



Utica United  
Methodist Church

# Weekly Messenger

December 15, 2023

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## "Good News, Coming at Just the Right Time..."

I recently discovered that someone I know would receive news they had not wanted to hear. I began to wonder how this news would impact their celebration of Christmas and whether it would put a pall over their planned celebration. As I reflected on their situation, I began to think of those who have lost loved ones during this season and of how their loss continues to impact their celebration of Christmas. I remember one parishioner whose mother and father died during Advent and how she couldn't look at Poinsettias as anything other than funeral flowers.

As I was reflecting, I was reminded by the Spirit that Christ came amid people hearing and living in times of bad news. The Spirit reminded me that Jesus was born in humble circumstances to lift the downtrodden who are groping to find the light. As God spoke to me, I was assured that the news I was sure would break their hearts may do just that, but God has a plan to help them through it. My prayer for this person is that they will see that God has not abandoned them in their time of trial but that God's Good news has come at just the right time.

Soon, the longest night of the year will be here. And, after that night, the days will begin to grow longer again. The amount of light will increase, and I pray we will hold fast to the truth that our Lord came to us to bring us light in the midst of darkness and that we are called to share the light. Let the soon-increasing minutes of daylight remind us to share the light.

Grace and Peace,

Rev. Don

## Mini Pantry

Thank you to all who continue to support the Mini Pantry. Our church continues to be a blessing to our neighborhood and those suffering from food and hygiene insecurities. We are collecting cans of tuna, chicken and Vienna sausages (can) throughout December. Place your items in the Wagon of Hope.

Utica United  
Methodist Church

8650 Canal Road,  
Sterling Heights, MI

(586) 731-7667

[www.UticaUMC.org](http://www.UticaUMC.org)

# **THE WEEKLY MESSENGER**

**Happy 200th Birthday Utica UMC!**

Utica United Methodist Church is 200 years old this year. We have many things planned to celebrate this wonderful milestone. Please consider inviting your friends and family or neighbors to the different events we will be having. This is a great way to reach out to our community and extend an invitation to someone new.

Please mark your calendars as we look ahead....

## **December -**

- Christmas Eve 9:30am - "Three Perspectives"
- Christmas Eve 10:30am - A Family Christmas Celebration - "The First Christmas"
- Christmas Eve 8:00pm - Candlelight, Carols and Handbells
- December 31st - 1 Service at 9:30 followed by a brunch in Fellowship Hall

**Christmas Eve Morning**  
**9:30am - Sanctuary**  
***"Three Perspectives"***



**Christmas Eve Morning**  
**10:30am - Fellowship Hall**  
***"The First Christmas"***



**Christmas Eve**  
**8:00pm - Sanctuary**  
***Candlelight, Carols and Bells***



## **New Years Eve Morning**

Everyone is invited to join us on Sunday, December 31st for 1 service at 9:30am followed by a brunch in Fellowship Hall at 10:30am. The sermon title is "Will you hold my baby?" based on Luke 2:22-35.

This service will be a wonderful reminder that God sent His Son into our care as a baby. How will we hold onto the gift of His child throughout the coming year? The brunch following will be a wonderful event to share in a meal and fellowship with each other to celebrate the coming new year.

Sign up sheets will be out starting Sunday, December 17th to sign up for the brunch on December 31st. Please let us know you are coming so we can plan for enough food.

# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER



The loss of a loved one is not easy. It may be hard for you to feel optimistic about the future right now. When you've lost a spouse, child, family member, or friend, you've probably found there are not many people who understand the deep hurt you feel.

This can be a confusing time when you feel isolated and have many questions about things you've never faced before.

**"Going to GriefShare feels like having warm arms wrapped around you when you're shivering."**

GriefShare will return to Utica United Methodist Church on:  
Thursday, January 18<sup>th</sup> 2024 at 6:30 PM in Fellowship Hall

If you or anyone you know could benefit from attending GriefShare contact:

Bob or Patsy Clark

or

Register at: [www.griefshare.org/findagroup](http://www.griefshare.org/findagroup)



It's hard to believe we've had an active Celebrate Recovery Group at Utica United Methodist Church for a full four years. This Christ centered ministry has changed so many lives, offered so many opportunities to help others get over the things that they need to get over.

Celebrate Recovery is a safe place, a place where it's OK not to be OK. We have a saying at Celebrate Recovery **"No perfect people allowed. All others are welcome."**

Join us on January 4, 2024 as we enter year five. We meet each Thursday at 6:30 PM in Fellowship Hall.

Let the healing begin!



# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER

## THE OPERATING FUND NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!

This December, it seems like everywhere we turn there is a financial appeal from one charity or another. All of them are in need of additional financial resources to be able to do more good. In the midst of all of these requests, we too are **appealing to you to make an additional contribution above what you normally give to our Operating Fund between now and the end of the year.**

Giving to the Operating Fund probably doesn't tug at your heart quite as much as someone needing food or medical assistance. But, it is essential if we are going to pay our staff, maintain our facilities, carry out our ministries, and meet our financial obligations for this year (2023). The Operating Fund is the foundation which enables us to provide all the ministries we do for others.

Our remaining expenses for the year (as of December 12) include: \$9,300 for compensation; \$9,500 for ministry shares; \$8,000 for utilities and property upkeep; and \$7,500 for ministries. Included in these are some unexpected expenses and a few larger expenses that don't occur regularly, such as: \$2,270 to load test the elevator (something we are required to do every 5 years); \$3,000 to repair the front door; and \$4,500 for our semi-annual insurance payment. This is almost \$10,000 in "extra" expenses above what we normally need on a monthly basis.

Along with your contributions, we will use the proceeds from our Cookie Walk for our remaining obligations (about \$20,000 - \$25,000 still needed). The Christmas Offering has been designated by Together-in-Mission (TIM) to fulfill our pledges to the mission ministries we support near and far. These mission ministries are independent of our Operating Fund.

We are grateful for the gifts we have received throughout this year. So far this year we have received about \$15,000 more than last year. And, our expenses have been consistent with last year. However, we no longer have any resources from previous years to help us make-up short-falls. This is why every dollar now will make a difference toward being able to meet all of our obligations in 2023. Thank you!

## CHRISTMAS COOKIE WALK DELIGHTFUL

Our Christmas Cookie Walk, held December 9 and December 10, was delightful in many ways.

- We were delighted over 20 bakers provided over 100 dozen cookies (that's more than 1,200 cookies). The amazing variety filled 8 tables!
- Customers from our community and congregation were delighted to fill containers with their cookie selections. We also sold jars of apple butter and apple sauce.
- Three Sterling Heights police officers delighted us by joining in Saturday morning to help greet, serve, and assist customers.
- In the end, we were delighted to have raised \$1,945.
- Thank you for your support – baking, serving, and buying! Your generosity and support is astounding and very much appreciated!

Also, if you purchased apple butter or apple sauce (or freezer jam this summer) please consider returning to the office any empty jars you aren't using so they can be filled and sold the next time we have a bake sale or cookie walk. Thank you!

# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER

## CHRISTMAS IS COMING

Christmas seems to have snuck up on me this year. I have been basically housebound since a fall the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. I have done my shopping online and now am worried about how I will get the packages inside when they come. I have given up on the notion of Christmas Cards because the cards left from last year are stored downstairs and I can't do stairs and cannot get to the store. I have an advent wreath with candles out and a manger scene. The manger figures were stored on the first level and a friend got it out for me. I won't have a tree up unless I make a pain free recovery soon. One thing I can do, besides shop online, is enjoy the Christmas music. My favorite hymn is one that is not often sung. It is "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." The words speak to me of the times it was written, the Civil War, and the times we are in now. The writer's son had been wounded in the Civil War, his beloved wife had died in a fire two years before and he had been burned trying to save her. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow sat listening to the bells pealing from a nearby church, he poured out his sorrow in his words. "I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play of peace on earth, goodwill to men. And in despair I bowed my head; there is no peace on earth I said, for hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men." The words reflected his grief and loss. But then he finished the song with, "God is not dead nor doth he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on earth, good will to men." He wrote a poem of sorrow and salvation. It was set to music in 1872 and then in 1956 it was recorded by Bing Crosby with music composed by Johnny Marks. It is a sad hymn that then becomes a reminder that despite our sorrows, God is with us. My hope for all of us is that when we sing those old hymns like Away in the Manger we will think of those without shelter, that when we sing O Come All Ye Faithful we think of those who are searching for God, and that when we sing Hark The Herald Angels Sing we remember that all are welcome at the table and with each song remember that our hymns call us to faith, to love, and to service. May we welcome Jesus remembering his love for us and may we show that love to each of his children.

Luke 2:4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her first born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in w manger because there was no room for them in the Inn.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of Jesus. Be with us in this holy season, may we see beyond the ribbons and gifts and know the true meaning of the birth of Christ and your gift to us with his life. Lord, be with those who are ill and those who grieve in our midst. Be with our church, may it be your church. Bless our Pastor and keep him in your care. Be with his family. Be with our staff and leaders, bless their service. May we be grateful for what we have, and may we serve others who have less in your name always with mercy and love. May all we do be pleasing to you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Grace Epperson



# THE WEEKLY MESSENGER

## SUNDAY WORSHIP TIMES:

**9:30AM**

with Organ, Choir and Handbells  
in the Sanctuary

**10:30AM**

with our Worship Band  
in Fellowship Hall

### Online Worship

A recorded service will be  
available online on  
Facebook, our church website and  
on YouTube beginning at  
9:00am each Sunday.

### OFFICE HOURS:

Monday - Friday  
8:00am-2:00pm

### Mini Pantry

Food and Monetary  
Donations are being  
accepted.

Suggested foods are eat  
and go items (tuna packs;  
cracker items; granola  
bars; fruit cups; salty  
snacks

### Keep Connected

If you are not signed up for our  
Weekly Messenger email, you  
can do so on our website by  
clicking on the "More" tab, then  
"Weekly Messenger"; on that  
page you will find a place to  
register for our weekly email!



*"Like" us  
on  
Facebook!*

### Our Mission

Inviting people to rely  
on Jesus to find  
unexpected purpose,  
peace and joy.

### Ministry Team

**Rev. Don Gotham**  
srpastor@uticaumc.org

### Music Ministry

**David Fox**, Organist, Bell, & Chancel Choirs  
Director

FoxDavidL@sbcglobal.net

**Mer Renne**, Contemporary  
Worship Leader  
mer@uticaumc.org

### Communications Director/Bookkeeper

**Rachelle Heldt**  
rachelle@uticaumc.org

### Deadline Information

Articles for advertising/  
announcements must be submitted to  
the office by 3:00pm on  
Wednesday of each week.

Messenger: Email to Rachelle Heldt

Prayer List: Email to Rachelle Heldt  
or call the church office.



Going on vacation; can't make it to church?

How about using E-giving so you can still give your offering for  
those times when you can't be here **The E-giving tab is on our  
church website: [www.uticaumc.org](http://www.uticaumc.org)**  
If you need assistance, call the church office.

**Celebrate Recovery, Thursday, 6:30pm**

