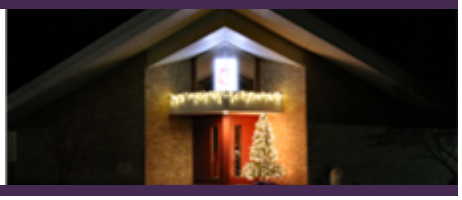
Dunes Digest



FROM THE PASTOR

Life in the Spirit: Bearing Fruit That Lasts

Rev. Lou Grettenberger, Pastor

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shines the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

Right now, at the beginning of Advent, Bethlehem seems a long way off, but we are on our way. We begin with Jewish people in the Roman Empire, longing for a better life, a better world, a more just society, a safer place to worship and work. There was what Christians might call a "Pre-Jesus yearning", a deep spiritual longing, an anticipation, a prophetic expectation for a coming Savior or Messiah. In Christian theology and church tradition, we explore this yearning during this season of Advent.

For centuries, the people of Israel lived under foreign oppression, exile, and spiritual brokenness, clinging to God's promises of a coming redeemer. Prophets like Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah spoke of a coming "Messiah" (Anointed One), a "Prince of Peace," and a "Suffering Servant" who would restore Israel and bring justice to the world. Many Psalms express a desperate ache for God's presence and rescue. I love Isaiah 64:1, which hopefully groans, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."

And so, we continue the tradition as we sing songs like "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus," singing from the perspective of a pre-Christian Israel waiting in "lonely exile" under Roman occupation for the Messiah to appear. Under the thumb of Rome, hope seemed fleeting. Yet, the people dreamed of a better day when the "hopes and fears of all the years" would culminate and resolve when the light of the world was born in the form of a baby in the far-away village of Bethlehem (the birthplace of King David).

Too often, we also feel removed from the halls of power, fearful of what happens next. Washington D.C. feels a long way from Grand Haven. But nonetheless, we live in hope, hope that the systems and corruption of this world will not have the last word, but our God will. As the timeless stars go by, may we believe again that dark streets will shine once more, that love will prevail, and that our journey to a brighter day will continue. Join me in the Advent journey. You won't be disappointed.

Peace,
Pastor Lou

Remembrance

Beverly Wennogle died on October 26, 2026.

James 'Jim' Prelesnik died on November 3, 2026.

Please keep their loved ones in your prayers.

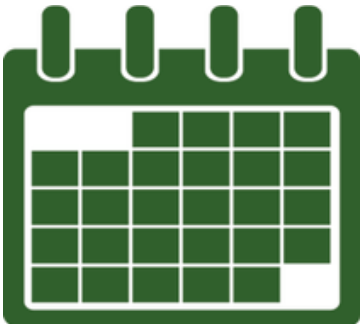
Sunday Worship
9:30 a.m.
All are welcome!
Livestream available at 9:30 a.m. on the church's YouTube channel. Recordings of the services are also available there. To find it, search *Dunes Church Grand Haven YouTube.*

Church office hours:
Monday through Thursday
9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.

Phone:
(616) 842-7980

Email: office@umcdunes.org

United Methodist Church of the Dunes
717 Sheldon Road
Grand Haven, MI 49417
www.umcdunes.org



Important December Dates for Your Calendar

Tuesday, December 1 - Advent Study Begins ..... Page 5
Bible Study Room (lower level), 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday, December 2 - Carols Study Begins ..... Page 5
Bible Study Room (lower level), 10:00 a.m.
Friday, December 4 - Men's Acts Study Begins ..... Page 5
Conference Room (lower level), 8:30 a.m.
Thursday, December 3 - Jesus the Star Child ..... Page 4
main floor, 5:30-8:00 p.m.
Friday, December 4 - Jesus the Star Child ..... Page 4
main floor, 5:30-8:00 p.m.
Saturday, December 5 - Jesus the Star Child ..... Page 4
main floor, 1:00-6:00 p.m.
Thursday, December 10 - Christmas Concert ..... Page 6
Church Sanctuary (main floor), 7:00 p.m.
Saturday, December 12 - Cookie Walk ..... Page 4
Wiltse Center (main floor), 8:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Saturday, December 12 - Dunesmen Bell Ringing
Walmart (Grand Haven), 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.
Monday, December 14 - Life After Loss Grief Support Group
Ryder Lounge (main floor), 1:00 p.m.
Tuesday, December 15 - ROMEOs Men's Breakfast
Russ' Restaurant (Grand Haven), 8:30 a.m.
Saturday, December 19 - 20 Somethings Party ..... Page 3
Wiltse Center (main floor), 9:30 a.m.
Monday, December 21 - Caregivers Support Group
Ryder Lounge (main floor), 1:00 p.m.
Thursday, December 24 - Christmas Eve Worship ..... Page 6
Ryder Lounge (main floor), 1:00 p.m.
Monday, December 28 - 4th Monday Reading Group .. Page 5
Panera Bread (Grand Haven), 1:30 p.m.

A WONDERFUL YEAR-END REVIEW

End of 2026 Updates

Madelyn Steinbeck, Director of Communications & Community Engagement

At the beginning of 2026, the Communications Lead position here at church was changed to become the Director of Communications and Community Engagement role. It has been an absolute blessing to be a part of the staff over this past year, and to oversee this change in the role. The primary duties remained the same, but I was able to also organize community outings, volunteer efforts, and be a more active part of the congregational care network of individuals here at Church of the Dunes.



Harbor Transit Info Presentation

Although most people have felt a positive change over the past year throughout all of the ministries, sometimes it can be hard to put into words what that positive change is to those outside of the church community. To convey this sentiment, sometimes it is easier when broken down into measurable metrics. This year, Church of the Dunes saw the following growth:

- Three babies born!
- 15 new members joined the church (up 25% from 2025!)
- Nursery attendance up 8.8% to date (end of October) from 2025
- Total attendance up 9% year to date (end of October) from 2025
- A new music education room (converted and remodeled from the old custodial offices)
- Online attendance up 29.2% to date (end of October) from 2025
- Missions giving up 9.7% to date (end of third quarter) from 2025
- Social media page views up 346.1% to date (end of October) from 2025



YMCA 5k Cheering 2026

With more and more happening around the church, and within the people here, it has been a joy to facilitate fellowship and volunteer opportunities this year. Church of the Dunes cheered on runners for the annual YMCA Kick-Off to Summer 5k and Coast Guard City USA 5k. Church of the Dunes hit the beach this summer with three fun beach outings for all ages. Kenzie's Cafe in Grand Haven graciously offered to host four Serving Saturday events. This year's Serving Saturday events focused primarily on coloring Kids' Food Basket bags. The 20 Somethings ministry had multiple fun outings, and has one more still to come! On **Saturday, December 19 from 4:00-6:00 p.m.**, anyone in or around their twenties is invited to join for a time of fellowship and Christmas ornament making in the Wiltse Center (main floor). See you there!



July Beach Night Outing

Finally, over the course of 2026, we learned about the West Michigan organization, Kids' Food Basket. To support Kids' Food Basket's sack supper program, so many of you all pitched in to help decorate lunch bags. Thanks to everyone's artistic contributions, we met our goal of coloring 2,026 bags in 2026! Stay tuned for updates on plans for next year's volunteer opportunities and ways to support your community.



Coast Guard 5k Cheering 2026



indoor self-guided walk through an immersive art experience

Join us this Advent for an intentional reminder of the birth of Jesus as the reason for the season. Explore Church of the Dunes through a self-guided indoor walk through an immersive art experience. This is a free event that is open to the community, family-friendly, and accessible.

The event will be open on the following dates and times:

Thursday, December 3 5:30-8:00 p.m.
Friday, December 4 5:30-8:00 p.m.
Saturday, December 5 1:00-6:00 p.m.

During these times, walk through a Biblical era Bethlehem with a functioning marketplace and Scripture-based artwork. The Jesus the Star Child experience will span throughout Church of the Dunes, beginning from the weekday entrance, and ending in the sanctuary with an optional time of reflective prayer.

Proceeds from this event will go to the following local organizations:

LOVE in Action — Transforming lives by empowering people to thrive.

The People Center

The Salvation Army

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12

United Women in Faith Cookie Walk

Ruth Woodward, United Women in Faith

The United Women in Faith at Church of the Dunes thanks everyone who so generously donated to our Fruit of the Spirit - Fruit of the Loom drive. We received:

- 170 children's underwear
- 155 adult underwear
- 95 pairs of children's socks
- 153 pairs of adult socks

Additionally, there was one pair of gloves and 25 undershirts donated. All were taken to The People Center in Spring Lake. THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU!

This month, we were also able to send a donation for $2,000 to the United Methodist Community House in Grand Rapids. As we prepare for the upcoming Cookie Walk, we are already thinking about what or who we can help with future proceeds.

Speaking of **Cookie Walk**, it's just around the corner - **Saturday, December 12 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.** Please consider baking for this delicious event. Any kind of cookies are welcome. Cookies can be frozen and brought to the church just prior to that Saturday. They don't need to be fancy! We will also accept candy and fudge, but no breads or pies please. On November 20, volunteers gathered to cut out and bake cookies in preparation for the event. Before the event, they will also be decorated! Watch for more information in the coming weeks or see Annette Allen with questions.

Our 2027 calendar is already in the works. We will also be hosting a garden party in June, Holly Berry Bazaar on November 13, and Candlelight Christmas on December 9, 2027! Busy! Busy!

If you are not a member of a Women's Circle, we invite you to join one. See Robyn Daane or Ruth Woodward for more information or for Circle meeting times.

United Women in Faith

Grow in Faith

December Book Discussion Groups for Adults

(includes both religious and secular reads)

Faith Linked Discussion Group

Sundays at 11:15 a.m. *Ryder Lounge (main floor)* *Facilitator: Gail Smant*

This weekly Sunday school discussion group for adults meets to facilitate conversations on current events and topics from a Christian perspective. Contact Gail Smant for questions regarding reading materials. No sign-up required.

Advent Study: Devotional and Discussion

Tuesdays at 10:00 a.m. *Bible Study Room (lower level)* *Facilitator: Mary Anne Miller*
Meets for four weeks *begins Tuesday, December 1* *Reading materials provided*

Enjoy an Advent devotional through small group discussion and reflection. Sign up on the Adult Ministries bulletin board. Reading materials will be provided during class at no cost.

Men's Bible Study: Acts by Matthew Skinner
Fridays at 8:30 a.m.
begins December 4
Conference Room (lower level)
Facilitator: Rich Cole
See the Adult Ministries bulletin board to sign up and for book information and cost. See Rich Cole for information. Book scholarships may be available.

Advent Study: The Carols of Christmas by Alan Vermilye
Wednesdays at 10:00 a.m.
begins December 2, Meets four four weeks
Bible Study Room (lower level)
Facilitator: Ruth Woodward
"Enjoy a fresh glimpse of some of the same joyful and nostalgic melodies you sing every year set to personal reflections." Sign up on the Adult Ministries bulletin board. Books are $10 and are available from Ruth Woodward.

4th Monday Reading Group: Small Things like These by Claire Keegan
1:30 p.m.
Monday, December 28
Panera Bread (Grand Haven)
Facilitator: Gayle Cox
"It is 1985 in a small Irish town. During the weeks leading up to Christmas, Bill , a coal merchant and family man faces his busiest season." To participate, get your own copy of the book, read it, and join the discussion. No sign-up required.

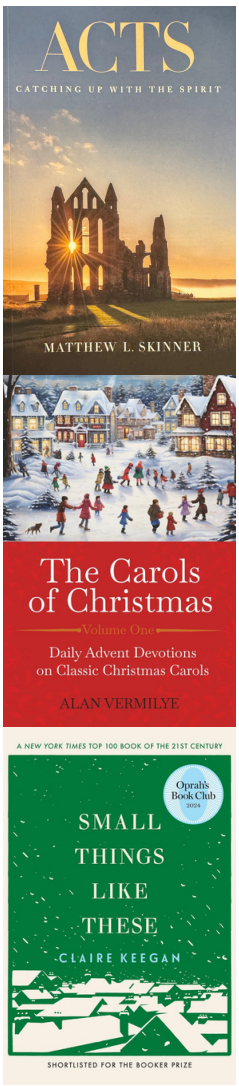


photo credit: Amazon.com



Worship Arts Ministry: Notes from the Loft

By Megan Horist, Director of Worship Arts
December 2026

JOIN US

Join us this Advent season, as we journey together not just to the destination of Christmas, but also to the places where events occurred that led to a starry night on which a child was born who would change the world. We will ponder our own milestones–the progress and the potholes "on the way." Rome: a place of longing (Hope); Jerusalem: a place of waiting (Peace); Nazareth: a place of simplicity (Joy); Bethlehem: a place of humility (Love); and The Manger: a place of care.

DUNES CONCERT SERIES

The November concert of the 2026-2027 concert season was fantastic! Thanks to our new friends, Acoustic Oasis for a wonderful evening of music! Our next concert will be **Thursday, December 10, at 7:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary**. We'll host the **Spring Lake High School Choir** program for a fun Christmas concert. Come out to enjoy some beautiful holiday music, hang out with your friends, and have a great evening together! See you there!

LIVESTREAM

Remember, if you can't make it to church for a Sunday or Christmas Eve, you can always find us on YouTube at *Dunes Church Grand Haven*.

CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP

Our Christmas worship service will be Thursday, December 24 at 7:00 p.m. This will be a lovely service that will include carols, candles, communion, special music, and a meaningful message from Pastor Lou. We hope you'll join us! See you in church!

~Megan

COMING UP IN WORSHIP

NOVEMBER 29 - Advent 1-Rome: A Place of Longing (HOPE)
Celebration Choir

DECEMBER 6 - Advent 2-Jerusalem: A Place of Waiting (PEACE)
Communion, Celebration Choir

DECEMBER 13 - Advent 3-Nazarath: A Place of Simplicity (JOY)
Jubilant Ringers

DECEMBER 20 - Advent 4-Bethlehem: A Place of Humility (LOVE)
Celebration Choir

DECEMBER 24 - Christmas Eve-The Manger: A Place of Care
Candlelight service with communion 7:00 p.m. Celebration Choir, Jubilant Ringers, and special guests

DECEMBER 27 - First Sunday of Christmas
Carol Sing

SAVE THE DATE

Dunes Concert Series Presents:

SPRING LAKE HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR

Thursday, December 10
7:00 PM
Church Sanctuary (main floor)

FINISHING WELL UPDATES

Jesus the Star Child, Prayer, Small Groups and More!

Susan Thorpe, Finishing Well

Hello Finishing Well Ambassadors! As we are winding down another year, I often feel a little melancholy for things I didn't get to and friends I didn't see, and for those that have transitioned to their heavenly home, for which this year has been especially hard. We all need a little peace in our lives and thankfully we know who gives us peace: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This holiday season will be such a special treasure to all of us at the Church of the Dunes and to our community. Jesus the Star Child will light our lives, feed our souls, and bring purpose for the coming year. Don't miss this event! To make room for Jesus the Star Child, we will pause all chair yoga, Greater Balance, and line dancing classes from Tuesday, December 1 to Saturday, December 6.

Benefits and Ways to Get Involved

- Get Involved: There is a small group that meets in the conference room (main floor) each Sunday before worship from 9:00-9:20 a.m. to pray for our Church and for Pastor Lou. Interested? Stop in by 9:00 a.m. on any Sunday!
- Get Involved: Want to try fun exercises without leaving the chair? Try chair volleyball (played with a beach ball) in the Wiltse Center (main floor) on Mondays from 10 a.m.-12:00 p.m. This is perfect for those that can't stand for long periods but want to work on their arms, shoulders, and wrists.
- Get Involved: Try meeting in small groups of no more than five. These are called 'Bands' and this idea was fostered by John Wesley many years ago. In these groups, each person gets a chance to share at the meeting. These meet once or twice a month at the location of your choosing. This is a time to share things like: Have you had any God sightings? Are you caring for your soul? And the conversation gets started. Each person is prayed over after sharing. Meetings last about an hour. If you are interested, talk with others you would like to have in your Band and see what happens; It's pretty amazing! I feel so loved and cared for after my Band meeting.
- Benefit: Goodwill has a senior discount ranging from 10% to 20% off on select days.
- Benefit: Kohl's Senior Day offers a 15% discount every Wednesday for customers age 60+.
- Benefit: Walgreens offers a Senior Day once a month where customers age 55+ can receive 20% off eligible, regular-price items. The specific day varies, so it's recommended to check with your local Walgreens for details.

Finally, we are planning for a Naturalist to come and speak to us on Bald Eagles in January. Stay tuned! Special blessings to each of you this Christmas.

RINGING IN CHRISTMAS

Salvation Army Bell Ringing: December 12



The Dunesmen will be ringing bells for The Salvation Army at Walmart in Grand Haven on Saturday, December 12, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Bell ringing shifts are one-hour long at both entrances of Walmart. Sign up on the Dunesmen bulletin board or see Don Woodward.

JESUS THE STAR CHILD

Advent Art Experience in December

Jodie Freeman, Family Ministries

At the moment of writing this article, we are three weeks away from the Jesus the Star Child immersive art experience. The past 18 months of working on this project have passed by quickly. The event dates are Wednesday December 2 for dress rehearsal (invitation only) night and then open to the public Thursday, December 3 and Friday, December 4 from 5:30–8:00 p.m. and Saturday, December 5 from 1:00–6:00 p.m. A very big and heartfelt thank you to the Core Team and all the volunteers who helped to take this from an idea to an event. It has been a journey of questions and worries mixed with hope and excitement. The Core Team consists of Cathryn Marshall, Robyn Daane, Annette Allen, Susan Thorpe, Betty Roberts, Ann Antaya, and myself. They know the moments of sweat and tears along the way. And at one point, I managed to cut my finger and get blood on one of the set pieces we were creating. So, we checked all the boxes: blood, sweat, and tears. Many volunteers spent countless hours repairing and creating costumes, building set pieces, dyeing the scripture papers and making items for the marketplace. Artists spent over a year working on their individual pieces for the art portion on this event. Will the event do well? I do not know. Will we have a good turnout? I do not know. Will we raise enough funds from freewill donations, marketplace items and the silent art auction to have a meaningful impact for the three recipient charitable organizations (Love in Action, The People Center, and Salvation Army)? I do not know. But the team has agreed since the beginning… if even one person finds hope and peace from this event, it was worth it. Most likely we will never know if someone was touched enough to go home and consider connecting to Christ or renewing their relationship with God. We just have to continue to try and hear God's call, do the work, and leave the rest in God's hands. If you are one of the many who have helped to bring the event to fruition, please mark your calendar and save the date for Friday, December 11 at 6:00 p.m. for the celebration "thank you cast" party here at the church in the Social Hall (main floor). And of course, continue to pray.

family ministries

CHRISTMAS GIVING TREE

Gift Card Gathering for Grand Haven High Schoolers

Missions and Social Concerns Team

Do you remember the scene in A Christmas Story when Ralphy gets the bunny pj's for Christmas from his well-meaning relative? There comes a time in every young person's life when they outgrow the childish gifts and prefer to pick out the things themselves. Things that really fit, suit their style, and meet their needs. That's going to be us this year for the 350 homeless teens at GHHS. All the younger kids and their families are covered by Toys for Tots or Crusade for Toys, but the teens need something a little different. This year, they will be given a care bag that includes a gift card to Meijer or Walmart so they can shop for what they would like. We at Dunes are asking everyone to load our Giving Tree with Gift Cards to either Walmart or Meijer that fit your budget. The GHAPS Homeless Liaison aims to give each student $100 so we will combine them to make it work out. Do what works for you! Because of our busy church calendar, the Giving Tree will go up Sunday, December 6, so our window is short. We need to get them ready to put on the tree right away so they can be delivered prior to Christmas break. We'll have two weeks! Thank you!!