Welcome to the
April 2024 Newsletter
of
The United Church of Big Rapids

120 S. State St.
Big Rapids, MI 49307
(231) 796-7124
(231) 527-9567

Sunday Morning Worship Service - 9:30 a.m.

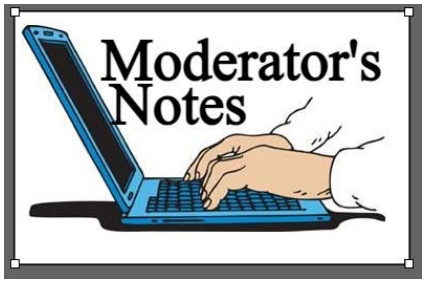
The United Church

120 S. State St., Big Rapids, MI 49307

(231 796-7124 or (231) 527-9567 secretary@unitedchurchbr.org

April

Moderator Message - April 2024



As we look forward to spring and the warmer weather of summer, the Governing Board looks forward to making the United Church of Big Rapids a better place for all those who worship with us. Our elders want to continue to make this church a beacon of hope for all those who depend on our church's mission work in and around Mecosta County. Our downtown location allows us to be a focal point for the many citizens who use our building for meetings, fundraisers, and social activities.

All of our members should be proud of the reputation of our United Church of Christ for the work it does and the symbol of hole it has become over the years. To all of our members and friends who continue their support and involvement, I want to thank you. There is much that still has to be done in our church, neighborhood, city, county, state, country, and the world. Whether it is through financial support of our church, volunteering to serve on a commission or committee, getting involved in our local or state organizations, it is important to show your concern. We can all make our community a better place to live, work, or raise our children. Please continue to stay involved or consider getting involved. Your Governing Board is working hard to make sure that the United Church of Big Rapids is the best it can be.

In a recent conversation at our last Governing Board meeting, I went over the pulpit supply issue. The elders were surprised that we were in a second year and had every Sunday covered through June 2024. I told them that I had developed numerous contacts and that we provided fair compensation for our retired pastors who serve each Sunday as worship leaders. I then brought up a recent conversation I had with Rev. Bruce Roller, who served in the pulpit for 4 Sundays.

> *"Thank you for the recent schedule clarification. I will correct my schedule accordingly. Being in worship with your congregation has been a real blessing to me. You all are doing a great ministry in Big Rapids. Best wishes for a fruitful pastoral search and a continuing impact in your community. Warmly - Bruce"*

A special thanks to everyone who sent me get well cards and messages while I recovered from my recent cancer surgery.

- Marshall

The United Church will be participating in two ecumenical services during Holy Week: the Maundy Thursday service on March 28 at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church at 6:00 pm and the Good Friday Service at First United Methodist Church at noon on March 29. Our members and friends are encouraged to attend one or both of these services.

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church will also host an all-night vigil Thursday, March 28 at 8:00 pm to Friday, March 29 at 9:00 am. People are encouraged to spend a half hour in prayer. Resources will be available. You can sign up for a slot at http://bit.ly/standrewvigil.

The Easter morning worship service for The United Church will begin at 9:30 am on Sunday, March 31. Worship will be led by Rev. Devon Herrell. Feel free to invite your friends and family to the celebration of the Risen Christ!

After worship, there will be an Easter brunch in the Parlor. Please join us for fun, fellowship, and food.

Project Starburst – Keeping the Pantry Filled!

Project Starburst would like to thank the United Church members for their continued support of the pantry on a regular basis and are thankful for their participation in the "keep the pantry filled" project. The demand from families needing assistance continues including both returning families and new ones.

The Mission Commission "Give to the Pantry" program has identified **cereal** as the "food of the month" for March. With the continued demand, any non-perishable food item is also greatly appreciated.

DUMP AND RUN IS COMING!!!

Planning is underway for the annual "dump and run" project sponsored by Immanuel Lutheran Church. As in the past couple of years, United Church is working with them and will be seeking volunteers to help. Dates for this year's event are April 29 through May 4. A sign-up sheet will be available in late April.

MISSION/SOCIAL ACTION COMMISSION:

The Mission/Social Action Commission currently meets on the second Wednesday of each month at 4:00 pm in the church parlor. Our meetings are open, and anyone interested in the work of the commission is invited to attend. Virtual attendance can be arranged by letting the commission chair, Frank Hartley (email: hartley51micro@gmail.com) no later than the Friday before the scheduled meeting.

APRIL IS CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION & AWARENESS MONTH

April is recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month. During April, the Meceola Children's Council is sponsoring many activities throughout Mecosta and Osceola Counties to bring awareness to the issue of child abuse prevention and provide opportunities for positive family experiences. These include ice skating, bowling, swimming and a 5K walk/run. Blue pinwheels will be planted by GFWC Big Rapids and flying in the wind. And for the Church, the last Sunday in April is recognized throughout the world as Blue Sunday. On that Sunday, we are asked to pray for victims of abuse that they will be rescued; that they are placed with caring people; that their minds and bodies can heal; that they find hope; and pray for those who rescue them. Church members will be provided with a blue ribbon as they enter the sanctuary on April 28 to wear in recognition of Blue Sunday. We all need to extend our loving hearts and care for these children of God.

From the Mission Commission

The Mission Commission continues to support the local organizations/charities that carry out our mission to help the members of our community who face food insecurity, the need for safe and affordable housing, safety in their day to day lives within the community (whether it be from personal crisis or from voices of discrimination). We encourage all of our Church members to support these organizations in whatever way they can; whether it be through financial donations, support of specific events or as volunteers. Your commission members encourage you to visit the links below for each organization to learn more about them and their needs.

Project Starburst - https://projectstarburst.org/

Our Brother's Keeper - https://www.obkshelter.org/

WISE - https://wiseagainstviolence.org/

Mecosta County Habitat For Humanity - https://mecostahabitat.org/

Pride Big Rapids - https://www.pridebigrapids.org/

It's Graduation Time!

If you have any graduates in your family that you would like to celebrate, please forward their name, school, and graduation information to the office. If you have a picture you'd be willing to share, that would be great!! We will be celebrating Graduation Sunday sometime in May. We want to know about your graduate too!

News from the Christian Education Commission

It is great to see young people in church and attending Sunday school. There are lots of things going on and the CE Commission will keep you up to date on all the happenings!!

Amanda Little will be working in the nursery & insure that there will be coverage for the nursery each Sunday.

Kerri Rouech is the current Governing Board representative for Christian Education. She has been working on accumulating more toys, craft materials, and books that would be appropriate for the ages of our current Sunday school attendees. She has put together a list on Amazon of some things that might be helpful. If you are considering making a gift to the Christian Education program, you can look at the list at this link: https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/1CA99PCFWBC3V?ref_=wl_share. Purchases from the list can be shipped directly to the church to Kerri's attention.

In addition, the Children's Time during worship will be re-started on a periodic basis as well.

Questions about our Christian Education program may be directed to Kerri.

SEARCH & CALL COMMITTEE

The UCBR Search Committee continues to review profiles as we receive them from our two denominations. There were some unanticipated "hiccups", for example: The Presbyterian Church USA changed the system but did not inform us that we basically had to "renew" our Church Profile on their newly constructed website. The Michigan Conference UCC underwent some personnel changes but we are working with the new Liaison Associate Conference Minister, who recently sent us several profiles for our review. We have a process in place and are working diligently to find a settled Pastor. We appreciate your continued prayers and patience as we proceed with our quest.

Blessings and Peace, Susan H Grant, Chair, UCBR Search Committee.

MDOT ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

Our Highway Pickup event is scheduled for Saturday, April 20, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. We will meet in the United Church parlor at 9:00 am to review the safety video, divide into teams, pick up our gear and carpool out to the Highway. If we field enough workers, we are generally done by noon. So, please invite friends, students and anyone else interested in becoming a steward of our portion of God's Creation. If you are interested or have questions, contact Susan H Grant at adonaldgrant73@gmail.com.

From the Governing Board

We are sure you notice that each Sunday a member of the Governing Board serves as "Elder in Charge" for the service. As much as each of them enjoys this activity, there are months when it has been difficult to fill all of the slots due to vacations and other personal events. So the Board members are happy to announce that they welcome members of the congregation to share this duty with them. Now named "Member in Charge," all members of the congregation are encouraged to share this responsibility. If you are interested in participating, please contact Moderator, Marshall Henry.

And, as a reminder, the Governing Board meets once a month on the 3rd Thursday of the month at 6:45 pm in the Parlor. The meetings are open to any member of the congregation who would like to attend. Governing Board meeting reminders will be placed in the bulletin the week before a planned meeting. If you have any questions regarding the meetings and attendance, feel free to talk to any of the Governing Board members - Moderator Marshall Henry, Wayne McKay, Roger Vajda, Kerri Rouech, Erin Dumond, and Chuck Achterhof.

AARP Tax Program Ready to Serve Mecosta County Residents

As the time approaches for preparation of tax returns for the 2023 tax year, there is a program in Mecosta County that can help. Sponsored by AARP, this program is designed for taxpayers with low and moderate incomes, with special attention to those age 60 and older.

The program is run entirely by volunteers who will be assisting clients at four (4) centers from February 5, 2024 through April 15, 2024. Appointments are usually scheduled for one and a quarter hours and can be completed in a timely manner if the taxpayer brings all the paperwork required to prepare the return. Appointments can be scheduled beginning January 22, by calling the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) at 231.796.4848.

Locations and times are:

Salvation Army, Big Rapids – Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., beginning 2/6 through 4/11

Morton Township Hall, Mecosta – Mondays, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., beginning 2/5 through 4/15

Morton Township Library, Mecosta – Fridays 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., beginning 2/9 through 4/12

Wheatland Township Library, Remus – Wednesdays 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. beginning 2/7 through 4/10

At the time of the appointment, volunteers need to see:

Photo identification and Social Security cards for the taxpayer(s) and Social Security Cards for all dependents are REQUIRED.

Copy of last year's income tax return – Federal, State and Local

All W-2 forms from each employer

Any 1099-R if a pension or annuity is received

Any SSA-1099 if Social Security benefits are received

All 1099 forms (1099-INT, 1099-DIV, 1099-B, etc.) showing interest and/or dividends as well as documentation showing the original purchase price of any assets sold

Any 1099-MISC showing any miscellaneous income

All forms indicating any Federal or State income tax paid.

Any unemployment compensation statements, if applicable
Child care provider information, including name, employer ID, Social Security number
Any 1095-A or 1095-C forms received.
Only standard deduction returns will be completed. NO itemized deductions
No Schedule C returns if they are the primary source of income
A printed card from the bank showing savings account information, or a blank check are required for direct deposit.

If you are filing for Homestead Property Tax Credit or Home Heating Credit, taxpayers will also need copies of city or township property tax statements and prior year home heating bills.

With the ongoing changes to Federal and State tax regulations, even simple tax situations can appear more and more complicated. This program stands ready to assist all those in need.

Joys/Concerns Form Available

On the Cards of Caring table there are some half sheet forms that say "Joys/ Concerns." This form is to let you inform the church of any prayer requests or joys that we may be able to share during Sunday morning worship. You may share your own or someone else's (with their permission, of course.) The office can also arrange for a visit or a call from a pastor, if you desire. You are important to us all and we want to help celebrate your joys or listen/act when there is a problem. Please reach out!!

Friendship pads are back in the pews!!

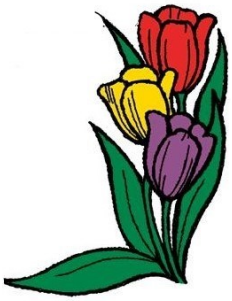
On Sunday morning, we'd like to invite you to sign in on the friendship pad that is in the pew that you were here. Invite any guests in your row to sign in as well. If you're the last one to sign, if you could remove the page and put it in the offering plate on your way out—that would be great!

We want to be able to keep track of our visitors and their contact information so we can invite them back again!!

IN OUR Thoughts and Prayers

Word has been received of the passing of long-time United Church member, Diane Kennedy. Diane passed away on Monday, March 24, surrounded by loved ones. A memorial service is being planned for later in the spring. Please keep Diane's family and friends in your prayers as they navigate this sad time.

Easter Flower Dedications



Amy Buse, in honor of my mom, Mary Ryman.

Wayne & Maxine McKay, in memory of our parents: Claude & Zylda McKay and James & Thelma Eddy.

Jim & Carolyn Chipman, in memory of our parents and loved ones.

Cecilia Hamilton, in memory of Murriel Hamilton and in honor of Lucinda Russell.

Randy & Linda Vance in memory of loved ones past.

Jim & Alice Bandstra in honor of Juliana Bandstra's graduation from Grand Canyon University.

Barb Johnson, in honor of family and in memory of Newell.

Susan H. Grant, in memory of A. Donald Grant and in honor of Maryanne Heidemann.

Marshall & Melanie Henry, in honor of Diane Kennedy.

Bill & Nancy Peters, in memory of our family.

Don Olree, in memory of Joan.

Paul & Maryanne Heidemann, in memory of their parents.

The United Church of Big Rapids
is an
Open and Affirming (UCC) and a More Light Church (PC-USA)

Thanks to the hard work of our O&A Implementation team and many others in our church family, our church is recognized by both denominations as an inclusive church!

https://openandaffirming.org/ona/ https://mlp.org/

MORE LIGHT PRESBYTERIANS

You can click on the links above to get more information about what this means to the "outside world." Thank you to all who live out the words in our O & A Covenant!

Date	Name
4/5	Rich Coby
4/8	Kayin Weber
4/11	Kurt Somsel
4/12	Corey Thompson
4/14	Randy Vance
4/17	Diane Kennedy
4/22	Bruce Fredrick
4/23	Don Morris
4/30	Kathleen Haag

Date	Couple	Years
4/1	Michael & Tracey McMullen	29
4/11	Michael & Beth Scsavnicki	32
4/13	Kurt & Maureen Somsel	28

APRIL
BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

Thank You!

Thank you to the many volunteers that help make The United Church a welcoming place for all! Your efforts do not go unnoticed! We're so thankful for the help & time given to the Church to spread God's love.

Want to host coffee hour after worship or provide altar flowers on Sunday morning? Check the sign up sheets on the hallway bulletin board for available dates. No training or experience needed!

Altar Flowers

Remember that you may access our monthly events calendar online from our website, www.unitedchurchbr.org. The calendar is kept up-to-date. If you have questions or would like an item added to the calendar, please contact the church office.

Service Volunteers for April

Thank you for volunteering to serve on Sundays! If you see some empty spaces & would like to volunteer, contact the church office. If you'd like to volunteer in future months, let us know - we'd love to have you!

Date	Liturgist	Member in Charge	Flowers	Fellowship Time Host	Sound Board	Ushers
4/7	Jim Bandstra				Mike Rinehart	Maxine McKay, Paul Challender, Don Stephen
4/14	Kari Clark				Peter McHugh Trish McHugh	Jane Grzybowski, Julie Kysela, Don Stephen
4/21	Dee Van Horn		Pat Heeter Kari Clark		Bruce Fredrick	Maxine McKay, Jane Grzybowski, Don Olree
4/28	Susan H. Grant				Randy Vance	Paul Challender, Kay Achterhof, Julie Kysela

A special thanks to our hard-working media team - Amy Buse, Annie Ducat, Wayne McKay, and Paul Heidemann who make sure we can all see and hear the service, in the sanctuary and through the livestream and radio broadcasts.

There are spaces available on the sign-up sheets on the bulletin board to provide flowers or to provide coffee after worship during Fellowship time.

We also would like to thank the Spiritual Life Commission for all they do to make our worship meaningful each Sunday.

Want to know more about Earth Day, April 22? Want to know what YOU can do to help care for our Earth?

Check out Earth Day 2024 - Earth Day

We need to take care of our Earth—it's the only one we have!

The United Church of Big Rapids is a union of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ. It is a congregation that worships together, seeks opportunities to serve others, encourages one another to grow in intellect and spirit, strives for social justice, and fully embraces Jesus' call to love one another as God loves us.

Because we believe God's whole creation is good, blessed, and sacred, we are an open and affirming community of faith. We celebrate persons of all races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, family structures, faith backgrounds, abilities, and economic circumstances.

As valued members of this congregation all persons are invited to equally participate in the full life of the church - worship, sacraments, ministry, fellowship, leadership, responsibilities, sorrows, blessings, and the continued presence of Jesus Christ.

Our Vision and Mission Statements

Our vision is to honor all children of God through following the ways of Jesus Christ.

Our mission is to celebrate all creation as an active presence in our community, engaging in transformational worship and nurturing families and relationships, as we learn to foster more justice and love in ourselves and our community.

Contacting the Church

The church office is open and staffed Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday 9:00 am - 1:00 pm.
Messages & emails are checked every day.

231-527-9567

Leave a message if no one answers, your call will be returned as soon as possible.
You can also reach the church office via e-mail:

Secretary@unitedchurchbr.org

You can also see videos and keep up with us on:
Facebook: www.facebook.com/UnitedChurch
YouTube: www.youtube.com/@unitedchurchbigrapids.com

Sunday morning worship (9:30 am) is live streamed on YouTube with a link on our Facebook page and also broadcast live on WWBR-FM, 100.9.