

Pastors' Report for Mentor UMC Charge Conference, 2024

Written by Rev. Steve Stultz Costello, Sr. Pastor, MUMC October 31, 2024

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age – Matthew 28:19-20

Intro

I just read last year's Pastors' Report for the 2023 MUMC Charge Conference. It is a wonderful and spiritual exercise to look back over the year and take stock in all that God has done and is doing in and through Mentor United Methodist Church. I am so grateful to be in ministry with Pastor Ivy, Pastor Tammy, the staff, all the lay leadership and the whole congregation at MUMC. Together, with God's abiding presence, we accomplished many goals and navigated challenges with faith, courage, vision and strength. I invite you to celebrate with me God's faithfulness over the past year.

Baptisms and New Members

This has been a banner year of baptisms and new members. Since January, we have baptized ten adults and ten children. Altogether, we welcomed thirty-seven new members (27 by profession of faith, 10 by transfer). On October 20, more than sixty people gathered for a Service of Baptisms and New Members at Headlands State Park Beach where three adults were baptized by immersion in Lake Erie, six others were baptized by sprinkling, two others who were already baptized became members and everyone renewed their baptismal vows. The Holy Spirit is on the move!



Bible Studies and Small "Journey" Groups

MUMC assist people on a path of Christ-centered discipleship through Journey groups, Bible Studies, luncheons and fellowship opportunities. This year, the pastors facilitated studies including:

- 7-week Study - Being United Methodist Christians (41 participants)
- Mentor 101 – 5-week class in spring (15 participants), 2-Hour class in September (7 participants)
- Wandering Heart Formation Group 5-weeks during Lent (20+ participants)
- 6-week Wrestling with Doubt Finding Faith Study Groups (72 total participants)
 - Thursday class – 21 participants
 - Sunday Young Adult Class – 17 participants
 - Journey Group Classes, one on Monday and two on Tuesday – 34 participants
- 6-Week Spiritual Parenting class – 7 participants



Hiring a Full-Time Youth Director

Last year at this time, we had four open positions. Today, we have just one position to be filled – a Part-time Modern Worship Director. In July, 2024, we hired Mackalyn Figgis as our Full-Time Youth Director. Mackalyn has an undergraduate degree in youth ministry and a Master of Divinity and a Master of Arts in Social Justice from

Methodist Theological School of Ohio (MTSO). She loves youth ministry, loves building relationships, loves the church and most importantly, loves Jesus. MUMC believes in cultivating the faith of our youth.



Children, Family, Youth, and Theater Arts Ministries

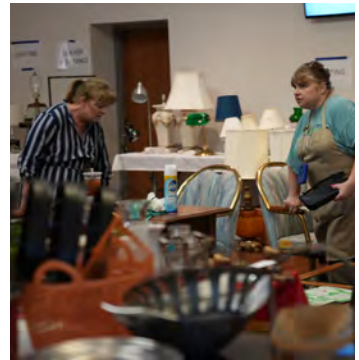
Children and families have been engaged this past year through Sunday school at both service times. Community events for our church families, our preschool families, and the greater community included Treat Street, the Easter Egg Hunt, Vacation Bible School, Theatre Arts Camp (TAC), and Middle School Mission Week. The theatre ministry, Truth & Light Players, is currently rehearsing A Charlie Brown Christmas for a December 14 performance. Pastor Tammy and Kat Fisher produced Aladdin, Jr. at Memorial Middle School. Several of the Memorial MS students participated in the Christmas play and TAC. Our new youth director, Mackalyn Figgins, has been cultivating relationships with parents and students. She has been leading a middle school Sunday school and “Tea Time” for the high school students. They are planning to go to the youth retreat at Camp Wanake in November. Moms continue to meet for MOMCo at Mentor UMC. The Mentor UM Preschool is doing well with four classes having only two openings.



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Mission and Outreach

We reached out to the community with monthly More-Than-a-Meal and several other mission/outreach events like Build-a-Bed, Rummage Sale, UMCOR Disaster Relief, The Big Event, Alzheimer’s Walk. We also served people far beyond our community through the Youth Service Project (YSP) trip to Obion, Tennessee, an UMVIM trip to Puerto Rico and a conference trip to Africa University in Zimbabwe for the dedication of the newly constructed women’s dormitory. We are the hands and feet of Christ.



Shepherding Summit – Leadership Strengthening

On November 19, 2023, we held our first Leadership Training event called the “Shepherding Summit”. Fifty-six people attended. Dinner was provided. Grounded in MUMC’s core values and focusing on our mission to lead all onto a path of Christ-centered discipleship, the Summit reaffirmed and strengthened best practices for congregational health and vitality. This year (2024) we decided to participate in a District sponsored Healthy Congregations Workshop that has now been scheduled for February 8, 2025.



Wednesday Night Dinner and Programming for Lent

We enjoyed five weeks of Wednesday night meals and “camp-style worship” at our Lenten Family, Feast, and Fellowship gatherings providing an opportunity for the whole church to grow in faith and fellowship.

Fellowship Hall Renovations

In October, 2023, the Administrative Council decided to move forward with a goal we all agreed was overdue and would have the greatest impact - renovations and upgrades to the fellowship hall to enhance and better support all of our ministries that use that space including our Modern Worship service, theater arts program, and many other uses. MUMC is a church that makes decisions through healthy, transparent, and collaborative processes that keeps the church’s mission front and center. The renovations were completed in August, 2024 and on November 10, we will be dedicating the renovated space to God for God’s mission.



Pastor Capture Weekly Recap Video & Facebook Live

In September, we marked one year of weekly videos. Each video (6-7 minutes long) features Pastor Ivy, Pastor Tammy and I reflecting together on the key aspects of our sermons, highlights from worship and Children and Family programming from the previous Sunday as well as giving a teaser for the upcoming Sunday’s focus. The video is posted on YouTube and other social media platforms where we usually get between 65 and 85 views each week. We also marked one year of Sunday morning Facebook Live videos between services at 10:30 in the gallery - sharing the spirit of welcome and inviting people to worship and fellowship.



Staff Retreat

The staff went on their second annual staff retreat. We returned to the Lodge at Geneva on the Lake September 5-6. Our retreat leaders, Barry LeNoir and Rev. Gary Heaton, led us in worship, communion, singing, games, storytelling, reflections and discussions that all served to sharpen our skills as a staff team and prepare us for the year ahead.



Staff Lunches and Epiphany Dinner

Spending time together in fellowship as a staff is essential for maintaining a strong, high-functioning and healthy staff. This year we celebrated staff birthdays and anniversaries over lunch almost monthly. In addition, in January we had our first ever Epiphany dinner that included our preschool staff. Recognizing, affirming and investing in our staff and building stronger ties with the



preschool staff is consistent with MUMC’s belief that when our staff are strong, the whole church is strong and the mission is expanded.

New Church Directory

The new church pictorial directory is in its final stages of editing and is expected to be in homes in time for Christmas. Everyone is eager to see how people have changed since the last directory in 2014! It will be a great resource for helping us connect with one another and get to know each other better.

A New Thing – Music at Seven

On Friday, October 25, we had our first ever “Music at Seven” that created a fun, relaxing evening of music provided by many different talented members of the congregation with savory snacks as a potluck. It was an incredible event held in our gallery with over eighty in attendance!



A Passion for Evangelism

It’s always a sign of God at work when someone is moved with passion to lead a ministry with new ideas, energy and commitment. On August 15, MUMC hosted a conference event called “Listening Church Workshop”. Chris Fletcher was one of the participants from MUMC to attend. She came away with a strong prompting from the Holy Spirit to lead our Evangelism team in new ways inspired by the workshop. She took the reins on October 6 and has already devoted many hours to recruiting others, soliciting ideas, listening to others, organizing meetings, developing a strategy and securing funding. Go God Go!

Expanding our Online Presence

This year we expanded our online presence by exploring more video-based sharing on Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok in addition to our regular presence on all social media platforms including X, LinkedIn, and our church app.



Stewardship

Last year in October we had a four-week stewardship series based on Bishop tom Berlin’s book “Defying Gravity – Break Free from the Culture of More” that helped us understand stewardship as a way of life that leads to freedom and joy for serving God’s mission. This year in November we are doing a three-week focus on stewardship based on the theme “Love Begins at Home”. Created in house, this series will help us see that practicing generosity as a disciple of Jesus is investing in God’s vision for all people to enjoy the blessings of home – at home, at church and in the world.



Weddings

Two weddings were conducted at MUMC and two off site. Each couple engaged in several premarital counseling sessions with a pastor. One couple decided to join the church! We celebrate couples who choose to be married at Mentor UMC and the opportunity for us to plant seeds of faith.

Funerals – Services of Death and Resurrection

Since last charge conference, we have had 20 members of MUMC transition to eternal life. In every case, one of the pastors met with family and loved ones providing pastoral care. A team of volunteers extend caring hospitality at every funeral service often providing a meal following the service.



In the Midst of Challenges, Perceiving a New Thing

In addition to all these celebrations, we witnessed together a historic General Conference that officially changed the United Methodist Church's position on LGBTQI+. While many at MUMC celebrate this change, there are others who do not agree. The good news is that we don't need to all agree. In fact, MUMC has always been a church with a wide range of perspectives on social and theological issues. It has also always been a church where all are welcome - conservative and liberal, traditional and progressive, republican and democrat, rich and poor, weak and strong. As far as I can tell, MUMC has always been a church that above all believes that God's love is bigger than our different perspectives and every Sunday is an opportunity to receive and practice that love.

MUMC believes that all of us are seeking to be on a path of Christ-Centered discipleship and what helps us on that path is when we walk it together. Because of this conviction, it hurts whenever a member of the Body of Christ decides to step away from the MUMC path. Since the General Conference decision, we have had some longtime members disengage from MUMC. Their absence has been a source of heavy grief for all who knew them. Also since General Conference, we have had a drop in giving. In response, the Ad Council commissioned a "Financial Review Task Group" to prayerfully consider all the information and come back to Ad Council with a proposal for how best to move forward. The task willingly examined cherished traditions, practices and goals and sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We were challenged to set aside our preferences and lean into uncomfortable decisions that will help support and further the mission of the church.

The recommendation to the Administrative Council that was approved unanimously on September 18 was to transition from four services each Sunday to two: Modern at 9:00, Traditional at 11:00 with Pastor Steve preaching three times per month, Pastor Ivy preaching once a month and Pastor Tammy preaching whenever there is a fifth Sunday. This new schedule will allow Pastor Ivy time to fill the church's visitation needs so that we no longer need to hire a Half Time Pastor of Visitation. The recommendation also included changing the still vacant Modern Worship Director position from a full-time position to a half-time position. These changes and others contribute to a 2025 SPRC budget that is reduced by over \$80,000 compared to the 2024 budget. We also anticipate enjoying greater attendance per service that will increase a sense of energy and spirit in worship. These changes reflect good stewardship, deep faith, bold vision and a strong commitment to the church's mission.

Conclusion

Clearly the Holy Spirit is on the move at Mentor United Methodist Church. What a blessing to get to serve with Pastor Ivy and Pastor Tammy, with an amazingly dedicated and grace-filled staff and among a spirit-filled people!

Rev. Steve Stultz Costello
Sr. Pastor, MUMC

Rev. Dr. Ivy Smith
Associate Pastor, MUMC

Rev. Tammy Palermo
Pastor of Children and Family Ministry