



# The Open Door



## From the Pastor...

During the months of March and April, our Reaching Out Team is turning our congregation’s attention toward our evolving partnership with Healthy Communities in Guatemala. Perhaps a brief history of this important part of our church’s ministry will be helpful for some of you.

In September of 2024, I was invited down to Coyolate, Guatemala with a team of pastors and counselors in order to provide some grief counseling and some seminars on mental health. That trip gave me a terrific overview of this amazing and resilient country, but, more importantly, it introduced me to Gerber Perez, one of the most amazing servants of Jesus that I have ever met. After watching Gerber do what he does in his beloved native land, I knew that whatever our church would wind up doing in Guatemala, it would be in support of his work.



Gerber founded Healthy Communities, a grass roots, village-by-village network to bring support, basic healthcare, education, and spiritual encouragement to the people who need it most. In Coyolate, a tiny rural village in the jungle, Healthy Communities built and eventually staffed a clinic with a pharmacy and other basic services. They also worked to improve the schools in the village.



In February of 2025, I returned with a team of 7 participants from our church to build a kitchen and a couple bathrooms on the back end of a brand-new pre-school that Healthy Communities had just built. We also took with us 6 large suitcases full of school and medical supplies – thanks to all of you! - that the Guatemalans wouldn’t have had access to otherwise. All of us were blown away by this incredible village and the difference Gerber’s team was making there.

Since that time, Gerber has turned his attention to another village in need, the one that he actually grew up in – San Antonio. He has recently established a community center there that focuses on children, providing after school programs, group therapy, and emotional wellness training. He has asked us to come down this April to do some roof repair and small-scale classroom expansion projects. So from April 18-25, Hagen Manker, Jeff Kloiber, and I will be returning to help Gerber’s vision for this community center take shape.

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

All of you are encouraged to support this trip in any of the following ways:

- Participate in the supply drive from March 15 – April 5 (see Page 6 for details)
- Donate funds to cover the \$1200 of project materials we'll need there
- Attend the Switchback concert on Thursday, March 12, the proceeds of which will support our upcoming project in San Antonio
- Donate to help defray the costs Hagen, Jeff, and Toby will incur getting down there and back.  
\* For any donations, simply make the check out to 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational and write "Guatemala" in the memo line and it will go into a restricted fund we have specifically for our work there.

Whenever a church or organization undertakes partnership work like this in another country, people will often ask, "Why are we doing this work so far from home when there is so much need nearby?" Our answer to that grows out of our conviction that we're all God's children – everyone, everywhere... period. The kind and level of poverty experienced in a place like Guatemala is like nothing you'll see here. Additionally, those of us who have studied Guatemala's history (see the booklist provided in the article below) have come to understand that American foreign policy has had a lot to do with the awful situation Guatemalans are still trying to dig their way out of. Coming alongside our Guatemalan brothers and sisters feels like the right thing to do from the standpoint of justice.

I am so incredibly grateful to be a part of a church family that understands that we exist for others, that the very reason for our existence is to make the world a better place, wherever and however we can. We do so much good in and around Charlevoix, and we will surely continue to do so. To be engaged in a small, global partnership with Healthy Communities in Guatemala says even more about just how far this small but mighty congregation is willing to go to jump into the story of Jesus and his love.



## An Update about the Jail Outreach Program...

The Reaching Out Team has started a new connection with the Charlevoix County Jail to serve the inmates in various ways.

First, we connected the Charlevoix Library with the Sargeant at the Jail who has a book service that has been going for some years. We were able to survey the inmates for book requests and supplement the existing books with new titles in fairly new condition. These books were donated by the library. This will be an ongoing endeavor, and we have already received a signed thank you card from the inmates.

Next we discussed ways we could help inmates that might be in need of clothing to appear in court, or when they are discharged in winter. Often they do not have funds for transport, shelter, or food. We came up with the idea of creating a new fund which the Jail administration can manage to serve those in need. They call this "The Penniless Fund" and, through our generous donations from the RO budget and the proceeds of our Christmas Eve Service, we have close to \$2,000 to start this fund.

The most recent addition to our emerging inmate support initiative involves providing a mentoring service to those inmates that want to connect with somebody on the outside who is not part of their family or friends. Our inmates may want advice or just to talk to a mentor to discuss a better path for when they are released.

We are pleased to announce that we have five mentors who have been approved by the Jail administration and have had training and orientation for this delicate work. We are still in the early days of all this, but we are already making a difference in the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

A big thanks to our RO team and the generous donations of money and time that has allowed us to begin this exciting new ministry with our incarcerated brothers and sisters. Below is a Thank You note we received in February from some of the inmates who have benefitted from this program so far.



much. We appreciate  
Mindy.

*Dea*  
Thank you for  
thinking of us  
and donating books  
for our library.  
We appreciate you.  
Shantell  
Eric Sina  
Daxiel  
Klaswell  
Jenny  
Vladimir  
Joanna  
SCOTT  
Jenny

# SWITCHBACK

**Irish Music Concert**  
**1st Congregational UCC**  
**101 State St., Charlevoix**  
**Thurs, March 12 @ 7:00 PM**



**Doors Open 6:30 PM | All Are Welcome**  
**TICKETS \$20 advance, \$25 door**

**Online @ [WayGoodMusic.com/tickets](http://WayGoodMusic.com/tickets)**  
**In-store @ Charlevoix ACE Hardware**

**A portion of the proceeds will benefit the organization**  
**“Healthy Communities in Guatemala.”**

# Happy **MARCH** Birthday

To the Following Participants!

John Hess 3/3 \* Pam Smith 3/3

Betty Wadland 3/4 \* Julie Geyer 3/7 \* Karen Joy 3/10

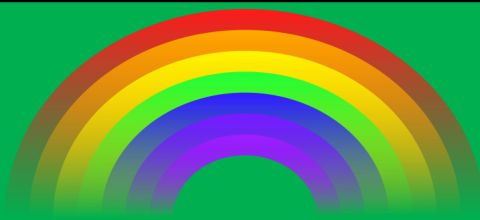
Sandi Button 3/17 \* Carrie Minch 3/19

Mark Kage 3/25 \* Scott Beatty 3/26 \* Sarah Borths 3/27

Charlotte Koger 3/28 \* MaryAnn Ogden 3/29

Steve Libert 3/31

Wishing you nothing but Good Luck for the Year Ahead!



## MARCH MEETING TIMES:

Reaching In Team, 3/5 @ 9a

Reaching Out Team, 3/11 @ 9a

Church Council, 3/15 @ 11:45a

Board of Trustees, 3/22 @ 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 on Thurs., March 19th & Tues., March 24, 2026. Linda Weller will be covering the office during that time.

Toby will be out from March 26 to April 2. There will be a guest Pastor.

## ***From the Reaching Out Team...***

The Reaching Out Team approved a donation to the **Charlevoix County Community Foundation's "Housing Solutions Fund."** Funds that support predevelopment housing efforts across Charlevoix County include the following:

- Supported predevelopment work for **Pinebridge Place**, a six-unit apartment complex led by Northern Homes CDC near the Charlevoix airport, opening this summer.
- Backed the **Charlevoix County Housing Ready Program (Housing North)**, funding Zach Sompels' role to assist developers and municipalities and move projects forward — including the Charlevoix Baptist Church housing project now in progress.
- Helped fund land surveying on Beaver Island to prepare for future affordable/workforce housing development currently underway.
- Most recently funded architectural services for a proposed mixed-use development currently underway in East Jordan.



*Lisa Copass (center) with Representatives from C3F*

### **Workforce-Affordable Housing Database**

The RO Team created a working spreadsheet tracking known workforce and affordable housing projects in Charlevoix and surrounding counties. This spreadsheet includes housing partners and collaborators, such as Habitat for Humanity, Housing North, Northern Housing CDC. It includes project status, key contacts, and related correspondence. Thank you to everyone who has shared housing updates.

This tool helps us keep regular communications with various organizations, respond more effectively and keep church participants informed. It also includes planning department's regular meeting days and times. To request a copy, contact Lisa Copass at (825) 550-1885.

### **Update: First Baptist Church, Charlevoix**

The RO Team, including Toby, met in February with Pastor David Anderson and Zach Sompels (Housing North) for a project update. At this time, no developer or board-approved solution has been secured. The future direction of the housing project remains to be determined.

### **CJ Rapp – Eco Village Co-op**



*C.J. Rapp*

In January, we welcomed CJ Rapp to Coffee Hour to share his vision for the future of affordable housing. CJ's focus is on intentional, community-based living rather than isolated single-family homes — especially for the growing senior population. The model features private rooms arranged around a large shared living, dining, and kitchen space. This shared-living approach helps make housing more affordable — particularly for seniors living on approximately \$2,300 per month. The Eco Village Co-op is a planned 40-acre intentional living community near Mancelona. The project is finalizing permits and anticipates breaking ground within 6–12 months. We hope to support CJ throughout the process and closely observe how the model performs over time, with the goal of adapting it in other communities if successful.

**For more information go to: <https://www.ecovillageco-op.org/>**

## March/April Reaching Out Focus: Guatemala Partnership

During the months of March and April, the Reaching Out Team will focus on our ongoing partnership with Guatemala.

Last year, a team of seven traveled to Coyolate to deliver health and school supplies and to help build a kitchen adjacent to the local elementary school.

This year, our partnership continues as Toby, Jeff Kloiber, and Hagen Manker travel to San Antonio from April 18–25, 2026. This small but mighty team will help repair the roof and expand classrooms at the community center, supporting the people of San Antonio as this important gathering place takes shape.



We will again be collecting donated supplies (see supply list below). Large suitcases to help transport items are also welcome and may be brought to church.

### Upcoming Events

March 8 – Short video of the new community center in San Antonio, created by Gerber Perez.

April 12 – Guatemalan-themed coffee hour featuring authentic foods and Guatemalan coffee.

### SUGGESTED READING

- Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala – Stephen Schlesinger & Stephen Kinzer
- Escaping the Fire: How an Ixil Mayan Pastor Led His People Out of a Holocaust During the Guatemalan Civil War – Thomas Cutraro & Terri Jacob McCome

## Guatemala Partnership Donation List – must be received by April 12

### FOR THE COMMUNITY CENTER

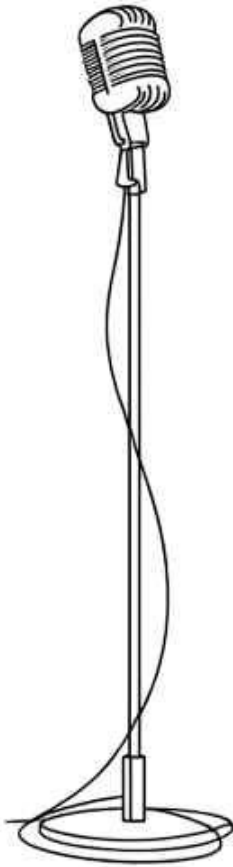
- ◆ Children’s books in Spanish (emotions, values, nature, science)
- ◆ Educational board games and puzzles (teamwork, problem-solving)
- ◆ Art and creative materials (colored pencils, markers, paints, paper, glue, scissors, craft kits)
- ◆ Sports equipment (soccer balls, jump ropes, cones, bean bags, frisbees)
- ◆ Social-emotional learning tools (emotion cards, story cubes, puppets, fidget tools, mindfulness dice)
- ◆ Building and logic toys (LEGO sets, wooden blocks, marble runs, construction kits)
- ◆ School supplies (notebooks, pencils, sharpeners, erasers, rulers, folders)

### FOR THE MEDICAL CLINIC

- ◆ Digital thermometers
- ◆ Gauze pads and rolls
- ◆ Medical tape and bandages (various sizes)
- ◆ Alcohol pads and antiseptic wipes
- ◆ Cotton balls and swabs

# POETRY OUT LOUD

Community Poetry Reading with Piano Interludes



March 27, 2026 7:00PM  
First Congregational, UCC

All are welcome, students & adults  
Favorite Poem or Original Poem  
First Time or Seasoned Performers

TAKE THE MIC & RECITE

To Participate Submit Your Selection  
by March 15th.

[info@charlevoices.org](mailto:info@charlevoices.org)

Questions, (231)330-5441



Story/Stage Productions



**Spring Forward!!!**



**Next Issue!**

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

- *Info on Easter Service*
- *Reports from the Teams*



**MARCH VOLUNTEERS**

**GREETERS**

- Mar. 1 ... **OPEN**
- Mar. 8 ... **OPEN**
- Mar. 15 ... **OPEN**
- Mar. 22 ... **OPEN**
- Mar. 29 ... **Denise Fate**

**COFFEE & CONVERSATION HOSTS**

- Mar. 1 ... **John & Anna Young**
- Mar. 8 ... **Ellen Kendall & Karen Joy**
- Mar. 15 ... **Kendra Gates**
- Mar. 22 ... **OPEN**
- Mar. 29 ... **Potluck Collaboration**

**LAY READERS**

- Mar. 1 .... **Suzanne Balter**
- Mar. 8 ... **OPEN**
- Mar. 15 ... **Denise Fate**
- Mar. 22 ... **OPEN**
- Mar. 29 ... **OPEN**



# March 2026\*

SUN Mar 1	MON 2	TUE 3	WED 4	THU 5	FRI 6	SAT 7
<p><b>In-Person &amp; Virtual Wors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10:30am COMMUNION</li> </ul>	<p><b>Main Church Office Clos</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6pm Products Pantry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10am Prayer Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5:30pm Lenten Worship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9am Reaching In Mtg</li> </ul>	<p><b>Church Offices Closed</b></p>	
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<p><b>In-Person &amp; Virtual Wors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11:45am Church Council</li> <li>• 4pm GLCO Concert</li> </ul>	<p><b>Main Church Office Clos</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6pm Products Pantry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10am Prayer Group</li> </ul>			<p><b>Church Offices Closed</b></p>	
<p><b>In-Person &amp; Virtual Wors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9am Trustee Meeting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Main Church Office Clos</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6pm Products Pantry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10am Prayer Group</li> </ul>			<p><b>Church Offices Closed</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7pm Poetry Out Loud</li> </ul>	
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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

Shelley Fisher, Music Minister

Stacey Luoma, Office Manager

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**."*