

Still Speaking

First Congregational

United Church of Christ
Charlotte, Michigan

November 2024
Volume 2
Issue 11

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: "Let's Take a Trip - Nokomis," October 25, 2024, organized by Bill Oatman, See story on page 4. Left to right, Ron Bracy, Don Johnson, Judy Johnson, Jenny Rentfrow, Diane Hudson, Amy Slot, Deanna Rendel, and Thuc Nguyen. Caryn Hansen, photographer.



Thinking, A Stewardship Moment

Amy Frost, shared from the October 13, 2024 service

There are many reasons this church is such an important part of my life. Today I am focusing on this being a thinking church. Thinking is encouraged and supported.

My early church life did not encourage or really allow thinking. I remember being in first grade and coming home and asking my Mom why my friend, Meredith, was going to hell. It seems Meredith was a Methodist and that alone was enough. When I asked in Sunday school why a nice person like Meredith was going to hell they told me that she didn't go to our church. Follow up questions were not entertained.

I didn't fair much better when I wondered why, if we didn't send missionaries to China that they too would be going to hell. Seems it was the same answer.

My confirmation class questions about capital punishment and how a God who loves us would want us to kill someone got me a "conversation" with the minister. It was a pretty one-sided conversation.

There was one line of thought in that space and everyone was supposed to follow along without questions.

Surprisingly when I left home I didn't seek out a church for a long time. There were so many absolute rules that didn't make sense to me. I could not reconcile a loving God with all of the rules and restrictions I had heard.

I dabbled along the way with a few churches but it was not until I walked in these doors that I realized God wants thinkers.

In this space there is plenty of room for differing perspectives and interpretations. The sermons and book studies stretch our thinking. The person sitting next to you on Sunday probably does not see the world exactly the same way you do and that is a great thing.

There are not that many churches that welcome this much diversity of thought. So I will devote my available time, talent, and treasures to make sure we are here for all the folks looking for a welcoming, thoughtful space to belong. I would encourage you, if you value this space, to share what works for you and together we will keep thinking.



Nokomis, a Reflection

Caryn Hansen, as she grows

As a child, I lived along the great lake Gichi-Gami (Lake Superior) in a small community just 3 miles west of the Bay Mills Indian Community, aka, Gnoozhekaaning (Place of the Pike). My stepmother was a member of the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (Ojibwe: Gakiwe'onaning) in the western side of the Upper Peninsula. From ages 8 to 11, I learned to swim in the clear icy waters from June to August. We canoed, we caught minnows, we mapped the sandbars to the large diving rock whose tip still crests from the community beach even today.

On Friday, October 25, a small group from our church visited Nokomis Cultural Center in Okemis, Michigan. Bill Oatman was the organizer of our trip but was unable to attend due to illness. Jenny Rentfrow the Board Secretary of the Center was our guide as we explored the nuanced past of the original people who inhabited the great lake region, and still do, in lesser numbers.

The center was created in 1989 to preserve the history, arts, culture and language of the Anishinaabe people - Ojibwe, Odawa and Potawatomi nations. These are the people who traversed the lakes and rivers of our state and the surrounding areas, prior to the migration of northern Europeans to the region.

One thing that struck all of us was a map that Jenny showed us. The East was at the top of the map obscuring our upright mitten shaped state. This was how the Anishinaabe oriented themselves. The rising sun was the top of their world. It seems small, but this 90 degree change opened a new unexplored land, hidden but not hidden, just different, much like the people are.

She then turned our mitten upright again and showed us the hunting routes by season. Much of our current highway system is layered over these old routes, preserving, if only by accident, the footfalls of a more humble, more quiet, more tranquil people.

Jenny with her soft accented voice shared how the atrocities that we often attribute to other states, the relocation of Native peoples and the boarding schools for children, also happened in Michigan. There is a Potawatomi tribe in Oklahoma today due to a forced exodus from north to west. There were once three federal boarding schools for Native children operating in Michigan: one in Baraga, another in Harbor Springs, and a third in Mount Pleasant. The last one closed as recently as 1972.

Today, the center holds festivals, language classes, markets, and feasts, bringing together those who ventured to the bigger cities for employment.



24-Hour Prayer Vigil-In Person and Via Zoom

Organized by Sandra Field and the Thursday Prayer Group

Monday, November 4 at 8 pm to Tuesday, November 5 at 8 pm
Church Sanctuary and via Zoom
For the US Election

The church sanctuary will be open for prayer for 24 hours from 8 pm on Monday, November 4 to 8 pm on November 5. Candles will be lit on the Chancel throughout this time ("Lit" = electric candles for fire safety purposes). An hourly sign up sheet is on the long table in the Church Lounge.



Zoom will be our standard Zoom Meeting ID: 517 543 1310, but the password will be "vigil." This link will be available to share with friends. We will send the QR code out in the November 2 email. You can also send an email to Editor@uccCharlotte.org to obtain the QR code via email.



Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5175431310?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5175431310?pwd=1rdhdShlULrDe3UQaoBpHqElb4cGgi.1&omn=81559836343)

[pwd=1rdhdShlULrDe3UQaoBpHqElb4cGgi.1&omn=81559836343](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5175431310?pwd=1rdhdShlULrDe3UQaoBpHqElb4cGgi.1&omn=81559836343)

One tap mobile

+13052241968,,5175431310#,,,,*026431# US



Group Prayer Service

Tuesday night, November 5
8 pm Sanctuary

As polls close in Michigan, all are invited to gather to pray as a group and individually in one place.

This will be a time to detach from the constant election updates, a time to reflect, and a time for new hope.

Pastor's Corner

Pastor Adam Droscha

Thanks and Gratitude When we Do Not Feel Them

There was a short poem that was supposedly written on the walls in a Nazi death camp during WW11. Choirs like ours now sing the words with melancholy and power. I first sang those words with my college choir. It was a song that made many of my peers tear up as we sang it. The words are, "I believe in the sun even when I don't see it. I believe in God even when I don't feel him. I believe in love even when I don't feel it."

In our Sunday services during the month of November, we as a congregation will be reflecting on themes of giving thanks. (You'll have to come to church to hear each topic.) Giving thanks, I believe, is one of the central reasons people of faith must continue to gather on regular basis; it's too easy to go through life without being thankful. One problem arises for me as I think about writing sermons for that theme, however. 'What about the times when we don't feel thankful?'

If you're like me, you don't go through life generally unthankful or lacking gratitude. The older I get the more easily I recognize just how much I have to be thankful for. Similarly I find myself expressing gratitude for the smallest accommodations and help. Even so, there are times when I struggle to give thanks or express gratitude, and the reason is simple: I don't feel thankful.

As many of us know, feelings are complicated. On the one hand we shouldn't avoid our feelings or suppress them. It's vital to sit with our feelings, understand where they come from, and discover what they might be trying to tell us. On the other hand, our feelings can't do all of our thinking and decision making for us. Our feelings can deceive us, cause us to be dismissive of the feelings of others, and bring out behaviors and choices lacking tact and rationality. So not feeling thankful can be tricky. It can be evidence of a lot of things, not the least of which is deeply imbedded and unanalyzed discontentment.

Thankfulness and gratitude are like many vital feelings and postures on life. Like love, grace, or peace, thanks and gratitude are less feelings (though they certainly should be) than they are practices. Thankfulness and gratitude are less destinations as they are journeys. For me, this truth is evident in how the times when I feel the least thankful is always when I have not been practicing giving thanks. I am sure I'm not alone in that experience.

My hope for November is that we as a congregation will not just intellectually reflect on having gratitude and giving thanks, but will practice it. Father Richard Rohr so beautifully said, “We do not think our way into new ways of living; we live our way into new ways of thinking.” I believe that we can embody a gospel of thankfulness in this season, or a new way of being.

To return to the words I opened with, I hope that we can come to say, “I will believe in and practice thankfulness, even when I don’t feel it.”

November Giving Tree



Winter coats for all ages Give coats or money to Bill/Carol Yerkes, or put checks in the offering plate, with “Coats” marked in the memo line.

Warm socks for the homeless.

Self-Care During Election Season



Kate Durda, WISE Committee

Sunday, November 3, 4 pm to 5 pm
Church Lounge

How are you all doing out there?

We invite you to join with others in a supportive setting to discuss how to manage our fears and anxieties during this fraught time of uncertainty. Explore strategies for managing our emotions, find inspiration and grounding with your community at this gathering. Offered by Social and Environmental Justice in conjunction with the WISE Committee (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged) for Mental Health.

Contact Stephanie Tighe or Kate Durda if you have questions.





Mission Moment

Mary Normand, Mission Board Chair

A few months ago we had a loose change collection for Holy Joe's Café. We finally got that counted and donated. It came to \$315.25. Thank you to all who were able to contribute.

Giving Tree

June was flashlights and batteries and Wet Ones for Housing Services. We were able to give them 23 flashlights, 2 bags of Wet Ones, and several packages of batteries.

August was Stuff the Trailer. Mission Board matched a bag of food or personal care items for each 5 bags donated. We estimated we would spend approximately \$300 from our funds. We have since decided to give the agencies the money instead so we will be issuing checks for \$100 each to SIREN/Eaton, Eaton Clothing and Furniture Center (ECFC), Housing Services, and Helping Hands. I realize this is \$400 not \$300. We decided to add Housing Services to our list.

September was CROP Walk and Gun Buy Back. We collected approximately \$800 for CROP Walk and \$400 Gun Buy Back.

October was winter coats and Neighbors in Need. The winter coat project is ongoing. You can indicate on your envelope if a donation is for winter coats or on a check. Please see Bill or Carol Yerkes if you have questions. The coats are given to SIREN/Eaton and EFCC.

November is Homeless Awareness month. We will be collecting warm socks.

Loads of Love

We were there October 19. We were totally slammed that day. Folks are so appreciative of this program. It is very expensive to wash clothes at a laundromat. We also gave out a lot of books, both children's and adult.

Festival of Trees is coming up the end of November 29 to December 1. All proceeds go to EFCC to buy boots for their clients. Please support this event if you are able.

Christmas families will be coming up in December. Generally, we help 2-3 families with Christmas gifts.

IN A WORLD WHERE YOU CAN BE ANYTHING, PLEASE BE KIND.

Stay Tuned



A Tale of Two Churches – Stewardship Lessons I Learned

Donald Sovey

September 18, 2021, was a beautiful and sunny Saturday and at the last minute I decided to attend a meeting the First Congregational United Church of Christ of Charlotte had scheduled to have a “conversation” about critical issues that were front and center at the time. I am so glad I decided to attend, because it markedly changed the way I now think about supporting the church and its related sustainability.

This meeting is what stimulated Maria Davis and me to recommend a new conversation, called a strategic plan (SP) with our church members. The plan was completed in February 2022 and by this February it will have been in place for three years.

As Maria and I prepared to present our final written work on the SP, I saw a troubling article in the Lansing State Journal about a church with the name First Congregational Church of St Johns. The article was entitled “Century-old St. Johns church has new owners a year after being put up for sale.”

The article written by Rachel Greco was published on February 8, 2022, and told this story: The former First Congregational Church, built with solid granite blocks over a century ago, has been purchased by Community Church, a multisite church with campuses in Mount Pleasant and Alma. The congregation paid \$150,000 and closed on the 15,000-square-foot building in mid-January, Community Church Executive Pastor Eric Barz said.

First Congregational Church in St. Johns built the church in 1899, said Tom Webb, the congregation's moderator and treasurer. The original stone building, with an intricate stained-glass window near its entrance, sits off Maple Street. Its sanctuary seats over 200 people. Members placed it up for sale last February, he said.

After reading the article, I contacted FCC of SJ moderator and treasurer Tom Webb and his wife, and we had a sobering but informative conversation in February of 2022. In our first conversation I learned that St John's church membership had been declining steadily for seven or eight years and that the pandemic continued to hasten the decline as Zoom services did not meet the needs of the 100 members. Tom said the church building was in “very good shape,” and they had just replaced the roof a few years ago “but maintaining it became a financial drain. It just became more expensive, almost too expensive for the size of our congregation to maintain,” Webb said. Deciding to sell the property was difficult, he said, but the pandemic

likely “expedited” their decision.

The new owner stated, “The facility itself is incredible. The fact that they’ve got something from the 1890s that has stood the test of time and was built so impeccably, as far as that original part of the building goes, is just phenomenal”.

During my February 2022 conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Webb I asked them what lessons they had learned, and they said:

1. We needed to appeal to younger families
2. We did not have people who wanted to come forward to implement action plans at the church from our strategic plan
3. Many people just wanted to come to church and did not want to get involved
4. You must “level” clearly with the congregation about the facts
5. We needed people to work through issues
6. We would run out of money in 3 years if we had stayed in the building
7. Next, we needed to implement our strategic plan

Following the sale of the St. Johns church, the remaining congregation rented space in the Lutheran Church and they would partner on activities. Their goal was that in 18 months, they could be in their own place. “In December 2021, we had a farewell service to the building, and we said we were not sure if we could survive as a church,” Webb said.

Follow-up 32 Months Later

I have been curious about the outcome of the St Johns First Congregational Church since our first visit in 2022, so I reached out to Tom Webb on October 26, 2024. This was more sobering than our first talk.

I learned that in June of 2023 the SJ FCC “went under”, according to Tom. He was still the moderator at the end and there were about 40 people left in the congregation that had been using rented space. Although the church had maintained an endowment fund, the remaining members voted to give the remainder to local charities. The members intend to meet occasionally in small groups, and they still have a Bible study. First Congregational Church of St Johns no longer legally exists. Tom said he feels disillusioned now.

Lessons Learned

As I attended church at FCC of Charlotte on October 27, 2024, I realized we are very fortunate and that we should understand the generosity and abundance that we have enjoyed. Other lessons learned:

1. FCC of Charlotte is blessed with dedicated and selfless servants
2. Our members are very articulate, smart, and motivated as evidenced by the vibrant weekly church calendar
3. I have seen marked progress of people working collaboratively following completion of our SP
4. We have maintained our fiscal health, but must be ever diligent to project and anticipate where we could be if we did not have dedicated leadership and the follow-through of strong dedicated members
5. Sustainability can be elusive and must always be considered
6. Church leadership and members should review the original SP from February 2022 to see if the organization is in compliance with its original thinking from that time
7. I personally have reviewed my stewardship thinking and have set new goals which I will reach in 2025

Next Recommended Steps

A revisiting of the SP with the entire congregation should take place during 2025. The strategic goal from our 2022 strategic plan has a column titled Sustainability. As a refresher, here are the points from the plan which we should continue to emphasize:

- **Long Term Planning.** Prepare and support multi-year, long-term strategic and financial planning.
- **Strategic Budgeting.** Ensure mission, vision, and outreach work are financially supported in the church budget.
- **Finance and Giving.** Understand and act to positively encourage financial support of the church.
- **Marketing.** Become well known in the community by increasing marketing, media presence and church involvement with community events.

First Congregational Church UCC Charlotte is doing very well in relation to its vision and mission, so let's continue to work toward lasting sustainability during this season of stewardship.



First Congregational Church UCC Charlotte *Strategic Vision 2025*

Strategic Mission Statement: “We are God’s Love in Action”

Our Values

Love in Action: Inclusion, Outreach, Creativity, Diversity, Community, Education

VISION: First Congregational Church will be a vibrant, thriving, and inclusive church inspiring Love in Action

STRATEGIC GOALS

| UNITY: Build Relationships | GROWTH: Embrace Change | HEALING: Embody Grace | OUTREACH: Inspire Love in Action | SUSTAINABILITY: Plan for the Future |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| <p>Communications. Ensure clear and timely internal communications.</p> <p>Relationships. Strengthen relationships within our own congregation.</p> <p>Widen the Circle. Connect with new people and new organizations.</p> <p>Leadership. Build and support church leadership.</p> <p><i>Plan Dates: Feb. 2022–Dec 2025</i></p> | <p>Education. Promote learning and understanding, within both our church and our wider community.</p> <p>Programming. Find new and meaningful ways to engage with youth, families, and adults.</p> <p>Service. Apply our strengths and talents to improve our church and our world.</p> <p>Adapt. Recognize challenges and seek new solutions.</p> | <p>Welcome. Practice extravagant welcome and God’s love for all in our church.</p> <p>Diversity: Recognize that everyone brings unique talents and needs.</p> <p>Inclusion. Work to support inclusion of all, in our church as well as in our larger community.</p> <p>Engage. Overcome differences to find common ground.</p> <p>Forgiveness. Develop ways to work through conflict and let go of negative emotions and past mistakes.</p> | <p>Caring. Enfold our members in love and support in their time of need.</p> <p>Missions. Be the hearts and hands doing God’s work in our Community.</p> <p>Be the Church. Seek and promote Social and Environmental Justice.</p> <p>Inspiration. Express and model the values of our congregation.</p> | <p>Long Term Planning. Prepare and support multi-year, long-term strategic and financial planning.</p> <p>Strategic Budgeting. Ensure mission, vision, and outreach work are financially supported in the church budget.</p> <p>Finance and Giving. Understand and act to positively encourage financial support of the church.</p> <p>Marketing. Become well known in the community by increasing marketing, media presence and church involvement with community events.</p> |



Festival of Trees is Here!!! Woo-hoo!

Online Auction, Thanksgiving to Noon on December 1

In person, Friday, November 29, 5 pm - 8 pm; Saturday, November 30, 10 am - 5 pm

If you will be participating in the Festival of Trees and have not contacted Amy Frost, please do so now. Her email is either FestivalOfTrees@uccCharlotte.org or FrostAmy58@gmail.com.

The Festival of Trees is a fundraiser to raise money for children’s winter boots. People and groups donate fully decorated trees and other holiday decorations to be auctioned off.

Set-up times this year will be as follows:

- 11-24, Sunday, 11:30 – 4:00
- 11-25, Monday, 4:30 – 7:00
- 11-26, Tuesday, 4:30 – 7:00
- 11-27, Wednesday, 9:30 – 5:00

Additional times can be planned, if needed. All set-up must be complete by Wednesday.

Crafts from the Congregation

Friday, November 8th

9:00 am - 4:30 pm

Saturday, November 9th

9:00 am - 2:00 pm

Holiday Bazaar

Crafts, Baked Goods, Vintage Jewelry,
Pies, Cookies, Pickled Beets & more!

Conversation Café Friday, 9:30 am –1 pm

Family Dinner 4:00 pm—6:30 pm

Menu

Conversation Café Friday 9:30 am—1 pm

Enjoy conversation with friends in the church lounge. Beverages: Coffee, Tea, Christmas Punch and water is on us. Treats to purchase (cash only)

- Cinnamon Rolls – Fresh baked with cream cheese frosting \$2
- Large Buttermilk Cookie – A traditional Bazaar favorite \$2
- Turkey Croissant – Generous amount of turkey on a large croissant with chips (gluten free and vegetarian options available) \$10

Family Dinner Friday 4:00 pm—6:30 pm

Dine in or Carry out in our Bess Fulton dining room, traditional Bazaar favorites (credit cards accepted)

- Beef and Noodle Plate, includes beverage and choice of two sides \$15
- Hot Chicken Salad, includes beverage and choice of two sides \$15
- Broccoli Cheese Quiche, includes beverage and choice of two sides \$15

Sides

Cole slaw with homemade sweet and sour dressing, cinnamon spiced apple, pickled beets, homemade bran muffin, or roll. Extra sides available \$1/side

Pies

End your meal with one of our fresh baked Pies

Pecan \$4; Fruit Pies \$3: Apple, Cherry, Blueberry, Rhubarb, Strawberry-Rhubarb, Pumpkin

When We Come Together . . .

Sunday Worship, 10 am In Person and on Facebook, @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 |
| Devotional Bible Study | Mondays, 10 am and 4 pm | Adam Droscha, pastor@uccCharlotte.org |
| 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, Wednesday, 10 am | Pastor Droscha, pastor@uccCharlotte.org |
| Music | | |
| Choir Practice | Wednesdays, 7 pm | Ramona Kime, Ramona.Kime@gmail.com |
| Bell Choir | Wednesdays, 4 pm | 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 | 2nd & 4th Sat, 10 am, Annex SMR | Larry Taylor, TaylorLT1752@att.net |



Still Speaking

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
106 South Bostwick - Charlotte, MI 48813
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Office Hours
Monday to Thursday 9a - 2p
517 543 1310
Sunday Worship Service 10 am
In Person, Facebook, YouTube



Instagram



Find us on
Facebook



Calendar Highlights

The calendar in November is so full that it is difficult to read on the allotted page. We are working on alternative methods to share the information in the calendar.

The “big” events this month include:

Crafts from the Congregation

Holiday Bazaar, Friday, November 8, 9 am to 4:30 pm; Saturday, November 9, 10 am - 2 pm

Conversation Café, Friday, November 8, 9:30 am to 1 pm

Family Dinner, Friday, November 8, 4:00 pm to 6:30 pm

Cupcake Decorating, Friday, November 22, 6:30 (\$25)

Festival of Trees

OnLine Auction, Thanksgiving Day to December 1

In Person, Friday, November 29, 5 pm to 8 pm; Saturday, November 30, 10 am to 5 pm

To see a full calendar of events, please:

- Check out our online calendar at www.uccCharlotte.org/calendar
- See the insert in the weekly program
- Subscribe to our weekly emails by sending an email to editor@uccCharlotte.org
- Check out our calendar of events on the bulletin boards around the church
- Talk with Caryn Hansen or email her at editor@uccCharlotte.org for a paper copy