

Still Speaking

First Congregational

United Church of Christ
Charlotte, Michigan

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Volume 2

Issue 12



Never place a
period where God
has placed a comma



In This Issue

Advent, Pastor's Corner	3
Mission Moment	5
Advocate	6
From the Council President	8
Celebrations and Prayer	11
Calendar Notes	12



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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:** "The Littlest Angel," taken during the 2023 pageant (and altered slightly) photographer Caryn Hansen, who was sitting in the front row, wondered what the toddler who wandered away from the stage was doing, so she turned her camera around and put her hand out to blindly snap the picture.*

’ Pastor’s Corner

Pastor Adam Droscha

One of the frustrating things, so far, about being a pastor, is realizing that pretty much everything has been preached and written about. Everything’s been said. There’s nothing, or very little that is new. The only hope for novelty in this gig is in style and emphasis. Yes, times, technology, cultures, language, and people change, but the stories and themes we reflect on to give us hope and keep us going stay much the same. It’s often difficult to come up with new material, especially if you’re following the Christian calendar.

The season of Advent inspires me, but I’m finding that it generally inspires me in the same ways each year. That’s not good or bad, necessarily. I’m always inspired by the hope provoked by arrivals, what’s to come, and the unknown. I’m inspired by a story of a young woman thrown into impossible circumstances because she’s up to the task, who raised a person that changed the world. I’m inspired by the love, goodwill, generosity, and closeness that arise in people during Advent and Christmas.



But I’m a curious learner, and I’m a writer and a reader that is always seeking novelty. I don’t like being taught the same lessons, hearing the same variations of sermons and reflections, or reading anything delivered as an original idea when I’ve read it a dozen times the same way. That made being a churchgoer in the last few years disappointing at times, and it makes being a pastor incredibly challenging and daunting. If I’m not inspired in new ways, is the inspiration worth anything? If inspiration isn’t challenging me, is it just sentimentality?

Many of us find ourselves in these kinds of ruts, cynical about the old stories and themes of hope, peace, joy, and love because despair, violence, resentment, and hatred keep popping up. It’s difficult to be inspired when disappointment has become the norm.

It’s that reality that I think necessitates a return to the basics. Seasons like Advent its themes are not about novelty, or once-and-for-all statements that will finally end all disappointment and



despair. Advent is our reminder that no matter what despair, violence, resentment, or hatred we face, hope, peace, joy, and love are not going anywhere. They are always arriving, they are always becoming and manifesting; they always are. Their spark will always alight in the darkness somewhere.

So, when I sit at my desk and feel stumped trying to think of fresh ways to communicate the old stories, ideas, and themes, I take comfort in knowing others (many, many, many others) have been where I am. I take some comfort that faith, in part, is about reflecting on those stories again and again to see how they inform us today. I take comfort in knowing that in seasons like Advent, returning to the basics — hope, peace, joy, and love — is the point. In the same way we make room for Christ during Advent, give these themes room in your trials, sorrows, disappointments, and resentments to bring life and light.



Winter coats for all ages

(give coats or money to Bill/Carol Yerkes)

Mittens, gloves, & hats

(no scarves, please)

Christmas families

(see gift info on credenza in BFR)





Mission Moment

Mary Normand, Mission Board Chair

Giving Tree December Giving Tree is hats, gloves, and mittens to be given to Siren/Eaton and ECFC to keep their clients warm this winter. We also are continuing to collect winter coats and/or money to purchase them. Donations are way down this year, so if you can help out, it would be much appreciated. See Bill or Carol Yerkes if you have questions.

Christmas Families We will be adopting at least 2 families this year to provide them with a Christmas. Sheets with items requested are on the credenza in the Bess Fulton Room.

Loads of Love: Our next one that we will be sponsoring is January 18. There are more churches that are showing an interest. It appears that there will be a Loads of Love once every month. Our January Giving Tree is going to be in support of Loads of Love. More information will be coming in January 5 when Mission Board will be doing the children's message.

Health Kits: Mission Board purchased 288 Health Kits for the homeless. These were divided between Helping Hands, ECFC, Siren/Eaton, and Housing Services.



Christmas Fund: These are monies that are collected to help retired clergy with expenses. They will be collected December 22 but will be accepted anytime in December. Just note that it is for the Christmas Fund on your check or envelope.

Suitcases4Kids is needing help this year with gifts for their clients. Mission Board voted to give them \$100.

The Birdfeeder (High School Food Bank) is in need of donations. Mission Board voted to purchase \$200 in groceries for them. There is so much need out there.

Please Remember: Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can. John Wesley

Stay Tuned



Advocating Shalom

Curt Scott

It should never matter to a Christian what moment they find themselves in. The task is the same: respond with compassion and mercy. Feel the cries of injustice. Feed the widow and tend to the orphan. Go to village meetings and ask, “Who will be hurt by this?” Confront deception. Internalize God.

We feel in our God Bones that increased suffering is neigh; more un-housed people, more desperation, more fear and bewilderment. Yet our central task as the Body of Christ has been the same since Jesus. Carry light into darkness. Respond immediately and relentlessly to induced suffering. Feed souls, especially your own. Teach all of this to children.

However mind-numbing it may be if our neighbors are rounded up and sent to concentration camps, our reaction should reflect the Teachings of Jesus Christ, not Rambo or Santa Clause. Understand, also, that need in the village was dire before the last election, and general silence to that need, deafening.

We have homeless, hungry young people barely existing in 1930s numbers. We know some of them. Advocate for shelter. We have elderly people eating cat food because their cost of staying alive has reached pre-Black Plague conditions. Why? Because housing is now intrinsically linked, not to social or cultural prosperity, but Wall Street investment, and thus is driven by quarterly-profits rather than human need. Advocate.

For decades, Charlotte has needed hundreds of houses, apartments and other forms of basic shelter added to its housing stock, year upon year. It’s been almost 60 years since anything like that happened. Developers we know are some of the problem, but potentially also the solution. The plight, however, happened on our watch. Repent is probably a better word for this failure, then advocate.

Like the last decades of Rome, the wealthiest Americans have excused themselves from paying the costs of Empire. The poorest Americans have been increasingly picking up their slack since 1982. Black and Indigenous folk have, with their lives, borne the brunt of white, Christian greed for every single one of the last 500 years. Definitely, just repent.

The idea is not to suddenly become louder, then be martyred, but to more adamantly be what Jesus left behind and assume it will work again. First and foremost, be present. Stand for the ethics of Jesus Christ when the ethics of Caesar are brought up as rational thinking. Insist upon

moral decency. Ask, “Who will be hurt?” so that everyone in the room knows that Jesus is present in Spirit: you.

Homeless young people in the tree line are a sign of a complete systemic failure that took two generations to complete. Advocate for the restoration of human progress against the devolution of everything from civil rights to clean air and water. Expect it to cost friends, and maybe your life. Stand up anyway.

It was never about Easter dresses and Advent calendars to Jesus.

We need to remind ourselves, our friends and our enemies that Jesus was not a rogue rabbi, a peaceful Centurion or a Roman journalist with a crazy opinion. He was more like the guy standing in front of the tank at Tiananmen Square. So, it’s our job to stand in front of tanks and say, “No!” It always was. Even better, stand up at meetings so that the tanks never come. Advocate for the least among us before there are millions more.

Like the original church of James and Peter, we’ve chosen, as our calling, tending the needs of the village, often to the point of personal exhaustion. We meet on Sunday to refresh our souls, think, laugh and cry, preferably while eating. Music is our balm, friendship our gold. As the Body of Christ, please remember that today is always just like yesterday: always our moment to be Shalom.

A few ideas as you begin (or continue) on your path to advocating.

1. Spend time in your community.
2. Attend meetings - City Council and School Board, for instance.
3. Commit to one small act a day/week that connects to your passions, interests, and values.
4. Vote
5. Volunteer
6. Read and research about the topics and issues you are called to AND the ones that feel at the edge of your comfort zone.
7. Check your privilege and reflect on systems of privilege and oppression.
8. Find creative outlets for your processing and expression.
9. Talk with friends and family about issues you are curious about.
10. Write letters, send faxes, tag, or call local and federal politicians.
11. Host or participate in book clubs or conversation groups.
12. Find mentors and guides.
13. Enroll in trainings to learn more about issues that you care about.
14. Practice self-care AND collective care.



Proposing Change

Matt Slot, Council President 2024

If you've ever looked at the bulletin insert, the website calendar, or read the Tuesday email, you surely understand that this is a very, VERY busy church. There are so many events, so many groups, and so many people who show up to make these things happen.

In the 6 years since we last updated the By-Laws, the number of new teams and informal groups has grown dramatically, and the church reporting structure has simply not kept up. Following the 2022 Strategic Plan, a new ad hoc group was assembled to organize these groups into a new structure, one that is easy to understand and better reflects the various functions of the church.

On November 24, a Congregational Meeting was called to propose and present updating the By-Laws, to be voted on at the Annual Meeting in January. On the next page, there is an organizational chart which tries to capture the proposed changes visually, but here's a summary of the top-level items:

There are 4 named church officers: President, Vice-President, Clerk, and Treasurer. Council will consist of 12 voting seats: President, Vice-President, Clerk, and 9 Team Leaders. The President will only vote as a tie-breaker, and the Treasurer is a non-voting position that reports to Council (unless also serving as a Team Leader below). Finally, the Member-at-Large position is eliminated.

The 9 Teams are grouped as follows: "Ministry" is composed of the "Worship Team", "Education Team", and a new "Church Life" team, which will be responsible for membership development and engagement. "Stewardship" is composed of the combined "Business and Finance" team, "Buildings and Grounds", and "Communications", which becomes a formal Council seat. Finally, the "Missions" group consists of "CARE", "Outreach" (formerly Missions), and "Social and Environmental Justice" (SEJ) also becomes a new Council seat. All other new and existing groups will fall under this reporting structure, save Pastoral Search and outside chartered organizations (Women's Fellowship, Scouts, etc.).

Finally, members are allowed to vote at Council and Congregational meetings while attending remotely (such as over Zoom), as long as they are able to observe, respond, and otherwise participate in the proceedings. However, proxy voting is not allowed -- you must be able to interact in order to vote.

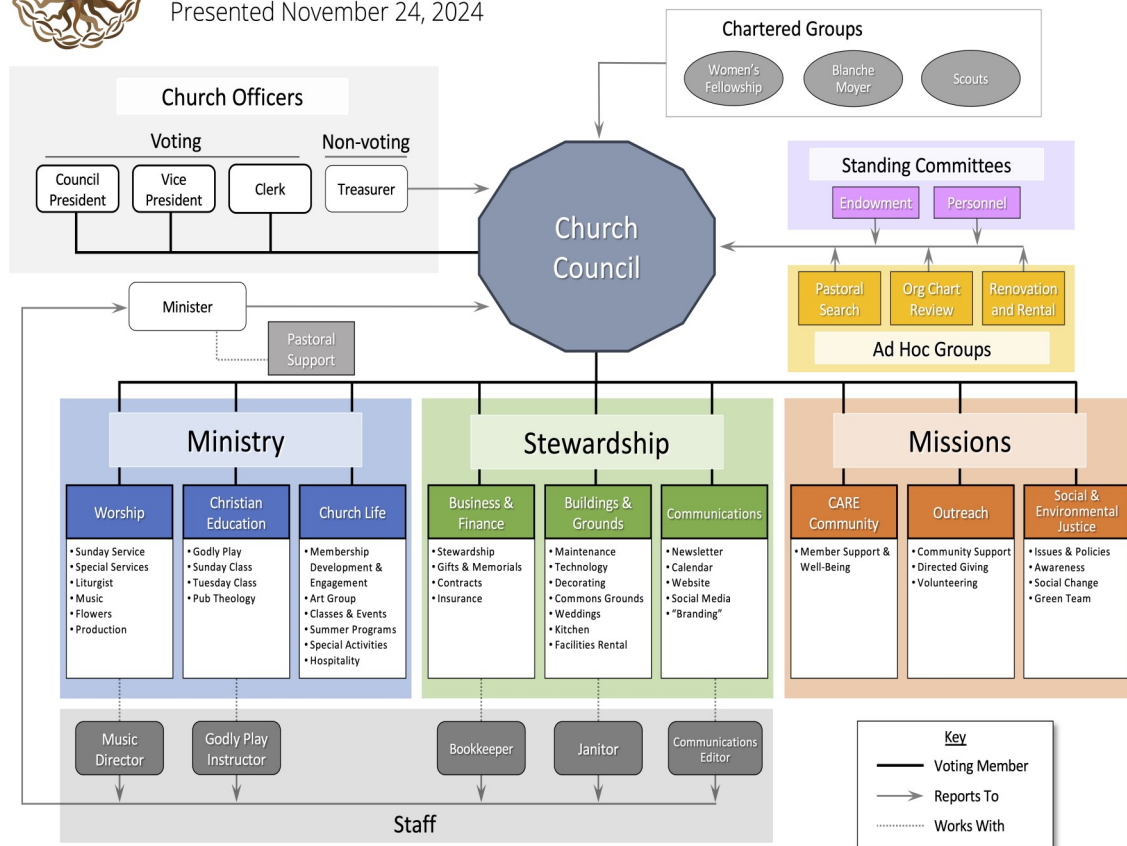
Overall, we feel that the proposed changes will make it easier to understand how the church is organized, provide representation to key teams, and better prepare for future opportunities and growth.

If you have not received a copy of the proposed changes, you can receive an electronic or print copy by reaching out to the office. Your feedback on the proposed draft is welcome through the month of December. You can submit your comments and suggestions to the office, to Council, or directly to Matt Slot or Kathie Cook. Again, the final discussion and vote will be held at the Annual Meeting in January.



First Congregational United Church of Christ

Proposed Organizational Chart
Presented November 24, 2024



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	Lexi Konietzko. akonietzko129@gmail.com
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	1st & 3rd Sat, 10 am, Annex SMR	Larry Taylor, TaylorLT1752@att.net



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

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

December 1, First Sunday of Advent - **Hope**

December 8, Second Sunday of Advent - **Peace**

December 9, 1 pm, **Blanche Moyer Holiday Appetizer Potluck and White Elephant Gift Exchange**, RSVP Barb Anderson, barbaraf5543@icloud.com

December 14, 6 pm, Our Choir will be performing in **Charlotte's Merry Little Christmas** at Charlotte Performing Arts Center. 378 State Street, Free Event

December 15, Third Sunday of Advent - **Joy**

December 22, Fourth Sunday of Advent - **Love**, Christmas Fund Offering

December 22, 6 pm, **Ecumenical Blue Christmas Service**

December 24, 7 pm, **Christmas Eve Candlelight Service**

December 29, **Family Christmas Pageant**

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