



JUNE 2026

From the Pastor...

While our team has been back from San Antonio, Guatemala for over a month now, the energy and direction that trip set in motion are still going strong. I've mentioned that this trip – my third to Guatemala so far – wasn't just fantastic due to the work we were able to do, but it also clarified our next steps, as this amazing, mutually beneficial partnership continues.

In the article below this one, you will learn about a person who has been an integral part of all our trips down there and a major player in the overall work of Healthy Communities – the organization with whom we partner. In all of my trips down there, Lorenzo has been my chauffer, my workmate on the various job sites, my instructor during challenging construction projects, and my friend. He is an incredibly kind, patient, loving, hardworking, and funny guy. He spends countless hours helping others – his fellow Guatemalans and all of the various Americans who come down to join in the efforts of Healthy Communities.

As you'll learn in the article below, Lorenzo's life story is incredibly sad, with both his parents dying in the Guatemalan Civil War when he was a toddler, being bounced around from one temporary foster family to another, until finally being adopted by Gerber's mother, Hilda Perez, when Lorenzo was nine. But one thing the story on the next page does not mention – and that we just discovered toward the end of our most recent trip – is the Lorenzo is essentially homeless. He sleeps in a storage closet attached to Hilda's house, with a concrete floor and nothing but an old twin mattress. He has few possessions, and because of this living situation, he rarely gets to see his three children, who spend all their time with their mother – Lorenzo's Ex.

When Lorenzo's living situation became clear to us, we were flabbergasted that this kind, generous, Christ-like servant was doing all this work to make others' lives better, while he, himself lives on the floor of a storage closet. That is when the Spirit led Hagen Manker to approach Gerber and me and said, "Why don't we build Lorenzo a house the next time we come down?" The idea felt absolutely right to all of us – especially given that we are going to make it a surprise!

So, we will be returning to San Antonio in February of 2027 to build a very simple home in one week. We have a simple design, using a floor plan Healthy Communities has used many times before. Lorenzo is a stone mason, so he will be laying the concrete block foundation, and our 1st Congregational team will take it from there. The estimated cost of this home from start to finish is \$10,000, which we are hoping to raise between now and January 1, so we can get the money down there in time for Gerber to procure all the necessary materials.

We are going to need a bigger team in February, so Hagen, Jeff, and I are hoping another 5-6 of you will join us for this incredibly exciting trip. The climate in San Antonio is much more comfortable than Coyolate. Our average temperatures will be in the mid 70s with very little humidity. The most we'll ever work is 6 hours a day with lots of breaks along the way. Let Toby know if you're willing to help us change Lorenzo's life in a way that will give him much more time with his children, much more comfort and ease in his life, and the ability to keep serving his fellow Guatemalans far into the future.

Thank you for your support of this vibrant and life-changing partnership! Now be sure to read more of Lorenzo's story in an article written by his adopted brother Gerber Perez. It will touch your heart in all the best places.

Lorenzo's Story

He Thought His Family Was Gone. Until We Went Back.

My brother Lorenzo and I share a passion: motorcycles. We've traveled many roads together, from the paths around Lake Atitlán to the winding highways that took us on a six-day ride to Costa Rica. But no journey compares to this last one. Because it wasn't just a trip across Guatemala's geography. It was a journey into its memory. And into Lorenzo's silenced story.



Gerber (left) with Lorenzo, Jeff Kloiber, and Hagen Manker at a local soccer game in San Antonio, Guatemala

Lorenzo is not my brother by blood. He's my brother by heart, just like he always says. He came to our home when he was nine years old, in the midst of the civil war that bled Guatemala in the 1980s. During those years, more than 400 villages were wiped off the map by the army. His was one of them. His parents were killed. And he, just a child, survived by moving from house to house, living with families that were not his own. Until one day, he arrived at ours, no paperwork, no court decision, just a government relief that someone had taken him in.

He couldn't tell us anything about his family or where he came from for a long time. He would say he didn't remember. That he only knew he had been passed from one family to another. And time slowly covered his story like a layer of dust on an old photograph. But in the past few years, something started to shift. We began to talk about his childhood. Carefully. Gently. And with the belief that when someone begins to tell their story with someone they trust, something inside them begins to heal. A

year ago, we said: "What if we go find your village?" All we had was a name in memory: Xexuxcap. But he wasn't ready. Until last week. He called and said, "I want to go." And that was all I needed to hear. I rearranged my schedule, talked to Michelle, and two days later, we were on our motorcycles, heading toward a village we didn't know how to find. We didn't know who to ask or where we'd sleep. We knew we had to go together because some things are only possible when you're not alone, because the hard things hurt less when you don't face them alone.

We went to the local municipal office, searched for papers, asked around, and eventually arrived at a small store in a neighboring community. Lorenzo remembered going there as a child to buy things. He walked in, asked... and to our surprise, the owner was still the same.

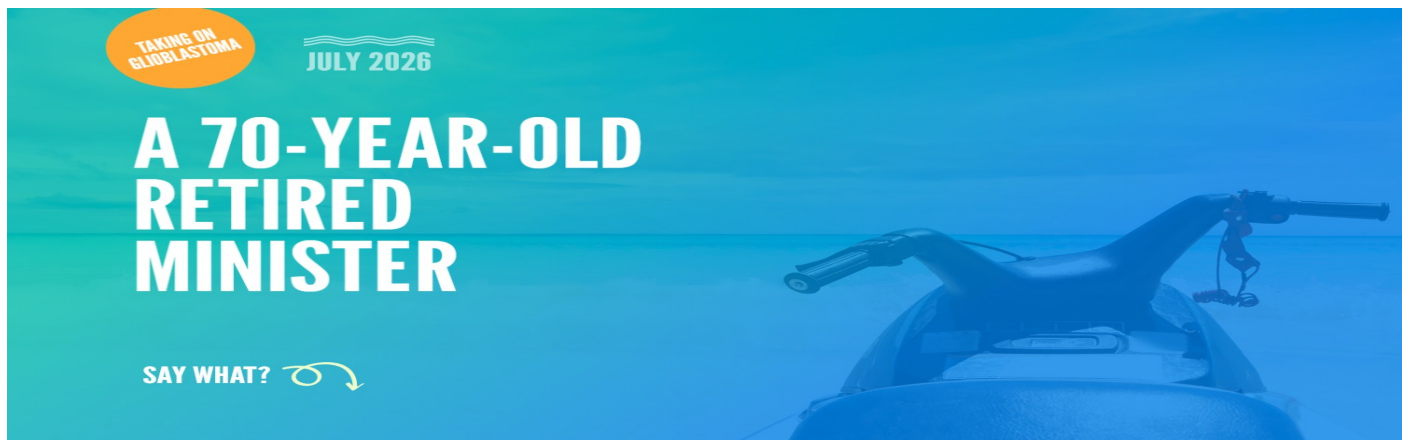
That man gave us our first lead: a childhood friend named Julio still lived nearby. We found him. And Julio couldn't hold back his tears when they saw each other. He had believed Lorenzo was dead. He hadn't heard a word about him in decades. Julio took us to see Catarina, a woman who cared for Lorenzo when he was a child. She told us about a man named Augusto. He turned out to be Lorenzo's older brother. And then Augusto called María, their older sister. For the first time, Lorenzo saw faces that shared his blood. To him, they are still strangers, but something sparked in that moment. A flicker of recognition. A quiet flame of belonging. They remembered the hard years together, shared fragments of the past, and told him things he never knew. And maybe, just maybe, this encounter will be the beginning of something new, something that gives him not just a story but a place in it.

Lorenzo's story isn't just his own, it's the story of thousands of Guatemalan children who lived through the same. Children who lost their parents, their homes, their names, and grew up carrying an invisible grief. A trauma with no voice. A silence heavier than memory.

This time, Lorenzo went back. And though memory doesn't always return whole, sometimes all it takes is the first step. Sometimes all it takes is someone walking beside you, so your heart can finally remember who it's been all along.

This journey, more than any other, brought us even closer as brothers. It reminded us that love is not always written in DNA but in presence, courage, and the willingness to walk into pain together.

Glioblastoma Fundraiser



As you read in the May Newsletter, Sunday, July 19 will be an important day for our congregation and community. Not only will Venetian Fest be kicking off, but we'll be welcoming an amazing person with an incredible story to our worship service and hosting a real celebration afterwards.



The morning sermon will be an informal interview/conversation between Toby and Tom Dickleman, exploring the link between his faith and this crazy idea to circumnavigate Lake Michigan on a wave-runner. He'll share the story of his late sister's battle with Glioblastoma and the research institute for which he is raising funds.

Once the service ends at 11:30, Toby's "Yacht Rock" band – The Haz-Binz – will be our live soundtrack for a party we hope will attract a lot of Venetian Fest passers-by. (The band could use a few sponsors, so we don't need to drain any funds from the Glio 1000 kitty) We'll have balloons out with tables full of amped-up coffee hour fare, and we're hoping to fire up a couple grills for hotdogs and veggie burgers.

What we need to pull this off is lots of volunteers that day to do things like set up tables and chairs under the tent, bring in some picnic food to share, and maybe even grill us some hot dogs. We'd love to have a few friendly ambassadors hanging out along the Park St. sidewalk to explain to folks what's going on and encourage them to join us for the celebration for this very good cause – fighting Glioblastoma, one of the most devastating forms of cancer. We'll also surely need some extra help cleaning up as we wrap up around 1:00 pm

Stacey has set up a Sign-Up Genius on our website, so you can volunteer in whatever way you choose. Many hands make light work. We are looking at this event as a fun and tangible way to Reach Out to those in our community who may not know what a fun and generous bunch we are. Do your part to make July 19 a day to remember and Tom's most memorable and fun stop of his 14 ports of call. Thank you!

CharleVOICES: Watermark



CHARLEVOICES: TRUE STORIES TOLD LIVE presented WATERMARK on Friday, May 15th— an evening of stories shaped by water and the lives it carried along.

From a river raft in Colorado, a hot tub on a moonlit deck, a canoe in Northern Michigan, a dugout in the Amazon, a rowing shell in West Virginia, and a sailboat on Lake Huron, six storytellers: Bill Trubilowicz, Sharon Smithem, Karl Meisel, Brian Prokuda, Bruce Herbert and Emily Beynon captured our hearts and imaginations.

We laughed, gasped, and occasionally held our breath as each teller shared their own watery adventures — stories of joy, fear, wonder, survival, and connection. Admission donations went to Sail Charlevoix.

Tickets On Sale Now!



John M. Hall Auditorium - 1725 Encampment Ave., Bay View, MI 49770

Featuring...



**Hugh Hansen as
Marcellus**

**July 10 & 11
@ 8:00 pm**



**Toby Jones as
Mayor Shinn**

Get your tickets at:

www.onthestage.tickets/show/bay-view-association

Emergency Shelter Training...



May 14th Red Cross Shelter Training Lunch & Learn

Fifteen participants and friends of our church recently completed the American Red Cross Shelter Fundamentals training, helping prepare our congregation to serve as a welcoming and organized sheltering space during times of community need.

The training covered a wide range of important topics, including creating a welcoming environment for all guests, accommodating individuals with varying physical abilities, organizing and staffing shelter operations, and setting up safe and functional physical spaces. Participants also discussed food preparation and serving guidelines, as well as procedures related to service animals.

There was much to learn, and we are grateful to everyone who gave their time and energy to participate. Their willingness to serve reflects the caring spirit of our church community. We hope to offer a weekend training opportunity in the near future so that even more people can become involved in this important ministry.

A Special “Thank You”

A special thank you and shout out to Bridge Street Blooms for their generous donation of two beautiful hanging flower baskets, now brightening our garden entrance.

Each spring, Bridge Street Blooms thoughtfully donates two hanging baskets to churches throughout the area, helping add beauty and welcome to our community spaces. We are grateful for their continued generosity and community spirit!



From the Church Council

Your Church Council has been wrestling with how we might bring the vision of our



**1st CONGREGATIONAL
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CHARLEVOIX**

church into reality in the next few years. At the core of that vision is our church becoming a kind of community hub, connecting people throughout our community to one another and to meaningful lives of service. Thanks to all of you, we are already plugged into many terrific organizations, so the next logical step is to provide a central and visually pleasing space to showcase these organizations, so that others can get involved as we have. It is also our hope that newcomers to Charlevoix will come to our “Hub” and find in one place everything they need to also become fully engaged. At the same time, we want to help Charlevoix’s organizations be able to share their purpose and services, along

with volunteer opportunities, all in one beautiful and welcoming place.

To further develop the concept of using our physical space as a resource hub, members of the Council and Reaching Out teams recently met with interior design specialist Teri Stout, who offered an inspiring design concept within Ransom Hall that would be both visually striking and engaging. It would involve tasteful and uncluttered wall displays of roughly a dozen organizations, with QR codes to link Hub visitors to each organization and the volunteer opportunities they have available.

Council is currently in the process of updating the list you helped us compile a couple years ago of all the organizations our church participants are involved in. We hope to establish a single contact person with each organization who could best serve as a liaison for us. In the near future, we may be contacting some of you to serve in this capacity.

Watch for more updates and developments over the course of the summer.

Crop Walk Sponsorship Sought

1st Congregational UCC is seeking a volunteer to represent our congregation in the 22nd Annual Little Traverse CROP Hunger Walk on Saturday, June 27, 2026, in Bay View. For the past 21 years, this meaningful community event has brought people together to help fight hunger both locally and around the world.



Lucy Witthoef
Cropwalk Recognition

Last year’s three-mile walk welcomed more than 100 participants and raised over \$28,000. Twenty-five percent of funds raised support the Manna Food Project, serving Antrim, Charlevoix, and Emmet Counties, while the remaining proceeds support global hunger relief efforts through Church World Service.

In 2024, Lucy Witthoef, who faithfully represented the Charlevoix CROP Walk on behalf of our church for many years, accepted a CWS Legacy Congregation Award from Church World Service. We are deeply grateful for her dedication and commitment to this important ministry. As Lucy steps away from this role, we are hoping someone from our congregation will step up to continue this meaningful tradition.

If you would be interested in being a part of a team walking on behalf of our congregation, please contact the church office. This is a wonderful opportunity to be part of a generous and caring community working together to make a difference.

WALK. GIVE. CHANGE THE WORLD.

Little Traverse
CROP HUNGER WALK

JUNE 27, 2026

PETOSKEY, MICHIGAN

<https://www.bayviewassociation.org/events/crop-hunger-walk-2026>

Active Assailant Preparedness

In today’s world, places of worship are not immune from unexpected emergencies. While we all hope such situations never arise in our community, being prepared is one of the most effective ways to protect ourselves and care for one another.



Charlevoix Chief of Police
Jill McDonnell

On Sunday, June 14, 2026, during Coffee and Conversation, we will host an Active Assailant Preparedness Information Session led by Charlevoix Police Chief Jill McDonnell. This session will focus on simple, practical steps anyone can take to stay safe in the event that an assailant enters the church—emphasizing awareness, communication, and thoughtful response. It is designed to be informative, practical, and appropriate for all comfort levels and abilities.

We understand that some may feel this particular topic is unnecessary or unsettling, especially in a place that feels as safe and familiar as our church. However, preparation is not about fear—it is about caring for one another. Much like fire drills or first aid education, this is simply another way we support the safety and well-being of our community.

Participation is encouraged but entirely voluntary. Whether you attend to learn something new or simply to better understand our safety plan, your presence helps strengthen our shared commitment to care and readiness.

We hope you will consider joining us.



Next Issue!

Things to keep an eye out for coming in July...

- **Pledge Picnic Details**
- **Muffin Sale Donations**



JUNE VOLUNTEERS

GREETERS

June 7 ... **OPEN**
 June 14 ... **OPEN**
 June 21 ... **OPEN**
 June 28 ... **OPEN**

COFFEE & CONVERSATION HOSTS

June 7 ... **Colin Morris**
 June 14 ... **Janet VanAlsten & Bob Dion**
 June 21 ... **Judy Seibert, Michelle Babcock, Ellen Zienert, & MaryAnn Borths**
 June 28 ... **The Lyons & The Herberts**

LAY READERS

June 7 ... **OPEN**
 June 14 ... **OPEN**
 June 21 ... **OPEN**
 June 28 ... **OPEN**



June Birthday Bash!

Chuck Gaputis 6/1 * Sylvia Burns 6/5
Ron Moore 6/6 * Murphy Watts 6/8 * Colin Morris 6/8
Kathie Libert 6/10 * Wanda Stopher 6/12
Meg Kitson 6/12 * Marty Merz 6/17 * Susan Warner 6/21
Jack MacKenzie 6/22 * Dave Robinson 6/22
Liz Mielke 6/25 * Pat Chamberlin 6/26
Patti Ulrich 6/28

Wishing you all an outstanding year full of
joy, laughter & celebration!

JUNE MEETING TIMES:

Reaching In Team,	6/4 @ 9a
Reaching Out Team,	6/10 @ 9a
Church Council,	6/21 @ 11:45a
Board of Trustees,	6/28 @ 9a

Reaching In Team meets on the 1st Thursday at 9a
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 4th Sunday at 9a

Just a Reminder...



Stacey will be out of the office from June 16 to June 25. She will return on Tuesday, June 30th. Lynette Webb will be covering the office during this time.

June 2026

	MON Jun 1	TUE 2	WED 3	THU 4	FRI 5	SAT 6
	Main Church Office Closed • 6pm Products Pantry	• 10am Prayer Group		• 9am Reaching In Mtg • 6:30pm Choir Rehearsa	Church Offices Closed	
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
In-Person & Virtual Worship • 10:30am COMMUNION	Main Church Office Closed • 6pm Products Pantry	• 10am Prayer Group	• 9am Reaching Out Mee	• 6:30pm Choir Rehearsa	Church Offices Closed • 12:30pm COA Grief Sup	
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
In-Person & Virtual Worship • 11:30am Active Assailar	Main Church Office Closed • 6pm Products Pantry	Stacey Out of Office • 10am Prayer Group			Church Offices Closed	
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
In-Person & Virtual Worship • 11:45am Church Council	Main Church Office Closed • 6pm Products Pantry	Stacey Out of Office • 10am Prayer Group			Church Offices Closed	• 8:30am Bayview Crop V
28	29	30				
In-Person & Virtual Worship • 9am Trustee Meeting	Main Church Office Closed • 6pm Products Pantry	• 10am Prayer Group				



*No Matter Who You Are,
or Where You Are on
Life's Journey*

You are Welcome Here!

1st Congregational UCC of Charlevoix
101 State Street, Charlevoix, MI 49720
(231) 547-9122 (office)
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.”

Toby Jones, Pastor
Shelley Fisher, Music Minister
Stacey Luoma, Office Manager
Lynette Webb, Childcare Supervisor