

ADOPT-A-FAMILY CHRISTMAS OUTREACH

This year, UMMMC is sponsoring two local families—a single mother with two young daughters and a single father caring for a son with special needs—to help make Christmas a little brighter.

This Sunday, December 14, is the final day to drop off gifts. Gift details are posted on the Adopt-A-Family bulletin board in the Downtown Campus Fellowship Hall. Please select an item, add your name, and return unwrapped gifts to First Church by Sunday, December 14.

Those worshipping at the Paris Campus or who need assistance may participate by calling the church office to sign up, shopping online and shipping items to the church, dropping gifts at the Paris Campus for pickup, or giving financially so volunteers can shop on your behalf.

Gift wrapping will take place Tuesday, December 16, from 2–4 PM in the Fellowship Hall at First. All are welcome to help wrap and share in this meaningful work.

Questions? Contact Larisa Draves (231-598-1911) or Jackie Fitzgerald (231-250-6681).

Thank you for helping us extend care, generosity, and hope this Christmas season.

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

When Big Rapids Public Schools are closed due to inclement weather, the church office will also be closed, and all church-sponsored events and activities will be canceled for the day.

There may be occasions when small groups or outside groups using the building choose to meet despite weather conditions. If you have questions about a specific event, please contact the organizer or group leader directly for the most accurate and up-to-date information.

Thank you for helping us prioritize safety while staying connected.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES FOR 2026

As we prepare for the new year, we're building teams to help create a warm, welcoming Sunday experience at UMMMC.

- Fellowship Hosts – Provide simple refreshments after worship at First Church. Individuals, families, or groups welcome.
- Communion Stewards – Prepare the bread and cup before worship (about one hour, once a month).
- Greeters – Offer a warm welcome and help people feel at home when they arrive.
- Ushers – Distribute bulletins, assist with seating, and help keep our worship space ready.

If you're interested or want to learn more, please contact Barb Erb in the church office or Pastor Jeremy. Thank you for helping us build a welcoming, vibrant community!

ALTAR FLOWERS – 2026

The 2026 altar flower sign-up sheet is now available in the Fellowship Hall at the First Church Campus. When signing up, please include the purpose of your flower dedication, noting whether the flowers are given in honor of or in memory of someone. If you have questions or need assistance, please contact Barb in the church office. Thank you for helping beautify our worship space throughout the coming year.

SAVE THE DATE: LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

Please mark your calendars for a Longest Night Service the weekend before Christmas, in partnership with the United Church of Big Rapids. This service acknowledges the heaviness many carry during the holiday season and offers space for quiet reflection and hope. More details coming soon! (Keep an eye on your email and Facebook!)

Happening This Week

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

9:30AM - Worship @ Paris Campus
10:00AM - Worship @ First Church Campus
Please join us for coffee and fellowship immediately following worship, in the Fellowship Hall.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

12PM - Red Cross Blood Drive @ First
12PM - Alcoholics Anonymous @ Third Ave

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

9AM - Ministry Staff Meeting @ First
12PM - Alcoholics Anonymous @ Third Ave
2PM - Gift Wrapping Party @ First (see "Adopt A Family" for more info)
6:30PM - SOUL Circle @ First
7PM - Alcoholics Anonymous @ Paris

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

10AM - SOUL Circle @ First
11:30AM - Community Lunch @ Third Ave
4PM - Christmas Choir Rehearsal

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

5:30PM - Community Dinner @ First
7PM - Alcoholics Anonymous @ Paris

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

12PM - Alcoholics Anonymous @ Third Ave

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

11AM - Alcoholics Anonymous @ Paris
11:30AM - Community Lunch @ Third Ave

HOLIDAY OFFICE CLOSURE

The church office will be closed December 22, 2025 - January 2, 2026. Staff will be available by email or phone. See contact information below.

FAMILY MEETING / POTLUCK

February 1, 2026 @ 11:15AM
First Church Fellowship Hall

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

Barbara Erb - *Director of Administrative Services*
barbara@ummecosta.org - (231) 796-7771

Julie Setlock - *Director of Family Ministry*
julie@ummecosta.org - (231) 796-7771

Kathy Bell - *Director of Congregational Care*
kathy@ummecosta.org - (231) 224-6177

Rev. Jeremy Wicks - *Executive Pastor*
jeremy@ummecosta.org / (231) 224-6545

To schedule an appointment with Pastor Jeremy, contact Barbara Erb or schedule online @ calendly.com/jeremy-ummecosta.

Week of December 14 - December 20, 2025

Family News



UNITED METHODIST MINISTRIES OF MECOSTA COUNTY

304 ELM STREET, BIG RAPIDS MI 49307 • (231) 796-7771 • WWW.UMMECOSTA.ORG

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE HOURS: TUES - FRIDAY, 9AM - 3PM
PASTOR OFFICE HOURS: TUESDAY & THURSDAY, 9AM - 12PM & 12:30PM - 3PM

NORTH CAMPUS - PARIS

109 Lincoln St
Paris, MI 49338
ummecosta.org/paris

Worship Gathering
in-person
Sundays @ 9:30AM

DOWNTOWN CAMPUS - FIRST

304 Elm Street
Big Rapids, MI 49307
bigrapidsfirst.org

Worship Gathering
in-person and online
Sundays @ 10AM

Order of Worship - December 14, 2025

Prelude

Welcome & Announcements

* Call to Worship & Lighting of the Advent Candles (Reader / People)

Advent meets us again—not because everything is settled, not because the world is suddenly at peace, but because God continues to draw near.

We come carrying both longing and gratitude, trusting that God meets us exactly where we are.

In these weeks of Advent, we have been daring to dream—dreaming of hope that stays awake and peace that prepares the way.

We hold onto that hope. We continue to walk toward that peace.

Today we pause to name a third gift of the season: joy. Not joy that ignores pain, not joy that rushes past reality, but joy that rises unexpectedly when we recognize God at work among us.

We open our hearts to joy that surprises us and reminds us that God's promises are still unfolding.

Today we light the third candle, the candle of joy. This candle reminds us that joy is not shallow happiness, but deep assurance—the joy that comes when love is recognized, when promises are remembered, and when God's presence is felt, even in unlikely places.

As these candles burn, may hope steady us, peace guide us, and joy rise within us—not because everything is easy, but because God is near.

Come, let us rejoice in the God who draws close. Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

* Hymn - "O Come, All Ye Faithful!", UMH #234

Children's Message

Scripture Reading - Luke 1:39-55 & Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 (NRSVUE)

Reader: The word of God, for the people of God.

People: *Thanks be to God!*

Special Music - "Breathe of Heaven"

Message - "Dare to Dream: Unexpected Joy"

Pastoral Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

* Hymn - "Joy to the World", UMH #246, vss. 1-3

* Benediction

* Hymn - "Joy to the World", UMH #246, vs. 4

Postlude

* PLEASE RISE IN BODY OR SPIRIT

Join us for coffee and conversation in Fellowship Hall immediately following worship.

Welcome to First Church!

Welcome to First Church, the downtown campus of United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County - we're so glad you're here! This is a community where every person belongs, every story matters, and every question is welcome. If you're new or exploring, we'd love to get to know you. You can learn more about who we are and find helpful information for your first visit at bigrapidsfirst.org.

Need directions? Curious about something? Our welcome team is nearby and ready to help. Truly, we're delighted to worship with you today.

NOTES:



Check In Here

SERVING TODAY - DECEMBER 14

Reader: Marlene Rodgers

Ushers: Colin & Roberta Cline

Greeter: Pete Jensen

Nursery: Sarah Delany, Paige Madden

Sunday School: Thomas Wheeler, Brenda Chaffee

Fellowship Host: Cheryl Richardson

SERVING NEXT WEEK - DECEMBER 21

Reader: Rick Hult

Ushers: Mike & Jana Pisani

Greeter: Kathi Parker

Nursery: Sarah Delany, Grace Supanich

Sunday School: Kathi Parker, Frankie Supanich

Fellowship Host: Denise Cosper

THINK ABOUT IT - WEEK THREE: UNEXPECTED JOY

Joy doesn't always arrive the way we expect it to. Sometimes it doesn't come with laughter or ease or celebration. Sometimes joy shows up quietly—in recognition, in connection, in the moment we realize we are not alone. Scripture reminds us that joy is not the absence of hardship but the presence of God breaking into ordinary lives in unexpected ways.

In this week's story, Elizabeth recognizes what God is doing before anyone else says a word. Mary's song bursts forth not because her life has suddenly become simple, but because she trusts that God is already at work in ways she cannot fully see yet. Their joy is rooted in relationship, in shared recognition, and in the deep assurance that God's promises are unfolding—even when the future is uncertain.

Unexpected joy often appears when we slow down enough to notice it. It surfaces in moments of affirmation, in being truly seen, in the quiet confidence that love is still shaping the world. Advent invites us to pay attention to those moments—not to rush past them, but to receive them as gifts.

Reflection Questions

1. When you hear the word joy, what comes to mind first—celebration, relief, gratitude, connection? How has your understanding of joy changed over time?
2. Where have you experienced unexpected joy recently, even in the middle of stress or uncertainty?
3. Elizabeth and Mary's joy is shared and spoken aloud. Who are the people in your life who help you recognize joy when it appears?
4. What might it look like to make space for joy this week without forcing it or rushing it?

Prayer for the Week

God of surprising joy, open my eyes to the ways you are already at work. When I feel overwhelmed or uncertain, help me notice moments of grace and connection. Let joy rise in me—not as denial of what is hard, but as trust that you are still present and still moving. Teach me to receive joy when it comes, to share it freely, and to hold it gently as a gift. Amen.

Putting It Into Practice

This week, try one simple practice of attentiveness: when you notice a moment of joy—however small—pause. Name it. Let it linger for a breath or two. You might even write it down or share it with someone you trust. Joy grows when it is recognized and shared.

As you continue this Advent journey, allow unexpected joy to remind you that God's dream is still unfolding—and that you are part of it.

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP SERVICES

We will offer two Christmas Eve services this year as we celebrate the wonder of Christ's birth and the light that breaks into our world.

- 5:00PM - Paris Campus, Candlelight Service
- 7:00PM - First Church Campus, Candlelight with Communion

If you'd like to volunteer to serve on Christmas Eve at either campus, please contact Pastor Jeremy or Barb in the church office

Your generosity makes a difference! To avoid any confusion in our giving systems, please make your checks out to First Church. Thank you for your continued support!

ALL FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS INTENDED FOR 2025 GIVING MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28. GIFTS RECEIVED AFTER THAT DATE WILL BE RECORDED IN THE 2026 GIVING YEAR.