

Welcome to the
April 2025 Newsletter
of
The United Church of Big Rapids



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

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

The United Church

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

(231) 527-9567 secretary@unitedchurchbr.org



APRIL



From
Pastor
Devon

When I was a kid, Easter always felt like an exciting day. My mom was the church accompanist and the choir always sang a cantata, which she practiced tirelessly in our living room. It also meant a short sermon, which was never a bad thing. It was one of the few Sundays my Dad would join us for church and we would sing hymns that had been ingrained in my soul: "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," and "Up from the Grave He Arose." Do you know those hymns? For me, Easter meant a fancy new dress wearing my little patent leather shoes that shined, hunting for eggs and other little gifts, and chocolate (still my favorite part!) When I was in seminary, I served as the pastor for youth and small children at a small church in Georgia. Because it was warmer there, we did our Easter Egg hunts outside. For the teenagers that meant a night-time hunt, using flashlights. It was a blast, but what I had not counted on were the presence of hundreds of little slugs that had just sprung to life. That was kind of gross! It was a memory I won't forget. What memories do you have of Easter?

I suppose some of the excitement of Easter is due to the nature of what comes before it: the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter's denial, and the cross. We can't fully celebrate the power of resurrection unless we also know the depth of grief, loss, and fear that comes with death. Resurrection means that we can be people of hope even in the hardest, darkest times because we know that there is more to the story. When it feels like we are surrounded by difficult circumstance, often hope, the promise of resurrection, can be found in our connection to our faith community. My prayer for us the Lent/Easter season is that as we begin to see the signs of spring and the promise of new life and renewal around us, our spirits may also be renewed and strengthened as we journey together. Let's keep our eyes, ears, minds, and hearts open to the presence of resurrection and the power of hope.

Pastor Devon

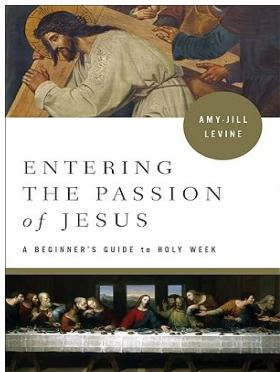


Worship times for Holy Week:

- Palm Sunday, 4/13 - 9:30 am, United Church
- Holy (Maundy) Thursday, 4/17 - 6:00 pm, United Methodist Church (worship with potluck following)
- Good Friday, 4/18 - 12:00 pm, United Church
Community Choir rehearsal at 11:00 am
- Easter Worship, 4/20 - 9:30 am, United Church

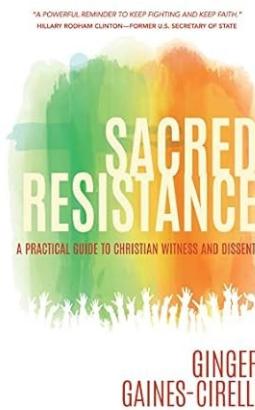
Pastor Devon's Contact Information

If you need to contact Pastor Devon, you may contact her by phone for pastoral care needs at 231-629-2302. You may also reach out via email: devonherrell@gmail.com. Pastor Devon does have another full time job, so in-person meeting time is limited. She plans to be in the office on Thursdays from 9:00 am - 11:45 am. You may contact the church office to set up an appointment.



The first of two Lent studies continues at the United Church on Tuesdays, 7:00 pm, in the Parlor until April 15.

"Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week," by Amy-Jill Levine.



The second Lent study continues at the First United Methodist Church both in person and via Zoom. The study dates are on THURSDAYS until April 10. To register for the Zoom session email your name to register@ummecosta.org with "Sacred Resistance" as the subject. Registration is not necessary to attend the in person session.

"Sacred Resistance: A Practical Guide to Christian Witness and Dissent," by Ginger Gaines-Cirelli



Pub Theology

7:00 pm @ Crankers
Tuesday, April 22

Join us for a relaxed time of conversation and connection!





March 2025 - Moderator's Message

Greetings from your moderator at the United Church of Big Rapids! There are good things happening because of Pastor Devon, your Governing Board, and involved members of our congregation who are active in the various committees and commissions. Pastor Devon is providing insight into how to be better Christians and how to better serve those people in need of a spiritual life in the practice of our faith.

Our sanctuary and main hallway are due for a facelift, with a new paint job, carpeting, and a rearrangement of our pews. All of this is to make our church more welcoming to newcomers, but also for our members who can be proud of our church and its impact on the local community and the organizations it supports with volunteers and financial assistance.

The United Church of Big Rapids can be a force for good, with its mission work in the community, as well as providing space for:

- Project Starburst
- Pride Big Rapids
- Boy Scout Troop 114 along with 2 Cub Scout Dens and an Arrow of Light Den
- TOPS (Taking Off Pounds Sensibly)
- Our Brothers Keeper
- Voca Lyrica
- Big Rapids Treblemakers (children's choir)
- Voca Lyrica Comfort Choir
- Investment Club
- Drama Organizations - Prohedria and STAGE-M
- Family Support Services/DHHS supervised visitations

I also want to thank all the clergy who have provided much-needed pulpit supply over the last two and one-half years. Our church values their experience and the important spiritual messages that they have provided for us in our time of need. We will see some of them in the coming months as our Pastor Search continues. On behalf of the congregation, thanks for your help when called upon.

We can do much good for our members, local organizations, state and national groups. We can also accomplish much for the good of our community, with your financial support on a yearly basis, volunteering at the church, as well as other organization at the local, state, and national levels. The United Church needs everyone involved to continue the support for our great church!

God bless,

Marshall Henry, Moderator



Happy Earth Day - April 22!

"He has made everything beautiful in its time."

- Ecclesiastes 3:11



BOOK SALE

**April 11, 9am-5pm
April 12, 9am-2pm**

**First United
Methodist Church
304 Elm Street**

Donation bin locations for gently used books,
CDs, & DVDs (no encyclopedias or textbooks)

- Artworks
- First United Methodist Church
- The United Church of Big Rapids
- Immanuel Lutheran Church
- Antlers Fireside Grill
- Conley's Bakery
- DLR
- Canadian Lakes Pharmacy
- Coldwell Banker Lakes Realty
- Meccosta County Commission on Aging and Activity Center

Proceeds fund scholarships for Ferris students.
For more information, call 614-282-4396.

AAUW-Big Rapids Annual Used Book Sale

The Big Rapids branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) is holding their Annual Used Book this month!

The sale will be held Friday, April 11 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday, April 12 from 9:00 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 304 Elm Street, Big Rapids. Proceeds fund scholarships for nontraditional Ferris students. For more information, call 614-282-4396.

(Donations may be made up to the time of the sale in the bin in the narthex or by calling the number above.)

IT'S TIME FOR MEIJER SIMPLY GIVE!

The Spring Meijer Simply Give program running from Sunday, March 30 through Saturday, June 28 will benefit Project Starburst. During this time, donations are matched by Meijer one to one. Example - a \$10 donation turns into a \$20 donation. And there is a double match day opportunity on Saturday, June 14 where donations are matched 2 to 1. Example - a \$10 donation turns into a \$30 donation. Simply Give cards will be available in the Narthex after March 30 or at Meijer. Or you can turn your donation into Diane Long at Project Starburst and she will turn it in with other donations on double match day. As the demand for food continues to grow and prices continue to rise, we can be a source of support for our neighbors in need. Thank you for your support.



APRIL IS CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION & AWARENESS MONTH

April is recognized as Child Abuse Prevention Month. In recognition of the Month, church members and members of the broader community are asked to **wear blue on National Wear Blue day on April 4**. As part of the monthly awareness activities, the Meceola Children's Council is sponsoring a 5K run/walk on Saturday, April 26.

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 27** to wear in recognition of Blue Sunday. We all need to extend our loving hearts and care for these children of God.



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.

Noodles/pasta were identified as the "food of the month" for March. Noodles/pasta can be a real staple for many families. The bin was filled and the clients were so thankful!



The "Give to the Pantry" program has identified **baking mixes – cookies, muffins, cake** as the "food of the month" for April. Baking mixes of any kind can provide families with some warm comfort foods. Baking mixes are a wonderful addition to the regular food offerings from the pantry.

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, Dee Van Horn

(email: deevanhorn44@gmail.com) no later than the Friday before the scheduled meeting.



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/>





ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

Spring has arrived and so it is time for our *Adopt-a-Highway Event!* Our collection date is Saturday, April 5, 2025, beginning at 9:00 am. Please plan to meet at the United Church to sign in and review the safety video. Then we will form teams, pick up our gear and head out to the US 131 Highway to take our picture and begin our work. As with any task, many hands make light work, so please invite your friends. We generally finish by noon. If you have any questions, please contact Susan H. Grant at adonaldgrant73@gmail.com.
Thanks - Susan



The church building is being utilized every day by various organizations and committees. Thank you for keeping the church office informed of meetings that you will be hosting in the church **prior** to the meeting. This allows the calendar to be kept up to date and the custodian to be informed so that the room is ready for your use.

The generosity of the congregation to open up the building to those that have need of a place to meet is greatly appreciated throughout the community!!



The Spiritual Life Commission

will be taking orders for Easter Lilies and Spring Flowers on April 6 and 13 to decorate the sanctuary on Easter Sunday, April 20. To order your flowers, complete this form, include payment and drop it off on the table in the narthex on Sunday or mail it to the church office.

Deadline is April 14.

Given by: _____ Phone #: _____

In Memory of: _____

Or

In Honor of: _____

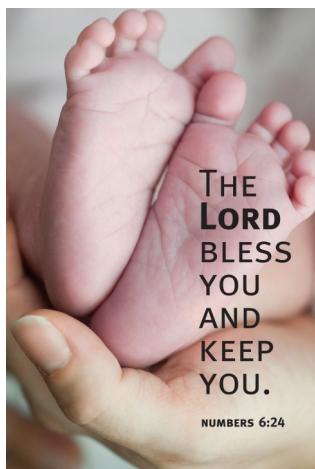
Please order _____ **Easter Lilies at \$10.00 each**

_____ **Spring flowers at \$10.00 each**

Enclosed is \$ _____

_____ Deliver my flowers to a shut-in after the Easter Service

_____ I will pick up my flowers after the Easter Service

It's Baby Shower Time!

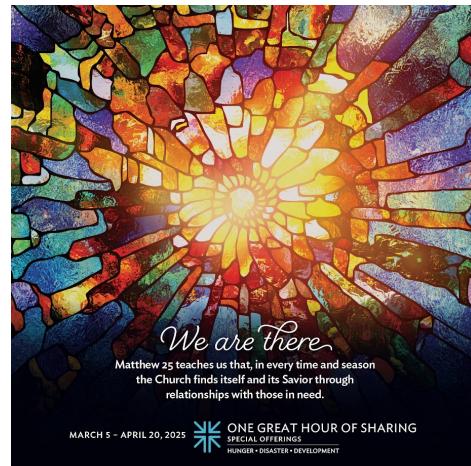
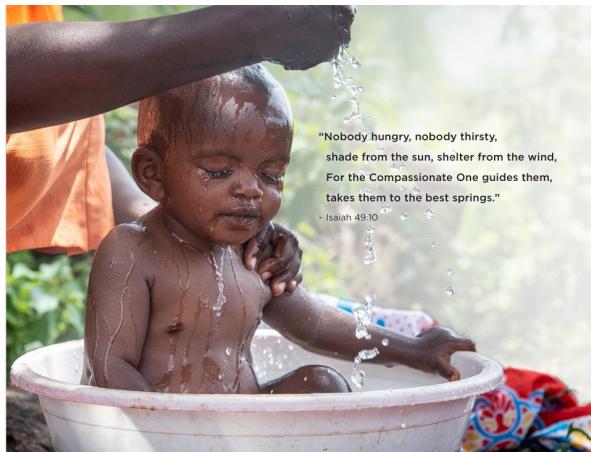
We are excited to share the baptism of Wren Helsel on Palm Sunday, April 13 with a baby shower during Fellowship Hour! Plans are underway and it should be a wonderful time of celebration. Based upon a wish list of small items supplied by Mom Tessa, the planning committee has decided to purchase gifts for baby Wren on behalf of our congregation. Any church member who would like to contribute to the gifts can give their donation to Dee Van Horn, Melanie Henry, Amy Buse or Megan Vajda. If you need to write a check, make it payable to Dee Van Horn. We are also providing a small gift to each of Wren's siblings – Ryland and Ruby. Palm Sunday is a wonderful day to share in the joy of this addition to the Helsel family.

ONE GREAT HOUR OF SHARING SPECIAL OFFERING TO BE TAKEN PALM SUNDAY

In Isaiah 58, the prophet exclaims, "Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in" (Isaiah 58:12). As the people of Israel returned from the cloud of exile and struggled to rebuild their lives, Isaiah questioned their efforts: [Are you not called] "to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them?" (Isaiah 58:7).

When we give to the One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS), we are combining our efforts with those across the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ to repair peoples' lives—people who are hurting, oppressed, lost or on the margins of society. The exact people about whom Isaiah is speaking of. The people we are called to connect with every day. By giving, you will see how giving opens your heart to God's work in your own life.

You are invited to visit the OGHS website for PC-USA (pcusa.org/oghsmap) or the United Church of Christ website (One Great Hour of Sharing - United Church of Christ). See how your donations help those in need.



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/>



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	Date	Couple	Years
4/8	Kayin Weber	4/1	Michael & Tracey McMullen	30
4/11	Kurt Somsel	4/11	Michael & Beth Scsvnicki	33
4/14	Randy Vance	4/13	Kurt & Maureen Somsel	29
4/22	Bruce Fredrick			
4/23	Don Morris			
4/30	Kathleen Haag			

Enjoy your special day!!

APRIL



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 February

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

A special thanks to our hard-working media team - Amy Buse, Adam Jewell, Aleah Ritzema, 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.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Liturgist</u>	<u>Flowers</u>	<u>Fellowship Time Host</u>	<u>Sound Board</u>	<u>Ushers</u>
4/6	Kathleen Keys Singh			Mike Rinehart	Maxine McKay, Alice Dean, Julie Kysela
4/13 <i>Palm Sunday</i>	Susan H. Grant			Mike Rinehart	Jane Grzybowski, Don Olree, Don Stephen
4/20 <i>Easter Sunday</i>	Kari Clark			Trish McHugh	Jane Grzybowski, Don Stephen, Paul Challender
4/27	Dee Van Horn			Randy Vance	Maxine McKay, Todd Elkins, Paul Challender

We are also grateful for the Spiritual Life Commission for all they do to make our worship meaningful each Sunday.

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 Pastor Devon, 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.



Don't forget to sign the friendship pad in the pew on Sunday morning! Encourage any visitors to add their name and address as well. If someone is interested in becoming a member of the church - have them contact the church office!

Are You Interested in Joining our Church Family?

We are accepting new members on Palm Sunday, April 13. If you would like to join the church and have not yet told Pastor Devon, please contact the church office with your name and contact information. Welcome to the UCBR family!!





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.