



## The Open Door



**1st Congregational UCC**

*Opening the Doors of Possibility*

*An Open & Affirming Church*



**December  
2025**

### ***From the Pastor...***

Before I left for my sabbatical back in early September, a couple pastor friends of mine pulled me aside and said, “Have a wonderful time on your sabbatical, Toby...just be prepared for the fact that it will be really hard to get back into the swing of things at the church when you return.” Well, I certainly did have a wonderful time, as I’ve been sharing with you these last few weeks. But I’ve had no difficulty at all getting back into the swing of things here.

The reason for the ease of my re-entry transition is that you all did such a fantastic job leading our various ministries while I was away. There was no backlog of tasks not finished, no email inbox overflowing with urgent needs, and no list of administrative decisions that weren’t able to be made in my absence. In short, you all proved once again – just as you did after Neil left – that you truly are a Congregational Church, tremendously capable and self-sufficient.

Thank you! It has been an incredible gift to come back to this amazing church to both hear stories and see evidence that you were firing on all cylinders while I was in Europe!

Now we turn to the holiday season – Thanksgiving and Christmas. There is no place I’d rather be and no group of people I’d rather celebrate this sacred time with than you. We have some terrific holiday traditions around here, starting with the Community Thanksgiving Service on November 27. It’s thrilling to see how the entire community of faith throughout Charlevoix pulls together to welcome and feed those who might otherwise be alone and hungry over at the Community Reformed Church.

Then there’s the Community Christmas Project over at the new Genesis Church – formerly Bethel Lutheran. As usual, our own Bill Trubilowicz will be coordinating all the deliveries and keeping Marty’s generous spirit alive getting as many folks from our church involved as possible in getting Christmas gifts and meals to those who need them the most. (Call Bill if you’d like to help in any way.)

On Wednesday, December 17, we’ll host our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Blue Christmas service. Those of you who attended our wonderful Coffee and Conversation time with Erin Gray from Munson Hospice will know just how important such a gathering is at holiday time. Grief and holiday depression are real – VERY real – and I’ve always believed that it’s the responsibility of Jesus’s followers to seek out and be near those who are struggling this time of year. Our Reaching Out team has designed another compassionate, quiet, and meaningful gathering for any in our community who aren’t up for decking the halls or singing “Joy to the World.” Maybe you could benefit from such service, but even if not, you surely know a person or two who could. Start there with a personal invitation.



### ***From the Pastor (Cont'd)...***

Our church-wide theme for Advent is “Christmas is Communal.” As we will see, as we work our way through the well-worn stories and prophecies of the savior’s birth, literally everything that happens in Advent is for ALL people, for EVERYONE, with NO exceptions. None of what God did in bringing Jesus to the world was for some particular, narrowly defined group of “us’es.” So it stands to reason that all of our most treasured Advent traditions are for others, for those most likely to be forgotten, on the outside looking in...Those least likely to know that all this Gospel Good News is for them too! In other words, there is no “them” in Christmas, only a world full of us’es. Let’s celebrate the holidays this year accordingly.

Keep up the GREAT work! I couldn’t be more proud of my church family!



### ***A Special Request from the Reaching In Team...***

For the last year, we have been focusing on how to improve our congregational care for our older participants. You may remember that we put out a survey soliciting your input on what kinds of needs you have and how our team might better meet those needs. We didn’t get many responses to this well-intentioned effort, but we are still very interested in improving our care for those of you who are struggling with the kinds of challenges that aging brings.

Even if you, yourself, aren’t elderly, perhaps you have interacted with some of our aging participants enough to know what they need and would appreciate. And we are equally concerned about helping those of you who are caring for an aging spouse, parent, or friend.

We have updated copies of our surveys on the table under the Reaching In Board as you enter Ransom Hall from the sanctuary. Would you please take 5-minutes the next time you are in the church to complete one for us? If you can’t get to church, just call Stacey in the office and she will get you a copy either electronically or by mail. Help us do a better job of helping you! That is what we are here for.

1st Congregational UCC

BLUE

# Christmas SERVICE

Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with cancer or some other disease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our community.

This Service will be a time of quiet reflection, worship, and peaceful music.

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WED. DEC. 17, 2025

7:00 P.M.

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101 State Street  
Charlevoix





1st Congregational UCC

# Christmas Eve

## CANDLELIGHT SERVICE

Please join us for a  
beautiful candlelit evening of  
Lessons & Carols

***ALL ARE WELCOME!***



**24th**  
Dec, 2025 | **7 PM**  
**Wednesday**

101 State Street  
Charlevoix, MI  
(231) 547-9122  
[www.CHXUCC.org](http://www.CHXUCC.org)





## ***Thank You & Welcome...***

### ***Well done, good and faithful servant...***



On January 1, 2026, our beloved custodian Larry Minch will hang up his mop after over 22 years of stellar service to our church. It's utterly impossible to chronicle all that Larry has done in and around this building going all the way back to the days of Pastor Mary Willis, who hired him. But to speak of Larry's contributions only in terms of the building is to completely miss the point of his unique brand of service.

Larry has been the consummate greeter and welcomer to literally everyone who walks by or into our building – and not just on Sunday mornings. When he is out raking or mowing during the warm winter months, he stops to chat to passers-by with a smile and endless tales of this church he so dearly loves. Whenever we've had weddings, funerals, concerts, meetings, or Bible Studies, Larry gets here early to open the building, arrange the furniture, turn on the lights, and even get the coffee brewing. When you look up the phrase "going the extra mile" it will be Larry's picture that illustrates its meaning.

On January 4, we will have a chance to celebrate and thank Larry for his above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty service to our church family at a special coffee and conversation gathering to be held in his honor. If you have special memories and stories of Larry's service among us, please email them to Toby as soon as possible.

Of course, the best news is that we don't have to say "goodbye" to Larry. He will continue to be a tremendously active participant in our vibrant church family. But we do have to say an enormous "THANK YOU" to this good and faithful servant.

### **Welcome Deloy's Exterior Home Cleaning!**

Our Personnel Team, in collaboration with our Board of Trustees, has decided to handle our custodial needs by means of a cleaning service rather than through the hiring of an individual. That search has resulted in a new agreement with Deloy's Exterior Home Cleaning, a small, family business run by Page and James Deloy. The Deloy's are recent transplants to the Charlevoix area. Their business began in Mackinaw City, but as their family has grown, they have found a way to make Charlevoix their home. Page and James have a two-year-old son named Zayden, and they're expecting a little girl this spring. Be sure to welcome them when you see them around. And a BIG thank you to the Personnel Team (Bruce Herbert, Jeff Kloiber, Charlotte Koger, and Tim Watts) for taking care of this huge need for our congregation.



## ***An Update from Donn Start...***

Toby recently received a wonderful email from Donn Start, a fellow Streaming Participant and who has begun his own outreach to a homeless community in Arizona. We want to share his latest report with you.

“Hi Toby -



I am excited to share with you that I encouraged one young lady, Dion, to enter into rehab today. I waited with her as an Uber picked her up. I am selfishly excited because I now feel as if I have figured out how to get past the bureaucratic rigmarole and I am confident that I can make this happen for anyone on Bell Road who wants to enter rehabilitation. Dion was really nervous so I hope that she stays.

The photo is of several of my friends that love the idea that you, me, and others might pray for them without them even knowing about it. I know that you have much to pray for, but I would love it if you would pray for each of these people too. Selma, Stephen, Grant, Reggie, Ray, Timothy, Dion, Marissa, Matthew, and their dog Toby (Matthew and Marissa love the fact that my pastor's name is also Toby.) I passed out all 30 slices of pizza, so there are many more stories, but this is the group that I spent my last hour with.

Today we prayed in a circle, with an older woman dubbed granny helping me lead the prayer. I had run out of most of my pizza by the time I got to this group in the photo +4 more who were perhaps two high to get up and join us. You'll love the story - this group of 8-10 argued about who should get the 4 slices of pizza. But the argument was that each person wanted to give their potential slice to someone else who hadn't eaten yesterday or today. How cool is that? There must be a Jesus parable in that story somewhere.



I had the time of my life today just loving on, encouraging, and getting better acquainted with these Bell Road street survivors.”

## ***From Reaching In...***



### **Get to Know Your Neighbors**

A few weeks ago in worship, Toby shared some words from Father Jerry, the Catholic Priest in Belfast, who was working for peace in Northern Ireland. “Jesus called us to love our neighbor. But to love our neighbor, we must first get to know our neighbor.” That is exactly what hope to do during our weekly Coffee and Conversation time after worship.

But on December 7, we are going to take that call to know each other better to another level. As you enter Ransom Hall that day, you’ll be asked to sit with your neighborhood group – all those in the congregation who live nearest to you. Some folks at your table may already be familiar to you, while others may be new faces or folks you had no idea lived so close by.

Gathering in these neighborhood groups on the 7<sup>th</sup> will introduce you to our emerging Emergency Preparedness Plan, which a team has been working on ever since last winter’s ice storm. We’ve devised a way to be able to reach out to everyone in our congregation quickly and easily, even if the power should go out for a prolonged period of time. Each neighborhood will have a designated team captain who will serve as the information hub during a crisis, and your neighborhood captain will be at your table on December 7.

All those at your neighborhood table will share contact information and begin conversations about “what happens if...?” that will help all of us be better prepared, less afraid, and far more connected the next time an unexpected crisis affects Charlevoix. Don’t miss this wonderful Coffee and Conversation time on the first Sunday of December.

## ***Next Issue!***

***Things to keep an eye out for coming in January...***

- ***Annual All-Church Meeting on Budget Approval***
- ***News from Teams***



### **DECEMBER VOLUNTEERS**

#### **GREETERS**

Dec 7 .... **OPEN**  
Dec 14 ... **OPEN**  
Dec 21 ... **Denise Fate**  
Dec 24 ... **OPEN**  
Dec 28 ... **OPEN**

#### **COFFEE & CONVERSATION HOSTS**

Dec 7 .... **Dave & Darlene Heine**  
Dec 14 ... **Lisa Copass & Susan Warner**  
Dec 21 ... **The Wadlands & Lynette Webb**  
Dec 28 ... **POTLUCK SNACKS**

#### **LAY READERS**

Dec 7 .... **Suzanne Balter**  
Dec 14 ... **Denise Fate**  
Dec 21 ... **OPEN**  
Dec 28 ... **Suzanne Balter**







# SEND A LETTER TO SANTA!

**Do you have children, grandchildren,  
or are you just a kid at heart?**

**1st Congregational UCC is an  
Official North Pole Express  
drop-off point!**

Drop your letter into the North Pole Express Mailbox and your letter will get to Santa himself!

No need for a stamp, because this is a MAGIC mailbox that goes STRAIGHT to Santa's Workshop! Remember to leave your address so Santa can respond!

Can't get to 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational to put your letter in the mailbox? Mail it to us and we will put it in for you!

Mail your letter to: Santa Claus  
c/o 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational UCC  
101 State Street,  
Charlevoix, MI 49720



**The North Pole Express Mailbox  
is at 101 State Street on the  
Park Street side.**

## ***An Update from the Reaching Out Team...***

### **An Update on John Howard's Progress**



Our journey with John began in early 2024 when he was serving time in the Marquette prison. Having seen our streamed service, he wrote to us asking for help with work clothing so he could get a job on his release. Toby presented the letter to the RO team and it was decided to allocate funds for clothing from the resale shops. Max Carthew delivered these to John's advocate sister, Eloise, in Boyne City and started corresponding with John while he was still in prison. Max and John became brothers in Christ.

John was finally released from a prison on September 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year. So arrangements had been made for his transport, so Max drove to Northeastern Ohio and brought him back to Boyne City. Unfortunately, living with Eloise didn't work out through no fault of John's. There being no affordable accommodation in Charlevoix, John stayed with Max while applying for his job at Nucore Inc. After passing his interview and medical exam, John was given a chance by the owner and secured a good job receiving a hourly raise after the first week.

The next hurdle was to find John a place of his own. John applied to all the local apartments in the area but there were no vacancies. Stacey, our Office Manager, had already been on the look out and saw an ad pop up on Facebook which turned out to be a good fit for John, close to downtown, within his price range, and immediately available. John secured the keys and moved in right away. Stacey was already accumulating furniture and other household items for John and the word spread that he needed help with setting up a home. He was already attending church service, and the first big help was the loan of an E-Bike by Larry. There then followed a steady stream of useful items that John could use in his own apartment.

With the weather turning colder, Max started putting out the word for an inexpensive vehicle to get John to work this winter. They eventually found an old Toyota truck that only needed a little work done on it. The seller we met in Alden figured out that the church was helping John make a new start and made an unexpected gesture returning our \$200 deposit to Max as John's first down payment on the loan. John will be repaying the loan by working overtime and we are hoping to get it paid off in a year or two with the help of small donations.



John has been through a very steep learning curve these past two months and has felt quite overwhelmed at times. The warmth and material support he has felt from our little community has been a big part in setting John on the path to success. John and Max both want to thank you all for your kindness and thoughtfulness on this journey which they would not have undertaken without knowing you were all behind them.

You can see from this story that John has hit several home runs: finding our congregation, finding a mentor, finding a job, finding an apartment, finding a truck, and finding hope. One cannot but think there has been a guiding hand in this journey.



## ***Cookie Walk...***



## ***From the Personnel Team...***



Near the end of each year we ask you to consider making a contribution to the Church Staff Christmas Gift. Toby, Stacey, Shelley, and Larry serve us very well throughout the entire year. They are the unsung heroes who keep things running smoothly for the Church.

We hope that you will make this donation to show our appreciation for all that they do. This year's gift for Larry will also serve as a special retirement "Thank You."

Just indicate "Staff Gift" on your checks. Streaming Participants can also make a gift using the "Online Giving" tab on our website. Thank you!

*- Charlotte Koger, Bruce Herbert,  
Tim Watts, & Jeff Kloiber*



## ***CharleVOICES: My Bags are Packed, I am Ready to Go***

On Friday, October 24, five storytellers took the stage to share their personal takes on the theme “My Bags Are Packed, I Am Ready to Go?!”



*Storytellers: Laura Goenicki, Ellen Bennett, Virginia Eckern, Banjor Musa, Emcee Betty Wadland, and Bill Wadland.*

Each storyteller opened a suitcase of memory and meaning—traveling through stories of adventure, risk, love, and faith. The audience was transported from a foreign land to an upside-down kayak, from the joy of a first home to the power of a prayer answered, and from a refugee’s long journey from Sudan to American citizenship to a teenager’s first love and the fiery disapproval that sent her packing her emotional bags.

It was an evening of courage, laughter, and connection—real stories from real people, told live on stage.

The Charlevoix Food Pantry was the beneficiary of the evening’s donations. More than \$900 was raised through the generosity of the audience.

Betty Wadland, founder of CharleVOICES: True Stories Told Live, brings a compassion for people and love of language to this growing community venture. She believes storytelling builds connection, heals communities, and reminds us that every life holds meaning. A special thank you to the 1st Congregational, UCC Church for the use of the historic and beautiful sanctuary and especially for the opened arm reception to this concept.

To get involved, contact [bettyjwadland@gmail.com](mailto:bettyjwadland@gmail.com). Betty welcomes anyone interested in storytelling, website design, Facebook promotion, or behind-the-scenes production. Proceeds from Charlevoices events are donated to local organizations—including the Rayder Generous Heart Emergency Fund, the Charlevoix Ministerial Association Emergency Fund, and, most recently, the Charlevoix Food Pantry.

Coming soon: the Charlevoices website! Up coming Themes include "I Can Laugh About It Now," and "Food for Thought."

# Community Christmas Project

For many years, the Community Christmas Project has served more than 250 families annually by providing food, gifts, and clothing for Christmas. We anticipate that we will have at least that many individuals/families in need this year, possibly many more. This project is supported by churches, businesses, and individuals in Charlevoix. Our church supports this project through our Reaching Out initiatives.

Our church is responsible for SOCKS of different sizes and colors. This week we will label a collection box and put it in the Fellowship Hall for socks. A particular need is for TEEN SOCKS, and they like the shorter ankle variety. We also need waterproof GLOVES for elementary-age children., as well as donations of jars of peanut butter.

Pick up is December 3.

Thank you for helping to support this huge community project!

**Questions? Call Bill Trubilowicz @ (231) 675-7551**







## **DECEMBER** **MEETING TIMES:**

**Reaching Out Team,**  
**12/10@ 9a**

**Reaching In Team,**  
**12/12 @ 9a**

**Church Council,**  
**12/21 @ 11:45a**

**Board of Trustees,**  
**12/21 @ 11:45a**

**Reaching In Team meets on**  
**the 1st Thursday at 9:00a**  
**normally.**

**Reaching Out Team meets on**  
**the 2nd Wednesday at 9a**

**Church Council meets on**  
**the 3rd Sunday at 11:45a**

**Board of Trustees meet on**  
**the 3rd Sunday at 11:45a**

## ***Thought for This Month...***



## ***Just a Reminder...***



Stacey will be out of the office  
for a 1/2 day on December 6th,  
and a full day on December 16th  
but she will be IN the office on  
Mondays Dec 22nd & 29th.

The Church Office will be closed  
on December 24th & 25th for  
Christmas, and December 31st  
and January 1st for New Years.  
We will still be having our  
Christmas Eve service at 7pm  
on December 24th. The Church  
Office will reopen on Tuesday,  
January 6th.



## ***Caring Partners Needed...***



Are you aware, that YOU can make a big difference? You can be a Caring Partner and make our world and community a better place. There are members of our congregation who have needs that are not being met.

You can send a card, make a call to, or visit a participant recovering from an illness or in a rehab/extended care facility. Share a home cooked meal or help do a little work around their home. This act of kindness will brighten their day. You can also complete a Participant Need form for them, and we can reach out to them ourselves.

If you are interested in sharing your time and your gifts, please contact the church office at 231-547- 9122. They have a list of persons that really could use a little TLC. If you know of someone that would benefit, please let the church office know.

## December 2025\*



	MON Dec 1	TUE 2	WED 3	THU 4	FRI 5	SAT 6
	<b>Main Church Office Closed</b> • 6pm Products Pantry	• 10am Scripture Discuss	• 12pm Lunch & Learn: Fc	• 6:30pm Choir Rehearsa	<b>Church Offices Closed</b>	• 9am Cookie Walk
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<b>In-Person &amp; Virtual Worship</b> • 10:30am COMMUNION	<b>Main Church Office Closed</b> • 6pm Products Pantry	• 10am Scripture Discuss	• 9am Reaching Out Mee • 12pm Lunch & Learn: Fc	• 6:30pm Choir Rehearsa	<b>Church Offices Closed</b> • 9am Reaching In Mtg • 12:30pm COA Grief Sup	
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
<b>In-Person &amp; Virtual Worship</b>	<b>Main Church Office Closed</b> • 6pm Products Pantry	• 10am Scripture Discuss • 6pm Uke Group Christn	• 7pm Blue Christmas	• 6:30pm Choir Rehearsa	<b>Church Offices Closed</b>	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
<b>In-Person &amp; Virtual Worship</b> • 11:45am Church Council	<b>Main Church Office Open</b> • 6pm Products Pantry	• 10am NO Scripture Gro	<b>CHURCH OFFICES CLOSED - HOLIDAY</b>			
			• 7pm Christmas Eve Ser	• 6:30pm Choir Rehearsa	<b>Church Offices Closed</b>	
28	29	30	31	<div> <b>*for more details, please go to the Calendar page on our website, <a href="http://www.CHXUCC.org">www.CHXUCC.org</a></b> </div>		
<b>CHURCH OFFICES CLOSED</b> <b>In-Person &amp; Virtual Worship</b> • 11:45am Trustee Meetin	<b>Main Church Office Open</b> • 6pm Products Pantry	• 10am NO Scripture Gro	<b>Church Office Closed for</b>			

NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE,  
OR WHERE YOU ARE ON  
LIFE'S JOURNEY, ✨  
YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!



# 1st Congregational UCC

*Opening the Doors of Possibility*

*An Open & Affirming Church*



Toby Jones, Pastor

Stacey Luoma, Office Manager

Shelley Fisher, Music Minister

Larry Minch, Custodian

Lynette Webb, Childcare Supervisor

101 State Street, Charlevoix, MI 49720

(231) 547-9122 (office)

[www.CHXUCC.com](http://www.CHXUCC.com)

#### Our Covenant

*"Our church community seeks to embody God's Spirit and live the teachings of Jesus. We offer a sense of belonging to each other and to all our neighbors, as we build a just and sustainable world for **all**."*