



First Congregational
United Church of Christ
Charlotte, Michigan
January 2026
Volume 3
Issue 1

Never place a
period where God
has placed a comma

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Still Speaking



Stories on Page 2 and Pages 10, 12, 13

January 9 & 21

Join us for Music In
the Sanctuary!
The WISE committee
is offering an hour
of contemplative
music for calming
the mind and
restoring the soul
(times on page

Time to
paint
some
bowling
pins. Story
page 8.



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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. Article deadline is the 25th of each month.

About the cover: The children formed a choir for caroling purposes. They sang one of their songs, Silent Night, for the Family Christmas Pageant. From left to right (front), Anija E, Wyatt C, Rylan E, Saniya E, Colten C, Sequoya E, and Marceline. From left to right (back), Zelda H, Le'Tayvia E, and Lynn'Aiyah E. Story on pages

PASTOR'S POST

Pastor Adam Droscha

New Year's: Only a Matter of Time

At the time I'm writing this, it is December 17, Christmas has not yet come (obviously), I have only just made plans with family for Christmas day, and I am feeling that holiday season daze familiar to pastors, ministers, and priests. Which is to say writing a piece for the January newsletter or thinking about anything that's not happening in the next seven days seems, at best, a questionable use of time. 'Time' is the operative word here and a topic I want us to think about as we transition into the New Year. For the last few months I have been reading philosopher Martin Heidegger's seminal work 'Being and Time' (If you have any context for Heidegger or any other philosopher within the school of German Idealism, you'll understand exactly why it's taking me months to read one book. Wandering, run-on sentences are both the style and form.), so the object of time and who we are within it has been on my mind of late.

I was sitting at my desk this week, gazing lovingly at Sidestreets Deli as I often do, when I thought about how New Year's is simply another calendar date. Not New Year's as a holiday celebration necessarily, but the mark of the new calendar year itself; it's just another day. Nothing inherently magical, or substantial happens on New Year's. Nothing really changes. Again, I'm talking about the calendrical nature of the day, how it measures and marks time, not the romance of the holiday, resolutions, or the hope of a new season. New Year's Day is simply another day that comes and goes like any other. Many of you are well past excitement for most holidays by this point in your lives, let alone staying up until midnight on New Year's Eve; stick with me though.

I forget sometimes how directed and constrained I am by time, or how much I've tried to orient myself around time (Some reading that last line

understand that all too well from working with me. Special apologies to Ramona and Caryn in particular, who are often on the receiving end of my inconsistent regard for time.). At my work desk, my work calendar and weekly planner are always flattened out. I attempt to write down meetings, appointments, and events. To my right, on a free hanging shelf next to a photograph of theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is a small clock I can look to so I don't have to keep time with my cell phone. I still resort to checking the time on my cellphone, however, which inevitably leads to distracting five-minute side quests of aimless app surfing. For months I've had the book 'Atomic Habits' by James Clear centered on my desk, the purpose of which is to help readers develop healthy habits and quit wasting time. Propped on my desk and leaning against my window to the outside world is a framed photo I took of a beach in Olympic National Park in Washington with one of my favorite lines of poet WH Auden from his poem 'Spain 1937,' which reads, "We are left alone with our day, and time is short." So in my workspace I try to balance the measurement of time with making meaning of time, structuring time with best use of time, and so on.

Measuring time, marking it, and scheduling around it, as we all know, is part of the human experience in modern life. It seems that most electronics are somehow incomplete if they do not come equipped with a clock. Yet, the interesting thing about time and how the average person measures it day to day, as physicists and philosophers tell us, is that clocks and calendars don't actually measure and mark time itself. It's truer to say that clocks and calendars give structure to our perception within time because time is actually a mysterious material of the universe, one that is relative to celestial bodies and gravity, and, so far as we can tell, only moves in one direction.

So, I've spent a lot of ink here prattling about the New Year, calendars, the nature of time, and my desk. What I'm getting at is clocks and calendars are not our time. They give us structure and help us stay organized, but clocks are not our moments and hours, and calendars are not our days and years. These organizing tools help us observe time from our own perspective, but they are not time themselves. And while we live

and move within time, time is moving forward without consent or much regard for us; thousands of years of humanity's existence is seconds on the cosmic time scale. The New Year may be upon us, but when the clock strikes midnight we are still much the same as we were at 11:59 pm.

As we head into this new year of 2026, keep time in perspective (That's all you can do anyway.). Remember that time itself is part of you, and you are in it. Time is not in your control, but, as with most things in life, you have some control in your relationship with it. Don't let your only relationship with time be in measuring, observing, and passing through it. You are part of the unfolding of time itself, so let the substance of your moments and hours, days and years be of laughter and joy, community and love, attentiveness to one another, and appreciation to have any time at all. Happy New Year, friends. I am grateful for this time we have together.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Deb Cogswell, Social and Environmental Justice Team

Environmental Health Presentation Sunday, January 18, 11 am

On January 18, the Social and Environmental Justice Team will be hosting coffee hour with guest speaker Ashley Mark from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Service. Ashley will be discussing health effects that can occur when exposed to environmental hazards such as micro plastics, wildfire smoke and mercury in our fish. She will have suggestions on how to apply safe practices and limit exposure and welcomes any questions regarding environmental health. All are welcome to attend.



OUTREACH MOMENT

Mary Normand, Chair

November Giving Tree 143 pair of heavy socks for the homeless were distributed to Eaton Clothing and Furniture Center (aka, ECFC), Helping Hands Food Bank, and Housing Services

January Giving Tree

*Sheets
Towels
Blankets*

Adopted Christmas families Thank You to everyone who participated in this project. We filled a pickup truck and van with gifts for our two families. The generosity of this church never ceases to amaze me.

Winter Coat Project One hundred new and gently used coats have been donated to Eaton Clothing and Furniture Center and SIREN/Eaton. We voted to purchase a pair of winter boots for a church member who was in need of them.

Loads of Love Our church will host the first Loads of Love event of 2026 on January 17. We are funding it internally through a mini grant. For those unfamiliar with the Loads of Love program, there are several churches/organizations in Charlotte that participate. Once a month, on the third Saturday, one of the groups is at Quality Dairy Laundromat from 8-11 am. paying for folks' laundry. This has proven to be a very necessary program. It has grown from providing the service 4 times a year to having enough participants that it can be held monthly.

Festival of Trees This event raised \$4083 for Eaton Clothing and Furniture Center. There were 64 entries and 101 bidders. We have already picked our theme for next year. It is a CAT tree. See, it's never too early to start thinking about entries for next year's Festival.

For your calendar Dessert auction is April 10. Proceeds to go to Eaton Clothing and Furniture Center to support their mission of helping folks in Eaton and Barry counties who are struggling financially.

To Love Is To Act. – Victor Hugo

Stay Tuned

MLK DAY PRESENTATION

Ramona Kime, Social and Environmental Services Team

Monday, January 19, 6:30 pm, Sanctuary (Reception to follow)

In recognition of Martin Luther King Day, the Justice League of Greater Lansing will be giving a presentation that examines the historical events that created long-standing wealth inequities, and they will explore the concept of reparations, why it's important, and how they're addressing the racial wealth gap in the Greater Lansing area.

The Justice League was created in 2021 to repair the breach caused by the historical damage of slavery and its aftermath. In the spirit of repentance for racism, they are working to build relationships and facilitate reparations between houses of worship and collaborative partners. Making the presentation will be co-founder and president of the Justice League, Prince Solace, and co-founder and vice president, Willye Bryan.

A Lansing native and a descendant of Mississippi Delta sharecroppers, Prince Solace graduated from Holt High School, attended LCC, and earned a bachelor's degree in professional communications from Sienna Heights University. His career spans roles in corporate and non-profit institutions where he uses inclusive frameworks to promote equitable and empowering working environments. Prince actively leverages his network within the Greater Lansing region to promote the mission of the Justice League.

Willye Bryan worked as a career entomologist, spending most of her career with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, then in the private industry, and lastly as a researcher at Michigan State University. She founded the Justice League in 2021 as a project to initiate reparations with predominantly white houses of worship for the descendants of enslaved Africans in the greater Lansing area. This was done to repair the breach caused by centuries of slavery and its continued devastating aftermath, such as prison leasing, lynching, legalized segregation, redlining, mass incarceration, etc. Willye says that the part of her life as a community activist is motivated by working to be the change she wants to see in the world around her.

"Justice is what love looks like in public." – Cornel West

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ART MINISTRY CORNER

Stephanie Tighe, Art Team Member

With the start of the new year, the Art Ministry encourages all to join in on some of their fun. In creating, we are able to draw closer to one another, to our internal self, and to our Creator God.

Except for June and July, the team holds regular meetings twice a month - the second and fourth Tuesday. They also have fun "extra" times. The church art room is located on the second floor, at the end of the long open space.

January 10, 2026 10:30 am Bowling Pins!! This is a fun activity we did in previously in 2024. Turn them into chickens or turkeys or Batman or many other ideas!! This is a **FAMILY FUN** activity!



January 13, 2026 11 am Junk Journals. Art Team Meeting

February 13, 2026 6 pm Group Painting Class with Wine and refreshments. **Adults only.**

February 18, 2026 11 am - Papermaking. Art Team Meeting



March date to be determined - outreach to Nursing home to do craft activity

March 10, 2026 11 am - Bookmaking/binding. Art Team Meeting

March 21, 2026 10:30 am - Meditative Art. See what your inner artist wants to express! **Open to All.**

March 22, 2026 11 am - During Coffee Hour - Help us to package up bags for the shut in members.

April 4, 2026 10 am Easter Egg Hunt for the Godly Play children

April 24, 2026 5:30 pm Retreat Dinner

April 25, 2026 10 am to 5 pm Women's Retreat

May 2, 2026 10:30 am Making Mothers/Fathers gifts **Open to All!**

August 25, 2026 11 am Painting the Garbage Enclosure - an end of the summer Fun Opportunity.

September 19, 2026 10:30 am Family tie dye, bring a white t-Shirt or object to tie dye. Family Fun Activity!

October 24, 2026 10:30 am Mask making and button making

November 10, 2026 11am Card making for Shut-ins. ATO

November 22, 2026 11am Congregation helps with stuffing envelopes for shut-ins

November 24, 2026 11 am Art Team completes bags for shut ins in the Art Team Meeting

December 8, 2026 11am. Annual Art Team Tea



RESTED AND READY

Chris Mereschuk, Southern New England Conference, UCC

[Jesus said to them,] *“Beware, keep alert, for you don’t know when the time will come. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”* – Mark 13:33, 37 (NRSVUE)

Against my better judgement, there I was: downtown on New Year’s Eve in 1999, joining the countdown when I should’ve been in a bunker. “10, 9, 8...” Just several more seconds until ... something? Surely existence itself set its clock to Eastern Standard Time, and the stroke of midnight would usher in the End of History. “3, 2, 1...” Nothing. Y2K came and went. The countdown was a letdown after such a buildup.

What did we think would happen at such an arbitrary time? It seems kind of silly now. And yet there are those who remain alert and hyper-vigilant, prepared for the worst. Calendar coincidences, astronomical and astrological events, wars and rumors of wars lead us to calculate apocalyptic dates. But we can never know when the time will come.

Constant vigilance is exhausting and counterproductive. And being caught unaware and unprepared is a risk. Our reality is less about a divinely ordered end time and more about human-caused existential threats. We can’t close our eyes to these things, yet injustice-induced insomnia leaves us too depleted to respond when the moment arrives. So how can we be rested and ready?

What if rather than keeping awake, we kept prepared and connected? Instead of stockpiling canned goods, let’s stockpile our communities with mutual care. Some will keep awake while we rest, and rest while we keep awake, trusting that all will be prepared when the moment calls.

And for this, there is no mysterious future date—because the time is now.

Prayer

Call us into connection and community so that we are rested and ready for a time such as this. Amen.

DECEMBER HAPPENINGS

Caryn Hansen, Communications

Blue Christmas

An Ecumenical Blue Christmas Service took place on Sunday, December 14, 2025. Together with Lawrence Avenue United Methodist Church and St. John's Episcopal Church, we attempted to make space for the darker side of the holidays - grief, stress, loss. Reverend Wendy Brown (SJEC), Reverend John Messner (LAUMC), and our own Pastor Adam Droscha guided us through responsive readings, candle lighting, scripture passages, hymns, and reflections. Our music director Ramona Kime, brought us into the service with Silent Night, acknowledging the silence and sent us home with the ever soulful Coventry Carol.



Our Choir Sings

Our senior choir participated in Charlotte's Merry Little Christmas on December 13 at the Charlotte Performing Arts Center. This annual free family event also featured the Community Band and Chamber ensemble as well as the Jazz Ensemble (and St Nick!).

They also had a sing-along and a holiday gift basket auction.



Kiddos Caroling

Our children tried a new-to-them activity this year: Caroling church members and caroling at Hope Landing on Monday, December 22. Working with Kathie Cook ahead of time, they chose one song from the four songs they sang to be included in the Christmas pageant on December 28.

The children popped over to Maria and Terry Davis first. They had a small house full of guests so Maria brought the children inside to carol. The Davis home is where they visit Jo-Jo the giant tortoise in the summer so they were excited to visit their friends. Todd was a bit disappointed not to see his hard shelled friend, so queried Maria as to location. (Jo-Jo is at his winter home, University of Olivet.)



Maria sent them off to their next stop with cookies and pretzel sticks.

Their next stop was the Santa Claus stop with David and Amy Frost. They sang their same four tunes (*Silent Night*, *Jingle Bells*, *Rudolph*, and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*) to a group of friends gathered there and left with baggies of caramel popcorn. (Have you ever seen the Frost's lawn this time of year? It's covered in SANTA's!)



Morgan Englehart made arrangements for the children to carol at Hope Landing next. We walked the hallways and gave out home made ornaments. We ran into Ann Kent playing UNO, a friend of Vonda Stanton, who sent a "Hello" to her friend. She knew our church well. The children thought it might be fun to come back and play UNO sometime.

Steve MacKenzie was our next stop. This is where the children laughingly sang a much loved alternate version of Jingle Bells (it included Batman and smelly socks or something like that). Steve invited us in to show us his lovely Christmas decorations that he purchased at Festival of Trees! Steve sent them away with crème de menthe candies.



Our last stop was Deb and Bryan Reid. The two grandma's accompanying this troupe felt the sugar rush caught up to the children at this point since they couldn't seem to stand or sit still and were bouncing off the walls (or on the couch) - sorry Bryan and Deb. Despite the signs of sugar rush, they nevertheless took the sweets offered as they called it a night.



Candlelight Service, Christmas Eve

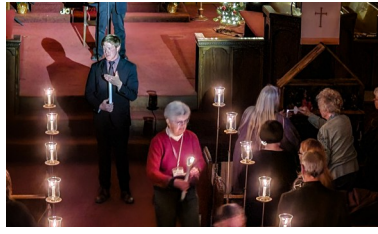
Strategically scheduled at 8 pm to avoid the traditional fire engine sirens delivering toys to children, we had about 150 attendees at this year's candlelight service on Christmas Eve. We are the work of Christmas that begins anew each year. The



candlelight service reminds us that we are the light of Christmas into a dark world. The light is love. We light one another's candles; we renew one

another; we show God's love through our actions.

A special thanks goes to all of those who had a role in this special service, including those who prepared the sanctuary and worked behind the scenes.



The Family Christmas Pageant - Back to Bethlehem

Our Annual Children's Christmas pageant took place during our morning worship service on December 28. Kathie Cook writes the Christmas pageant script and directs it every year. This was her 32nd year writing and directing! It changes a little every year. Last year, we had a live baby Jesus (Felix); this year toddling Felix wandered the aisles and the baby Jesus was already in the manger at the start of the performance.

Evelo and Annabelle Cook, the children of that once-upon-a-time first grader in the first show, now narrate the production, giving other children their cues to come forward as they unwind the Bethlehem story of Jesus' birth and the events that followed. This year, Rylan Englehart was a camel. Last year, he was a shepherd. This year our solo shepherd was Zelda, the older sister of Wyatt and Colten visiting for Christmas. Our angels were the five Englehart daughters, along with their cousin Marcelina. Once again, Wyatt and Colten were wisemen.

Things are the same and different. We build memories in the hearts of our children, and remember the story with new eyes every year.



AS WE ENTER THE NEW YEAR

Grace

By Ann Roskamp

Grace is the best Christmas gift we always get to give those who think differently than us,
those who are our neighbors, our enemies, our families.
We get grace this Christmas and we get to give Grace this Christmas.
Grace isn't a soft, feeble gift, but the most robust transformative gift of all.

H.E.A.L.T.H.

By Lawrence Richardson

Helping hands and hearts make the world a better place.
Energy to sustain our efforts comes from our connection to the Spirit of God.
All we do with and for each other, when rooted in Christian love, yields good fruit.
Let us love one another deeply, courageously, and fiercely.
Taking risks for the Gospel alive in our hearts, homes, and communities.
Holy One, bless us as we seek to love one another and be your church.

The Work of Christmas

By Howard Thurman

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,

The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.

First Coming

by Madeleine L'Engle

He did not wait...
till hearts were pure. In joy he came
to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame
he came, and his Light would not go out.

For Joy

By Jan Richardson

You can prepare
but still
it will come to you
by surprise

crossing through your door-
way
calling your name in greet-
ing
turning like a child
who quickens suddenly
within you

it will astonish you
how wide your heart
will open
in welcome

for the joy
that finds you
so ready
and still so
unprepared.

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	Sun, 10:20 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	Sandra Field yourstrulycollection@hotmail.com
Mental & Spiritual Wellness Support Group	Unknown	Kate Durda, KateDurda@gmail.com
Pub Theology	2nd, 4th Thurs. 7 pm, Riedys	Adam Droscha pastor@uccCharlotte.org
Adult Bible Study	Tuesdays, 6 pm, LMR	Curt Scott, CurtisJScott@hotmail.com
Coffee Hour with a Pastor	Evelyn Bay, Tuesday, 10 am	Pastor Droscha, pastor@uccCharlotte.org
Healthy Lifestyle Class	Last Saturday, 10 am, LMR	Deb Cogswell, cogswell2003@gmail.com
Music		
Choir Practice	Wednesday, 7 pm, Lounge	Ramona Kime, Ramona.Kime@gmail.com
Bell Choir	Wednesday, 4 pm, Sanctuary	Jenny Bohms, rjbohms@yahoo.com
Committees & Groups		
Art Ministry Committee	2nd, 4th Tues, 11 am, Art Rm	Sandra Field, yourstrulycollection@hotmail.com
Blanche Moyer	2nd Monday, 5:15 pm, LMR	Judi Cates, JudithCates68@gmail.com
Church Life	Sept. 2nd Mon. 6:30, SMR	Amy Frost, frostamy58@gmail.com
Communications	3rd Monday, 6:30 pm, SMR	Matt Slot, MattSlot@gmail.com
Prayer Shawl	1st & 3rd Sat, 9:30 am, Lounge	Diane Hudson, dianeHUDSON@sbcglobal.net
Social & Environmental Justice Committee	2nd Sun, 11:30 am, Annex LMR	Mary Kohmuench, mtheoharis@gmail.com
Women's Fellowship	As Needed	Mary Normand, DavidNormand@att.net
Men's Group	2nd and 4th Saturday, 10 am	Larry Taylor, TaylorLT1752@att.net



Still Speaking

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

A full calendar of events can be found at
www.uccCharlotte.org/calendar

- January 1** - Office Closed for holiday
- January 3** - Prayer Shawl, Church Lounge
- January 4** - Women's Fellowship Annual Meeting directly following coffee hour,
- January 5** - Church Life Meeting, 6:30 pm
- January 7** - Care Community, Annex Library
- January 8** - Pub Theology, 7 pm, Reidy's Pub
- January 9** - Music in the Sanctuary, 6:30 - 8:30 pm
- January 10** - Men's Group, Annex Large Meeting Room
- January 10** - Bowling Pin Painting, 10:30 am, Church Art Room
- January 13** - Art Team Meeting - Junk Journals, 11 am, Church Art Room
- January 15** - Prayer Group, 10:30 am, Small Prayer Room
- January 17** - Prayer Shawl Group, 9 am, 9 am, Church Lounge
- January 17** - Cozy Congregational Creators, 10 am to 2 pm, Church Art Room
- January 18** - Environmental Health Presentation, 11 am, Bess Fulton Room
- January 19** - MLK Presentation, Refreshments to follow, Sanctuary
- January 21** - Music in the Sanctuary, 3 - 4 pm
- January 22** - Pub Theology, 7 pm, Reidy's Pub
- January 24** - Men's Group, Annex Large Meeting Room
- January 25** - Annual Church Meeting, 11 am, Sanctuary
- January 26** - Communications Meeting, 6:30 pm, Annex Small Meeting Room
- January 27** - Art Team Meeting, Church Art Room