

Still Speaking

First Congregational

United Church of Christ
Charlotte, Michigan

August 2024

Volume 2

Issue 8

Never place a
period where God
has placed a comma



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***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.*

About the cover:** "Making Ice Cream Sandwiches" for the July 11 concert on the Eaton County Courthouse Museum concert featuring the country group Homespun. Picture provided by Amy Krizek. From L to R: **Chris Reist-Rush, Mary Normand, Stephanie Tighe, Ramona Kime, Audrey Kepler, Mary Kohmuench, Bill Yerkes, Amy Frost, Carol Yerkes.



Powerful Tools for Caregivers

Christine Histed, Registered Dietitian/Evidence Based Programs Manager



Thursdays, September 26 to October 31, 1 to 2:30 pm

Annex Large Meeting Room

Pre-registration requested (see below)

Do you attend doctor appointments with an aging parent? Do you prepare meals, grocery shop, or do laundry for someone you care for? Then you're a caregiver! Join us for the next Powerful Tools for Caregivers workshop where we will discuss self-care strategies for caregivers such as stress management, dealing with difficult emotions (like anger, guilt, depression), communicating in challenging situations, dealing with losses and much more! Workshop is free of charge but donations accepted.

In this workshop, learn how to:

- Take care of yourself
- Reduce stress and help you relax
- Make tough decisions
- Reduce feelings of guilt, anger, and depression
- Communicate effectively
- Work with family, providers, and care staff
- Set goals and problem-solve, and more!



To register: Call Tri-County Office on Aging at 517-887-1465 or e-mail Christine at histedc@tcoa.org

Get Ready! The Festival of Trees is Coming!

The Festival of Trees is the fundraiser brainchild of Amy Frost that raises funds to purchase winter boots. Through the years, it has become a part of the Charlotte Thanksgiving weekend tradition that takes place on Friday and Saturday, just prior to the Annual Christmas Parade.

People and organizations decorate Christmas trees to donate to the event, which we then do an online auction. It's not just Christmas trees: it can be a wall hanging, a quilt, or any other holiday style item.

How can we each help? Get creative. Look within our circles for opportunities to do a group project. Check out garage sales, clearance aisles, and estate sales for items. Talk within your family. If you need an actual Christmas tree to decorate, talk with Amy Frost.



Crafts from the Congregation

Amy Krizek, Co-Chair

“Crafts from the Congregation” is the official name for this event. Lovingly called “Bazaar,” this is the 88th year that the Woman’s Group has been organizing this beloved fundraiser. The 2024 All Church Bazaar is scheduled for Friday, November 8, and Saturday, November 9, with final sales for church family that Sunday following worship.

Funds raised will go primarily to local charitable organizations. We have a meeting in January, to which the entire church is invited, to determine the distribution of funds.

How can we all help?

It may seem early but the title describes it all – we count on the congregation and friends of this church to donate toward its success.

If you:

- do a craft (or many)
- garden or do canning
- cook or bake
- have vintage costume jewelry to donate

We need YOU! Contact Mary Normand or Amy Krizek for more information on any of this. Watch the back of the Welcome Card on Sundays for opportunities to volunteer.

Craft sessions with planned ideas will be publicized. Watch your emails and the program insert on Sunday.

We will pickle beets and process butternut squash the later part of September, so kitchen help is welcomed. Jewelry donation boxes are placed in the annex and Bess Fulton Room basement for your donations of grandma’s or auntie’s or even your own repurposed jewelry.

It takes a lot of work and people to put this event on. Money from the events fund several projects around the church as well as assisting several local charitable agencies/projects in the community.



Pastor's Corner

Pastor Adam Droscha



What is Christian Nationalism, and Why are We Talking About it?

There are a lot of cultural, social, and political buzzwords and hot topics to keep track of these days. If you're around the Gen Z (born 1995-2010) folks you might hear all varieties of new slang words and sayings such as 'rizz,' or 'no cap.' (It's okay; I don't know what they mean either.) You might hear words like 'woke,' or 'SJW' (social justice warrior), 'leftist,' which are both social and political terms often used derogatorily against generally liberal people. And maybe you've heard terms like 'alt-right,' 'conservative populism,' or 'Christian nationalism' to refer to people who are more socially and politically rightwing. That last term — Christian nationalism — is the one I want to focus on here, not only because it's being used more and more to reference a particular movement within the broader rightwing side of the political aisle, but also because the impact of that movement is far-reaching and Christians of any kind need to understand what it is. To understand what Christian nationalism is in the United States, we have to have a grasp of the intersection of politics, religion, history, and race.



Samuel Perry, who is a professor of Sociology and Religious studies at the University of Oklahoma and author of 'Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States,' defines Christian nationalism as "...an ideology that idealizes and advocates a fusion of American civic life with a very particular kind of 'Christianity'... That 'Christianity' is usually shorthand for traditionalist Anglo Protestantism, if not white Evangelicalism." In describing the perspective of Christian nationalists, Perry says, "When someone says 'America is a Christian nation,' they don't usually mean the Christianity of the black church, or Latino Catholics, or liberal mainline Protestants. They mean to argue that America was founded by conservative Anglo Protestants for conservative Anglo Protestants and we should not only celebrate that heritage but ensure that America still reflects that in its identity, symbolism, and even its policies." David Gushee, who is a Christian ethicist, professor at Mercer University, and author of 'Defending Democracy from its Christian Enemies,' defines Christian nationalism as, "The

belief that the US was once and rightfully should be a Christian nation, officially or unofficially. It's often understood by critical scholars as the belief that the US should be led by white straight Christian men whose power to establish a traditionalist Christian culture/government should be unquestioned." Gushee often uses "authoritarian reactionary Christianity" in place of Christian nationalism.

A few points stand out in those definitions of Christian nationalism, as well as my own knowledge and experience with it. The first is that in Christian nationalist ideology Christianity is understood very narrowly. Christian nationalism, at its most modest, may tolerate other historic Christian traditions, but will treat the western evangelical tradition as the truest; at its most extreme, Christian nationalism outright dismisses or condemns other Christian traditions as illegitimate or heretical, let alone other religions and spiritualities. The second is that in Christian nationalist ideology the history of the United States is primarily based in narrative, as opposed to facts and evidence. Curating and preserving a historical narrative that the United States is a Christian nation takes priority over historical facts that undermine that narrative, such as that the indigenous people who were here before the country's founding were not Christian, or that many of the United States' founders were mainline Protestant deists (not evangelicals) who wrote the Constitution to protect personal religious freedom and the separation between the church and the state, or that the hundreds of crimes against humanity in our country's history — genocide of indigenous peoples, chattel slavery, segregation, colonial conquest, etc. — do not align with any morals or ethics resembling the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The third is that there is both explicit and implicit identitarianism in Christian nationalist ideology. While many Christian nationalists would not argue for the superiority of the white race, nor argue that theirs is a political ideology that primarily serves white people, Christian nationalism depends on mostly white personalities in information media to promote it, most faith and political leaders that identify with it and promote it are white, and it is regularly pitted against justice causes of non-white minorities. In its more extreme version, Christian nationalism is openly aligned with white grievance politics, white sentimentality for a past times when racial minorities did not enjoy as many rights, relies on public personalities who promote racist ideas, and is identified with symbols and flags of white supremacy.

The last point is that Christian nationalism so heavily blurs the lines between religion/faith and government/politics that they're practically indistinguishable. Because of the historical narrative that Christian nationalism relies upon (the founders were God-fearing men; God has uniquely blessed the United States, etc.), and because of its narrow understanding of Christian faith (which looks exactly like modern day evangelicalism), Christian nationalism argues that the United States government needs to give Christianity and Christians a privileged status in everything from K-12 education, legislation and laws, the public sphere, reproductive rights, and more.

When I think about Christian nationalism and why it's important to learn about it, understand it, and to speak out against it, the word that comes to mind is 'distortion.' Christian nationalism represents a distortion of history, of our politics, and the person and teachings of Jesus. It gives a distorted interpretation of history that doesn't reconcile honestly with past injustices. It distorts our democratic politics with religious authoritarianism and it distorts the teachings of Jesus — loving our neighbor, serving the least of these, leaving judgment to God, a kingdom not of this world — by making Jesus the champion of causes and a country he never spoke about. Nowhere in the gospels did Jesus command his followers to position themselves in places of political power in order to establish Christianity as the state religion. When we look in the Old Testament we see over and over again the manifest failure of humanity's quest for power and power combined with divine authority. Indeed, the Old Testament does a very good job of highlighting how few and far between good, God-fearing leaders actually were.

The distortedness of Christian nationalism is why Christians and Christ followers who know better need to take a confident stand against it. The history of the Christian religion reveals that we are always navigating and renegotiating the terms and conditions of faith and theology; it's part of the journey and experience, and it's why there are so many Christian traditions and denominations. But when one group or movement starts to center and prioritize itself over the others, let alone over others who are not of the Christian faith, that's not negotiating in good faith. It is authoritarianism and abuse. And there are always, always victims of authoritarianism and abuse. Even if **we** are not the victims, it is incumbent upon those who bear the name Christian to speak out against the abuse and disrupt it.

When confronted with Christian nationalism, the important thing is the ability to say, "That's not patriotism; it's nationalism," as well as, "That's not the gospel; that's idolatry."

Similar to taking a stand on any other issue, I don't think speaking out against Christian nationalism requires heroes, or grandstanding. It doesn't require lecturing others, becoming an expert, or rubbing our opinions in others' faces. What is required is confident and consistent responsive values. When confronted with Christian nationalism, the important thing is the ability to say, "That's not patriotism; it's nationalism," as well as, "That's not the gospel; that's idolatry." When confronted with religious authoritarianism, stand by religious freedom and religious diversity. Don't tolerate outright racism and covert whitewashing, and call them what they are. When confronted by propagandistic historical narratives, respond by acknowledging the injustices of the past, as well as those of the modern day. And when someone calls their Christian nationalism the 'Christian' or 'Biblical' worldview, respond politely with, "Respectfully, that is not how I understand Christian faith and the Bible."



Notes from Blanche Moyer Circle

Barb Anderson, Recorder

Blanche Moyer is a Woman's Circle that meets on the 2nd Monday of the Month.

On July 15, 2024, Blanche Moyer Circle gathered in the Bess Fulton Room to enjoy an indoor picnic with sloppy joes, baked beans, chips, a splendid salad and ice cream with berries. Thanks to the dinner committee: Kathie Cook, Kathy Fuhr, Eva Crandall, Jenny Bohms and Barb Anderson. There were 18 in attendance including Mary Normand's guest, her sister-in-law Dee. Following dinner, Pam Rinckey provided a lovely devotional message.

Treasurer, Chris Reist-Rush reported: Old balance - \$719.88. Receipts: \$55 from June dinner/dues. New Balance - \$774.88.

We acknowledged with great joy and affection Ethel Hallett's 90+ birthday this month!

Mary Normand updated on the Bess Fulton Room/basement updates project. The foundation repair work on the northwest corner is complete. There was still some water infiltration after heavy rain. The committee continues to prioritize projects and gather cost estimates. Overall cost is estimated at approximately \$140,000.

Judi sent the following message on July 20 regarding new church dinnerware: *"We had a discussion and a show and tell on the purchase of new dinner service for our dining room.*

Corell was a good choice but very expensive. Mary Normand, Pam Rinckey, Chris Reist Rush and myself did a day trip to Canton, near Ann Arbor, to IKEA. WOW, that was an experience!! They had comparable Corell dishes at a much lower price. In looking up the comparison I read they were both evenly matched. A decision was made and due to the cost we purchased 200 4-piece place settings (Dinner, luncheon, dessert plates and bowl). We also bought 12 serving dishes. Mugs were in all different sizes but no stacking mugs. We picked out a really nice 10.5 oz mug but they only had 30 available to take with us. 92 dishes and 30 mugs came to about \$670.00. They also accepted our tax deductible ID so no tax!

I went on line to IKEA and was able to order 60 mugs so we have 90 mugs total.

Grand total came to approximately \$970, which is about \$1,200 less than Corell with additional mugs. We loaded them in Mary's car and took to Annex and unloaded."

Bazaar crafting sessions have begun on Thursday mornings. The Bazaar will be November 8, 9.

Next meeting: Monday, September 9 (No August meeting). We will gather at 5:45, with dinner at 6:00. September committee members are Mary Normand, Ethel Hallett, Pam Rinckey, Judi Cates and Marylyn Bernard.

Summer

ON THE COMMONS

Bring a lawn chair and a friend!

August 3, Saturday

5 pm John Nulf
6 pm Fabulous Oldies But Goodies

August 24, Saturday

5 pm, Two-Faced Wilson
6 pm, The Rolling Hills

September 21, Saturday

3 pm, Harpists Dede & Acacia Potter
4 pm, Charlotte Acoustic Project

Don't forget the August Food Drive!

August is our annual Food Drive. Our hope is to encourage concert attendees to bring non-perishable food items and/or personal hygiene products to the concert. These will be given to local charitable organizations for distribution.

*Money raised from food sales will go to upkeep and future programming on the Commons.

Food items for sale* at August concerts:

August 3: \$5 Hotdogs, \$1 Popcorn

August 24: Matt Slot's Barbecue - YUM!





Not Your Typical Bible Study

Curt Scott, Facilitator

What? Bible Study Class

When? Tuesday nights at 6:30 pm (or Wednesdays at 11:30 am)

Tuesday's class is not a typical bible study. No one tells anyone what to believe, ever, and the bible is only discussed in its historical context. If the subject is Amos, we're in his time, not ours, for instance. This bible study is an archaeology class, and anthropology, linguistics, world religions and philosophy in order to see the past and its texts for what they meant when they were written. Even better: understanding why they were written.

I seek to ease this village's transition into the next Christianity while explaining what's happening now, culturally. I present the changing narratives that led to how we explain Jesus and Christianity today. Over the years, I've covered eight eras of 500-years each: Bronze Age Fertile Crescent to the current rise of Christian Nationalism.

The beginning, on Tuesday evenings, starts with the global change in the human mind 50,000 years ago, leading to Neolithic Cave Art. Not surprisingly, the long view reveals much.

The class is called Bible Study for Adults because an adult reading of the Bible and history reveals the full breadth of human consciousness; from the selfless to the self-obsessed; from murderous ambition to self-sacrifice for all of humanity.



One of the first things folks realize is that they'd been given a purposefully narrow and quite recent story about Jesus, and a mighty thin slice of scripture too.

The class has no beginning and no end. Tuesday evenings function like drop-in basketball: never the same game or team, but always revealing of the inner self to the inner self. I let the rabbis and professors do most of the teaching. I simply push "play" and start conversations.

Recycle-Palooza

August 10, 2024 9 AM – 1 PM

Charlotte, MI

*****Registration Required*****

Location released upon completion of registration

Register online: <http://www.eatoncounty.org/913>

ELECTRONICS

Computer Accessories, CPU's, Printers, Fax Machines, Scanners, TVs, Cell Phones, Fans, Laptops, CD Players, Camcorders, Copiers, Small Kitchen Appliances, Hair Dryers, Curling Irons, Remote Control Items, Almost anything with a cord

****NO FREON CONTAINING ITEMS, LARGE APPLIANCES OR EXERCISE EQUIPMENT****

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE

Acids & Bases, Aerosols (no empty cans), Asphalt/Roofing Tar, Automotive Fluids, Cleaners, Polishes, Fluorescent Light Bulbs/Tubes, Fire Extinguishers, Flammables, Glues, Caulks, Flea Collars & Sprays, Mercury & Mercury-Containing Items, Oil-Based Paint, Stains, Varnishes, Paint Thinners, Wood Preservatives, Pool Chemicals, Solvents, Pesticides, Herbicides, Sharps (must be in a Puncture-Resistant Container)

****NO LATEX-BASED PAINTS, MEDICATIONS OR BATTERIES****

TIRES

Passenger tires only, with or without rims. Oversized tires (larger than 24") will not be accepted

Limit 10 tires per vehicle

Funding for Scrap Tire Collection made possible through a State of Michigan EGLE Scrap Tire Cleanup Grant

PARTICIPANT RULES

1. Events are for private (non-commercial) residents of Eaton County.
2. Registration is required. Please provide 48-hour notice of cancellations. Limit of **Two** registrations per household.
3. Electronics: **NO** refrigerators, freezers, dehumidifiers, air conditioners, large appliances or exercise equipment will be accepted. **\$10 suggested donation per TV or monitor**.
4. Household Hazardous Waste: **NO** latex-based paints, medications or batteries will be accepted - please visit our website for disposal options.
5. Tires: Limit of 10 tires per vehicle. We are unable to accept oversized tires.
6. For your safety and ours, you must remain in your vehicle for the duration of the event. Workers will retrieve your recyclables for you.



For questions, cancellation or volunteer information:
visit <http://www.eatoncounty.org/913/>,
email Recycle@eatoncounty.org
or call (517) 543-3686.



EARLY MORNING MAZATLAN

Arriving 2:00 AM

in a tropical Niagara of rain,

calling the pensión,

(Sí, cómo no, we are assured, los espero.)

finding a cab,

knowing we will pay what is asked.

Through the streets,

glittering puddles of red and green,

kettledrums overhead,

our clothes leaking

into small dark puddles

on the unreceptive vinyl,

our bodies,

still new to each other,

meeting in damp contentment

at elbow and thigh.

At the pension

a dark young woman receives us,

gracious in flowered robe,

offers a key



without asking our names.

Together in the wrought iron bed,
the mattress troughing in the middle,
we sleep peacefully.

The rain, still like tambores,
orchestrates our dreams,
quieting only at sunrise,
replaced by a noisy urban cock
which surprises us from sleep.

Next door

the panaderos bake bolillos
which we will buy crusty warm
to accompany our café con leche.

But that will be later.

For now in the torpid, yeasty dawn,
the cock's crow intermittent, receding,
for now softly, softly
we sleep.



Former Peace Corps volunteer,
retired educator, and published author,
member Mary Roessler shares from the poetry she
wrote while working on her masters thesis.



When We Come Together . . .

Sunday Worship, 10 am In Person and on Facebook, @[ucc48813](https://www.facebook.com/ucc48813) and website: ucccharlotte.org

Learning Opportunities	Meeting Times	Contact Person
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@uccCharlotte.org
Adult Bible Study	Tues, 6:30 pm, Wed. 11:30 am Annex Large Meeting Room	Curt Scott, CurtisJScott@hotmail.com
Coffee Hour with a Pastor	Evelyn Bay, Tuesday	Pastor Droscha, pastor@uccCharlotte.org
Music		
Choir Practice	Summer Hiatus	Ramona Kime, Ramona.Kime@gmail.com
Bell Choir	Summer Hiatus	Jenny Bohms, rjbohms@yahoo.com
Committees & Groups		
Art Ministry Committee	2nd & 4th Tuesday, 11 am 2nd & 4th Monday, 7 pm, Zoom	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	3rd Monday, 6:30 pm, SMR	Amy Frost, frostamy58@gmail.com
Prayer Shawl	1st & 3rd Sat, 9:30 am, Lounge	Amy Krizek, Mom_Krizek@hotmail.com
Social & Environmental Justice Committee	2nd Sun, 11:30 am, Annex LMR	Ramona Kime, Ramona.Kime@gmail.com
Women's Fellowship	As Needed	Mary Normand, DavidNormand@att.net
Men's Group	1st & 3rd Sat, 10 am, Annex SMR	Larry Taylor, TaylorLT1752@att.net



The God Who Sees the Women

Vicki Kemper, Pastor
First Congregational UCC, Amherst, Massachusetts



Then Abraham took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before [the three travelers]; and he stood by them under the tree where they ate. They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” – Genesis 18:8-9 (NRSV)

It was Abraham, called by God and head of a painfully dysfunctional family, who looked up from the shady resting spot in front of his tent and saw three unfamiliar men standing nearby.

It was Abraham, faithful to God and to his culture’s tradition of life-saving hospitality, who took it upon himself to serve the wayfaring strangers—by enlisting the help of his wife and his servant.

And so it was Abraham, proud and probably awaiting an expression of gratitude, who stood by silently as his guests enjoyed their meal.

But when the guests—identified in the story as a manifestation of God—had eaten their fill, they did not lavish their attention on Abraham. Instead, they asked where his unseen partner was. They called her by name.

Which is to say: While Abraham thought everything happening was a reflection on him, actually it was about (a) those objectified and used by the more powerful, and (b) God’s steadfast love and faithfulness.

And isn’t that the way it always is with God?

We walk through life—and, sometimes, even our faith journeys—as if everything is about us. God, meanwhile, is busy fulfilling promises, healing hearts, and transforming entire systems and ways of being. While we focus on performance and reputation, God attends to the business of love, grace, justice, and lifting up the lowly and left out.

Prayer

For seeing me when others don’t and encouraging me to make room for those I’ve overlooked, thank you.



Still Speaking

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
 UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
 106 South Bostwick - Charlotte, MI 48813
 office@uccCharlotte.org www.ucccharlotte.org

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



August 2024

Full calendar details can be found at uccCharlotte.org
 Changes should be submitted to Editor@uccCharlotte.org

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 10:30 Prayer Group, Church	2 Office Closed	3 9 am Prayer Shawl 5 pm Concert
4	5 5:30 Soul Sisters Women's Support, Library	6 6:30 Bible Study for Adults, LMR	7 9 Care Comm., Lib. 11:30 Bible Study, LMR 6:30 Soul Sisters Women's Support, Library	8 7 pm Pub Theology, Riedy's	9 Office Closed	10
11 11:30 SEJ Meeting, Annex	12 5:30 Soul Sisters Women's Support, Library	13 6:30 Bible Study for Adults, LMR	14 11:30 Bible St, LMR 6:30 Soul Sisters Women's Support, Library	15 10:30 Prayer Group, Church 6:30 Chur. Council	16 Office Closed	17 9 am Prayer Shawl 11 Vermontville Pride Festival
18 11:30 Missions Meeting, Annex	19 5:30 Soul Sisters, Library 6:30 Communications Meeting, SMR	20 6:30 Bible Study for Adults, LMR	21 11:30 Bible St, LMR 6:30 Soul Sisters Women's Support, Library	22 7 pm Pub Theology, Riedy's	23 Office Closed	24 10 am Men's Group 5 pm Concert Commons
25 11:30 Worship Team Meeting, Annex	26 5:30 Soul Sisters Women's Support, Library	27 6:30 Bible Study for Adults, LMR	28 11:30 Bible St, LMR 6:30 Soul Sisters Women's Support, Library	29	30 Office Closed	31