

# CONNECTIONS

Our purpose is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world



## Message from the Pastor



**Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.**

**Our Vision: With Christ as our center, we are His extended family, compassionately sharing Jesus' love with all people. Our congregation is on a life long journey of discipleship to become more like Christ.**

Proverbs 29:18

Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. (KJV)

Where there is no prophecy, the people cast off restraint, but happy are those who keep the law. (NRSV)

If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed. (MSG)

When there's no vision, the people get out of control, but whoever obeys instruction is happy. (CEB)

**UPCOMING EVENTS**

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2/14/21  
Valentine's Day

2/15/21  
President's Day

2/17/21  
Ash Wednesday  
Noon-12:30  
6:30-7pm

2/21/21  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

2/17/21  
Lenten Devotion Begins

With Christ as our center, we are His extended family, compassionately sharing Jesus' love with all people. Our congregation is on a lifelong journey of discipleship to become more like Christ.

# Prayers and Praise



## PRAYER requests

### In the Hospital

Please remember those in  
Continuing Care Facilities

Luanne Genga  
Novi Lakes Health Campus

Bobbie Winters  
Superior Woods

## PRAY FOR OUR MILITARY

Stephanie Boltrick  
Daughter of Nancy Boltrick

Christopher Stone  
Son of Mike & Dawn Stone

Michael Stone  
Son of Mike & Dawn Stone

Blake  
Grandson of Betty Hughey

Jared Stabnau  
Grandson of Elaine Stabnau

Cody Ford-Aimone  
Grandson of Mike & Lynda Aimone

Justin Renton  
Grandson of Donna Sweeney

Chad Koenne  
Grandson of Dick & Lila Timm

## February BIRTHDAYS

Carol	Leake	4
Kim	Paris	5
Angelle	Whitt	9
Kathleen	Caldwell	10
Donna	Gotts	12
Linda	Lewis	15
Carol	Shuryan	15
Chris	Whitt	16
Vern	Carlson	18
Marilyn	Wood	21
Barb	Moore	22
Suzanne	Stevens	22
Tara	Cleveland	24

## February ANNIVERSARIES

Michael & Kelly	Boelter	1
Ron & Joyce	Banks	9
Paul & Cindy	Smith	9
Ed & Joy	Dubin	15
Dick & Lila	Timm	16
Joseph & Janelle	Wofford	27

# Message from the Pastor

Continued from Page 1

I just past my six-month mark. I have been at Belleville First as your pastor for six months. What I have learned is that you have had wonderful leadership prior to my arrival, and that you spent two years working hard on the vision statement above. Some of you may not have recognized this vision statement that greets you as you enter the church building on the parking lot side and is on our website and app. Never fear, that's why I am here, to place that vision before us as we grow into it. For as the verse from Proverbs above puts it plainly, so plainly I gave you four different versions to read: Without vision, the people perish.

The good news is that we have a vision; yet how do we implement that vision in our daily life? How do we make the words, in-person or virtually, leap off the page and grab our mission field's attention? That is the task that Jill Sestok, your Director of Spiritual Formation, and I took on for the three-week sermon series prior to Lent. We wanted to immerse ourselves in the vision of Belleville First. We wanted to understand how God has led you in order to help you to fulfill the vision God gave you.

**ENGAGE**

	S	M	T	W	Th	F	S	
<b>ENCOUNTER</b>								
								
								
								

Then... **EXPRESS**

- Serve 
- Give 
- Influence 

# Message from the Pastor

Continued from Page 3

We have the tools. We have a Spiritual Pathway that guides you along your lifelong journey of discipleship **and encourages you to live a Christ-Centered life.** We have Growth Groups that are a vital part of the engage section of the Spiritual Pathway and fulfill the vision by deepening our family bonds and helping us to share Jesus' love. Growth Groups help us to grow in community learning to love one another as we play together, serve together, give together, and help one another to be influencers in our daily lives. That's why it is so important to plug into a growth group. Jill and I really expect that if you attend Belleville First, in person or online, that you will take the opportunity to join a growth group. Sign-ups for Lent Growth Groups began January 24 and are still open. Sign up today!

As we embark on month seven and beyond of our journey together, let us continue to live into the vision that God has placed before us as we work with Jesus to transform the world.

## **Drive-thru imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday**

Ash Wednesday begins the season of Lent, a time when many Christians prepare for Easter by observing a period of fasting, repentance, moderation and spiritual discipline...Ash Wednesday emphasizes two themes: our sinfulness before God and our human mortality...Ashes are an [ancient symbol](#). In Genesis, we read that God formed human beings out of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). After expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the first human beings are told by God, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19 NRSV). The Hebrew word translated dust, is occasionally translated ashes elsewhere. Throughout scripture, ashes are part of rituals when people seek forgiveness and mourn their sin (see Numbers 19:9, 17; Hebrews 9:13; Jonah 3:6; Matthew 11:21, and Luke 10:13, among others)... As the ashes are placed on the forehead, words such as these are spoken: "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return," recalling God's words to Adam in Genesis 3:19, or "Repent, and believe the gospel" recalling the message of both John the Baptist and Jesus (Mark 1:15).

On **Wednesday, February 17, 2021 @ noon-12:30pm and 6:30-7pm** are two opportunities to participate in this ancient symbol. Pastor Mary and Jill Sestok will be at the parking lot entrance of the church to impose ashes upon the forehead or hand of anyone who desires them. Let us begin Lent together by remembering that we are dust, and to dust we shall return.

God's Blessings,

Pastor Mary



## Reflection on 2020

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Friends -

The turning of the calendar to a new year is often a time of looking forward to the year ahead and setting goals for what we want to accomplish. However, it's also important to spend some time reflecting on the past year. In this midst of all that 2020 brought us, our church was faithful and continued to find unique ways to share God's love. We wanted to take a few minutes here to reflect on all the things that we did last year. (And we know there is a risk that this list doesn't include everything ... we didn't intentionally leave anything off the list and apologize if we missed your favorite way of sharing God's love.)

In 2020, Belleville FUMC (in no particular order):

- Built and stocked a mini food pantry that was installed between the church memorial garden and is visible from inside the new Belleville public library
- Converted our food closet to a drive through pantry that served 162 clients at various points during the year. The food closet also provided food to the Belleville High School food pantry, the church mini food pantry, migrant workers in Monroe, and the Monroe Homeless Shelter.
- Continued our ministry to the homeless in Detroit through Mike Skelton's ministry and the Noah Project
- Delivered 12 Easter baskets to the residents of Girlstown
- Started full online worship services that are available on Facebook and YouTube
- Hosted periodic outdoor services and parking lot services with audio available through your car radio
- Celebrated Advent with a weekly gathering around a new outdoor wreath built by the United Methodist Men
- Continued/started several Growth Groups meeting online, including an online children's growth group / Sunday school



- Celebrated the retirement of Pastor Walker
- Repainted and recarpeted the entire parsonage
- Welcomed Pastor Loring and her family to Belleville First
- Hired a new Director of Spiritual Formation focused on meeting the spiritual growth needs of all members/attendees
- Held virtual Vacation Bible School
- Hosted Fabulous Fun Fridays during December (online) for increased fellowship time
- Cleaned up the Memorial Garden
- Sent a small group on a mission trip to Florida in February for hurricane Michael recovery
- Sponsored one year of the nurse's salary for John Dean Town in Liberia
- Participated in a month-long SON (Serving Our Neighbors) project, including collecting school supplies, caring for our community, collecting food for the food pantry, and sharing God's love with those around us
- Assembled and delivered Advent boxes to church members including an Advent devotional and candle to participate in Advent candle lighting
- Collected a designated Christmas Offering of approximately \$3000 benefiting Guiding Harbor and CAF 5
- Sponsored Angel Tree gifts for more than 20 children at Rawsonville Elementary
- Updated the church website and developed a church app to help members stay connected and to help others learn about BFUMC. The updated website also includes copies of past newsletters.
- Hosted a regular watch party for small groups of members without access to watch our online church services
- Participated in congregational care outreach to ensure regular communication with members who may become isolated due to the pandemic situation



Wow ... what a list! It can be easy to feel like things are not happening when we are not together on Sunday mornings, but our church has shown that we can still “be the church” outside of the church walls. For me, pulling this list together was inspiring as I was reminded of what we have accomplished and what we can continue to accomplish!

Thank you to those of you who have been involved in these ministry activities. If you read this list and saw an area you’d like to help with in the future, please let me know, and I’d be happy to get you connected.

It will take all of us to continue to share God’s love with the community around us. I appreciate all of you and look forward to what this list will look like at the end of 2021.

In Christ,  
Abby



Ash Wednesday  
February 17<sup>th</sup>  
Noon-12:30 and 6:30-7pm.  
Ashes imposed upon the  
forehead or hand as  
desired.





## **Lenten Series:**

## ***Final Words from the Cross***

This series is based on Adam Hamilton's book by the same name. We will explore the seven last words of Christ and how they continue to connect with us today.

### February 21, 2021—FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Scripture: Luke 23:26, 33-34a

Sermon Title: *Father, Forgive Them*

Synopsis: Answering the questions: For whom was Jesus praying? Who was the "them" Jesus was asking God to forgive? Do we have a need for forgiveness?

Eyewitness: Simon of Cyrene

### February 28, 2021—SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Scripture: Luke 23:32, 39-43

Sermon Title: *Today You Will Be with Me in Paradise*

Synopsis: Answering the questions: What does this scene teach us about Jesus, and what does it teach us about ourselves?

Eyewitness: The Thief on the Cross



2021 Giving envelope boxes are available from 10:00a.m. – 1:00p.m., and every Tuesday & Wednesday throughout the month of February. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Micky Keelan (734-740-3700) or the church office (734-697-9288) M-Th 9:00am-12:00pm .

Thank you  
Finance Committee

## Liturgists are Needed:

If you are available, and would like to participate by reading the scripture and prayer list on Sundays, please contact Paul Smith [pksmith402@yahoo.com](mailto:pksmith402@yahoo.com).

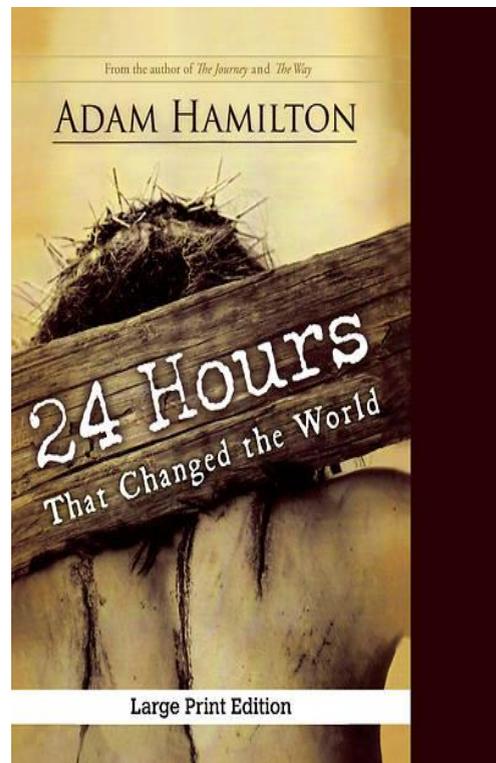
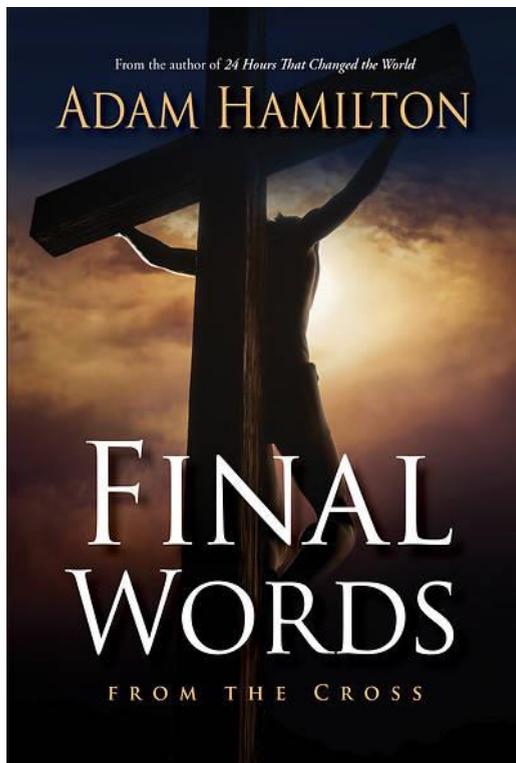
Thank you!  
Paul Smith





GROWTH GROUPS ARE STARTING!!! Join in for the all church study through Lent: Final Words From the Cross by Adam Hamilton. Sessions begin **Sunday, February 21st** and sign-ups are available. Make sure you sign up through the MyChurch App, church website (Sign-up Genius link), or by contacting the church office (734-697-6288).

You do not want to miss this opportunity to be a participant in an All Church Growth Group!!! Publications also accompany the experience for adults. The cost of an adult book is \$10 each, which can be paid for and picked up in the church office. Scholarships are available. Children (Kindergarten - 5th graders) and youth (6th - 12th graders) do not have a book that accompanies the study so they just need to show up!!! Children, please make sure you check out the Lenten packages delivered to each home, which will contain some of the materials for your Growth Group (Sunday School) experience based on 24 Hours That Changed the World, also by Adam Hamilton. A follow-up publication to Final Words.





## CAF 5

11334 HUNT STREET  
ROMULUS, MICHIGAN 48174  
(734) 941-3510

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Belleville First United Methodist Church  
c/o Pastor Mary Loring  
417 Charles Street  
Belleville, Michigan 48111

January 12, 2021

RE: A beautiful blessing!

Dear Pastor Loring;

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The CAF 5 committee would like to give you and your congregation a heartfelt thank you. This is a true sign of fellowship and caring for your community and neighboring communities that we serve. It will be put to good use helping families and children in need, not only with financial support, but also providing encouragement that there are those who care.

Very truly yours,

  
Brian A. Oakley  
President CAF5

BAO/pkm

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Greetings Church,

The season of Lent will be upon us this month. What will you be leaving at the cross for this time of solidarity in the desert? Or perhaps you are someone that likes to take on something new as a spiritual discipline for the experience in the wilderness. Whatever you decide is your route, please consider the spiritual pathway that you are navigating. First up for the Belleville First extended family of Christ is ***Encounter: The Decision*** by *Encountering God in Worship*. "Worship" may mean many different things to many different people. For the practical purposes of the BFUMC Spiritual Pathway, it is to "make worship a part of your weekly pattern" as you "grow your participation in singing, prayer, and communion". So, are you tuning in for the Belleville First weekly worship service? Lifting up your voice while doing so to make a joyful noise? Prayerfully participating? Maybe now is the time you commit to watching it online every week. Maybe if you are already doing that you commit to sharing the service with those you hold dear, to ensure they too are able to encounter a worship experience, especially during this period of isolation.

The Lenten season can also be an ideal opportunity to choose a daily devotional to read at a time that works for you. This touches on the next step of the BFUMC Spiritual Pathway of ***Engage: Growing in Trust*** by *Engaging God in Scripture, Engaging God in Prayer, and Engaging God in Small Groups*. Having a daily "Holy Time Out" where you read faithful text that helps illustrate a point based on scripture and includes prayer is an important spiritual practice. Some folks choose to start their day this way by doing it before absolutely anything else when they rise, others choose to end the day this way by reading it and having a prayer as the last thing they do before they go to bed. Still others may have the perfect time for themselves during a midday lunch, and choose to pick themselves up with a faithful reminder then that God is at the helm of all things. There is no wrong time to have your Holy Time Out. It is whatever works best in the course of your day, and that will likely be different for each of us. Trying to do it at the same time each day might help it become more of a habit, but even that can remain flexible. As you begin to incorporate this practice, pick it up again for the umpteenth time, or just continue as you have already been doing, please be gentle with yourself. Do the best you can and do not be so rigid with the structure piece, that it prevents you from continuing because you missed a day or two and end up just dropping it altogether. The most important thing is to keep trying to do your best. Encourage yourself with small steps by incorporating more and more at a gentle pace. There are many reading options out there such as the Upper Room, U-Version Bible, or any devotional written by your favorite Christian author. Just as we did for the Advent season, we will again have a congregationally authored daily devotional put together and delivered for the Lenten season. If you really want to commit to your spiritual walk in 2021 make sure you incorporate reading scripture daily and get a journal to write about the experience in.



Draw what comes to mind as you contemplate God's word, write about the thoughts, feelings, and prayers that are laid on your heart as you hear the "same" scripture in a new way, or send a note to that person whom you haven't connected with in a while and invite them to share your faith journey by joining a Growth Group. In this way we can truly live out **our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.**

Don't forget to sign up for a Growth Group with every time offered the week of February 21st - the first full week of Lent. For a refresher as to when each group will meet and who will be leading it, please see the January Connections newsletter, which can be found on the BellevilleFirstUMC.org website ([Newsletter | Belleville First UMC](#)). That information is included under the Education section in my article (page 10). Feel free to sign up electronically through the links that will be provided via the church membership e-mail software at the end of January or by contacting the church office or myself directly.

I look forward with quiet contemplation, to the journey we will have collectively this month and onward as the people of faith of Belleville First, living out our vision **with Christ as our center... on a lifelong journey of discipleship to become more like Christ.** I thank you as always, for your faithful presence, prayers, witness, gifts, and service, especially during times such as these. Take good care and God bless!!!

**Jill B. Sestok**  
**Director, Spiritual Formation**

**Phone: 313/948-7050**

**E-Mail: [JBSestok@GMail.com](mailto:JBSestok@GMail.com)**

## *Who did the Emergency Food Closet serve in 2020?*

Total number of clients in 2020 - **162**

Total number of clients returning from 2019 - **66 (66/162) or 41%**

Even though we are an emergency food closet, some clients' circumstances do not change.

**NEW** clients in 2020 - **96 (96/162) or 59%**

January – 6

February – 7

March 1 – December 31 – 83

Number of clients who are seniors age 60+ - **80 ((80/162) or 49%**

Number of clients who are **NEW** & seniors age 60+ - **53 (53/96) or 55%**

Number of clients with families (living with parents, children, siblings, others) - **70 (70/162) or 43%**

Number of clients with families who have children under 18 - **47 (47/70) or 67%**

Number of seniors age 60+ and raising grandchildren - **3 (3/80) or 4%**

Number of clients who have referrals - **82 (82/162) or 51%**

Number of referrals from Salvation Army - **40 (40/82) or 49%**

Number of referrals from BFUMC - **6 (6/82) or 7%**

Number of referrals who are VETS (which is an automatic referral) - **5 (5/82) or 6%**

Number of clients receiving food stamps with referrals - **17 (17/82) or 21%**

(Referrals are the only way to verify if one is receiving food stamps)

Number of seniors age 60+ with referrals receiving food stamps - **9 (9/82) or 11%**

April (26) and May (11) were the two months with the most new clients - **37 (37/96) or 39%**

Number of clients who came only **ONE** time - **69 (69/162) or 43%**

Number of clients who were served on a **regular** basis - **93 (93/162) 57%**

Number of **NEW** clients who came **ONE** time - **61 (61/96) or 64%**

Number of **NEW** clients who came **ONE** time who are seniors age 60+ - **30 (30/53) or 57%**

Several clients car pool to pick up their food. If one is unable to come due to illness or lack of transportation, he/she will send a friend or a relative to pick up his/her food. Three clients received food from BFUMC members who made home deliveries.

# Food Closet



The Emergency Food Closet donated food to the Belleville High School food pantry and to the Little Free Pantry located on the east end of the church. Cart food items not selected by our clients were taken to the migrant workers in Monroe and/or to the Monroe Homeless Shelter.

Members of BFUM church, residents of the community, local businesses, local churches and other United Methodist churches have supported the EFC with food and monetary donations in 2020. It has been heartwarming, inspiring, and a blessing to see so many help feed those in need.

As of January 1, 2021 the EFC has a balance of \$46,026.51 in the EFC Chase Debit account. In addition the EFC has as of today, January 5, 2021, \$12,024.80 in Meijer Simple Give Food Only cards. There are also five-\$10 Meijer Gift Cards that were donated to the EFC. The EFC will continue to operate as a drive-thru food pantry in 2021 for the safety of clients and volunteers.

Each weekly bag costs \$20 to \$25 depending on the weekly menu items included. There are five different weekly menus which were reviewed and approved by a dietician. In addition, the weekly refrigerator choice items (one dairy-cheese, eggs, or margarine; one lunch meat-bologna, salami, ham, or hot dogs; one meat-ground beef or ground turkey; and a loaf of wheat or white bread) cost \$5-\$9 depending on the selected combinations. Each client also receives a four-roll package of toilet paper which is purchased from The Dollar Tree for a \$1. Food donations that do not go into weekly bags and personal care items are placed on carts for “free choice” items.

Due to the amount of money and Simply Give cards on hand, the EFC will pass out bags to all clients on a weekly basis starting January 1, 2021 for as long as it is financially possible. All who received bags in December received written and verbal notification of this change. This was also shared in the local paper, *The Independent*, as a Letter to the Editor in its December 31 edition. Several years ago the EFC started passing out bags on an every other week schedule due to limited funds. Currently, 23 volunteers staff the EFC.

Marilyn Wood – Emergency Food Closet Coordinator



# Events & Activities



Worship Committee wishes to thank all who participated in the Advent activities.

Thank you to Gabe, Marlayna, Harper and Quinn Keelan, plus Jill Sestok for putting up the tree and decorating the Sanctuary.

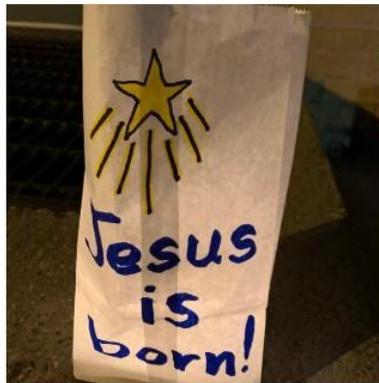
A huge THANK YOU to the men's group for making our outdoor Advent Wreath.

We appreciate those that attended the Advent Wreath lighting each week, Christmas Eve Parking lot service and everyone who made a luminaire. We had such a great response. The luminaries were so beautiful and added a special touch to the service.

Thank you to those who came early to help fill and set up the luminaries.

Photo credit- Lisa Archer.

Thank you



A white paper bag luminaire with the words "Love Came Down" written in black cursive. A small star is drawn at the top right, and a black manger illustration is at the bottom.





## Lent

W Q K P G N I T S A F P K V K F L  
P O A S H W E D N E S D A Y C Z R  
S N R E C I F I R C A S T N R K L  
R S L R V Z K Y N B N N S N U K B  
H C E W O F X P G N E E M O C E D  
M R P N H S J B G L H F X I I E N  
C X C N E F Y N P S T P G T F W J  
V R G W B V I M A P E R N A I Y Q  
T N O B M R I P T A P A I I X L J  
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almsgiving  
ashes  
ash wednesday  
cross  
crucifixion  
easter  
fasting  
forgiveness  
holy week

lent  
meditation  
penance  
prayer  
prepare  
reconciliation  
sacrifice  
sorrow  
spring