

Welcome to the
December 2024 Newsletter
of
The United Church of Big Rapids



120 S. State St.
Big Rapids, MI 49307
(231) 796-7124
(231) 527-9567

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

The United Church

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

(231) 796-7124 or (231) 527-9567 secretary@unitedchurchbr.org



From
*Pastor
Devon*

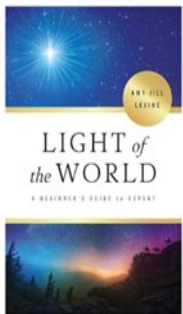
Here we are...how did we get to Advent already? Although it happens every year, it always feels like a bit of a surprise to me. I'm not sure I'm ready, are you? I guess that is really the whole point when you get right down to it. Prophets foretold of the coming of a Savior, John the Baptist challenged to repent and "Prepare the way," Mary pondered, Joseph questioned, and angels appeared with important messages. All of this happened right in the middle of the chaos of normal life, people trying their best to thrive and survive. Here we are, living amid a reality that challenges us to buy more, do more, and give more while society seems to lean into deeper divide and compassion is in short supply. It all feels a little messy...and yet, we are challenged by Advent to remain people of hope. For what do you hope this Advent season?

I especially hope you will join our community this season as we come just as we are, bringing our joys and fears, our excitement and worry, and all that makes us a real community that truly seeks to shine love into this world. It's a great time to invite people to join us and I truly look forward to making this journey to the manger with all of you!

Be blessed, friends.

Pastor Devon

Dates to Remember



Light of the World

Tuesdays during Advent

December 3, 10, 17

7:00 pm in the Parlor

Pub Theology

7pm @ Crankers

Thursday, December 5



Please note:

The Governing Board has decided that there will be no worship service on December 29

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.



December 2024 - Moderator's Message



Greetings to all members, staff, and friends of the United Church of Big Rapids.

I would like to extend this holiday greeting to everyone who is a part of the United Church of Big Rapids. Our church is so important to many individuals who reside in the surrounding community in and around Mecosta County. Our church and its members have strived to support many causes throughout the years that help individuals become better Christians and individuals. On behalf of the United Church, I want to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas, with your family and friends.

Christmas - A Reflection on Giving and Receiving

Christmas is a special time of the year for many around the world. Most of us have those special memories as children waking up to presents from Santa Clause on Christmas Day under the tree. We are all certainly shaped by our experiences of Christmas that we carry with us as adults in how we celebrate the holiday today. Our spiritual lives also play a major role as followers of Christ and tell us why we celebrate Christmas as well.

Let's start with the joy of receiving gifts this time of the year. Everybody loves to receive an awesome gift this time of the year. The gift represents a thought of love and how much someone means to you. Most people make lists and rank those things they dream of receiving this Christmas. There is nothing wrong with wanting nice things for Christmas, but a proper balance and perspective helps make the receiving that much sweeter.

As much fun as it is to open presents, there is nothing more joyous than to be a blessing to someone else at Christmas. There is something about giving, no matter what time of the year, that brings inner joy. Christmas provides that special opportunity to be a blessing through online church giving. By giving to others (loved ones and even those you don't know in need), we model what God did for each of us that very first Christmas in Bethlehem.

Christmas is about Christ! The center of all that we do this holiday season should go all the way back to the manger and the birth of a baby boy. There will be no gift that we can ever give or receive that will touch what God gave to all of humanity. May we model that this season through the blessing of giving to others and by receiving presents from those that we love and care for.

God bless all of you and your families! Merry Christmas!

Marshall Henry, Moderator



The Annual Congregational Meeting will be held after worship on Sunday, December 1st. Members are asked to participate! The meeting will be short and does need a quorum of members to attend.

Thank you!!

Advent begins on December 1!!



*Join us for
Candlelight Worship on
Christmas Eve at 7:00 pm!*

Advent devotional booklets are available on the table in the narthex.



The Spiritual Life Commission will be decorating the church for the Advent season on Saturday, December 7 beginning at 9:00 am. Help is needed for many areas. Someone comfortable to climb a ladder would be helpful.



It's That Time Again!!

I will be updating the church directory for distribution in January. If you have updates to cell phone numbers, email, or addresses, please let me know via email before December 20, 2024. If you would prefer that your information NOT be published in the directory, please contact the office. Our directory is available in print from the church or via PDF electronically upon request. The information is NOT shared with any other persons or organizations other than those attending the United Church.



**Merry Christmas
&
Happy New Year!**



Stewardship Campaign

Thank you to those that pledged during the stewardship campaign! Your stated gift helps our financial team plan better for the coming year's budget. If you have made your pledge, thank you! If you still need to make a pledge - cards and envelopes are on the table in the narthex and can still be put in the offering plate on Sunday or sent the church office.



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!!

Bringing Joy to Others

We are coming up on that time of year where we are all looking for opportunities to share Christmas joy with others in our community. Due to staff changes at Project Starburst, we are not able to conduct the Red Tag project this year, but we do have an alternative!

We have a new partnership for 2024 - Mission Point Residents

We want to make sure that every resident at Mission Point receives some of that Christmas joy. Church members are asked to shop for small gifts that can be distributed to the residents at Mission Point. Our goal is 70 individual gifts - 35 for men and 35 for women. Tags are provided in the Narthex with a sign-up sheet to indicate which tags are taken. Only one gift is needed per tag. A list of suggested items is also provided to assist shoppers. Gifts will need to be returned by Sunday, December 15, wrapped with the tag attached. Due to the number of gifts needed, we are hoping that church members will take 2 or more tags each.



Suggested items: For men - hats, gloves, wallets, cologne/lotion, electric razors, flannels. For women - hats, gloves, nice scarves, perfume/lotion, jewelry (earrings, bracelets), flannels.

Toys for Tots



The Toys for Tots box is also available in the Narthex for those who feel the need to shop for and donate a toy. Other opportunities for giving exist throughout the community including the Salvation Army "Angel Tree" project.

Project Starburst – Keeping the Pantry Filled!

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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.

October was instant rice packets month. The church members were so generous with donations of single serve rice pouches/boxes, peanut butter, jelly, cereal, soup, pasta noodles, and canned vegetables.

Stuffing mixes are being collected for November. An update will be provided next month but the bin is filling and the generosity continues!



And the “Give to the Pantry” program has identified sweet potato / potato mixes as the “food of the month” for December. Potatoes makes a nice addition to any meal and wonderful to include with every order. So as demand increases, so does the need.

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.



Christmas Joy and Christmas Fund Special Offerings

On December 24, we will collect the Christmas Joy (PC-USA) and Christmas Fund (UCC) special offerings. Through these offerings we celebrate God’s perfect gift to us with generous support of the leaders among us - past, present, and future - who point us to God. 50% of your gifts to the Christmas Joy offering make it possible for students to learn and grow in faith at Presbyterian-related schools and colleges equipping communities of color. The other 50 % of your gifts provide assistance for current and retired church workers and their families with critical financial needs.



Watch our Facebook page and the weekly bulletin to see more information about these special offerings.



From the Mission Commission

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/>



From the Governing Board

We are sure you notice that each Sunday a member of the Governing Board serves as "Elder in Charge" for the service. As much as each of them enjoys this activity, there are months when it has been difficult to fill all of the slots due to vacations and other personal events. So the Board members are happy to announce that they welcome members of the congregation to share this duty with them. Now named "Member in Charge," all members of the congregation are encouraged to share this responsibility. If you are interested in participating, please contact Moderator, Marshall Henry.



And, as a reminder, the Governing Board meets once a month on the 3rd Thursday of the month at 6:45 pm in the Parlor. The meetings are open to any member of the congregation who would like to attend.



The church office will be closed on Thursday, December 26th as part of the Christmas holiday.



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
12/2	Nora Dumond Rewa	12/9	Jonathon & Maryrose Robison	7
12/9	Alexander Derwin	12/13	Michael & Linda Rinehart	16
12/19	Donna Dunstone	12/19	Wayne & Maxine McKay	54
12/24	Murray Sayre	12/23	Paul & Maryanne Heidemann	56
12/26	Kayla Somsel	12/28	Jim & Alice Bandstra	57
12/29	Andrea Renas	12/29	Bill & Ginny Kerwin	35



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!



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 December

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, Jaylah Lewis, 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>
12/1	Kathleen Keys Singh	Elizabeth Morningstar		Mike Rinehart	Elizabeth Morningstar, Don Stephen, Paul Challenger
12/8	Susan H. Grant			Mike Rinehart	Barb Johnson, Paul Challenger, Don Olree
12/15	Kari Clark	Mike & Linda Rinehart	Devon Herrell Laura Herron	Mike Rinehart	Jane Grzybowski, Alice Dean, Paul Challenger
12/22	Diane Fleming	Pat Heeter			Jane Grzybowski, Melanie Henry, Marshall Henry
12/24				Mike Rinehart	Melanie Henry, Marshall Henry, Don Stephen
12/29	There will be no worship service on Sunday, 12/29				

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. Please reach out!!



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.