



BRANCHES



A Publication of **Muskegon County Cooperating Churches**
Convening the Community of Faith
to serve the needs of the people of Muskegon County for over 70 years.

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Office Closed Temporarily-call or email and we will return your call or respond to your email.

MCCC is a non-profit ecumenical organization serving all faith congregations in Muskegon County

What's Happening at Cooperating Churches?

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Membership Drive:

Letter in this issue-Page 3.

Please send in your membership.

Recovery Congregations:

Support and Resources

Call Lily at 231-670-5911

Mobile Food Pantries:

**Mobile Food Pantries are still happening.
Protocol is different in this day of Covid 19.
Drive up and volunteers will hand you your food.**

Monthly Schedules on our website.

**Opportunities to host mobiles at your church.
All you need is a large parking lot and 20 to 25
Volunteers.**

Call Jack at 231-828-4422



Gleanings by Tom Wagner



May-June 2020

In the shadow of Covid-19

As I begin this epistle, our world has changed significantly during the past two months. Covid-19 at the time I last wrote was like a storm on the horizon. We have yet to feel its full force. I pray that readers and families are healthy and observing appropriate precautions to avoid contracting the virus.

We have been fortunate; members of our household are well. Since my employer has been designated a “critical infrastructure operation” (we make manhole covers and access panels), I continue to work my usual 10 hour four day a week schedule. This has led to a number of alterations in daily operations; from keeping our distance, to sanitizing tools at the beginning of the shift, to even redirecting how we enter and exit the building. As a rural household, much of our daily and seasonal routine at home has not changed. Chores related to animal husbandry and garden prep continue. It has been my habit to combine visits to the grocery store and the feed mill in the same trip. The difference is that now I cover my face with a bandana and do my best to keep a proper distance from other customers. The greatest disruptions to our lives have been the cancelation of gathered worship and much less contact with our daughter’s family. Instead of sharing meals a couple of times a week or allowing our 4 year old grandson to occasionally sleep over, we have made brief visits dropping off care packages of eggs, goat milk, etc. We don’t have the machinery or band width to do virtual visits, but we can phone and email. Lois and I have made short videos on the digital camera reading some of Ben’s favorite books and passing them along on a flash drive in the care packages. When better weather arrives we hope to spend some time together in outdoor settings. So far we have not faced the trauma experienced in other parts of Michigan, the U.S. or the world.

It’s been a time for rapid adaptation among our faith communities, since gathering plays such a central role in our shared life. In some ways it feels like we are going through an extended Lent, in which we continue to sacrifice community for a season. Electronic means of connecting are helpful, but not the same. It is one thing to watch a sermon or sing along with hymns led on-line, but it’s quite different to reduce the very physical rites of footwashing and Eucharist to “virtual reality”. Yet these are inconveniences we live through in this moment for the common good. Though the greater Muskegon area has been so far less affected by the pandemic than many urban communities, infection and death rates continue to grow. We share the grief of Holy Trinity Church of God in Christ following the passing of their pastor Bishop Nathaniel W. Wells, Jr. of Covid-19 in March. This most likely will get worse before life can get back to some sense of “normal”. Take time to grieve. It is part of what makes us human. We applaud first responders, medical staff, grocery clerks, mobile pantry volunteers and many others in our community who are taking significant risks to care for others. We encourage everyone to continue maintaining physical distance, masking faces and washing hands for the duration. We also need to find creative ways to maintain our social ties.

Current conditions do allow many of us an unusual opportunity for in depth contemplation. Taking his cue from Archibald MacLeish’s play *J.B.*, among other sources, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner in the conclusion to his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (1981) suggests that working through tragedy is less about discovering the *why* and more about *how we respond* to it. In a sense it involves asking how to go on living in a less than perfect world. Love and caring for each other are always in season. Today the immediate needs continue to be caring for the sick, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, feeding the hungry. Yet in whatever capacity God has blessed each of us to help in this time of need, this is also a time for visions and dreams. What kind of society do we want to create in the future? Inequality in today’s world has fueled the spread of the virus. On the first Pentecost, Jesus’ followers met behind closed doors. I suspect they did so with some anxiety about possible discovery by the authorities, in spite of Jesus’ post-resurrection reassurances. Then, the Spirit set them on fire—opening their hearts to the world and to the needs of each other in spite of the risks. It remains a worthy vision today.

Tom Wagner is a former pastor in the Church of the Brethren (Dunker) and serves Muskegon County Cooperating Churches as clerk and archivist. He can be contacted at gleanertw@hotmail.com

Membership letter

Muskegon County Cooperating Churches

*"Moved by the love of Christ, we seek reconciliation and justice for all,
reaching across barriers that divide to alleviate poverty, both spiritual and physical."*
120 W. Apple Ave. Muskegon, MI 49440 Phone: 231-727-6000

March 10, 2020

Dear Partner in Building the Beloved Community,

Please keep Muskegon County Cooperating Churches as an outreach priority in your life and community by paying membership dues today.

MCCC membership is a bargain – only \$50 (Organizations) \$25 (individuals), annually, which can be paid as a lump sum or in installments. You may also take advantage of a discounted Muskegon Chamber of Commerce membership of \$75 by being a member of MCCC. If interested call our office and we can set this up.

For an MCCC membership, you are entitled to:

*The Directory of Muskegon County Churches & Religious Organizations, updated periodically. (If you have not received the latest (2019) edition please contact us.)

*Six issues annually of the MCCC Newsletter, BRANCHES, for as many people as would like to receive it from your congregation. You have the option of hard copy or email versions of the newsletter.

*Partnership in an organization which values both ecumenical and interfaith work in our community, supporting Christian community worship experiences, and various interfaith events, including the annual Shoah (Holocaust) memorial service.

*An annual voice in the work of Muskegon County Cooperating Churches.

The Chamber membership can offer you much more.

This is an exciting time to be involved with Muskegon County Cooperating Churches. We have several projects which will inform and involve the faith community; such as the Mobile Food Pantries, Recovery Congregations, the Family Faith Fellowship Fair, and Peace and Justice events.

Please use the enclosed envelope to send your membership contribution today.

Thank you!

Paul Emick, President

Muskegon County Cooperating Churches

Please remove this section and send it in with your contribution. Thank you.

Organization (Individual) Name: _____

Muskegon County Cooperating Churches Annual Membership Contribution: \$50.00 (or more)

Muskegon County Cooperating Churches (MCCC) is a 501(c)(3) not for profit organization.

May They Rest in Peace and Rise in Glory

With sadness we express our condolences to the family and friends of Bishop Nathaniel W.

Wells, Senior Pastor of Holy Trinity Institutional Church of God in Christ. He passed from this world on March 24. We also express our condolences to the family and friends of the Rev. Don Mathews, retired Pastor from the 1st Presbyterian, who passed away on April 10.

Don was an past board member of Muskegon County Cooperating Churches.

Save the Date



2020 Crop Hunger Walk

Muskegon CROP Walk planned for Oct. 4, 2020.

Tim Breed will be this year's coordinator.

Many of us are feeling pretty vulnerable right now. Let's switch our focus and plan to BE the good we hope to see. In 2019, the Muskegon CROP Hunger Walk raised over \$25,000 which is helping people right now. THANK YOU!

THANK YOU!
THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

We would not exist without your generous support.
Contributions have been received during the last 2
months from the following individuals, churches and
organizations.

First Presbyterian Church
Nancy Waters
First Church of Christ Scientist
William and Down Boelkins
Kay Ostrom
Sacred Heart

Church of the Living God
William and Erika Paulson
Muskegon Church of the Brethren
Harry and Lori Archer
Bill Page