

Welcome to the
February 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**

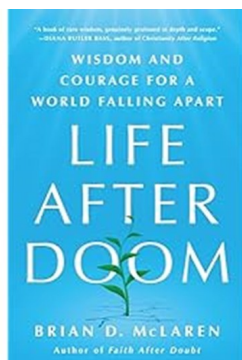
In Romans 8, right before the part that proclaims, "nothing can separate us from the love of God," Paul mentions something that has always intrigued me a bit. He is talking about the power of the Spirit that dwells within us and how all of creation is in the process of

being re-created or redeemed. He explains it to his audience using the metaphor of giving birth, that the experience of birth pains will lead to something new, and good. This metaphor makes sense to me in light of the climate of our culture in this moment. Persons of certain socioeconomic statuses, races, genders, sexual orientations, and more inclusive Christian beliefs may be watching and listening to the news and pondering how this can possibly be the best way to move our nation forward. Other persons are thrilled with all of it, happy to get back to what they believe to be the *correct* priorities and values for our nation. It can all feel a little overwhelming and even lead to what feels like spiritual despair.

The part of the passage that often speaks to my heart follows this explanation of new birth, recognizing that there are moments in our lives when our circumstances leave us without words, even lost in a pathway to conversation with our Creator. Paul explains that it is in these moments that the "Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit." There is something really beautiful about the idea that even in the midst of our confusion, frustration, grief, despair and all the other hard spiritual/emotional places in which we find ourselves, the Spirit of God remains connected to the Spirit within us, and the conversation continues. I tell you often, you are known, and you are loved. I believe that and I hope you know it!

We have a busy month before us. My prayer for us is that we do not lose sight of the work of the Holy, in us and around us. In times of chaos, may we be the bearers of peace, light, and love. I am grateful to be a part of this journey with you, for the many ways this community of faith bears witness to the radical, all-embracing love of God. I trust that together we will courageously continue embracing our call to be a faith-community that lives what it believes. Let's be intentional to care for, encourage, and strengthen one another.

Pastor Devon



New Book Study!

Life After Doom, by
Brian D. McLaren

More information on
page 4 of the newsletter.



Pub Theology

7:00 pm @ Crankers
Tuesday, February
18th.

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.



February 2025 - Moderator's Message



As our congregation moves into another new year there are many activities that our members should be aware of that will make this year an exciting year. This year, we have several exciting projects and initiatives that are set to enhance our church's spiritual and physical environment.

The first is the 2025 annual pledge campaign. The campaign ensures the continued support of our church's mission and activities. Through generous pledges we can fund essential programs, outreach efforts, and maintain our beautiful sanctuary. I want to encourage ALL MEMBERS and FRIENDS to participate in this crucial campaign, as every contribution no matter the size, helps sustain our church. Important Note: at the current time our pledges are below expectations. Please help the best you can!

One of the exciting projects this year is the painting of both the interior and exterior of our sanctuary. This renovation will not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of our church but also preserve the structural integrity of our great church. This project will be a wonderful opportunity to revitalize the area where we gather for worship.

Our church's success relies heavily on the active participation of our members. We need volunteers to serve on the various commissions and the Governing Board. These roles are important in guiding our church's direction, planning events, and allowing the church to run smoothly. We also need volunteers to do coffee hour after our service, provide flowers, and help with communion.

Our church plays an essential role in the local community. Our members' generosity, through the donation of both time and money, has enabled us to offer support and services to those in our community in need. As we look forward to the coming year, let us celebrate the many things happening at our church where we can contribute and make a difference.

TOGETHER , WE CAN CONTINUE TO BUILD A STRONG, AND COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY AT OUR UNITED CHURCH IN 2025.

Moderator – Marshall Henry



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!!

Sending Thoughts, Prayers and Revenge Fantasies

by Lillian Daniel, Michigan Conference Minister



Photo: Associated Press, Ethan Swope, 2025

Photo: Associated Press. Ethan Swope 2025

I've been praying for California in the aftermath of the fires, all while wanting to do so much more than pray. So I watch the news in order to understand the science more, in the hope that some nugget of knowledge will prevent this disaster from happening again, or at least give me someone to blame it on, as if some final judgement from me in Michigan will bring care and closure to California. If you've ever tried this particular self-soothing tactic, you know that it makes nothing better.

So now I'm going to start preaching to myself by saying that I hope you can also experience the comfort of knowing that in the United Church of Christ covenant, by sharing your church budget through the Michigan Conference to Basic Support, your dollars are already there on the other side of the country, meeting practical needs and showing Christ's love, through the national church that holds those gifts and is ready to share those gifts on the ground when needed.

As a Conference Minister in Michigan, I am in touch with my Conference Minister colleagues around the country about what they need when disaster strikes, and what they do not need. What they do not need are a million requests from a million missions committees via email inquiring about how to donate to a very specific thing someone saw in the news, with a long list of questions and caveats about how exactly the funds will and will not be spent, with so many strings attached they feel like tug ropes to the little boat that's already sinking.

What my Conference Minister colleagues do need and truly appreciate are the covenantal gifts that come through your local church's Basic Support, from funds carefully set aside by our national setting for these times of need, released through Church World Service when and where disaster hits, but also reserved for the long haul of recovery. Your gifts are already there.

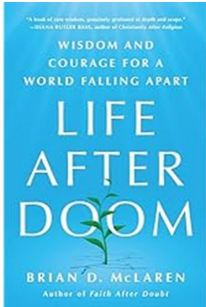
And yet, there are also those times when God may use a particular disaster to crack open your God-constructed compassionate heart in a moment that inspires more generosity than you knew you had. I get it and I feel it. So if you, like me, are tired of talking back to the talking heads on TV as they second guess the first responders and pander to the pundits, click [here to donate](#) to "California Wildfire Response and Recovery," as together we live out the wideness of God's mercy.

Generosity in all forms beats hollering at the news on all channels.

Trust me, I've tried them both.

New Book Study beginning on February 16

A new book has been chosen for our next Book Study - *Life After Doom*, by Brian D. McLaren. The book is available on Amazon. The first meeting on the new book will be Sunday, February 16, after worship.



"Blending insights from philosophers, poets, scientists, and theologians, Life After Doom explores the complexity of hope, the necessity of grief, and the need for new ways of thinking, becoming, and belonging in turbulent times. If you want to help yourself, your family, and the communities to which you belong to find courage and resilience for the deeply challenging times that are upon us — this is the book you need right now."

FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS 2025

The United Church is hosting two organ concerts as part of the Festival of the Arts. Hae Won Jang, organ instructor at Michigan State University, is performing on our lovely instrument on Tuesday, February 4, at 7 pm. Noah Mallett, who grew up in Big Rapids and is a graduate student at Michigan State University, will perform on Tuesday, February 11, at 7 pm. Please come and support our church and the Festival of the Arts! Both concerts promise to be interesting and rewarding.

This year, as in past years, the church will also host weekly knitting workshops hosted by Knitters Anonymous on Tuesdays from 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm in the Church Parlor.

We are aware that there are many wonderful activities happening all throughout the month and that some may conflict with other church activities. Please, take advantage of what Festival of the Arts has to offer! For more information on Festival of the Arts activities, there are event catalogs in the narthex and available online at www.brfota.org or on their Facebook page, Big Rapids Festival of the Arts.



LOVE

Love is *patient*,
love is *kind*.
It does not *envy*,
it does not *boast*,
it is not *proud*.

1 Corinthians 13:4

Happy
Valentine's
Day!

AAUW
Big Rapids (MI) Branch
BOOK SALE

April 11, 9am-5pm
April 12, 9am-2pm

**First United
Methodist Church**
304 Elm Street

Donation bin locations for gently used books,
CDs, & DVDs (no encyclopedias or textbooks):

- Artworks
- First United Methodist Church
- The United Church of Big Rapids
- Immanuel Lutheran Church
- Antlers Fireside Grill
- Conley's Bakery
- CL Pizza Co.
- Canadian Lakes Pharmacy
- Coldwell Banker Lakes Realty
- Mecosta County Commission on Aging and Activity Center

Proceeds fund scholarships for Ferris students.
For more information, call 614-282-4396.

**AAUW-Big Rapids Accepting Donations for
Annual Used Book Sale**

The Big Rapids branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) is collecting gently used books, CDs, and DVDs for its annual book sale. Donation bins are located at Artworks, Immanuel Lutheran Church, First United Methodist Church, the United Church of Big Rapids, Conley's Bakery, Canadian Lakes Pharmacy, Antlers Fireside Grill, Coldwell Banker Lakes Realty, CL Pizza Co., and the Mecosta County Commission on Aging and Activity Center. Please, no textbooks or encyclopedias. The sale will be held Friday, April 11 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Saturday, April 12 from 9:00 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 304 Elm Street, Big Rapids. Proceeds fund scholarships for nontraditional Ferris students. For more information, call 614-282-4396.

FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

The observation of Black History Month dates back to 1915, when Carter G. Woodson, now known as the 'Father of Black History,' created an organization called the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. In 1926, Woodson initiated the first Negro History Week in February. Woodson chose February specifically because it covered the birthdays of Frederick Douglass (February 14) and Abraham Lincoln (February 12).

The 2025 Black History Month theme, African Americans, and Labor, focuses on the various and profound ways that work and working of all kinds – free and unfree, skilled, and unskilled, vocational and voluntary – intersect with the collective experiences of Black people. Indeed, work is at the very center of much of Black history and culture. Be it the traditional agricultural labor of enslaved Africans that fed Low Country colonies, debates among Black educators on the importance of vocational training, self-help strategies and entrepreneurship in Black communities, or organized labor's role in fighting both economic and social injustice, Black people's work has been transformational throughout the U.S., Africa, and the Diaspora.

2025 marks the 100-year anniversary of the creation of Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids by labor organizer and civil rights activist A. Philip Randolph, which was the first Black union to receive a charter in the American Federation of Labor. Martin Luther King, Jr incorporated issues outlined by Randolph's March on Washington Movement such as economic justice into the Poor People's Campaign, which he established in 1967. For King, it was a priority for Black people to be considered full citizens.



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 January. Cereal is something both young and old can use to help meet their daily needs. 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 **soup** as the “food of the month” for February. Soup is a wonderful addition to a family for a warm meal during the winter months. Soup is always added as a “staple” for families of all sizes and ages.



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/>



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
2/4	Amy Buse	2/6	Don & Judy Mullens	60
2/5	Ginny Kerwin			
2/5	Maxine Sayre			
2/8	Kerri Rouech			
2/16	Barb Johnson			
2/17	Bill Peters			



FEBRUARY 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 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 February

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>
2/2	Diane Fleming			Mike Rinehart	Paul Challender, Don Stephen, Julie Kysela
2/9	Kari Clark			Trish McHugh	Maxine McKay, Paul Challender
2/16	Kathleen Keys Singh	Julie Cole		Mike Rinehart	Jane Grzybowski, Don Olree
2/23	Susan H. Grant			Randy Vance	Maxine McKay, Jane Grzybowski, Julie Kysela

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!

Are You Interested in Joining our Church Family?

Pastor Devon is working on a New Member Class. If you are interested in attending, please contact Julie in the church office to be added to the list. More details will be forthcoming.





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.