of a few sections of windows, where the stained glass had sagged or collapsed.

We found Bo and his team to be thorough, passionate, and committed to the historical nature of our building. The Trustees approved \$460,000 for the project; it was completed in early June of this year.

Funded through Faithful Generosity

Remarkably, both of these major preservation projects were fully funded without launching any additional capital campaigns. This financial milestone was achieved entirely through the deep generosity of church members and their foresight in planned giving. Through these visionary gifts and meticulous exterior updates, First United Methodist Church has successfully reinforced its physical structures, ensuring that its magnificent Late Gothic facade continues to welcome visitors to Bronson Park for generations to come. So please, take the time to treasure and enjoy the enhancements to our place of worship. Whether it is a walk around the building, enjoying sitting in a church service, or cherishing some peaceful, meditative reflection during the week, give thanks to all who have made these projects possible!

Did You Notice Anything Different?

Last month our intrepid building superintendant, Drew Bolton, took a can of bright red paint and brightened up the United Methodist Church logo over the parking lot entrance.

The history and significance of the Cross and Flame emblem are as rich and diverse as The United Methodist Church. The insignia's birth quickly followed the union of two denominations in 1968: The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

Following more than two dozen conceptualizations, a traditional symbol—the cross—was linked with a single flame with dual tongues of fire. The resulting insignia is rich in meaning. It relates The



Drew repainting the flame, June 2026 (photo by Julie Kline)



The flame before...

United Methodist church to God through Christ (cross) and the Holy Spirit (flame). The flame is a reminder of Pentecost when witnesses were unified by the power of the Holy Spirit and saw “tongues, as of fire” (Acts 2:3).

The elements of the emblem also remind us of a transforming moment in the life of Methodism's founder, John Wesley, when he sensed God's presence and felt his heart “strangely warmed.” The two tongues of a single flame may also be understood to represent the union of two denominations.

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF KALAMAZOO - FINANCIAL UPDATE

	2024	2025	Month Ending 5/31/26	Year-to-Date 2026	2026 Annual Budget	% of Annual Budget
Total income (\$)	1,053,747	1,200,362	60,144	528,731	1,116,200	47.37%
Total expense (\$)	1,166,950	1,095,394	90,508	478,123	1,162,100	41.14%
Excess/ (deficit) (\$)	(113,203)	104,968	(30,364)	50,608	(45,900)	

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
Rev. Gene & Marilyn Lewis
Judy McClelland
Mumma 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 August 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 **August 3**. Articles may be edited for space and content.

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

Free Store 2026 - A Joy Filled Event!

by Vickie Winfield

Margaret Mead said “ Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.” That statement came to life June 14–17 as many small groups of people



Helping shoppers (photo by Erika Jones)

showed up each day to create the 2026 Free Store. From barren to bountiful, Wesley Hall took on a life of its own as you showed up with donations that would change the ‘world’ for many people of our downtown community. For many of our neighbors, our excess is their necessity. Not only did you bring donations, you donated your time to create a safe space for our neighbors to shop, mingle and enjoy lunch. You listened, assisted and shared. We were a



Volunteers right before opening (photo by Susan Eden)

blessing but we too were blessed beyond measure by the people who came through our doors on June 17th. The smiling faces that left with ‘treasures’ that day were proof that when the ‘village’ shows up amazing things can and will happen. Thank you to ALL who made our Free Store event a success. Whether you donated items, volunteered with set up or clean-up, printed or delivered flyers, assisted our neighbors on sale day, cooked hot dogs, served lunch, greeted all who entered our doors with a smile or prayed for the success of the Free Store, YOU MADE A DIFFERENCE! Thank you for being a part of the village.



Serving lunch (photo by Erika Jones)

July Mission of the Month

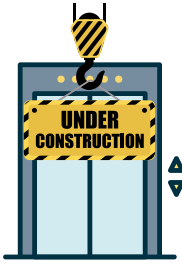
We are collecting school supplies for Spring Valley Elementary School. Following is a list of supplies that can be purchased and placed in the Mission of the Month bin next to the host desk:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Pencil boxes | Water bottles |
| Pencils | Sticky notes |
| Clorox wipes | Lined paper |
| Tissues | Band-Aids |
| Paper towels | Pens |
| White board markers | Erasers |
| Backpacks | Whiteout |
| Erasers | Binders |



Thank you for helping students in our community!

Elevator Replacement Begins



Our church elevator will be closed beginning Wednesday, July 8 and lasting through at least the rest of the summer. We appreciate your patience as we replace our aging elevator with a modern one that meets current safety codes and will function smoothly for many years to come.

FUMC Staff Introductions

Drew Bolton - Building Superintendent

by Linda Hamill

If you've ever thought about how our historic church seems to run so smoothly, or if you've ever been pointed in the right direction or helped with a locked door, you've probably encountered our fantastic Building Superintendent, Drew Bolton. For over two years now, Drew has been the friendly, capable presence keeping our sacred space safe, sound, and operational.



While he thrives on the unique challenges of maintaining a building with decades of stories in its walls, Drew will quickly tell you that the best

part of his job is building relationships. He loves swapping stories and getting to know more of you on a personal level during his weekly activities.

His adventure squad includes our pastor, Julie, and their two sons, Jonah and Lucas. Their household is a lively menagerie with a dog named Suki, Ziggy the cat, and five chickens. A proud Piqua, Ohio native, Drew's athletic loyalty leans decidedly maize and blue (University of Michigan, for the uninitiated), though he diplomatically observes a truce for one specific game each year.

When he's not on duty here, Drew can often be found biking, fishing, or perfecting his dart-throwing aim. Come spring, he channels his inner pioneer, crafting delicious homemade maple syrup. An outdoor enthusiast at heart, he also has a playful streak—ask him about the legendary “SURPRISE” prank in the office sometime!

We are grateful for Drew's dedicated service, can-do spirit, and the warm, personal touch he brings to his work. Next time you see him, please join us in saying, “Thanks, Drew!”

Poetry Corner

The Blue Bicycle of Kindness

by Carol Hodges



This bicycle is not a stunning latest model. Rather it is old-fashioned with a woven basket and a bell on the handlebars. The blue paint has nicks by now. And the brand logo is faded and scratched.

The blue bicycle of kindness has a history:

dents
flat tires
a slightly mangled frame

Tears have fallen on this conveyance from more than one rider.

Sorrows, both small and overwhelming, have aged it, rendering it fit for watching with an open heart... watching for the small and insignificant for inhabitants of life's waste places.

Small and seemingly insignificant?
What perfect fertile ground for the Holy Ghost,
leaving kindness in its wake.

When you ride the blue bicycle of kindness,
you make a choice to imagine your heart as a glass
shop door,
and you gently flip the sign from CLOSED to OPEN.

Immigration Law & Justice News

by Ann Sweany

With a 6-3 decision by the Supreme Court on June 25, TPS (temporary protected status) has ended for Haitian and Syrian refugees who have until now been protected from deportation under this program. In 2011, Ray and I spent one short week in Haiti, where we saw lines of people taking whatever containers they had to a community well for water. Then, the country was still reeling from the 2010 earthquake. Now, Haiti struggles further with the chaos of rule by violent gangs. Sending Haitians back to this environment is unconscionable. The only remedy would be Congressional action.

Financially, ILJ-MI has unexpectedly received some extra funding from long-time supporter Kalamazoo Community Foundation, as well as funds from a new source for us, South Central Michigan United Way. The United Way grant is focused on children and young adults, and is welcome help in serving clients of our own Kalamazoo office. As always, thank you for your support.