

# Still Speaking

First Congregational  
United Church of Christ  
Charlotte, Michigan

December 2023  
Volume 1  
Issue 12

Never place a  
period where God  
has placed a comma

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## Leaders and Staff of the Church

<b>Council President</b> 3rd Thursday, 6:30 pm	Matt Slot	MattSlot@gmail.com
<b>Vice President</b>	Mary Kohmuench	MTheoharis@gmail.com
<b>Buildings and Grounds</b>	David Frost	Black_ice@att.net
<b>Business Team</b>	Bill Oatman	Oatman701@att.net
<b>Care Community</b>	Pam Rinckey	rinckey1@hotmail.com
<b>Church Clerk</b>	Barbara Anderson	BarbaraF5543@icloud.com
<b>Congregation At-Large Representative</b>	Amy Frost	FrostAmy58@gmail.com
<b>Endowment Team</b>	Mike Fulton	mjfulton@sbcglobal.net
<b>Education Team</b>	Judy Johnson	Johnsoj@ameritech.net
<b>Financial Secretary</b>	Don Johnson	DonJohnson106@mac.com
<b>Mission Team</b>	Mary Normand	DavidNormand@att.net
<b>Treasurer (Finance Team)</b>	Kathie Cook	crkcook@hotmail.com
<b>Worship Team</b>	Dennis Cates	DWCates55@yahoo.com

### Staff

<b>Minister</b>	Pastor Jody Betten	Pastor@uccCharlotte.org
<b>Director of Music</b>	Ramona Kime	Ramona.Kime@gmail.com
<b>Communications</b>	Caryn Hansen	Office@ucccharlotte.org
<b>Bookkeeper</b>	Sher Brown	Office@ucccharlotte.org
<b>Child Educator</b>	Sarah Cook	SCook@uolivet.edu
<b>Custodian</b>	Rex Todd	Office@ucccharlotte.org

***Still Speaking** is the monthly newsletter distributed to members and friends of First Congregational United Church of Christ of Charlotte. We welcome inside and outside comments, creative writing, illustrative photos/art, and articles. We appreciate feedback; please send comments to the Editor @ Editor@uccCharlotte.org*

***Editor:** Editor@ucccharlotte.org **Still Speaking** article deadline is the 25th of each month. Queries are due by the 18th.*

***About the cover:** Photographer, Caryn Hansen, captured an image of Katie Metz during the Christmas Pageant of 2022, where Katie played a memorable shepherd.*

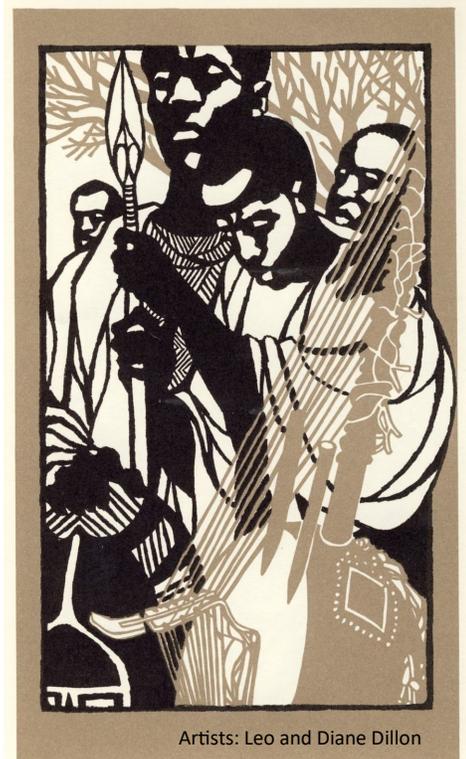


## Royalties for Spirituals??

Ramona Kime, Director of Music, Social and Environmental Justice Chair

When hymns are sung in church, royalties are paid to the owner of the intellectual property, such as to the composers or to the estates of the authors and composers. (We do this through our annual payments to CCLI—Christian Copyright Licensing International.) However, Negro Spirituals are the creative product of a people whose work was never compensated. Spirituals weren't published until after the names of their creators were long forgotten, if they were ever even known.

As an art form, Negro Spirituals are the unacknowledged intellectual property of the enslaved Africans in America. ("Negro Spirituals" is the term most used by Black Americans and historians for this body of music.) Often using biblical references to hide their meanings from slave masters and overseers, songs were used to express the suffering of enslavement, to provide solidarity and emotional support to one another, and to send coded signals about escape plans.



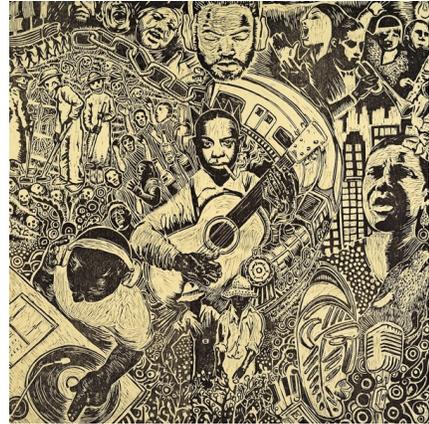
Artists: Leo and Diane Dillon

Many of these songs were eventually written down and have become the source of literally countless musical arrangements and compositions published and sold to churches, schools, community choruses, orchestras, bands, and other musical organizations. Experts estimate that there are at least 1,000, and possibly up to 6,000, Negro Spirituals in existence coming exclusively from the period of legalized slavery.

The fact that this music was never acknowledged as belonging to the enslaved Africans in America is not just a justice issue but is a legacy of slavery that requires some form of reparations. A growing nationwide movement has developed over the last several years, often by majority-White congregations, colleges, and universities, to collect reparations for these songs when they are performed. "Reparations can begin to compensate persons who have

suffered these deprivations, and to set us on a path toward right relationship. It is not charity – it is the repayment of a debt long overdue. Paying ‘royalties’ for Negro spirituals can also begin to normalize reparations as something appropriate in our larger American institutions.” (Unitarian Universalist church; Columbia, MD)

Some churches have found local Black music groups to which they pay their “royalties”, and others send their money to organizations that offer scholarships to African American youth. The UCC Musicians Association is offering to handle and then donate these royalties for any church that hasn’t found an organization to receive their payments.



Artist: Ric Kasini Kadour

Through the music budget and a mini-grant, our church will be paying back royalties for 2023 for the many times we have sung or played spirituals in our church. We will be sending our money to the Fox Music Center in Kalamazoo to provide music lessons for Black youth who otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford them. Stay tuned for ideas on how we can continue to pay these royalties as we go into the new year.

Little by little, this practice could become one instrument of restorative justice in which we all participate. May we truly work to become healers of the breach.



## Michigan Miracle

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Reverend Dr. Lillian Daniel, Michigan Conference Minister

At our first in-person Michigan Conference Annual Meeting in years, we beat our pre-pandemic registrations and literally packed the place. In what will heretofore be referred to in church history as the “Michigan Miracle,” we ended the business session ten minutes early.

Getting to preach at worship, hearing everybody sing, and eating lunch in a noisy social hall are all blessings that I do not take for granted. I’m so grateful to the Planning Team, Conference Staff, Michigan Conference UCC Board of Directors, and our hosts at Plymouth United Church of Christ, but most of all I’m grateful to God that we didn’t have to do another Annual Meeting sitting at a screen.

Of course, screens have their place when it comes to connectivity and catching up. On our website, you'll find my sermon from the Annual Meeting and the recording of our Keynote. On our YouTube channel, you can view last month's lively Leadership Lunch with Bishop Will Willimon whose take on Advent preaching was both holy and hilarious. I hope these recorded resources inspire you to register for the live ones. Our December 6 Zoom at lunch time will feature Still Speaking Daily Devotional author Quinn Caldwell. His Advent devotional book All I Really Want: Readings for a Modern Christmas made him my first choice to boost the spirits of our clergy and church members during this Advent Season.

Before we get to December, let's take a moment to acknowledge the November holiday that precedes it. Yes, I am well aware that most nations around the globe do not acknowledge the occasion. Even in our country, it is a day that is not celebrated by all people, a day with a complex history, a day that some increasingly choose to ignore and others denounce outright. But the fact is November 18 is still my birthday and I won't condemn anyone who celebrates it with a gift to the Friends of the Michigan Conference.

In all seriousness, my heart is filled with prayers of thanksgiving for you all. In a culture of crass commercialism, consumerism, colonialism, and conflict, our brave Michigan UCC churches stand up and stand out as a lighthouse to the spiritually ship-wrecked. I know of UCC pastors who are not invited to their town's clergy meetings because they have defended the local library's mission to include all authors, all readers, and to invite free speech. I know of UCC church members who are told by other so-called Christians at the grocery store that our search for salvation does not count because it is not exclusive enough, as if cruelty will be our ticket into heaven. I know of UCC youth who are shocked to discover that their loving local church nest hangs on one of the smaller branches of the ancient Christian family tree, a thin branch that cares about Trans Day of Remembrance, that takes unpopular stances long before the rest of Christianity catches up. I know it's not easy out there. I know that there are times when you feel alone. You are not alone. God is still speaking and the Spirit knits us together.

By now each Michigan Conference UCC local church should have received a personal letter, thanking you for what you have shared over the years in the Basic Support of Our Church's Wider Mission. Those Basic Support dollars are as precious and essential to us at the Michigan Conference as the donations of church members are to the local church, especially in these tough economic times.

In the United Church of Christ, we are connected, not by commandment but by covenant. We give, not because we must but because we may. I pray that the Michigan Conference provides the momentum for many more moments like our Annual Meeting when the ministry we do together reminds us that we are never alone.



## Pastor's Corner

Reverend Jody Betten, Interim Minister

### Waiting in Advent

Advent is a season of waiting. The Jewish people longed for 400 years for a prophetic voice. Sages watched the skies with interest for a new astrological event. Shepherds on hillsides kept vigil for the night to pass. For nine months, Mary and Joseph were expecting a baby. We are waiting to hear the story of the birth of the One who will bring Good News once again.

Waiting is not always easy. Waiting for grief to subside. Waiting for a diagnosis. Waiting to hear about a job offer. Waiting to turn sixteen to get your driver's license. Waiting to open Christmas presents!

Waiting is not passive. Meals must be cooked. Bills must be paid. Relationships must be nurtured. Presents must be purchased. Honing the practice of waiting is a deliberate skill.

During our Advent worship services, we are building in opportunities to practice waiting. There are moments of silence during which you are invited to listen for a word of comfort, an inspiration, or a challenge. We are waiting to Pass the Peace until the coffee hour. Take a moment as you worship to look around. Find someone you don't know and invite them to the coffee hour with you.

Finally, we're waiting quietly in our seats for the Postlude to be played. Like the Prelude, the Postlude is an element of worship. Our Music Director, Ramona, thoughtfully curates and prepares the music for that moment. As in Yoga, Shavasana (the final pose) integrates all other poses of the practice; the Postlude is a moment to integrate all other elements of worship. During the Postlude you are invited to reflect on the past hour of worship for a new insight, a deeper level of joy, a strengthening of your faith, the commitment to a new challenge, or a confirmation of God's love for you.



Waiting looks a little different for each of us.



3-year-old Todd Metz practices his Shavasana pose while waiting for the Children's Blessing.

## S E J M o m e n t

### M e n t a l H e a l t h A w a r e n e s s



“**Breaking the silence on mental illness** will lead to a deeper compassion toward those who are affected by mental illness,” said Alan Johnson, chair of the **UCC Mental Health Network**. “It can create a safe space so as to speak honestly about mental health challenges, including offering acceptance for speaking out for the family members of those who are living with those mental health challenges. Congregations can be assertive in **offering education and encouraging conversation.**”

### December Special Dates

#### Advent Sundays

**Hope**, November 26

**Peace**, December 3

**Joy**, December 10

**Love**, December 17

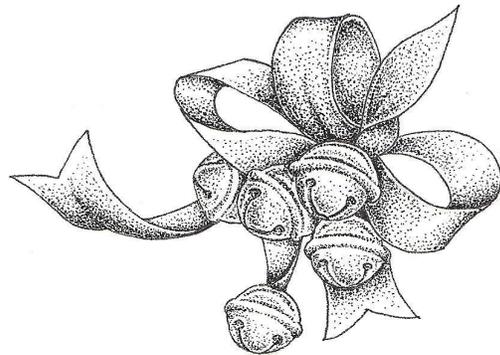
**Blue Christmas**, December 10, 3 pm

**Blanche Moyer Circle**, Monday, December 11, 1 pm

**Charlotte’s Merry Little Christmas**, Saturday, December 16. 7 pm,  
Charlotte Performing Arts Center, 378 State Street

**Christmas Pageant**, December 24, 10 am

**Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**, December 24, 8 pm





## Mission Moment

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Mary Normand, Mission Team Chairperson

What a busy time of year for all of us. We have lots going on in Missions.

**Winter Coat Project:** \$980 collected so far with \$915 spent. 45-50 new coats and several gently used. This is ongoing until the end of December. Many times there are great sales after the New Year and folks pick up coats then too.

**Health Kits for the homeless:** 64 kits each were distributed to ECFC, Housing Services, and SIREN/Eaton. These were purchased out of the Mission Boards budget.

**Christmas families:** We have adopted 3 families this year. The information is on the credenza located in the Bess Fulton Room on the Lower Level. Please check it out and help if you can.

**Giving Tree for December:** Hats, gloves, mittens. No scarfs please.

**Christmas Fund:** These monies will be collected on December 24. There will be an envelope in the bulletin. The monies help retired clergy with expenses that they may not be able to meet.

**Loads of Love:** This is a new project we are taking on. We were approached by Peace Lutheran Church to see if we would like to get involved in it. In January (13 or 20) we will be at the Quality Dairy laundromat from 8-12 offering to pay for the laundry of those folks coming in. We have received a \$500 mini grant to provide this service. We will see how it goes and may do it quarterly as Peace Lutheran does.

**Festival of Trees:** As I write this, Festival of Trees is almost ready to go. All the entries should be set up. At last count there were 48. A Great Big Thank You goes to Amy Frost for championing this event every year and to her assistant Jeannine Scott. It takes a great amount of time to get all the information gathered and posted on line.

Our next meeting is December 17.

In A World Where You Can Be Anything, BE KIND





## A Blue Christmas Service Making Space for Healing & Hope During the Holidays

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Excerpted from Small Church Ministries

### Blue Christmas Service, December 10, 3 pm

For many, Christmas is not ‘The Most Wonderful Time of the Year’ (as the song goes). A Blue Christmas service can offer some healing and hope.

The idea behind the Blue Christmas service is to create space for the acknowledgment of the heaviness often carried during this season, as well as offering the hope that Jesus gives.



Our society has become one of masking emotions that are sometimes considered negative. The Bible clearly acknowledges, celebrates, and makes space for pain, struggle, hardship, and tears — and so should we.

In fact, science, too, is catching up to the Bible as recent studies confirm that the “claim-your-happiness” pop psychology isn’t healthy for us physically, socially, or spiritually — and that putting on a smile without making space for the tough stuff of life actually leads to more (and deeper) unhappiness.

This Blue service is a beautiful way to make space during the Advent season for those suffering any kind of loss — whether the loss of a person, a dream, finances, stability, health, or more.

### What Is A Blue Christmas Service?

A Blue Christmas service is a quiet, contemplative service that usually happens on the evening of December 21, the winter solstice. This day, which has the longest night and the shortest day, is symbolic of our darker nights when we find ourselves grieving, lonely, or longing for something better. The Blue service is all about making space during a season that is noisy with celebration, to acknowledge the “both/and” of our emotions. It’s an avenue of making space for beautiful pastoral care and compassionate community for those who are struggling.



## January and February All Church Book Read Me and White Supremacy by Layla F. Saad

(Contains excerpts from articles authored by Frances Prather, Layla Saad, and Wikipedia)

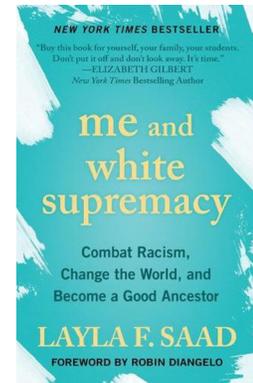
The book is available in the church office. A grant from the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ allowed us to make books available to all who want to read it.

### Discussion Dates

Wednesday, Jan. 17 at 5 PM

Wednesday, Feb 7 at 5 PM

Wednesday, Feb 28 at 5 PM



### The Journey to the Book

First Layla Saad wrote a blog post, “I Need to Talk to Spiritual White Women About White Supremacy.” It was 2017.

Then, in 2018, she ran a month-long Instagram challenge, #MeAndWhiteSupremacy Challenge. Thousands of people from around the world were galvanized to examine and own responsibility for the ways in which they upheld white supremacy.

From this, she wrote a book which was published in January 2020. The aftermath of the death of George Floyd in May of 2020 brought this, and many other similar books, to the forefront of our national conscience, as we sought to understand our culpability.

Layla Saad’s **Me and White Supremacy** is a series of short lectures and reflective prompts designed to last its reader 28 days. It centers on white supremacy and the many ways in which it manifests, including through subtle, passive-aggressive displays such as tone policing, tokenism, and white saviorism. The book also addresses how white supremacy damages and puts Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) at a disadvantage on both an individual and a structural level. Ultimately, the aim of **Me and White Supremacy** is to take readers on a deeply reflective and transformative journey to help them challenge racism and set a better example for future generations.

**The book is divided into two parts.**

**Part 1 begins with an account of the author's personal background** and how she has engaged in community work in order to dismantle racism from within the system. As a Muslim and an East African and Middle Eastern Black woman, Saad discusses how growing up in a white-dominated society has impacted her life and personal identity. She defines white supremacy as a racist ideology which holds that white people are intrinsically superior to other races.

The ideology of white supremacy results in privileges and advantages being granted to white individuals at the expense of minorities. According to Saad, *Me and White Supremacy* is meant to be read by people who hold white privilege, including individuals who are biracial, multiracial, or people of color who benefit from a white-dominated system by "passing." Saad also explains that, in order to properly utilize her book, readers must commit to telling the truth and proceeding with love even when presented with difficult facts and questions. Readers are advised to keep a journal and go at their own specific personal pace, even if that means exceeding the 28-day mark. Finally, Part 1 ends with the caveat that the 28-day challenge *Me and White Supremacy* presents is only meant to spark and aid transformative change; battling racism, on the other hand, must be an active, lifelong commitment.

**Part 2 of the book is divided into four weeks.** Each "day" of the *Me and White Supremacy* challenge ends with a series of journaling prompts and questions for the reader to more deeply reflect on the various issues Saad brings attention to. Week 1 centers on what Saad calls "the basics": white privilege, white fragility, tone policing, white silence, white superiority, and white exceptionalism. She defines each of these terms and explains them as racist behaviors, mindsets, and phenomena which are at the root of the issues to be discussed in the forthcoming chapters.

**Week 1** discusses what white supremacy is and defines related terms like "white privilege" and "white fragility."

**Week 2** focuses on the real-world effects of anti-Blackness by discussing harmful stereotypes and cultural appropriation.

**Week 3** covers allyship and the ways in which white allies can both help and hinder anti-racist movements.

**Week 4** deals with the ways in which people can combat racism through their personal relationships and commitments.

Along with the author, the book was also featured in an informative National Public Radio Podcast, *Life Kit*, in 2020. You can listen to or read the interview here:

[www.npr.org/transcripts/887646740](http://www.npr.org/transcripts/887646740)



## Tremble

a poem by Jan Shall

You tremble,  
Not in anger or fear, but with loneliness.  
Alone amidst others.  
Tremble, such an old-fashioned word which perfectly describes that feeling  
when the floor feels unsteady and may crumble.  
Oh! The feeling you can't come through this!  
Aching. Sorrowful.  
The proverbial "dark night of the soul".  
What a long, long night!  
Yet tearfully you hold on through the darkest midnight and into the witching hour.  
Just holding on, trembling, now with fear.  
Then, the light cracks open, no sun yet, just the slightest lightning of the black.  
Yet you tremble, with just the distant glimmer of hope.  
But there it is, and you hold on.  
Then, the sun rises to the horizon.  
Glowing dim at first, then gradually, gradually brighter.  
You begin to feel as though it's light, piercing Earth's darkness, is penetrating you.  
You tremble, this time with the beginnings of determination.  
You will get through this.  
As the sun rises, its light encompasses a greater field.  
You tremble with relief, as you know, deeply, others are there with you.  
The loneliness begins to dissipate.  
As the sun rises, they join you adding needed strength.  
You tremble in joy!

You've got this!  
The sun peaks at its apex.  
High noon!  
The banishment of shadow, albeit temporary.  
Your trembling lessens, enough that you reach out with a steady hand.  
You gather others tightly.  
You sigh.  
The sun begins its descent and the trembling stops.  
You know, not only did you persevere, but you also became powerful, peaceful and energized.  
You stand in the knowledge you can help.  
That feels good.  
As the sun sets, you realize the darkness isn't returning.  
A light emanates from within.  
As others see the light and are drawn, their light flickers brighter.  
You remember the trembling and here on the other side, know you light burns in a new way  
that the night can't dim.  
A ceaseless gratitude envelops you, extending for the remainder of your life.  
A light that can't go out.  
And life is good.  
Then, you remember this light doesn't extinguish at your death.  
If anything, it grows brighter to cut through the veil and enfold your loved ones.  
You realize we are all one, forever.  
Love is all that remains.

The poem Tremble was read by liturgist Diane Hudson on Sunday, November 19. During the service, Jan shared with us bits of her personal journey to find gratitude during the challenging time that surrounded the birth of her poem..





## The Eve of Preparation

by Talitha Arnold, Senior Minister of the United Church of Santa Fe (UCC)

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.  
Psalm 80:7 (NRSV)

“Let your face shine, that we may be saved.” What a great line for the Eve of Advent. The ancient psalmist reminds what we truly need—and what we’re waiting for—in these weeks leading to Christ’s birth. Be our Shepherd. Give ear to our prayers. Restore us. Shine your face upon us in these shadowed days. Be strong for us and save us.

Since September, the world around us has proclaimed what we need to prepare for Christ’s birth: The perfect decorations for the perfect tree. The perfect presents for our perfect children. And, if you watch the Hallmark Channel, the perfect relationship with the perfect partner.

In contrast, today’s psalm starts in imperfection, with a broken people in a broken world. It sings a lament, no fa-la-la. “We are the scorn of our neighbors,” the people cry. “Our enemies laugh among themselves.”

But the psalm also affirms the people’s understanding of what they truly need: to mend their relationship with God and one another, to turn again to God’s light. They pray for hope and guidance. They pray to be restored. They pray for a future. “Give us life,” they pray.

Tomorrow we start Advent’s four weeks of preparation. May the ancient psalm remind us and our world what we’re waiting for and how to get ready. Come, o come, Emmanuel.

### Prayer

Shepherd of all, on the Eve of Advent, we pray as your Psalmist prayed, “Stir up your power and save us.” Save us with your hope. Save us with your light. Save us with your presence. And may our Advent journey lead us to find that hope, light, and presence born anew in Bethlehem’s stable once again. Amen.

## When We Come Together . . .

**Sunday Worship**, 10 am In Person and on Facebook, @ucc48813 and website: ucccharlotte.org

<b>Learning Opportunities</b>	<b>Meeting Times</b>	<b>Contact Person</b>
Words and Tangents	Sun, 8 am, Annex/Library	Jan Shall, JanShall00@gmail.com
Godly Play	Sunday, 10:10 am	Sarah Cook, scook@uolivet.edu
Prayer Group	1st & 3rd Thur, 10:30 am Small Prayer Room	Sandra Field yourstrulycollection@hotmail.com
Pub Theology	2nd & 4th Thurs. 7 pm	Adam Droscha adam.droscha@gmail.com
Tuesday Night Study	Tues, 6:30 pm, Annex LMR	Curt Scott, CurtisJScott@hotmail.com
<b>Music</b>		
Choir Practice	Wednesdays, 7 pm	Ramona Kime, Ramona.Kime@gmail.com
<b>Committees &amp; Groups</b>		
Art Committee	2nd & 4th Tuesday, 11 am	Sandra Field, yourstrulycollection@hotmail.com
Blanche Moyer	2nd Monday, 6:30 pm	Judi Cates, JudithCates68@gmail.com
Commons Committee	Times Vary	Matt Slot, MattSlot@gmail.com
Communications	4th Mon, Annex SMR	Curt Scott, CurtisJScott@hotmail.com
Prayer Shawl	1st & 3rd Sat, 9:30 am, Lounge	Amy Krizek, Mom_Krizek@hotmail.com
<b>Social &amp; Environmental</b>		
Justice Committee	2nd Sun, 11:30 am, Annex LRM	Ramona Kime, Ramona.Kime@gmail.com
Women's Fellowship	As Needed	Mary Normand, DavidNormand@att.net



## Still speaking

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
 UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
 106 South Bostwick - Charlotte, MI 48813  
 office@uccCharlotte.org [www.ucccharlotte.org](http://www.ucccharlotte.org)

Office Hours  
 Tues - Wed & Fri 9am - 2pm  
 517 543 1310  
 Worship Service 10 am

Find us on  
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Full calendar details  
 can be found at  
[uccCharlotte.org](http://uccCharlotte.org)

# 2023 DECEMBER

Changes should be  
 submitted to  
[office@uccCharlotte.org](mailto:office@uccCharlotte.org)

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1 World AIDS Day	2 9 am Prayer Shawl
3 11:30 Education Meeting	4 5:30 Soul Sisters Support Group	5 6:30 Tuesday Night Class	6 10 am Care Community 6 pm Soul Sisters 7 pm Choir Practice	7 10:30 am Prayer Group 7 pm Pub Theology	8	9
10 3:00 pm Blue Christmas	11 pm, Blanche Moyer Circle 5:30 Soul Sisters Support Group	12 6:30 Tuesday Night Class	13 6 pm Soul Sisters Support 7 pm Choir Practice	14	15	16 9am Prayer Shawl 7 pm Charlotte's Merry Little Christmas, Charlotte Performing Arts
17 11:30 Mission team Meeting	18 5:30 Soul Sisters Support Group	19 6:30 Tuesday Night Class	20 6 pm Soul Sisters Support 7 pm Choir Practice	21 7 pm Pub Theology	22	23
24 10 am Christmas Pageant 8 pm Candlelight Service	25 Christmas	26 Boxing Day	27	28	29	30
31 11:30 Worship Team Meeting						