

Abiade & Abiade Associates
Bethany Christian Reformed
ChurchChrist Temple Apostolic Church
Community Radio
Covenant Community Church RCA
Dr. Martin Luther Evangelical Lutheran Church
First Church of Christ, Scientist
First Congregational Church, U.C.C.
First Evangelical Lutheran Church
First Presbyterian Church
Forest Park Covenant Church
Fruitport Congregational Church, U.C.C.
Harbor of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
Harbor Hospice
Harbor Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Lebanon Lutheran Church
Love and Grace Healing Centers
Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ
Muskegon Church of the Brethren
New Bethel Baptist Evangelistic
Sacred Heart Church
Salvation Army of Muskegon
St. Gregory's Episcopal Church
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
UBS Financial Services
White Lake Congregational, U.C.C.

Harry & Lori Arthur
Margaret Buggs
Dale Ertzinger
Martha Giacobassi
Peggy Jensen & Gerald Dehra
Randy & Evelyn Kunish
Rev. Lily Marx
Rev. Bobbie Overton
Erika & William Paulson
Tyrone Rule
Thomas Tuori
Robert & Ann Vanderlaan
John & Phyllis Wahlberg
Nancy Waters

BRANCHES



Muskegon County Cooperating Churches
120 W Apple Avenue
Muskegon MI 49440

December 2022, January, February 2023

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Convening the Community of Faith

To serve the needs of the people of Muskegon County for more than 80 years

Muskegon County Cooperating Churches is located at 120 W. Apple Avenue, Muskegon, MI 49440

You can contact us at 231-727-6000 or office.mccc@frontier.com

If you have info you'd like considered for publication,
please send it to druidgriffin@aol.com by February 20, 2023.

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The Passing of Fr. John P. (Jack) LaGoe (1932-2022)

By Tom Wagner

It is with sadness that Muskegon County Cooperating Churches acknowledges the death of long time Muskegon faith leader and social activist Fr. Jack LaGoe on October 31, 2022.

He was ordained to the Roman Catholic priesthood June 3, 1961 and came to the Muskegon area in 1966. Over the years, he served in the following parishes: St. Mary's, St. Francis, St. Mary of the Woods, and St. Joseph's. For 25 years, he served as founder and director of the Christian Community Center in Muskegon Heights and ministered to prisoners at the Muskegon Correctional Facility. At the civic level, he served 25 years as vice-president of the Muskegon NAACP and was on the board of directors of the Muskegon Department of Social Services.

Many of us recall Fr. Jack as one who confronted area officials about unjust policies and for his hands-on care for the needs of the poor. He said that people come to you with their lives when they ask for help. You have to listen and help as you can. He often responded to requests for help, "If I can, I will." Following the demise of the Christian Community Center due to fire, a group of friends and supporters created the Fr. Jack Foundation to meet individual needs in the community, using that quote as its motto. For many years, he led a Stations of the Cross walk on Good Fridays stopping at various sites in downtown Muskegon. Some folks remember his leadership in DeColores retreats.

I heard of Fr. Jack long before I met him. The first time we met was on a picket line protesting the Gulf War. After I was no longer in pastoral ministry, he occasionally invited me to give the homily during masses he conducted at the Christian Community Center, until his bishop got wind of this practice. Jack's vast memory for poetry always impressed me.

May his example inspire those of us who remain to go and do likewise.

MCCC's Annual Meeting will be held Monday, January 30, 2023 at 6 pm via Zoom. Contact the office at office.mccc@frontier.com to request the link.

The Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies is another program under the auspices of MCCC. Their annual fundraiser Holiday Bread and Pastry 2022 is underway right now. For more info, see page 4.

Year End Giving: Muskegon County Cooperating Churches is ALWAYS grateful for your support. If you are contemplating year end giving, please consider supporting us! Checks may be sent to MCCC, 120 W. Apple Avenue, Muskegon, MI 49440.

News from MCCC

If you are wondering what is happening at MCCC these days here is what's going on:

We continue to work with Feeding America to provide an enormous poundage of food to the greater Muskegon area. We provide a schedule to the public each month for the **mobile food pantries**. We target the food insecure areas within our community. The churches and organizations have come together to make sure that we are providing distribution in all corners of Muskegon and that we do not have overlapping places and times. If you are interested in seeing the schedule each month, go to our Facebook Page or our website, www.cooperatingchurches.com.

A couple of years ago we began a **Peace and Justice Committee**. MCCC is committed to promoting peace and justice, and it is interested in challenging issues which lend themselves to discrimination, injustice, and oppression within our community. We have discussed many ideas over the past two years and have been challenged to see some of these ideas through due to the pandemic. We did hold a weekly prayer time downtown when approaching the 2020 elections. We currently publish a Peace and Justice Blog. If interested in reading it, please check it out on Facebook or our website. Our contributors are our Board of Director members and area clergy. Stay tuned for more activity coming out of this group.

Our newsletter BRANCHES comes out four times a year. It is being released less often than in the past because we now use an on-line communication "**MCCC Blasts**" through mail-chimp which comes out each week. If you don't get this communication and wish to receive it, please call our office, and leave your email address so we can put you in our data base. We are committed to letting the area churches and organizations know what is going on in the community. We urge all churches, faith organizations, and not for profit organizations to keep us informed so that we can keep everyone else informed.

Membership to Muskegon County Cooperating Churches can be obtained by a mere \$50 membership fee. Our income is based on this membership fee. With these membership fees we are able to provide the services we have shared with you. You can also get a discounted membership fee to the Chamber of Commerce through your membership with us. This is because of a partnership we share with the C of C. If interested call our office at 231-727-6000.

We have a **Family Faith Fair** in Hackley Park each summer for family fun and the opportunity for churches and faith organizations to participate and show off who they are.

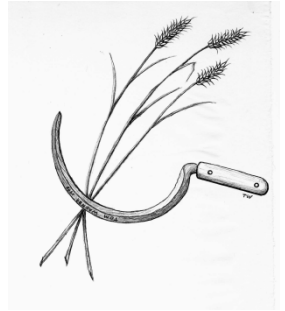
We also have an **Annual Meeting** for our members that always includes a program of interest, as well as celebrates the past year's activities and programs. This year's Annual Meeting will be Monday, January 30 at 6 PM via Zoom. If you have any questions, feel free to call us or email us at office.mccc@frontier.com.

Muskegon CROP Hunger Walk Raises Over \$23,000!

On a lovely sunny Sunday in early October, folks gathered from 19 different congregations to Walk (in honor of those who must walk for their daily needs) and raised over \$23,000 for our Muskegon CROP Hunger Walk. If you're thinking of year-end giving – you can still visit www.muskegoncropwalk.com and make a donation!

Gleanings by Tom Wagner December, January, February 2022 2023
Endurance and Hope

Recently I've been meditating on Luke 21:5-19 in prep for a sermon. It contains a portion of Jesus' apocalyptic sayings, which make up the bulk of the chapter. The term apocalyptic is rooted in a Greek verb meaning, "to reveal" or "unveil". While our culture commonly focuses on descriptions of disaster and destruction, the point of biblical apocalyptic literature is to open our eyes to the broader meaning of life and history. It intends to encourage perseverance in the midst of hard times.



The passage begins with the disciples marveling over the grandeur of the Temple. Jesus comments that this too will pass away, leading the disciples to ask when this calamity will take place. Their questions give Jesus an opportunity for a long discourse. First, he warns them against the claims of false messiahs and fake news. Then he urges them not to be terrified in the midst of wars, natural disasters and celestial phenomena. The greater concern is that they will face persecution and even betrayal by loved ones. This portion of the discourse ends with a note of encouragement: "By your endurance you will gain your lives." (v. 19 RSV) The Greek word behind "endurance" can be translated as patience, fortitude, steadfastness and perseverance. While the larger passage is full of dark images, it ends on a note of hope, much of which relies on our own actions.

The words patience and endurance both focus on the long view, but patience comes off as more passive. It has its place, yes even in social movements. It requires some discernment to know when to wait and when to push forward. Endurance seems more active, perhaps because I associate it with long distance running. One doesn't run a marathon on a whim. One trains weeks and months ahead of the race to build endurance

Many of us are familiar with "the arc of the moral universe" metaphor attributed to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a summary of Unitarian minister Theodore Parker's longer quote. While King's summary captures the sense of justice's eventual victory, Parker by referring to a difficult geometry problem and a sense of the unknown speaks to the struggles of the meantime. *"I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I can see I am sure it bends toward justice."* Clearly, neither Parker the 19th century Abolitionist nor King the 20th century Civil Rights leader was content to wait for justice to come in its own good time. They were inspiring people to action with a vision of hope. King made that point quite eloquently in his 1963 Letter from the Birmingham Jail, responding to the criticism by a group of moderate white Alabama clergymen that the Birmingham campaign was "unwise and untimely". *"...we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. History is a long and tragic story of the fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily... This 'Wait' has almost always meant 'Never.' ... We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that 'justice too long delayed is justice denied.'"*

Jim Wallis, longtime editor of *Sojourners* magazine, has defined hope as *"believing in spite of the evidence, and watching the evidence change."* His understanding echoes the unseen sense of hope found in Parker's "arc of the moral universe" metaphor. Hope does not live in broad daylight. Hope lives in the morning twilight, long before sunrise, when there is just enough light on the eastern horizon to distinguish the sky from the shadows of the landscape.

As New Year 1943 approached, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a lengthy essay titled "After Ten Years" in reference to the past decade of Nazi rule in Germany. He was one of several leaders of the Confessing Church movement opposing the Nazification of German churches. Under the heading "Optimism" in the larger essay he wrote: *"It is wiser to be pessimistic; it is a way of avoiding disappointment and ridicule; and so wise people condemn optimism. The essence of optimism is not its view of the present, but in fact that it is the inspiration of life and hope when others give in; There are people who regard it as frivolous, and some Christians think it impious*

for anyone to hope and prepare for a better earthly future....in resignation or pious escapism, they surrender all responsibility for reconstruction and for future generations. It may be that the day of judgment will dawn tomorrow; in that case, we shall gladly stop working for a better future. But not before.”

Tom Wagner is a former pastor in the Church of the Brethren (Dunker) and serves MCCC as clerk and archivist. This essay is condensed from a longer sermon. Tom can be contacted at gleanertw@hotmail.com

Holiday Bread and Pastry 2022

Add some tasty treats to your holiday gatherings and support the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies and the outreach of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church at the same time! Request the bread and pastry catalog and place your order at holidaybreads@gmail.com, or you can order by phone, leaving your name, phone number, and order at 231-260-8220.

Community enCompass Collecting for Neighbors in Need

As the weather gets colder, Community enCompass at 19 Hartford, and Sacred Suds at 289 E Larch, are asking for warm clothing, toiletries, non-perishable foods, coats, blankets and other items to help folks in need. A complete list of items needed, and ways to donate online, are available at www.communityencompass.org or by calling 231-728-3117.

READ Muskegon Holiday Village December 17, 2022

Read Muskegon is hosting their 6th annual Holiday Village **Saturday, December 17, 2022 from 1PM-3PM at 134 E Barney Ave, Muskegon Heights, MI 49444**. The Holiday Village is a forum for families to come together and have some good ol' fashioned fun, and learn through some fun interactive activities.

READ Muskegon is also looking for volunteers! Want to make a positive difference in someone's life? Contact Andre at andre.pierce@readmuskegon.org or call 231-747-7273 Monday – Wednesday 10 am – 4 pm.

Dickens Village Community Open House at Church of God United December 30 & 31

Church of God United invites the community to their Dickens Village Open House. The event will take place Friday and Saturday, December 23 & 24 and December 30 & 31 from 3 pm – 6 pm.

The church is located at 1630 Harvey Street.

Reader's Theater: Cozy Christmas Tales at Hackley Public Library December 15, 2022

Embrace a cozy night of Christmas tales, put on by local performer Les Rorick, accompanied by theater actors, including those from the Muskegon Civic Theater. Enjoy scenes of holiday magic and whimsy under Hackley Public Library's stained glass windows. Thursday, December 15, 2022. *Hot cocoa and candy canes provided.*

Care Fair and Neighborhood Meeting January 12, 2023

These last couple of months have been busy, busy, and busier especially with agencies ending out and going into their fiscal year on October 1st. Like MidMichigan Community Action, a lot of agencies' programs have changed, and some agency programs are no longer available due to budget and funding cuts.

Because we care and want to provide resources to our community, we need your help and assistance. MidMichigan Community Action Agency will be sponsoring a Care Fair and Neighborhood Meeting on Thursday, January 12, 2023, from 4:00 pm to 6:00 p.m. at the United Way of the Lakeshore located at 31 E. Clay Avenue in Muskegon.

This event is open to the public and community. Please join us with information (fliers, business cards, handouts, etc.) to share during this Care Fair and Community Neighborhood meeting. Please share, spread the word, and join us!

**Hunter's Service
Church of God United**

Church of God United invites hunters to afternoon worship services every Sunday at 2 pm now through January.

These services are open to all hunters – no matter their denomination – to give them an opportunity to both provide for their families and still attend church. For many, hunting has become an essential way of putting food on the table.

All area congregations are invited to be part of these services – through preaching, with worship teams or helping in the service. The hope is that the service will become a community service, bringing the churches together to be in service to and for the community.

If you would like to be part of these services, please contact Pastor Jared Rider at pastordaddycotn@mail.com or Coffeehousepastor on Facebook/Messenger.

Snow Much Fun Family Fest February 25, 2023

The Muskegon County Safe and Healthy Task Force membership would like to invite you to participate in the first ever Snow Much Fun Family Fest taking place at Reeths Puffer High School on Saturday, February 25, 2023 from 10 am to 2 pm.

The goals of the event are to:

- Raise awareness of family based services throughout the Muskegon County area
- Provide families health, safety, and socioeconomic focused educational information and skill building opportunities
- Offer families a day of fun, during what can often be the most dreary part of the year, at no charge.

If your agency would like to participate, please send an email to Lia Mayerski at Public Health at mayerskiLi@muskegoncounty.net.