

Welcome to the
June 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



From

*Pastor
Devon*

When Laura and I moved into our home a few years ago the yard had not been kept up very well. We knew that we wanted it to look nice because we love to hang out on our porch when it is nice outside. So, we got to work. We had two shovels (a flat one and a rounded one,) a couple of rakes, and we found a wheelbarrow on

sale for \$25 which felt like hitting the jackpot. Using these limited tools, we dug up the grass and created a few areas for plants. It was a LOT of work and as we planted those initial perennials, we weren't sure if they'd even live through the season, let alone survive the winter.

Every spring we celebrate when the Columbine blooms or the bushes that look like dead sticks start to show some spots of green growth. We haven't had too many casualties, and I think we consider it a bit of a miracle that things are flourishing! Every year when a vegetable shows up and begins to grow, we celebrate, when our dahlias bloom, we cheer, all because we have such little control over most of the process.

I have been listening to many of you as you speak about our church community. I notice a bit of a trend. A newer member of our community will stop me to celebrate who we are: kind and good people, inclusive theology, beautiful space. Alongside these joyful conversations come those of some of our more veteran members, persons who have held leadership positions for quite a while or those who remember the "good old days" when Pastor Jon was leading the church, and the pews were full. These conversations often center around the fear of "what is going to happen when..." These are normal conversations for most church folks these days. We miss the good times, those pre-COVID days when more people attended church in person, times when our families attended with us, our children and youth programs were thriving, and things seemed a whole lot easier. It's ok to grieve the changes, but we can't get so stuck in the fear of what may/or may not happen that we fail to recognize the opportunities God presents us in the here and now.

Church is not going to look the way it did, our lives are not going to be the same as they used to be, the world is changing and with that come both positives and negatives that we endure.

The good news is that we don't endure them alone – we are doing this as a community of faithful people who trust that God is not done with us yet. We can't allow ourselves to get stuck in "we have to do it this way" or "we've never done it that way." We have endless opportunities to try things, take a leap of faith, start new ministries, say yes to helping lead the church forward...and guess what, if we fail...we learn and we try something new.

I suppose our landscaping looks a lot like everyone else's, but for me it is a testament to hard work and a lot of hope and faith. Our church probably looks like a lot of other churches, too. But what is inside The United Church is a truly unique, loving, justice-making, fun and fairly radical gang. What "seeds" are we planting together, how are we tending them, and how are we celebrating our wins?

This all points to one of my favorite Scripture passages. I often joke I should have it tattooed on my forehead. It is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 6.

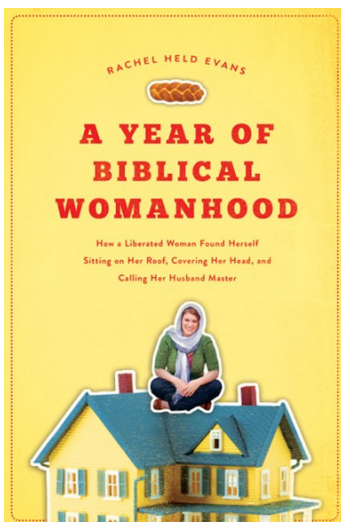
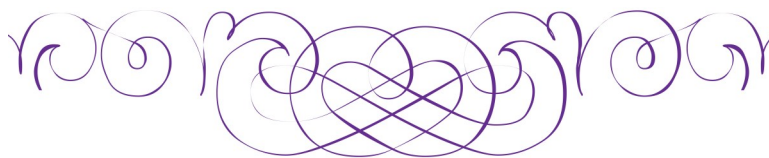
²⁵ *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"* ²⁶ *Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"* ²⁷ *And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life?"* ²⁸ *And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,* ²⁹ *yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.* ³⁰ *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?"* ³¹ *Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?'* ³² *For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.* ³³ *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

³⁴ *"So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

My prayer for us is that we hope more than we worry, that we celebrate more than we fret, and that we pull-together, trusting fully that God is doing something new. We must keep planting with expectant hope!

Peace,

Pastor Devon



Our current book study is a fun read by Rachel Held Evans. Rachel has been an important voice in the progressive Christian landscape. In this, her inaugural book, she discovers what it means to follow biblical laws for an entire year. Pursuing a different virtue each month, Evans learns the hard way that her quest for biblical womanhood requires more than a "gentle quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4). It means growing out her hair, obeying her husband, rising before dawn, abstaining from gossip, and remaining silent in church.

Our next meeting will be on Tuesday, June 10, 7:00 pm in the Parlor.

Feel free to join us even if you didn't join us in May!

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.



Happy Fathers' Day!

The word "father" has many meanings - the Oxford English dictionary defines "father" as "a man who undertakes the responsibilities of a parent towards a child..."

Thank you to all the men in our lives that provide us with wise words, guidance, teaching moments, bad jokes, and most of all, love and hugs when we need them.

To those that don't have children whether by choice or because of a loss or for those who are estranged from their families - we keep you in our prayers as this day may be difficult.

To all the men in our lives - may God bless you every day!



Pub Theology

7:00 pm @ Crankers
Tuesday, June 24

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

Julie will be on vacation from June 11 - June 17, returning to the office on June 18. Thank you to Amy Buse for taking over the bulletin prep for June 22 worship service. We're still looking for someone to cover the office for 3 days - contact Julie for more information!



Moderator Message for June



Being an active member of the United Church of Big Rapids (UCBR) is a fundamental aspect of nurturing one's spiritual growth while contributing to the well-being and vibrancy of the church community. While monetary contributions play a crucial role in supporting the church's infrastructure and various initiatives, the true essence of involvement lies in the active participation in the church's life through membership in its committees and commissions.

Active involvement in the church provides a number of benefits. Firstly, it fosters a sense of belonging and connection amongst members. When individuals engage in activities and take on roles within committees or commissions, they form deeper relationships with fellow churchgoers. These connections create a supportive network that is vital for spiritual and emotional growth. A sense of community is strengthened when members work together towards common goals, share experiences, and support one another.

Secondly, participating actively in the church's committees and commissions allows members to utilize their skills and talents for the greater good. Whether it is through organizing events, participating in outreach programs, or contributing to the maintenance and improvement of church facilities, every member has unique abilities that can be harnessed to benefit the church. This not only aids in the church's operations but also provides individuals with a sense of purpose and fulfillment as they see the tangible impact of their contributions.

Additionally, being active in the church helps one to grow in faith and understanding. Through involvement in various committees, members gain insights into different aspects of church life and theology. Engaging in discussions, planning activities, and implementing projects provides opportunities for learning and reflection. This process deepens one's faith and enriches their spiritual journey.

Moreover, joining a specific committee or commission allows members to have a say in the direction and future of the church. It empowers them to be part of the decision-making process, ensuring that their voices are heard and their ideas considered. This democratic involvement fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the church, motivating members to contribute positively and proactively.

In conclusion, the importance of being an active participant at UCBR extends beyond monetary donations. It encompasses the commitment to engage actively in the church's life by joining specific committees or commissions. Such involvement fosters a sense of community, allows members to utilize their talents, aids in spiritual growth, and empowers them to contribute to the church's future. Through active participation, members not only enrich their own lives but also enhance the vibrancy and strength of the church community as a whole.

Thank you for being part of the mission of the United Church of Big Rapids!

- Marshall Henry, Moderator





Save the Date for These Great Events!

- Voca Lyrica presents "The Beauty Still Remains" featuring the moving choral work "Anne Frank: A Living Voice" on **Sunday, June 1, 4:00 pm** at the Big Rapids High School Auditorium. Tickets are \$15 and available at Patterson's, Old Pioneer Store, and vocalyrica.org.
- The First United Methodist Church will sponsor a summer Wednesday night program for kids from **June 11 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.
- Senior Enrichment Day (SED) will be held at the Big Rapids High School on **Wednesday, June 25**. The seminar series offered this year includes a choice of more than 40 diverse educational sessions, providing a "one-stop-shop" for vital information for seniors. During the luncheon, the Mary Pine Award winners will be announced. The Mary Pine Award is given to honor special citizens, age 55 and over, who use the gifts of a long and productive life to benefit the Mecosta County area in a positive manner.



For the third consecutive year, the Thomas Hogenson Senior Enrichment Day Scholarships are available to those in need. The scholarship covers the cost of attendance for those with financial hardship, in hopes of making the event Tom loved so much accessible to even more Mecosta County Seniors.

Registration materials for SED may be found at locations throughout the county including the RSVP offices and the Mecosta County Senior Center. Materials can also be found in the narthex. You may also register online: www.seniorenrichmentday.com. If you call the Senior Center (231-972-2884), they are also happy to mail a registration form to you.

- The United Church is proud to support the Big Rapids Pride Festival on **Sunday, June 29**. Although we will not have a table at this year's event, church members are encouraged to attend. If you would like to volunteer, there are 3 shifts available. To volunteer, visit www.pridebigrapids.org and fill out an application. If you sign-up, please let Dee VanHorn, Chair of the Mission Commission know.



- UCBP'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! Details are being worked out and will be shared closer to the date of worship.

**June
25**



If you would like to donate, you can contact the church office either by email or phone to sign up.

MEIJER SIMPLY GIVE - DOUBLE MATCH DAY - JUNE 14

The Meijer Simply Give program benefiting Project Starburst runs through June 28. During regular days, donations are matched one to one. ***However, on Saturday, June 14, Meijer doubles that match.*** You may purchase Simply Give cards at the local Meijer store or find them in the narthex. You may also give your donation directly to Diane Long at Project Starburst and she will turn it in for you for that wonderful double match!



June is PRIDE MONTH

Pride Month is a month-long celebration that recognizes the LGBTQ+ community and their contributions to society. In 2025, Pride Month will take place from June 1st to June 30th. It is a time to acknowledge the challenges faced by this community and to stand in solidarity with their fight for equality, acceptance, and human rights. Pride Month is a joyful and colorful display of love, unity, and resilience, with events and activities that promote inclusivity, educate the public, and celebrate the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities.

The organized pursuit of LGBTQ rights in the United States reaches back to at least 1924 and the founding of the Society of Human Rights in Chicago by Henry Gerber. But the event that catalyzed the LGBTQ rights movement came in June 1969 in New York City's Greenwich Village, at the Stonewall Inn. In the early morning hours of June 28, police raided this popular gathering place for young members of the LGBTQ community, arresting the employees for selling liquor without a license, roughing up many of the patrons, and clearing the bar. Outside, the crowd that watched the bar's patrons being herded into police vans became enraged. Before long some 400 people were rioting. Although police reinforcements dispersed the crowd, riots waxed and waned outside the bar for the next five days, and these Stonewall riots (also called the Stonewall uprising) provided the spark that ignited the LGBTQ rights movement in the United States.



PRIDE
MONTH
2025

EVERY
ONE
IS
WELCOME
HERE


 The text "EVERY ONE IS WELCOME HERE" is displayed in a bold, sans-serif font, with each word on a new line. The words are colored in a rainbow gradient: "EVERY" is red, "ONE" is orange, "IS" is yellow, "WELCOME" is green, and "HERE" is blue. Below the text is a small, solid purple heart icon.

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.

Canned vegetables were identified as the “food of the month” for May. Vegetables are a “staple” part of the monthly food list for the clients. They go fast - your donations are greatly appreciated!

The “Give to the Pantry” program has identified cereal as the “food of the month” for June. Cereal is another one of those basics provided to clients each month. As you shop for donations, you are encouraged to look at the sugar content to try to limit the high sugar content cereals. 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) 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/>



Welcome to our new members!

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Mary Olshewski | In directory |
| Paul Challenger | In directory |
| John Clayton & Liza Juliano | 2508 S. Fawn Big Rapids, MI 49307 |
| Todd Elkins | 845 N. Pine St. Evart, MI 49631 Cell: 231-680-4245 todd.m.elkins@gmail.com |



*All information in directory is published with consent from the individuals listed. If you would like to change what is printed in the directory, please reach out to the church office.



Did you know that in May there were:

- 4 Worship Services
- 3 Church meetings
- 3 Chancel Choir rehearsals
- 17 Family Support Service Supervised Visits
- 9 Outside Choir rehearsals (Voca Lyrica, Comfort Choir, and Treblemakers)
- 4 TOPS meetings
- 1 Book Study meetings
- 15 Scout meetings
- 3 Play practices
- 1 Treblemaker concert

That is in addition to members of the Pride organization utilizing their offices, painters, contractors, and other individuals associated with the renovations, as well as the clients using the services of Project Starburst. The church was in use 24 out of 30 days!!

As you can see, the church building is being utilized almost daily 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 rooms are ready for 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!!

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
Penny Lowes 248-762-5551 revpen73@gmail.com
Registrar: Shari Hoppe 614-403-2364 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 |
|------|-----------------|------|----------------------------|-------|
| 6/2 | Deb Chipman | 6/3 | Bill & Nancy Peters | 69 |
| 6/2 | Tessa Helsel | 6/10 | Steve & Heather Derwin | 19 |
| 6/8 | Pat Heeter | 6/15 | Don & Sandi Morris | 62 |
| 6/9 | Mauren Somsel | 6/17 | Marshall & Melanie Henry | 58 |
| 6/12 | Chuck Achterhof | 6/20 | John Berkenpas & Sue Glatz | 13 |
| 6/22 | Bob Cassidy | | | |
| 6/22 | Sue Glatz | | | |
| 6/22 | Nick Somsel | | | |
| 6/23 | Carol Yacavone | | | |
| 6/27 | Roger Vajda | | | |
| 6/30 | Paul Challenger | | | |



Enjoy your special day!!

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. 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 June

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> |
|-------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 6/1 | Sue Glatz | Alice & Jim Bandstra | | Mike Rinehart | Kay Achterhof, Chuck Achterhof, Don Stephen, Judy Tressler |
| 6/8 | Kathleen Keys Singh | | | Trish McHugh Peter McHugh | Maxine McKay, Paul Challenger |
| 6/15 | Susan H. Grant | | | Adam Jewell | Mary Olszewski, Jane Grzybowski |
| 6/22 | Dee Van Horn | | | Mike Rinehart | Maxine McKay, Jane Grzybowski, Don Olree |
| 6/29 | Julie Cole | | June & Juliet | Adam Jewell | Mary Olszewski, Paul Challenger, Don Stephen, Judy Tressler |

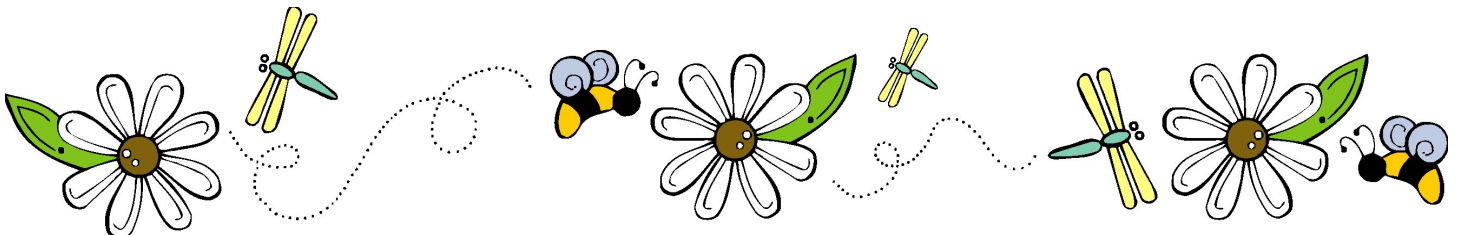
We are also grateful for the Spiritual Life Commission for all they do to make our worship meaningful each Sunday.

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

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.