

# THE MESSENGER

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2022

First Congregational Church UCC  
412 4th Street Manistee Mi



## From The Pastor

Dear Friends,

The newsletter that comes out in the few weeks before Easter is always a strange one to write. Should we sit in lent a little longer? Perhaps. But as I look out at the world I can see that every living thing is ready for spring, is ready for something fresh and life giving so it is understandable, that when I begin to write the newsletter article for whatever month Easter is in, I want to lean a little more into Easter than Lent. This balancing act between the quiet, the grief and the waiting of lent, and the hope, the life and the joy of what we know is coming; the celebration of Easter feels appropriate right now. The world's grief and worry is heavy beyond belief, but still there are moments of joy. If you are like me you probably see the news and wonder if we will make it through any of this; as storms grow bigger and stronger and wreak

havoc across the globe, war happening in Ukraine as saber rattling happens around the globe, unimaginable numbers of refugees seek shelter, inflation costs continue to rise, and more and more. But then something happens to fill you with hope for the future, kids continue to wow us with their ingenuity and kindness, grandchildren continue to fill grandparents with joy, and spring pushes forward with new hope showing in every flower that blooms a little early or robin that sings in the morning. In other words, the capacity for human kindness and compassion continues to push back against the capacity for human cruelty. This is perhaps just the way things are a constant balance between big and little worries and big and little joys. This rollercoaster of emotions can be exhausting and leave us feeling as if our heads are spinning faster and faster, and cause us to feel as if we are out of breath. But I wonder if it isn't all a part of what it means to be people of faith, to be a part of the wider community. There will always be times when we are both joyful and sad, hopeful and filled with worry. If we waited for everything to be right before feeling joy, and embracing hope, we would never be ready for either one.

We have about 2 weeks before we actually get to celebrate Easter, and in those days there will be time to sit with the all the Lent related feelings, but Easter is coming, so it is just as expected to lean into the hope of the days to come, to begin to work towards the life and joy that spring promises. Steve Garnaas Holmes shared this poem and scripture on his blog [unfolding light](#). I believe it is an excellent bit of inspiration for times like this, when we are caught in the balance of hope and worry, the time where we are still waiting but more than ready for change.

Be patient, beloved,  
until the coming of the Lord.

The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth,  
being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.

You also must be patient.

Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.

—James 5.7-8

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Hope is not wishing: no, not that tentative.  
 Hope is not wanting: no, not that self-centered.  
 Hope is trust in grace unseen,  
 already there, already unfolding,  
 the seed beneath, the child within.  
 Hope is surrender to a greater movement,  
 acceptance that I am the thread  
 and the tapestry is vast.  
 Hope is confidence in spring as winter approaches.  
 Hope is belief in the fullness of time.  
 Hope is knowing in death and suffering  
 there is a healing presence.  
 Hope is patience, letting grace take its time.  
 Hope is planting ourselves in a future  
 that exists only in our acting:  
 raising children, loving enemies, planting trees.  
 Hope is awaiting the One Who is Here.

Steve Garnaas-Holmes  
 Unfolding Light  
[www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net)  
 December 9, 2019

Blessing  
 Pastor Liz

April 4- Jane Amstutz  
 April 5- Jan Williams  
 April 6- Elissa Solis Miller  
 April 12- Ashely Johnson  
 April 13 - Steve Davidson

## April Birthdays



April 23- Laurie Lashbrook  
 April 26- Doug Savelle  
 April 27- Ryleigh Sands  
 April 30- Nathalee  
 Simoneau

## Happy Anniversary

April 1- Ben and Ann Bifoss  
 April 9- Jerry and Mary Lewis  
 April 30- Erik and Barb Johnson



## Crafts

The crafts group has been meeting every  
 Wednesday from 9-Noonish.  
 Everyone is welcome to join them. There has  
 projects for both sewers and non-sewers.  
 Everyone is Welcome!



## Moderator's Musings

We are deep into the Lenten Season looking forward to Holy Week and Easter Sunday which is coming rather late this year. Spring is beginning to peek around the corner and trying to decide whether to make a commitment to warming and greening up. It is a season of anticipation in so many ways!

We have been able to meet and worship in person in our fellowship hall during the winter season. It has been a real joy to be able to see and talk with so many on Sunday mornings even if we must do it through our masks. We may not be able to see each other's smiles, but the light in your eyes certainly tells me that you are thankful for the opportunity to be together. I know that I am anticipating the day when we can safely meet without the masks and without the fear of a deadly virus.

The painters have finished over 40 days of plaster repair and painting in our 130-year-old sanctuary. We can joyfully anticipate returning to this gleaming beautiful worship space on Palm Sunday. We will also be honored to share the refurbished sanctuary as we invite others to join us for a community Good Friday worship service. Easter Sunday will be a truly glorious day to celebrate the Resurrection.

We can also anticipate hearing more good news from the Sanctuary Project fundraising campaign. We have exceeded our initial goal of raising \$13,000 to win a matching gift from a generous anonymous donor. We currently have about \$30,000 in the bank that will go to repay the loans we took from the Endowment and Glass Sticks and Bricks Funds. Our goal is to raise \$75,000 and we will continue to ask for your help in achieving this target. Please consider helping in any way you possibly can.

As we continue to see the Covid risk reduced for those of us who are fully vaccinated we will also anticipate the opportunity to start up a regular weekly BINGO night to help raise funds for our church's mission and outreach work. We will need to recruit at least five dedicated individuals who will be trained to properly operate the BINGO games. As soon as we get those key members trained, we can then start to plan for regular games and activities. We will also need help from members who can sell and serve snacks and drinks as well as helping make the BINGO games go smoothly for our customers. It will be fun and a great way to get more people engaged in our beautiful building for some fun fellowship. Please contact me and let me know if you are willing to help!

As always, do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns or issues that need attention. My contact information is below.

John Helge.

**Cell Phone: 616-915-2403.**

**Email: [johnmhelge@gmail.com](mailto:johnmhelge@gmail.com)**

## Faith Formation

In our late 20's, when Jake & I were just a few years into marriage, we would sneak for a few getaways each year between academic calendars, family holidays, & professional schedules. Without loud kids at the time to shush at campgrounds or a minivan to manage excess pillows, books, or filthy socks, we were as free as cross country highways would allow.

For years we were committed to our road atlas, purchasing a new one for our anniversary each year. And even though I have forever pledged my allegiance to Google maps for city driving, I still often travel long distances with our spiral bound Rand McNally US map on my lap.

It was also during these early years of traveling on two pennies pinched together that we discovered Roadside America ([roadsideamerica.com](http://roadsideamerica.com)), an online guide to all things foolish, offbeat, hilarious, and in need of unnecessary attention.

Over years of traveling without reservations or destinations in mind, we have made our way from visiting a 50 ft. lady's leg sundial located right in the center of an Indiana nudist colony to the world's largest chainsaw here in the lovely state of Michigan!

The possibilities of off the beaten path adventures are endless & each stop we make with the assistance of Roadside America makes us laugh harder than we could ever anticipate. I mean, who doesn't need to witness a replicated stern of the doomed Titanic as it sinks into a sea of painted rubber pellets in someone's front yard?

I share this because, as Liz has shared with us each day throughout this Lent season, God's light shines even in the darkest of corners, and I would like to add, the most absurd of places.

It's impossible for us to carry on our shoulders the weight of loss we are faced with each day.

Still, every morning we tenderly gather up the suffering we see scattered all around us and day after day choose to offer it to the One who holds all things.

And every evening we lay to rest with a hundred possibilities on our mind & walk along neighborhood sidewalks knowing too much and still fully aware we will never know everything.

So we laugh. We submit. We lay down. And we laugh again & again & again.

We take time to be ridiculous. We remember how incredibly small we are. We serve. We laugh again & again & again. And we call it all good enough.

As we come to the end of this season of Lent we welcome you to join us each Tuesday for our Zoom Lent study or Thursday for an in-person time together to walk through the book Good Enough by Kate Bowler & Jessica Richie.

And as we anticipate Holy Week, beginning with Palm Sunday on April 10th, we hope you will join us as we walk together toward Easter through Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the most desperate Saturday before Easter Sunday.

Youth, we love you & would love for you & yours to join us on Sunday afternoons. Please see Pastor Liz for further details.

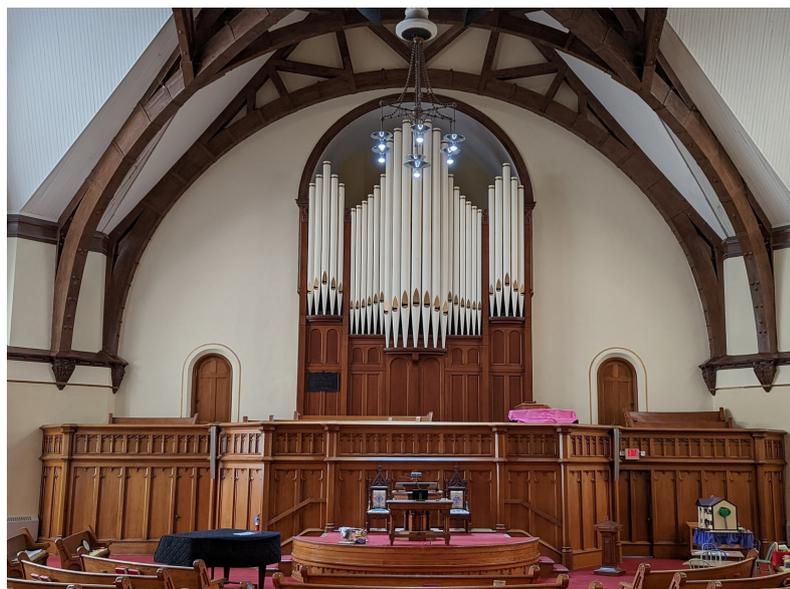
You are loved.

Partake in the ludicrous.

And remember that hope is imperative.

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2022  
**Sanctuary Painting Update**

The ladders and scaffolding are down, the cracks are patched, the paint is fresh and gleaming. After over 12 weeks of work, the great crew from Talk of the Town Painting has completed their work and our sanctuary is now awaiting our return on Palm Sunday! We can't wait for everyone to see the artistry that this painting crew has completed. Not one drop of paint is out of place. All the cracks and peeling plaster are repaired so well that you will never notice that these walls are 130 years old.



We are making good progress in our Sanctuary Project fundraising project. As of this writing we have received almost \$17,000 in donations and have also achieved a wonderful \$13,000 match from an anonymous donor. This totals just under \$30,000 of our \$75,000 goal. We will continue to fund raise to payback the loans we have taken from our Endowment and Glass Sticks and Bricks funds to pay for the sanctuary project. Please be sure to let your friends and family know about this opportunity to help us balance the books. We will keep this fundraising project going throughout the year until we hit our goal! Any help you can provide will be much appreciated.

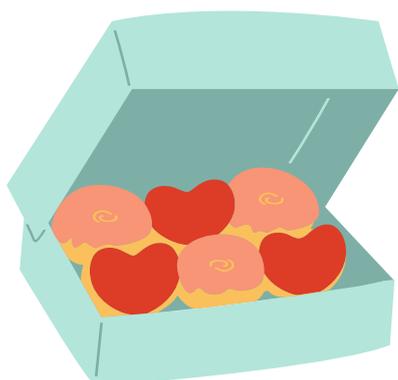


## Office Hours

**Deb will be in the office Tuesday-Thursday from 9am-Noon**

**Pastor Liz will be in the office as much as possible Tuesday-Thursday. If you need to contact her when she is out of office, her email remains the best option, or call her home phone.**

**Reminder: During office hours please use the door bell so that Deb can buzz you in from her desk. the keypad lock is only for use when Deb isn't in the building.**



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## Fellowship

The Fellowship team has not done much of anything except hoping things get back to normal soon. We try to greet people in church and make them feel welcome. Hopefully before too long we will be able to host coffee hour so we can all gather together and visit. Please stay safe. See you in church.

Mary and Stu,

## Sanctuary FAQs

### **Q. Why is this work costing \$75,000?**

A. The 132-year-old sanctuary has suffered significant plaster damage due to roof leaks and just plain old age. We have successfully repaired the roof to eliminate the leak damage. The extensive plaster repair requires experienced artisans to do the job right. Reaching as high as 60 feet requires a lot of scaffolding and ladders. This is a huge job requiring skilled manpower and lots of expensive equipment.

### **Q. Isn't \$75,000 a lot of money to just paint the sanctuary?**

A. This is a huge undertaking! The cost of materials for this job is at least \$25,000. This leaves \$50,000 for labor to pay skilled workers a living wage. There are an average of 5 workers putting in 40 hours of work per week over the 10-week period this job will require. That averages \$25/hour, which does not take into consideration their costs for health care or income, Medicare, and social security taxes.

### **Q. Did we get multiple bids for the job?**

A. We requested bids from local painting contractors. Our current contractor was the only one that had the ability to do both the plaster and painting work we required.

### **Q. Why do the job now? Why not raise the money and then do it?**

A. The condition of the plaster walls in the sanctuary was continuing to deteriorate. The incomplete attempt to repair some of the plaster resulted in an eyesore situation that reflected poorly on our efforts to maintain this building. The restoration contractor was available this winter with a full crew that could get the job done in time to celebrate the complete Easter season in the renovated sanctuary. We were able to borrow the money from existing funds owned by the congregation without taking on external debt obligations. Financial market conditions with our invested funds were also favorable at this time to support the sanctuary project. We also felt that when potential donors are able to see the finished product, they will be more confident and willing to contribute.

### **Q. Where did we get the money to pay for this project?**

A. The church Governing Board voted to withdraw no more than \$40,000 from the Endowment Fund which is invested in the UCC General Fund. The Endowment Fund is intended to be utilized to subsidize the day-to-day operations of our church. We have not had a need to withdraw from this fund for the past three years due to outstanding financial support from the congregation and financial discipline from our staff. The Governing Board also voted to withdraw no more than \$35,000 from the Glass Sticks and Bricks Fund which is invested in the Manistee Community Foundation. This fund is intended to support the maintenance and restoration of this church building including the stained-glass windows.

### **Q. Are we going to payback these funds?**

A. Yes! We are in the midst of the Sanctuary Project capital fundraising campaign that is focused on restoring these funds. We currently are more than half-way to achieving a generous matching gift of \$13,000 that will get us to \$26,000 and more than 1/3 or the way to our \$75,000 goal! This campaign will run as long as necessary to enable us to achieve our goal. We would also like to use this campaign to further promote long-term and estate planning gifts to the Endowment Fund to further improve the long-range financial stability of this congregation.

### **Q. Are there any other plans for finding additional funding?**

A. Yes. We are in the process of applying for grants from organizations that support the maintenance and restoration of historic religious buildings. All these grants require matching funding and definitive action plans from the applicant which this \$75,000 investment will support and put us in the best possible position to win the grants.

### **Q. Will there be any damage to the sanctuary carpet or furnishings?**

A. No. The restoration contractor has taken extraordinary steps to protect everything in the sanctuary. The pews are totally covered with plastic. The floors are covered with drop cloths. The 60-foot high scaffolding bases are on sturdy plywood to prevent any tears in the carpeting or dents in the sub-flooring. You will notice that not one drop of paint is out of place due to the attention to detail of this talented crew. The contractor will perform a final deep cleaning to ensure there is no residual plaster dust present in the sanctuary prior to our return on Palm Sunday.

## Volunteer Opportunities

### How Can You Be the Hands and Feet of the Church?

During the most recent Governing Board meeting, John Helge mentioned the opportunity to become a Meals on Wheels Volunteer. We talked about other local opportunities to be faithful and share our talents and time. Here are a few. Perhaps God will impress one or more upon your heart.

**Meals On Wheels** Drivers needed for as little as one route a week for about 2 hours or less. Training, support, and flexibility provided. Call: 299 – 7855

**Feeding America Food Truck** volunteers meet every 4 th Wednesday at 10:00 at the Youth Armory parking lot for 2 hours to unpack the items from pallets, put them into bags, and load them in waiting cars. No need to sign up; just show up!

**American Red Cross or Versiti Blood Drives** There is such a shortage of donors right now – nationwide! See either website for eligibility requirements and drive dates in the area. Generally, this takes 1-1/2 hours.

**ECHO His Love** This local ministry can use help in many ways. Their website has more detail, but there are basically four areas of service. **1) Safe Harbor** – from preparing meals to staying overnight with guests. **2) The Resale Store** - Needs items to sell and volunteers to sort them. **3) The Ministry Resource Center** – maintains pantries in various churches for food, boots & outwear, household items, clothing, infant/toddler supplies, appliances & furniture, etc. **4) Family Life Center** (depending upon Covid) provides meals, parenting classes and life skills.

If you know of other volunteer opportunities please consider sharing them with the office or Pastor Liz



## Outreach

We will be starting a MONTHLY MISSION project in April. Each month will focus on a charitable act or donation for our community. April's mission is to collect razors and shaving cream for ECHO his Love Family Life Center (FLC). There will be a bin in the Fellowship Hall along with information. The items will be collected until the last Sunday of April and then taken to ECHO. If you have an idea for a monthly mission please let Sandy, Marybeth or Pastor Liz know.

## Tech Update!

Our amazing Tech Person Joe will be taking some time off at the end of May and beginning of June. We are looking for someone who can help keep us online while he is gone.

If you are interested in doing this and willing to learn, or have any questions, please talk to Pastor Liz or Joe, he will be happy to train you before he is on vacation!



Manistee  
Community  
Worship

# Good Fridays



APRIL 15, 2022  
WORSHIP 12:00 NOON

Hosted at Manistee First  
Congregational  
412 4th Street Manistee Mi  
Corner of 4th and Oak

All are Welcome to Join us for Worship

# Holy Week Worships



*Maundy Thursday Worship*  
Holy Trinity Episcopal Church  
410 2nd Street  
April 14, 2022 1:00pm

Join us for  
joint worship  
on Maundy  
Thursday

All are  
Welcome.

Manistee First Congregational Church  
United Church of Christ  
412 4th Street  
Manistee Mi, 49660