

The First Word



September 2026

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

REJOICE SUNDAY

BEGINNING THE 2026-2027 MINISTRY YEAR TOGETHER



Beloved Community,

A new ministry year is beginning, and with it comes a joyful invitation: come and rejoice, come and reconnect, come and discover where God is breathing life among us in the year ahead.

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” -Isaiah 43:19

On Rejoice Sunday, we will gather for 10:00 a.m. worship with song, prayer, Scripture, and the holy feast of Communion as we celebrate God’s faithfulness and step into the 2026–2027 program year together. After worship, all are invited to share fellowship and root beer floats, a joyful way to greet one another, welcome new faces, and mark the beginning of a new season in community.

This year, our life together will continue to be shaped by worship, learning, care, service, fellowship, and spiritual formation. The 2026–2027 ministry year offers many ways to grow in faith and deepen connections—with God, with one another, and with our neighbors. Whether you are returning after summer travels, exploring a new ministry, bringing children or youth into the rhythm of church life, looking for a place to serve, or simply hoping to be renewed, there is a place for you in the year ahead.

Our Salt + Seawater + Soil worship series continues with the theme “God’s Breath,” returning us to the wonder of creation and to the Spirit of God moving over the waters. Together, we will listen for the breath of God that brings life, beauty, order, mercy, courage, and joy. As the year unfolds, we will be invited not only to worship and learn, but also to practice tender care for the earth, for our community, and for one another.

The program year ahead includes opportunities for every age and stage of life:

- Children & Family Ministries
- Youth Group
- New Confirmation Class
- Music Ministry
- Manna
- Dawn Patrol
- Volunteer in the Food Pantry
- C.A.R.E.S. Team
- Yoga groups with Pastor Julie and Ana
- Book Study
- Cuppa Inspiration
- Disciple Bible Study
- First Stitchers
- And so much more!

Each ministry is one way we live out our shared calling: to receive God’s love, rejoice in God’s presence, and carry that love into the world. Some ministries will invite you to learn and reflect. Others will send you out in service. Some will help you build friendships, pray with others, care for neighbors, sing, study, stretch, feed, welcome, or simply show up faithfully. Together, our ministries will form the rhythm of a church year rooted in gratitude, discipleship, compassion, and joy.

As we begin 2026–2027, may we look for the new thing God is doing among us. May we come ready to breathe deeply, serve generously, learn faithfully, welcome widely, and rejoice together. We hope you will join us for Rejoice Sunday and for the ministry year ahead.

Blessings, Pastor Julie

An Update from the Making Meaning Team

By Julia Librizzi

In 2025 our church was selected to participate in the 2026 Making Meaning Together (MMT) Initiative—a grant-funded initiative designed to support congregations to reimagine corporate worship and prayer practices so that children are fully included, engaged, and spiritually nurtured.



Making Meaning Together exists to guide and support churches as they design and implement creative, intergenerational, and child-friendly worship experiences that reflect the gifts and needs of children ages 0–12. Through learning, listening practices with children, grant funding, resourcing, and ongoing support, MMT accompanies congregations as they cultivate worship that helps all ages encounter God together.

Our project focuses on inviting professional storytellers familiar with scripture to teach children and our worship team how to engage with scripture in a way that adds depth and drama to the listening experience. We found a group called Wayfolk Arts that does just this in Holland, MI. From their website, “Wayfolk



Hannah Barker Nickolay

Arts is a community of artist theologians inviting fellow wanderers homeward through art and liturgy. Wayfolk Arts is a community of artists: pastor-artists and artist-theologians pursuing the dual-vocation of artist and minister.”

Hannah Barker Nickolay will join us from Wayfolk Arts in worship twice this fall to help us present scripture through dramatic scripture retelling, September 13 and October 11. On September 13th for worship she will also lead us in a Sunday School class. She and other Wayfolk Art team members will join us for 2 workshops on Sunday evenings this fall, October 4 and November 1.

We are so looking forward to working with them to help make meaning out of scripture for the children and our whole church family!

The Making Meaning Team: Julia Librizzi, Rev. Matt Weiler, Jacqueline Stilger, Cassie English and Kari Parthasarathy

Please keep these friends in your prayers:

Jan Baker's family
Wanda Boekhout's family
The Bultema family
Wayne Conner
Bill Dimond & family
Robin Entenman
Janet Hanson
Mary Ellen Fredenburg & family
Carol Hurley & family
Nancy Hyde
Rev. Gene & Marilyn Lewis
Judy McClelland
Mumma family
Anna Rasmussen
Hank Rohs' family
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 October 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, by **October 1** (ejones@umc-kzo.org). Articles may be edited for space and content.

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

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF KALAMAZOO - FINANCIAL UPDATE						
	2024	2025	Month ending 7/31/26	Year-to-date 2026	2026 Annual Budget	% of Annual Budget
TOTAL INCOME	1,053,747	1,200,362	73,494	682,241	1,116,200	61.12
TOTAL EXPENSE	1,166,950	1,095,394	123,075	690,872	1,162,100	59.45
EXCESS/ (DEFICIT)	(113,203)	104,968	(49,581)	(8,631)	(45,900)	

First United Methodist Church Conference September 20th

This annual business meeting will be held on Sunday, September 20 at 2:00 pm at Portage Chapel Hill, presided over by District Superintendent Rev. Dean Prentiss. We will gather as Branch 7 of the Greater Southwest District, which includes Milwood, Sunnyside, Westwood, Otsego, Parchment, Plainwell, Portage Chapel Hill, and FUMC. Members will vote on the 2027 elected lay leadership roster, the membership report, and celebrate our past year of ministry accomplishments. Please plan to attend and be part of this significant event. We need your presence and input as we make important decisions for the governance of our church community.



Save the Date: November 5

Mark your calendars for our annual **Four Score and More Luncheon!**

Family Camping Reservations

We have a group of tent/RV sites and 1 platform tent tentatively blocked out for our group under First UMC of Kalamazoo. Call (231) 869-5627



LAKE MICHIGAN
family campground

to reserve your family's site ASAP as this gives us higher priority for sites. A 1-night deposit is required to hold a spot and you can cancel before Jan 4, 2027 for a full refund. We will do a group dinner Friday and Saturday and group breakfasts Saturday and Sunday. There are many activities on site including Put-Put, swimming in

Lake Michigan, a tire swing, basketball, and disc golf course at the campground. The city of Pentwater and Silver Lake are also close by.

The address is: Lake Michigan Family Campground, 5807 Ridge Rd, Pentwater, Michigan.

Camping is July 8–July 11, 2027.

Bay Shore Vacation Bible School Photo Gallery, August 10–14



Photos by Keith Mumma and Juila Librizzi

FUMC Staff Introductions

Em Norwood - Youth & Young Adult Resident

by Matt Weiler

FUMC is pleased to announce that our new Youth and Young Adult Resident, Em Norwood began their time



serving with us on August 31st! Pastor Matt first met Em working on a Princeton Seminary Funded Young Adult Collaboration with First Presbyterian and First Congregational Churches. Since that time in 2023, Em has taken leadership with our ecumenical young adult ministry, Taking Root, participates regularly in Manna, and has

participated in the last two summer ASP trips. Here's a little more about Em!

Emily (they/them) was born in Iowa and now lives in Michigan. They graduated from Kalamazoo College with a degree in Biology/Pre-Veterinary Medicine and are currently working on an MDiv. They spent several years working in pre-clinical pharmaceutical safety assessment and in ethics and regulatory oversight for pre-clinical and clinical research. They now serve several Michigan churches in a variety of roles. They are seeking ordination with the United Church of Christ. In the winter, they are a member of ski patrol and teaches snowboarding, and in the summer they enjoy working with the education department at Binder Park Zoo. Em is the happy parent of two cats, an Ironman triathlete, a musician (especially handbells and tower bells), a hiker and adventurer, a collector of odd things, and a lover of all things weird and wonderful.

Mission of the Month

Salvation Army Coat Drive

~ Collection begins October 1 ~

FUMC will be participating in the Salvation Army 'Share the Warmth' coat drive again this year. Collection boxes will be available near the parking lot 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



Poetry Corner

With the completion of the work on our new church elevator, our custodian, Jim Tiffany, was inspired to write this:

Ode to An Elevator

by Jim Tiffany

And though we have our ups and downs,
You never seem to make me frown.
You lift my heart. You lift my spirit.
You lift the carts that help me do it.
A push of a button.
Destination met.
Third floor trash, I won't forget.
By days end, I'll wear no frown.
Because I know you'll bring me down.
Keeping me grounded, all year round.



Two New Bible Study Classes

For Adults:

Pastor Matt Weiler is offering an Old Testament Disciple Bible Study Fast Track for Adults on Wednesday evenings beginning September 23. Contact Pastor Matt at mweiler@umc-kzo.org to sign up, order materials, or to learn more.

For Teens and Young Adults:

Deacon Cara Weiler and Christine Charles are offering an Old Testament Disciple Bible Study Fast Track for High School Youth and Young Adults Wednesday evenings beginning September 23. Contact Pastor Matt at mweiler@umc-kzo.org to sign up, order materials, or to learn more.

“Hands On” Helpers Needed!

Looking for a way to help neighbors in need?

For several years our church has joined in the “Kalamazoo United Day of Service” (KUDOS), which will be Friday, October 2. Beginning at 8:30 a.m. at Allen Chapel A.M.E. church and ending at 1:00 p.m. (lunch provided!). Here's your chance to help people who don't have the physical or financial means to weatherize their homes or make other improvements that would make a huge difference. Sponsored by the Outreach Team of our church. Please let Dan Duncan (danduncan56@gmail.com or 616-502-5092) or sign up at the welcome desk at church if you'd like to be part of our team this year. No specialized skills needed and materials are provided.

