

THE MESSENGER

NEWSLETTER MAY 2022

First Congregational Church UCC
412 4th Street Manistee Mi



From The Pastor

Dear Friends,

This is where I should put the spring newsletter article. But it's a challenge to write about the joy and hope of spring right now. It is cold, outside and inside, so cold that the space heaters are working hard to keep the office warm; There was snow on my car this morning, and ice that needed to be removed from my windshield. It certainly doesn't feel like spring. It is hard to find the joy and hope of spring when the news headlines are as dark as they are. The headlines are filled with all the terrible things that humans are capable of, all the terrible things that we do to one another. The headlines are filled with doomsday predictions. It certainly doesn't feel like spring.

But I keep seeing the signs, signs that cannot be ignored. Proof that spring is in fact coming, even if it is still cold and snowing. Signs that hope is still around even if the headlines are filled with scary things. In my backyard there is a host of new daffodils, that continue to thrive in spite of the snow, in spite of the cold. I don't know where they came from, I didn't plant them and they have never been there before, but they are there, beautiful and bright. My backyard is full of birds, cardinals, robins and blue jays. And despite the dark news of the headlines I cannot help but smile (and maybe even cheer) when I see a bird proudly display their newest worm catch.

I am so ready for spring, I can taste it. I long to lounge in my hammock with a book, I can't wait for the temperatures to get warm enough that I will be able to dig into the fresh dirt and plant living things. But longing won't make the air warmer, I cannot hasten the arrival of spring time. So for now I'll have to settle for glimpses, and patience.

I wonder if this is what it was like for the disciples in the time after the crucifixion. Jesus was no longer dead, but also wasn't with them at least not really. They knew the tomb was empty, but still they hid behind locked doors. Thomas trusted his friends but still doubted that it could be true. They knew that Jesus had appeared to them, spoken to Mary but still they were unsure of what to do next so they fell back into old habits.

Jesus appeared in the stranger, as the gardener, in a breakfast shared along the lakeshore, in small glimpses, to remind his followers that they weren't alone, that hope wasn't lost, and to help keep them going so that they could do the work they were charged with doing. It can be hard to be in the "Not yet" phase, stuck between what was and what you know is coming. It can be hard to wait. We can spend our time stuck looking only at the cold and dark, or we can turn our attention towards glimpses of hope, and see the daffodils that refuse to wither in the cold, and cheer for the robins when they catch that worm.

Blessings , Pastor Liz

Worship Team

We are Easter People! That's what Pastor Liz tells us. Our spiritual discipleship has not ended but really just begun! After spending Lent learning to tend our gardens, we know that sometimes the fruit is not pretty but still delicious. It is good enough. Sometimes we need help caring for our gardens and find that we do better with support of our community.

Now is the season between Easter and Pentecost. Pastor Liz will be following the lectionary for worship, and there will not be a book/bible study until fall. (Then, we will join in again with the Goshen Connecticut church group.)

Pastor Liz will be taking a vacation week the first full week of June. For the two Sundays on either end, we will welcome Reverend Stephanie Weiner to our pulpit. (Rev. Weiner - Dr. Bill Weiner's sister - will come to us from Indiana.) We will need a liturgist for each of those two Sundays to assist with the service. Please see one of us or Pastor Liz if you are open to serving in this way.

When visitors come to our sanctuary, some are surprised to find an area (the "prayerground") for children down front. We are happy to invite anyone who brings little ones to church to allow them to play during the service. So, if you have family visiting this summer, please encourage the children to come. There is a place for them!

~Nanci Swenson & Joanne Cotugno

May Birthdays

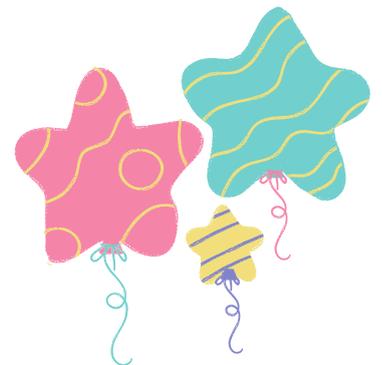
May 1- Jacob Lee
May 2- Jack Carlson
Steve Lashbrook
May 4- Lindsie Adams
May 7- Nathaniel Burkhart



May 7- Nancy Ault
May 8- Penny Kiss
May 10- Jim Uhl
May 18- Bob Zielesch
May 22- Ethan Skaggs

Happy Anniversary

May 12- Bill and Pam Weiner
May 16 Robert and Kelsey Carpenter



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. Bring your own projects, work on things for church, enjoy good fellowship.

Everyone is Welcome!

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Moderator's Musings

I hope that all of you had the opportunity to attend the Holy Week services in our newly refurbished sanctuary. If you were not able to be here in person, we hope you may see the services on our Facebook page where they will be available well into the future. We counted over 200 residents and visitors in the pews for a somber, but powerful Good Friday service presented with messages from the pastors of many Manistee churches. The voices in the combined choir told of his death on the cross but provided us with the soaring hope we needed to anticipate the coming miracle.

On Easter Sunday it was wonderful to see so many smiling faces bathed in the sun shining through the stained- glass windows. The music was spectacular as we joyfully worshipped with trumpets and voices proclaiming the risen Lord! The message of the resurrection and the renewal of spring were powerfully delivered by Pastor Liz and her group of amateur thespians. We successfully shared in communion with the bread and the cup being passed among us after over two years of do-it-yourself rituals. It is so nice to be back to some semblance of normalcy. We hope you all will join us in person as soon as you are able!

The Sanctuary Project fund raising effort continues to move along at a good pace. We have exceeded \$30,000 in donations so far. We are absolutely thrilled to be able to announce that we have received a major matching gift commitment for \$20,000. Once we can raise an additional \$20,000 this gift will kick in and we will be at the \$70,000 mark which means that we will be able to repay 100% of the funds that we have borrowed from the Endowment and Glass Sticks and Bricks funds. Please ask your friends and family to consider a gift to this cause. This 132-year-old sanctuary has a new lease on life and a face-lift that makes it shine like new.

We look forward to a congregational meeting on Sunday May 22 nd to review and approve the operating budget for the next year. Copies of the proposed budget will be available in the church office. If you wish to receive a copy in the mail, please contact Deb at 231-723-5361.

John Helge.

Cell Phone: 616-915-2403.

**Email:
johnmhelge@gmail.com**

(Photo from Good Friday
Worship Service:
April 15, 2022)



NEWSLETTER MAY 2022
Governing Board Meeting

Governing Board Meeting of First Congregational UCC of Manistee

April 3, 2022 at 11:05

Present: Moderator John Helge, Jan Williams, Solana Postma, Mary Beth Kennedy, Mary Hoffrichter, Sandy Turk, Stu Swiger, Bill Weiner, Jim Uhl, Jess DeBoni, Nanci Swenson, Pastor Liz, & guest Chere Ohman

Pastor Liz opened our meeting with a prayer.

The minutes/financials of March - put on file.

Pastor Liz: Deb would like to have a list of greeters & clock winders. Maunday Thursday service will be held at Trinity Episcopal. We will host Good Friday service in conjunction with 7 other congregations. Tech volunteers are needed for Joe's vacation times.

Moderator: Sanctuary plaster/repainting fundraising is above \$30,000! John has submitted a grant request of \$50,000 for historical church projects. The organ has been tuned but is still in need of some electrical work. Financial challenges: heat costs & the need to dip into the Endowment Fund. John praised staff and board for being good stewards of funds.

Ministry reports:

Faith Formation: Jess reports that the two book studies (Tuesday Zoom & Thursday in-person) are going well. Youth Group is happening. In the works... a monthly Family Gathering for all ages. Volunteers will be needed to help to share a craft and/or a study.

Fellowship: Coffee hours will resume on Palm Sunday!

Outreach: Each month, there will be some sort of mission opportunity. This month is collecting razors and shaving cream for ECHO.

Property: Doug and John will coordinate touch-up cleaning in the sanctuary. Bill W. volunteered to paint some downspouts. Volunteers will soon be needed for gardening.

Stewardship: Fewer 2022 pledges have come in, so committee will construct a budget utilizing funds from Endowment. This will be presented to congregation in May. Pastor Liz reported that we are not an anomaly in this respect – post-pandemic, & suggests that we do more fund raising events. Sandy has ideas for low budget/high yield events. Stu suggests a multi-musician concert over July 4th. weekend. He and John will pursue this.

Worship: We will start passing the collection plate again. Worship Ministry team will need more help to prepare/serve communion using individual cups rather than using communal cup for intinction.

Youth: Youth have made new "stained glass" windows for Fellowship Hall. Solana says they hold gatherings when they are available.

New Business:

Heritage Bazaar: Chere (& crew) have had seasonal table sales (Valentine's Day, Easter). Suggests having our traditional November bazaar and shortly thereafter hosting outside vendor craft show. Guidelines needed.

Public Safety Protocol Update: Discussion on Community guidelines for (current) medium risk of Covid in Manistee County. Motion by Nanci (2nd. Stu) to move to optional mask-wearing in the church. Passed.

Motion by Jess (2nd. Mary H.) to move upstairs for Palm Sunday. Passed.

Adjourn at 12:25.

Respectfully submitted,

Nanci Swenson. (Secretary pro-tem)

Faith Formation Report

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." Saying this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. (John 20:11-14)

Recently I was searching for a new book to read this Easter season, outside of the incomparable Phyllis Tickle canon. I wasn't necessarily searching for a certain devotional or set of prayers but something to keep me grounded in that which I hope to remember and celebrate mightily over the next 50 days, Christ has risen. It never stops being both odd and miraculous.

To dig up some ideas I sent a text to some dear friends asking if they had any suggestions. These women are so incredibly wise, ranging from authors to scholars to activists. They are an intelligent & thoughtful community whom I have learned to receive the Gospel from in very tender & new ways.

Much to my delight, minor embarrassment, and great laughter, my dear friend Laura Fanucci wrote back within hours sharing that ummmmm... she had actually written a book of Easter reflections herself in 2019, *Risen - 50 Ways To Live Easter*.

Needless to say, within a few days I had clicked purchase because no one communicates or writes as thoughtfully as Laura.

In yesterday's reading Laura opened up the daily reflection with the verse shared above & then had the audacity to write this, "Weeping shows up three times in these verses. Mary's grief is thick. Her sorrow keeps her outside the tomb at first. Easter is a season of rejoicing, but we can feel left out when our life is clouded by loss or suffering. Mary models for us how to bend down in prayer and enter into the startling mysteries of resurrection, even when we feel grief-stricken. In conquering death and transforming life, Christ brings not a simple, earthly happiness, but a deeper, transforming, eternal joy. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta said in her book *No Greater Love*, 'Let nothing so fill you with sorrow that you forget the joy of Christ risen.'"

This first week of Easter has been difficult, but this is not unique. So many of us are still bending low, squinting to examine what's been left at our feet from the last two, four, six years, and attempting to make sense of what is no longer recognizable. So we weep & we join in Mary's chorus of grief, even though we know Easter has come, rejoicing is ours, & the clouds have given way.

Some days it's comforting to know that Christ is before me, even when I cannot see Him.

Other days it's positively maddening.

So together we place our collected palms on our knees, lift our chins, let our necks bend low once again, arch our backs upwards, lift our tired hands from our knees & look upward with the promise of a brilliant & tired awe & comfort, "Risen & present with us always."

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.

Pastor Liz on Vacation!

Pastor Liz will be on Vacation May 27-June 10. If you have an emergency during that time please contact the church office. Rev. Patty Higgins from the Benzonia UCC will be on call for emergency pastoral needs.

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.

We would love to train someone to keep us online for May 29th and June 5th.

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!



Save the Date

The Secret Sister planning team is putting together a special reveal gathering. This will be a fun way to get to know your secret sister in person as well as women from the church. The event will be June 11th, at 3pm. Location will be announced soon.

Spring Planting

Our amazing Sally Mason will soon be working hard to make our church outside as beautiful as our church inside. There will be a sign up for opportunities to help plant, weed, spread mulch, put in new garden stones and much more.

We will take a noisy change offering on May 8th before worship to help buy supplies. So gather all your pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters and silver dollars!



Used Book Sale

As a fundraising effort we will be holding a used book and used puzzles and games sale in the fellowship hall on

Saturday, June 4, from 10-1pm.

If you have any gently used books, puzzles or games to donate, there will be a labeled box in the fellowship hall to put them in.

The books can be **infant/toddler board books, early readers, young adult, and adult books.**

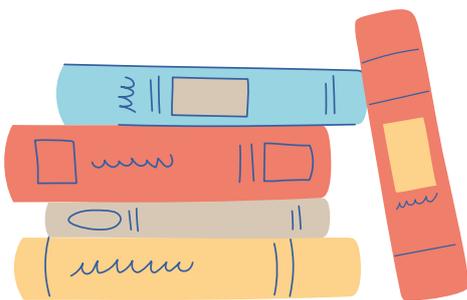
We will also need a few volunteers to help sort and organize the books, and a few to help on the day of the sale.

If you're interested, please contact Sandy Turk (231-233-4137).

Please Sign Up!

In the Fellowship Hall there are 3 sign up sheets! Something for everyone to get involved. You can host coffee hour (ask Mary or Stu if you need help!) You can sign up to greet and hand out bulletins on Sunday Morning! We are also looking for people who would like to help lead worship by reading scripture (sometimes called a liturgist).

Pastor Liz will be happy to answer any questions you might have.



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

May Monthly Mission: Homeward Bound

Please bring in needed items to help bless Homeward Bound in the work they do to care for animals in our community. Their needs include:

- Cat /Kitten Food - Canned (wet)/Dry, Dog/Puppy Food - Canned (wet)/Dry, Kitty Litter, HE Laundry Detergent, Garbage bags (kitchen size) Bleach (shelter uses a large bottle a day), Pet Safe Ice-Melt, Dish Soap, Hand sanitizer, Disinfectant wipes, Newspapers (for lining cat cages), Blankets, Paper Towels, Treats, Toys for dogs and cats, Brand Name Flea Meds (K9 Advantix, Advantage, Advantage Multi), Animal carriers and crates, Shelving for storage, Tools for yard maintenance - rakes, shovels, working gloves, etc, Gas Cards for transporting shelter animals, Volunteers, Baked goods for events-

Please put donations in the bin in the fellowship Hall



CONGREGATIONAL MEETING



May 22, 2022

Congregational Meeting!

Please plan to stay after worship on May 22, 2022 to discuss and approve the budget.

If you would like a copy of the proposed budget to look at ahead of time please contact Deb in the office.

She will be happy to email you one or print one out for you. Please be aware that Deb is only in the office Tuesday-Thursday 9am - noon. And she doesn't always check her email at home.

Thank you!

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