

Welcome to the  
July 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.



## From the Moderator

### Moderator's Message for July 2025

***Just as an experiment I thought you might like to read what Artificial Intelligence thinks about our United Church of Big Rapids***

In the heart of Big Rapids, the United Church of Christ (UCC) stands as a beacon of faith, community, and social responsibility. For many, belonging to the UCC is not just about attending Sunday services; it is about being part of a broader family that nurtures spiritual growth, promotes inclusivity, and actively participates in the betterment of society. This essay explores the multifaceted importance of belonging to the United Church of Christ in Big Rapids and the profound impact it has on individuals and the community.

One of the most significant aspects of the UCC in Big Rapids is its commitment to creating a welcoming environment for all. The church opens its doors to individuals from diverse backgrounds, embracing them with warmth and compassion. This inclusivity fosters a sense of belonging, where every member feels valued and accepted. The church's ethos of "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here" resonates deeply with the congregation and attracts those seeking a supportive and loving community.

Belonging to the UCC in Big Rapids means being part of a network of genuine relationships. The church encourages fellowship through various activities and gatherings, such as Bible studies, and community service projects. These interactions help forge strong bonds among members, creating a support system that extends beyond the walls of the church. In times of joy and sorrow, the UCC community stands together, offering comfort, encouragement, and a sense of shared purpose.

At the core of the UCC in Big Rapids is a commitment to nurturing the spiritual growth of its members. The church provides a space for individuals to explore and deepen their faith through worship services, prayer meetings, and religious education. The sermons delivered by our pastor are thought-provoking and inspire congregants to reflect on their spiritual journey. The UCC places a strong emphasis on personal reflection and discernment. Members are encouraged to question, seek answers, and develop their own understanding of their faith. This approach empowers individuals to take ownership of their spiritual journey and fosters a deeper connection to their beliefs. Through retreats, meditation sessions, and spiritual counseling, the church provides the tools and guidance needed for personal reflection and growth.

The United Church of Christ in Big Rapids is not only concerned with the spiritual well-being of its members but also with the welfare of the broader community. The church is actively involved in advocacy and outreach programs that address social justice issues and support marginalized groups. From organizing food drives to participating in environmental initiatives, the UCC demonstrates its commitment to living out the teachings of Christ through tan-

gible actions. These efforts not only make a positive impact on the community but also instill a sense of social responsibility in the congregation.

Belonging to the UCC in Big Rapids means being part of a movement that seeks to empower change. The church encourages its members to engage in social activism and to be voices for the voiceless. Through workshops, seminars, and partnerships with local organizations, the UCC provides opportunities for members to learn about and address pressing social issues. This proactive stance on social justice inspires individuals to become agents of change in their own right, making a lasting difference in the world.

The UCC in Big Rapids is dedicated to embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity. The church actively works to create an environment where people of all races, genders, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic backgrounds feel welcome and respected. This commitment to diversity is reflected in the church's policies, practices, and programming. By celebrating the unique perspectives and experiences of its members, the UCC fosters a culture of inclusivity that enriches the entire community. For many, the UCC serves as a safe space where they can express their true selves without fear of judgment or discrimination. The church's open and affirming stance provides a sanctuary for individuals who may have felt marginalized or excluded in other settings. This sense of safety and acceptance allows members to fully engage in the life of the church and to contribute their gifts and talents to the community.

Belonging to the United Church of Christ in Big Rapids is a transformative experience that extends far beyond the confines of Sunday worship. The church's commitment to fostering a sense of community, nurturing spiritual growth, promoting social responsibility, and cultivating a culture of inclusivity makes it a vital and vibrant part of the Big Rapids community. For those who call the UCC their spiritual home, it is a place where faith meets action, and where belonging means being part of something greater than oneself.



Blessings - Your Moderator, Marshall Henry

## 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](mailto: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.



On Sunday, July 20, we will welcome the UCC Michigan Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel, to lead worship! Rev. Daniel has been here previously and is looking forward to her visit to see our renovations! Hope you can join us for Rev. Daniel's visit!



### Pub Theology

7:00 pm @ Crankers

Tuesday, July 22

*Bring a friend and come out for a fun time of conversation!*

The First United Methodist Church will sponsor a summer Wednesday night program for kids from **through July 16**. This summer experience, "Camp Chaos" is for children who will be in Kindergarten through the 6th grade in September 2025. The United Church is proud to support this program through promotion to our children and others in the community.



UCBR's annual summer *Worship in the Park* has been scheduled for **Sunday, July 13** at Northend Riverside Park. This is always a highlight of our summer! Worship will be held at 9:30 am at the double pavilion (weather permitting). Bring a chair for the service - or sit on a picnic bench. A potluck lunch will follow the service. Please bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Beverages will be available. *There will be plenty of food for everyone, so please join us for a time of fellowship and food whether you bring a dish or not.* Watch your email or Facebook on the 13th for weather updates. A recording of the service will be available on Monday, but the service will NOT be livestreamed.



The church office will be closed on Thursday, July 3 to celebrate the holiday. Voicemail and email will be monitored.

Have a safe weekend!

## Happy 250th Birthday, America!!



## OBSERVING WORLD TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS DAY July 30



World Day against Trafficking in Persons is a global initiative dedicated to combating human trafficking in all its forms. Established by the United Nations, the day brings attention to the plight of trafficking victims and highlights the importance of preventing and eradicating trafficking worldwide. It is observed annually on **July 30th**. In 2025, it falls on a Wednesday, providing a midweek opportunity for schools, workplaces, and communities to participate in awareness activities and campaigns.

### Facts About World Day against Trafficking in Persons 2025

- Human trafficking is estimated to affect over 27 million people worldwide.
  - The majority of trafficking victims are women and children, but men are also affected.
  - The United Nations adopted July 30 as World Day against Trafficking in Persons in 2013.
- This day serves as a platform for survivors to share their stories and advocate for their rights.

### **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.

Cereal was identified as the “food of the month” for June. Project Starburst is thankful for all of the donations received. Cereal is a “staple” part of the monthly food list for the clients. So they go fast – thanks so much.

And the “Give to the Pantry” program has identified pasta as the “food of the month” for July. Pasta of all kinds is another one of those basics provided to clients each month. It serves as a wonderful part of the regular food order for each family or individual who comes into 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](mailto: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/>



## Church Renovation Project

Thank you for your assistance and your patience through the church renovations. The sanctuary is looking awesome - everything is nice and fresh! Again, many thanks to Amy Buse who has spear-headed this project! It's been a chore, but it looks so good! We are grateful to so many volunteers who have helped with moving furniture, putting up pictures, assembling light fixtures - this project has truly needed the whole village! THANK YOU!!



### Flowers & Fellowship!

Our sign-up sheets are empty for the next 2 months for altar flowers and hosts for Fellowship time after worship! Please consider signing up as these things make worship even more meaningful as we spend time together.

We will be hosting our conference minister on 7/20 and we'd like to be sure that there are flowers and goodies for her visit especially!

Thanks for considering helping out in this way.



# UCC WOMEN OF MICHIGAN

## AN INVITATION TO FALL GATHERING

**SEPTEMBER 5-7, 2025**

Friday evening thru Sunday morning

**Theme: "Be Still and Know That I Am"**

**Scriptures: Exodus 14:14; Zephaniah 3:17; Luke 10:41-42**

**Keynoter will be Sharon Hiller**



*Book: "Come Live Love Guidance for Life: As told to Sharon Sue Hiller"*



*save the date*

**JOIN US FOR OUR CONTINUING ADVENTURE!**

**We are excited to announce the 2025 Fall Gathering**  
**will again be held at The Lake Huron Retreat Center**  
**Located at 8794 Lakeshore Rd, Burtchville Twp, MI**

**Registration Information Will Be Available in April !!**  
**Watch for it in your email, on the UCC Women of MI Facebook**  
**page, or the MI Conference UCC e-newsletter & website.**

Co-Chair: April Reh 586-291-8827 [a.rehofcolor@gmail.com](mailto:a.rehofcolor@gmail.com)  
Penny Lowes 248-762-5551 [revpen73@gmail.com](mailto:revpen73@gmail.com)  
Registrar: Shari Hoppe 614-403-2364 [sfhoppe@gmail.com](mailto:sfhoppe@gmail.com)

## THE UNITED CHURCH

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	Date	Couple	Years
7/1	Luke Somsel	7/13	Chuck & Kay Achterhof	40
7/3	Carol Larimer	7/31	Rob & Kate McInnis	28
7/8	Jim Chipman			
7/12	Erin Dumond			
7/14	Richard Boitos			
7/14	Frank Hartley			
7/17	Kay Achterhof			
7/19	Peter McHugh			
7/21	River Rewa			
7/31	Gail DesNoyers			



JULY BIRTHDAYS  
& 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 narthex 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](http://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 July

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>
7/6	Kathleen Keys Sing			Trish McHugh Peter McHugh	Maxine McKay, John Gahrs, Carlene Gahrs
7/13 (Outdoor)	Susan H. Grant			Wayne McKay	Kay Achterhof, Chuck Achterhof
7/20	Dee Van Horn			Mike Rinehart	Maxine McKay, Paul Challender
7/27	Julie Cole			Trish McHugh Peter McHugh	Paul Challender, Jane Grzybowski Barb Johnson, Marge Punches

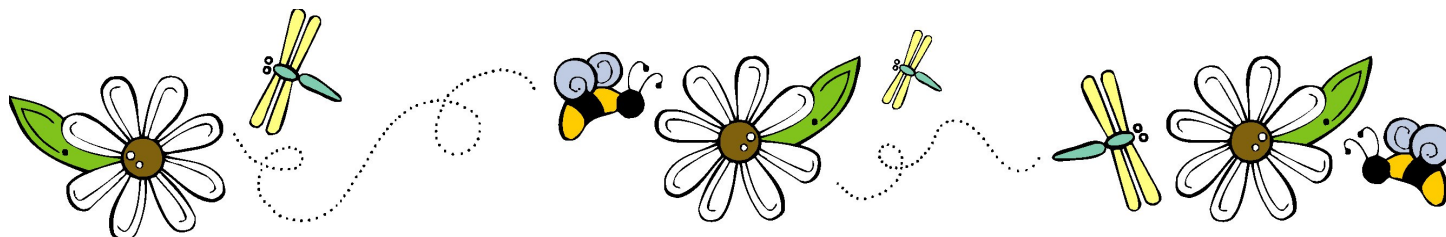
We are also grateful for the Spiritual Life Commission for all they do to make our worship meaningful each Sunday.

### 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!





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](mailto:Secretary@unitedchurchbr.org)**

You can also see videos and keep up with us on:

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/UnitedChurch](https://www.facebook.com/UnitedChurch)

YouTube: [www.youtube.com/@unitedchurchbigrapids.com](https://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.