

Welcome to the
May 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

We have made it to May, doesn't that truly feel like an accomplishment? It should and I know I am looking forward to sunny days, warmer temps, and those back porch gatherings involving good food and good friends.

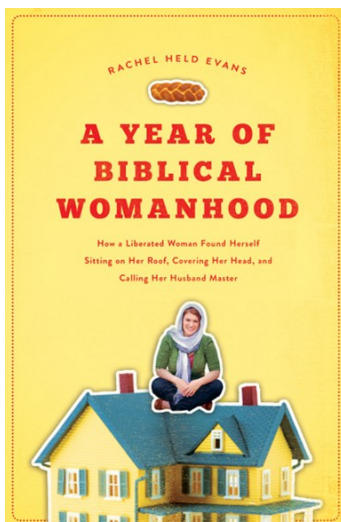
Before we jump ahead though, I want to thank you for journeying with me through Lent and Easter. It was such a gift to be a part of our community services, and I hope they impacted you in a spiritually strengthening way. I find that entering into the more difficult parts of our Christian story really helps me to do the important work of self-examination and reflection. This year it felt especially helpful to be connected to our faith community in the midst of what feels like a very difficult season for our nation and its people. Thank you for being the people in my life take seriously our calling to be a presence of compassion, inclusion, and love in the name of Jesus. Let's keep standing strong in our conviction that love will always win.

It has been quite a few months now since I have been serving in this very limited capacity. I recognize often the need for us to have a true full-time pastoral presence and believe that we are poised to grow and strengthen our presence in the community as a church that is truly welcoming. The reality is it will take all of us making use of the gifts God has given us and supporting one another in leadership to bring forth God-sized results. Many of our leaders have been in their positions for many years, how might we move forward as they move on from these roles? Would you be willing to help lead us forward? Do you have ideas for an event or gathering that would help us all connect? What ideas do you bring to the table?

I think dreaming together is one of the most powerful things we do. When we dream and look ahead with hope, trusting that God is with us and for us, nothing is impossible.

Happy Spring, my friends.

Pastor Devon



Our study for May 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. The book is available from many online sellers, if you need help finding one, let us know.

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 Mother's Day
to all the selfless women
who inspire, motivate and
remind us to be a better
person every single day.

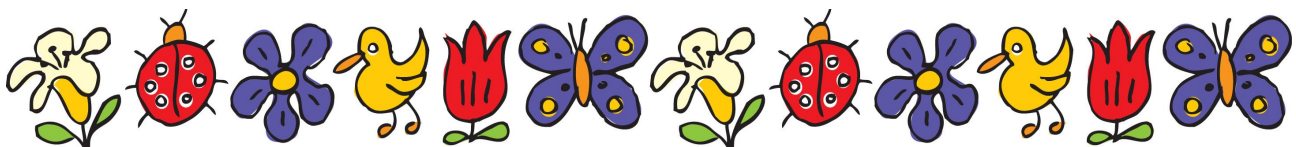
Happy Mother's Day!

Mother's Day is not always a happy time for those who have chosen not to have children, those that are estranged from children, those whose children have passed away. Know that you are in the prayers of all of us on this day. Our wishes extend to all women who act in a "motherly" role for each and every one of us. Thank you for all you do!



Pub Theology
7:00 pm @ Crankers
Tuesday, May 20

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



Moderator Message for May



This is a special message for all members and friends of the United Church of Christ in Big Rapids. Please read carefully, because it discusses the importance of our church to our members and friends, as well as Big Rapids and the surrounding communities. YOUR CHURCH NEEDS YOUR FINANCIAL AND SPIRITUAL SUPPORT TO FULLY IMPLEMENT ITS MISSION.

The United Church of Christ in Big Rapids (UCBR), is a beacon of hope and service in the community. Supporting this church is crucial not only for the congregation, but also for the broader community that benefits from its mission work and spiritual guidance.

UCBR is dedicated to addressing the needs of the local community. Through various outreach programs, the church provides food, clothing, and other essential resources to those in need. This support is vital for individuals and families facing economic challenges, ensuring they have access to the necessities that sustain daily life.

The church also offers education and social programs that enrich the lives of community members. These programs include adult education classes and social gatherings that promote fellowship and mutual support. By participating in these initiatives, community members can develop new skills, build relationships, and find a sense of belonging.

Our church is known for its inclusive and welcoming worship services. These gatherings provide a space for individuals to connect with their faith, experience spiritual growth, and engage in meaningful reflection. The church's commitment to inclusivity ensures that everyone, regardless of background, feels welcome and valued.

UCBR is actively involved in promoting social justice. The church advocates for equitable treatment of all individuals, working to dismantle systemic injustices, and support marginalized communities. By engaging in advocacy and action, the church plays a critical role in fostering a more just and compassionate society.

Support the United Church of Big Rapids is essential for the continued success of its mission work and the spiritual nourishment of its congregation. The church's efforts to meet local needs, provide pastoral care, promote social justice, make a significant impact on both the community and the individuals it serves. By offering support, you help ensure that these vital programs and services continue to thrive, bringing hope, growth, and positive change to Big Rapids and beyond.

- Marshall Henry, Moderator





Easter Flower Dedications

John & Carlene Gahrs, in memory of our parents and daughter, Julie.

Jim & Carolyn Chipman, in memory of our parents, James & Ruth Chipman and Robert & Elinor Griffith.

Diane Fleming

Susan H. Grant, in memory of A. Donald Grant and in honor of my United Church family.

Bill & Nancy Peters, in memory of our family.

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

Chuck & Kay Achterhof, in memory of Shawn Achterhof.

Mary Olshewski

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

Jerena Keys & Kathleen Keys

Barb Johnson, in memory of Newell Johnson, and in honor of Julie, Trenton, Cindee & Steve.

Don Olree, in memory of Joan Olree.

Paul Challender, in memory of Mother.

Kurt & Maureen Somsel,, in honor of our four children: Kayla, Luke, Jack, and Nick.

Jim and Alice Bandstra, in memory of our friend, Betty Stolarek.



Our annual summer **“Worship in the Park”** has been scheduled for **July 13** at Northend Riverside Park. This is always a highlight of our summer! Details are still being worked on and will be shared closer to the date of worship.



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 where volunteers are needed are May 7-9. A sign-up sheet will be available in late April – early May.

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.



MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, an annual observance established by Mental Health America in 1949 to emphasize the importance of mental wellbeing. Each May, additional attention is brought to the challenges faced by those with mental health conditions and the need for a supportive, understanding environment. Across the country, people unite to raise awareness, spark conversations and advocate for improved resources.

Despite recent strides in how our society approaches mental wellbeing, many Americans still don't have access to the high-quality, comprehensive treatment and care they need. Just take a look at some of the staggering data about mental health in the United States:

- [1 in 5](#) U.S. adults experience mental illness each year.
- Only [47.2%](#) of U.S. adults with mental illness received treatment in 2021.
- [1 in 6](#) U.S. youth have a mental health condition, but only half receive treatment.
- [50%](#) of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24.

And locally the New Journey Clubhouse, 405B South Third Ave., Big Rapids, is a place where people who qualify can become part of a community intentionally organized to support individuals living with the effects of mental illness. It's a place where opportunities are given to rejoin the worlds of friendships, family, work, education and to access the service and supports someone may need during hard times.

"Recovery is not a cure; it's the life you want to live," Sue Stewart, clubhouse director for New Journey Clubhouse, said. "A lot of people don't get help because they're isolated."



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.

Baking mixes – cookies, muffins, cake - was identified as the “food of the month” for April. Project Starburst is thankful for all of the donations received and know that their clients will enjoy having “goodies” for the Easter and May celebrations.

And the “Give to the Pantry” program has identified canned vegetables as the “food of the month” for May. Canned vegetables of any type can add some additional nutritional value to any meal. 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/>



ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY



ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY

Many thanks to the dedicated volunteers who participated in our very successful highway pickup: Amy Buse, Paul Challender, Maryanne Heidemann, June Liu, Katie McInnis, Rob McInnis, Donald Olee, Don Stephen, Judy Tressler, and Juliet Zhou. I am so fortunate to work with such an enthusiastic group of faithful Christians committed to improving our corner of God's World. God has truly blessed the UCBR community by bringing us together.

With Gratitude - Susan H. Grant



Did you know that in April there were:

- 5 Worship Services
- 8 Church meetings
- 13 Family Support Service Supervised Visits
- 10 Outside Choir rehearsals (Voca Lyrica, Comfort Choir, and Treblemakers)
- 5 TOPS meetings
- 3 Book Study meetings
- 17 Scout meetings
- 3 Play practices

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 27 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 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!!

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"



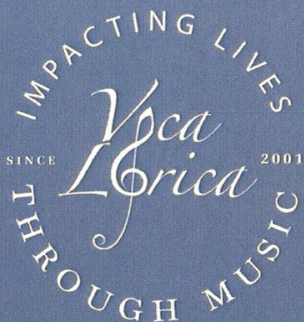
save the date

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



COMFORT CHOIR

supported by Voca Lyrica

We are a community outreach initiative offering the healing power of singing to those who are chronically ill, socially isolated, or actively dying.

Our Mission:

To provide a space of peace and love through song.

We use a cappella (unaccompanied) singing to bring comfort, human connection and deep peace.

We are non-denominational with a repertoire including:

- Christian hymns
- Traditional Jewish music
- Buddhist words set to music
- Secular songs

We are available to sing at:

- Private homes
- Long Term Care Facilities
- Hospitals
- Senior Living Centers
- Churches
- Memorial Services

A typical visit would comprise about 20 minutes of singing.

Our services are completely free of charge.

OUR INFORMATION:

Please contact:

Helen Brandt, director

Text or phone: (978) 729-1331

Email: hsbhospice2348@gmail.com

The beauty of healing through music

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
5/6	Aaron Rewa	5/1	Dave & Jo Anne Ellis	60
5/7	Jo Anne Ellis	5/10	Fred & Diane Guenther	50
5/13	Don Mullens	5/14	Bill & Nancy Burmeister	59
5/15	Jane Grzybowski	5/29	Roger & Megan Vajda	36

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 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 May

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>
5/4	Kathleen Keys Singh			Mike Rinehart	Maxine McKay, Bill Peters, Nancy Peters
5/11	Kari Clark				Paul Challender, Don Stephen, Don Olree
5/18	Susan H. Grant	Dee Van Horn & Bruce Fredrick			Maxine McKay, Don Stephen, Jane Grzybowski
5/25	Dee Van Horn	Wayne & Maxine McKay			Jane Grzybowski, Paul Challender, Maryanne Heidemann

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.