

THE FIRST WORD



212 S. PARK STREET, KALAMAZOO, MI 49007 // (269) 381-6340 // WWW.UMC-KZO.ORG

JOIN US FOR WORSHIP IN PERSON OR ONLINE ON SUNDAYS AT 10AM.



Photo by Keith Mumma

Our Call to Ministry

To serve one another

To see one another in the spirit of reconciliation as we rebuke racial and social divisions

To be the love of Christ infused with compassion and justice

To be a safe place for one another as we listen, learn and strive to be a faith community that is diverse and welcoming

Late in January, I asked worship participants to contemplate these questions: People of Kalamazoo First United Methodist Church what is our calling? As the embodiment of God's kingdom what is our movement with light and love that follows the hope and promise of Jesus? How do we name this and claim this and then live into it as we sing a new song that carries us out of the times of darkness and danger that we have lived through and into the dawn of God's redeeming grace? I then affirmed that reclaiming our calling will bring hope into this world, will bring hope into our tattered and weary souls. Worship participants were invited to come forward and place their responses to the question "what is our calling" on the prayer quilt. Online participants were encouraged to email me, and they did.

I did not know what would become of these responses and I am still discerning this, but I wanted to listen to you all, giving me greater understanding for my leadership. As I prayerfully read all these responses, I found they could easily be designated into four piles. From these four distinct groupings, I wrote the above four statements using much of the language that was written on the slips of paper. The responses to each of the overarching themes could be used to create action steps.

Once again, I would ask for your responses. What are your thoughts on these four statements of calling? Do you believe they reveal the identity of Kalamazoo First United Methodist Church? Would you be interested in further discernment of this calling to ministry? Let me hear from you, email, call, text, or perhaps we could have a cuppa together.

-Rev. Julie Kline

Lent reflection

Rev. Matt wrote a reflection about our youth ministry and the tradition of burning ashes. Lent has started and this piece serves as a reminder of the spiritual significance of this practice and its relevance to our younger generation. Rev. Matt's reflection offers a unique perspective on how the act of burning ashes can serve as a powerful symbol of renewal and rebirth for our youth. He shares his personal experiences and insights, exploring how this tradition has evolved over time and its continued relevance today.

We encourage you to take a few moments to read this inspiring reflection by scanning the QR code below.

Thank you, Rev. Matt, for sharing your wisdom with us.



Children and Families Ministries News

Moms Retreat



We have an exciting opportunity for you to take a break and recharge. Join us at Ludington Beach House in Michigan from Friday, April 28th at 6pm through Sunday, April 30th at 12 pm for a weekend of rest, relaxation, and connection with other moms. As Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." This retreat is a chance for you to take a step back from the daily grind, connect with other moms who understand your experiences, and get some much-needed rest and refreshment. The cost of the retreat is \$175, which includes accommodations and activities. Payment is due in full by March 12th to secure your spot, and you can pay via Venmo, cash, or check to Magen Lindstrom. Don't miss out on this amazing opportunity to prioritize your self-care and recharge your batteries. We can't wait to see you there!



Fish Race

The concept of Jesus making disciples "fishers of men" is a timeless lesson that continues to inspire and educate people of all ages. Through these races, the children could visualize and understand the significance of the disciples' role in spreading the word of God to others. They could see how important it was to cast their nets wide, and to not be discouraged by any setbacks they may encounter along the way. The lessons that the children learned from the fish races will likely stay with them for years to come.

Faith Milestone with Pastor Matt

Children had an exciting opportunity to learn more about communion by making bread with Pastor Matt.

We are grateful to Pastor Matt for his effort in leading this activity and for being willing to get messy with the children in order to make this learning experience a memorable one. His dedication and willingness to engage with the children in a fun and interactive way is a testament to his commitment to their spiritual growth and development. We thank him for his leadership and look forward to more engaging activities like this in the future.



Disclaimer: its juice, not wine in the glasses



Pastor Matt making bread and teaching about communion

Organ Lenten Concerts

Make sure to keep an eye out for these dates. Our Lenten Organ Series kicked off on March 2 and will continue throughout the season of Lent. Please join us!

March 9

Marilyn Ossentjuk, Organist and Minister of Music at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Kalamazoo

March 16

Dr. Andrew Meagher, Pastoral Musician, St. Kieran's Catholic Church, Shelby Township

March 23

Dr. Thomas Fielding, Director of Music at St. Augustine Cathedral, Kalamazoo

March 30

Mi Zhou, Doctoral Student in Organ Performance at the University of Michigan and Mayumi Naramura, Graduate Student in Early Keyboard Instruments at the University of Michigan

Easter Flowers

As we prepare to celebrate Easter, we would like to extend an invitation for you to remember your loved ones by providing Easter tulips for the floral decoration on Easter Sunday or by giving a monetary gift to the church Memorial Fund.

This is an opportunity to honor and remember those who have gone before us, and to add to the beauty of our Easter celebration. Your gift of Easter tulips will help to create a welcoming and joyful atmosphere in our church as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Simply scan the QR code with your smartphone or tablet, and you will be directed to our donation form



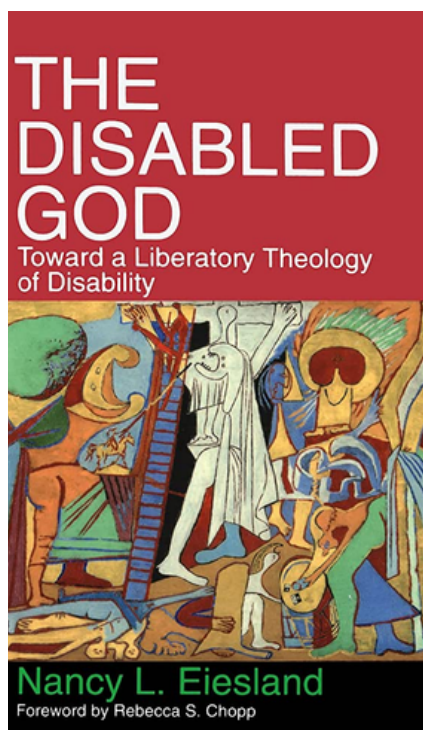
RECONCILING MINISTRY TEAM (RMT)

As an organization FUMC is committed to promoting inclusion and justice for all individuals, particularly within the Christian church, we believe that literature can be a powerful tool for sparking conversation and reflection. We started in January and each month, we will be reviewing a book that explore issues of diversity, inclusion, and justice in the church and broader society.

This month Barbara Toshalis reflects on the need for churches and communities to embrace inclusion as a core value, particularly for those with disabilities. Drawing on her own experiences and the insights of Nancy L. Eiesland's book, *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*, Toshalis argues that a shift towards inclusivity is necessary to fully live out the values of love and acceptance in our communities.

"I am thankful for reading *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* by Nancy L. Eiesland. Because in our congregation and in our broader community we, as beloved children, reside with varying abilities and disabilities. Some of us actively welcome anyone who comes through our doors, not all of us can approach a lectern to speak, nor could each of us sing in the choir, both of which require an ability to go up and down stairs, to read, and speak. We have, however, installed elevators, for which I am thankful.

Since our national culture "devalues and discriminates against people with disabilities," are we, in effect also doing so? Historically the Christian church has restricted ordination and approached those with disabilities with "pity and paternalism," even blame. This book calls us not to acts of charity but instead to inclusion. "Persons with disabilities constitute a minority group, shaped primarily by exclusion," whether their challenges are physical, social, intellectual or emotional." Who among us are not challenged now, previously, or in the future with a disability or the loss of an ability?



As we welcome people and families regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, or class, let us open our hearts and minds to those with various abilities! Inherently, we may need to love and welcome our own breathing bodies regardless of the cultural obsession with perfection and beauty. Since we are beloved children, are we not also beautiful in God's eyes?"

To expand your knowledge, wisdom, compassion, and action, I highly recommend your finding this book in our library or a local bookstore.

Manna Bible study group

Intentional spaces for reflection on the intersection of mental health and faith are scarce. Opportunities to explore sin and its personal implications are few and far between.

However, week one of Michelle King's Bible study provided just that for our young adult group, Manna. Over six weeks, we will delve into the complex relationship between mental health and ministry. It's a privilege to share this sacred space with like-minded individuals and wrestle with challenging questions.

Through this process, we are confident that we will grow both individually and as a group in our faith. Join us on Tuesdays from 6:30-8pm in the youth lounge of KFirst for a transformative experience.

Our Sympathy and Prayers to the Family and Friends of:

Keene P. Wolfe who passed away January 20th

Janet Bhuyan who passed away February 23

Reverend Wayne Gail Reece who passed away February 12

Please keep these friends in your prayers:

Lana Allen & family
The Bhuyan family
Don and Harriet Chalker
Christine
Destiney & Jasmine
Miriam Downey
Ashton Fredenburg
The Hastings family
Lenora Holliday
Nancy Hyde
Bill and Ruth LaMachia
Judy McClelland
Durrell & Marsha McKenzie
Susan Noble
Anna Rassmussen
Mary Lou Sanderson
Barb Skuza
Nelson & Mary Stapleton
Tom and Marcia Stobie
Jim Treece
The Uggen family
Lori Valkema
Nina Victor
The Walker family
Liza and the Wolfe Family
Janet Wyndendorf

Prayer requests

If you would like to share a prayer request with our clergy and prayer ministry team, please visit www.umc-kzo.org/contact-us/prayer-request/, or, please call the church at (269) 381-6340 and leave a message. Prayer requests need to be received each **THURSDAY by noon** for inclusion in our weekly list for the prayer ministry team.

After Worship Coffee Service Volunteers

Sunday coffee service has resumed at Kalamazoo FUMC. Join us after worship in the Perks area on the first level of the church. We look forward to once again sharing coffee and fellowship with you! If you have questions or would like to assist, please contact Ruth LaMachia at rlamachia@umc-kzo.org.

Youth group

All Youth are invited to attend youth group every Sunday evening from 6-7:30pm in the Youth Lounge. (There are occasional time and location adjustments). If you wish to receive more information or be included on the weekly email communications contact Pastor Matt Weiler at mweiler@umc-kzo.org

March 12 and 19: Sabbath as Resistance: During the season of Lent youth are exploring practices of contemplation, prayer, and play to learn about rest and the Spiritual practice of Sabbath. Practices vary from deeply contemplative to all out silly. Each week youth break into age related small groups for discussion. Snacks always provided.

March 26 (no youth group - Spring Break)

April 2nd: it's the end of Spring Break and we're entering Holy Week. So what better way to prepare for Easter than a giant Easter Egg Hunt and a bonfire! *Time and Location change for this night only. We'll be meeting at the Newman's home from 6-8pm.

The FUMC Dream Keepers

Have you heard about the Dream Keepers at FUMC? As indicated last year, our capital campaign for affordable housing, the Dream Fund, has been completed. Your contributions continue to impact lives every day. Families and individuals are now living in affordable housing provided by the Dream Fund. Other families are able to transition out of the YWCA Domestic Abuse Shelter to a safe transitional home, neighborhoods continue to be improved and critical home repairs are being made thanks to your generosity.

At the final team meeting of the capital fund drive, the Dream Team unanimously decided they would like to continue to build on the strong relationships that were built with our housing partners. The intent is to keep the spirit of and connections made during the campaign alive and active, hence the name Dream Keepers.

You might ask how the Dream Keepers plan to move forward with this goal. While the team will no longer meet monthly, it has and will remain in active contact with our partners to provide encouragement and distribute the funds you continued to contribute during the final months of 2022. The team has also begun to develop a list of educational and volunteer opportunities in which to engage the congregation. These volunteer opportunities could be as simple as spending time helping to establish a native plant garden at one or more houses or planting flowers at neighborhood intersections. There will be other long-term projects such as providing administrative support for one of our partners, or establishing and helping to maintain community gardens, or engaging as a member of a work team that assists in a neighborhood community project. As these needs arise, watch for opportunities in our church communications to participate in making our community better! Also, very important to each of our partners will be introducing others to the work and assistance our partners provide in meeting the needs of our neighbors.

Our housing partners are: Building Blocks, Community Homeworks, Kalamazoo Collective Housing, Kalamazoo Valley Habitat for Humanity and the YWCA. If you would like additional information, or if you have any questions, please feel free to contact any member of the Dream Keepers.

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| • Julie Kline | • Donna Dunyak | • Donna Oudersluys | • Sally Stevens |
| • Linda Lueth | • Pat Elzerman | • Judy Ross | • Mark Oudersluys |
| • Keith Mumma | • Nancy Hilliard | • Christina Stamper | |

Can You Lend an Ear to Helping Our Neighbors?

Ears wanted! Our Helping Our Neighbors ministry (HON) is in need of volunteers to help those who need assistance with utilities or avoiding eviction. Since the pandemic, this ministry has been operating by phone, answering calls daily. If you have a compassionate heart and are comfortable talking on the phone and using email, you can be a HON volunteer!

HON is hoping to staff this rewarding and much needed ministry with enough volunteers for each day of the week to be shared by two volunteers. Will you lend your ear? For information, contact Ann at rasweany@charter.net, or Ruth at rlamachia@umc-kzo.org.

JAZZ CONCERT: featuring The Baylor Project from Baylor University

You're invited to join us at First United Methodist Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan on Sunday, March 19, 2023 at 3:00 p.m. in the sanctuary for a special event. Come and be a part of this special gathering and make new memories with us. See you there!



The First Word for April

Articles for the next issue are due no later than **April 6, 2023**. The next newsletter will be mailed the week of **April 12**. Articles submitted to the newsletter should be sent to jcelorio@umc-kzo.org. Articles may be edited for space and content.



Our organist Bernie Foulk Sunday March 5th.



Rev. Matt Weiler Sunday March 5th.