

# 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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**Hours may vary depending on the work load, please call first.**

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

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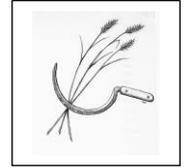
We now have our “Crib” covered with signage. We want to thank our sponsors – Feeding America West Michigan, William Hughes Attorneys, and Tischco Signs & Services for helping us with this project.

The “Crib” is available to a small charge to help organizations/churches with their mobile pantry. It comes with the supplies needed for registration, canopies when needed, heaters, and personnel that can guide you in your service with a mobile pantry.

Feeding America has developed some new registration forms that need to be used at the mobile pantries. If your organization has not received the newest form, please call our office and we will forward them to you.

We have also developed or are in the process of finalizing a release for volunteers and a contract for scheduling mobile food pantries and the requirements that go with scheduling.

"Gleanings" by Tom Wagner



### Recognizing Relationships

Among members of Anabaptist communities it is common for individuals meeting for the first time to ask each other about friendship networks or especially family ties. Dunkers of my generation, tongue-in-cheek call this “the Brethren game”. Of course, our Mennonite and Amish cousins play their own variations on the theme. The usual success of those inquires is rooted in both the relatively intimate size of these particular denominations and often deep family roots in the broader movement. Both of my grandmothers were masters of “the game”, because they had such deep knowledge of family histories in their respective Pennsylvania and Indiana communities. Once our family moved to Indiana, Dad broadened the focus of “the game”. If someone with a Pennsylvania license plate came to our gas station, he would automatically ask what part of the state they were from. Also anytime he noticed an Amish passenger, he would strike up a conversation in Pennsylvania German dialect. When I came to the Muskegon area nearly 30 years ago, I found most of my own attempts at “the game” highly frustrating. Curiously, it was only after I had finished my tenure as pastor and become more involved in local ecumenical and interfaith activity that people began to acknowledge their Anabaptist connections to me.

There was one case that had an additional twist to it. During the 1990s when Cooperating Churches was launching the Dispute Resolution Center and the Institute for Healing Racism, I became acquainted with a retired White Lake area educator. One of the first things I learned about him was that his paternal grandfather had served as president of my alma mater for much of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I was long aware of a story passed down through Mom’s family that my Great-Great-Great-Grandpa Neff had accompanied “Joe’s” great-great-great-grandfather by wagon most of the way from southern Virginia to north central Indiana in the 1840s. At the time I suspected an earlier genetic link. Eventually I did find a common ancestor, but surprisingly he turned out to be an 18<sup>th</sup> century Swiss immigrant on Dad’s side of the family, not Mom’s.

My involvement in the local ecumenical movement has encouraged me to extend “the game” a bit further. I often approach ecumenical relationships in terms of a family tree. The analogy grows out of my long standing interest in both church history and genealogy. The deeper I have dug into the roots of my own faith tradition, the more I have discovered how intertwined they are with those of other communities. It’s a recognition of what Thomas Merton called “our original unity.” That’s not to gloss over our differences. I’ve always considered assimilation overrated, whether in a civic or religious context. I find that the most valuable ecumenical experiences take place when we boldly embrace each other in our diversity. Sadly we live in one of the most segregated communities in Michigan. We can’t simply blame civic leaders. Local churches remain among the most segregated institutions every Sunday. True change has to go beyond attending the occasional prayer breakfast or Martin Luther King Day celebration. It’s too easy to simply check those events off the list and go back to business as usual. We have to dig deeper to develop actual relationships across the ethnic and racial divide. It doesn’t have to be confrontational, but it does have to be real. It may start by sharing picnics and potlucks, pulpit exchanges and joint worship services, but we have to build relationships strong enough to withstand troubled times. This is particularly imperative in the shadow of the recent election.

In the liturgical calendar we are approaching Epiphany. We frequently associate the feast with the visitation of the magi (Matt. 2:1-12), the baptism of Jesus (Mt. 3:13-17, Mk. 1:4-11, Lk. 3:15-22, Jn. 1:29-34) and even the wedding at Cana (Jn. 2:1-11). These are stories of Jesus’ manifestation or appearance to his own people, to all nations and even all creation. In the Common Lectionary, the season of Epiphany extends until Lent. Gospel readings this year cover all of Matthew 5, dealing not

only with blessed attitudes toward life, but also how we treat people, even enemies. Among eastern Christians it is also known as Theophany—appearance of God. It is recognition of God coming among us, living in our skin and walking in our shoes. Either way, it strongly suggests that we ponder our relationships to “the least of these” (Mt. 25:31-46) and that our fellow humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27) regardless of ethnicity, race or faith tradition. Lord, help us to recognize each encounter with every person to be an ordinary epiphany.

*Tom Wagner is a former pastor in the Church of the Brethren (Dunker) and serves MCCC as clerk and archivist.*



### From the Editor

The next *BRANCHES* will cover the months of March & April. If you have something you would like to have included, please e-mail to us at [staff@cooperatingchurches.com](mailto:staff@cooperatingchurches.com) or send it via snail mail. Please include a logo for your organization. Remember, I am unable to copy anything that is in a PDF format. The information is due into the office no later than February 20<sup>th</sup> to be included in the next issue. If you no longer wish to receive *BRANCHES*, please let the office know and we will remove your name and address from our file.



Free workshops will be available on manage your money, better banking, own your home, get credit smart, energy efficiency, and DIY home cleaning products. Representatives will be available to discuss housing, credit management, banking options and much more. There will be free food and prizes including a grand prize drawing. It all takes place at Christ Temple Apostolic Faith Church, 412 E. Sherman Blvd., Muskegon Hts. on January 28, 2017 from 11am-3pm.



### STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAM

Is your family struggling? Do you wish you has some answers? Learn and practice being a strong family unit. Separate sessions for pre-teens (ages 10-14) and parents, as well as combined family sessions! The program is FREE. FREE family dinner & childcare (ages 3-9) provided as well. This is a video-based 7 week program with lots of activities! It begins January 10<sup>th</sup> and continues through February 21<sup>st</sup>. It will be held at Reeths-Puffer Intermediate School, 1500 N. Getty St., Muskegon, MI 49445 from 5:30-8pm. Call now to register! Contact Howard Matthews at 616-396-2301, Ext. 145 or e-mail him at [hmatthews@pathwaysmi.org](mailto:hmatthews@pathwaysmi.org).



### MUSKEGON YMCA BLACK TIE FOR THE Y

You are invited to the 25<sup>th</sup> annual party and auction to benefit the Muskegon YMCA and Camp Pandalouan at the Muskegon Country Club – Black Tie Optional. Money raised for the YMCA will go directly toward outreach to fight the causes of childhood obesity with physical activity and nutrition education, teach third graders in Muskegon County about water safety, and prevent chronic disease through programs like Diabetes Prevention, LiveStrong for cancer survivors and Enhance Fitness. The event benefits Camp Pandalouan by funding summer “camperships” making sure all have access to a summer camp experience. The annual event will be held at 6pm on Saturday, February 11. There will be hors d’oeuvres, dinner, cash bar, and silent and live auctions. For reservations or more information, please call 231-722-9622 ext. 240. There will be valet parking.



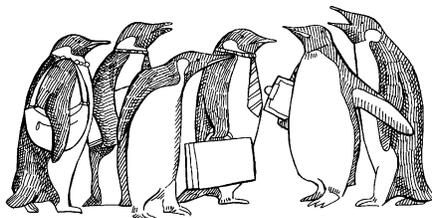
FRAUENTHAL  
CENTER

15 days of a free liberal arts education through a live video internet feed in cooperation with Calvin College will take place at the Beardsley Theater throughout the month of January. Admission is free and it runs from 12:30-1:30pm. It all starts on Wednesday, January 4 with Karin Maag – “500 Years Later: Why the Reformation Still Matters.” The series continues on Thursday with Matthew Desmond and on Friday with Mark Charles. The program runs every weekday through Tuesday, January 24<sup>th</sup> with a different subject each day. Contact the Frauenthal for more information.



### NURTURING PARENT CLASS

A 10-week series for parents with children and/or teenagers that covers topics such as Discipline, Communication, Child Development and Problem Solving. The 10-week series begins on January 24<sup>th</sup> and continues on 10 consecutive Tuesday mornings. The series ends on March 28<sup>th</sup>. It will be held at Central Assembly Church, 9-11am, 896 Home Street, Muskegon, MI 49442 in Room 15. This program is FREE. This is not a faith-based class. For more information or to register contact: Howard Matthews at 616-396-2301, ext. 145 or e-mail: [hmatthews@pathwaysmi.org](mailto:hmatthews@pathwaysmi.org). Childcare is not provided with this class.



## Annual Meeting

The Muskegon County Cooperating Churches will be holding their Annual Meeting for all its membership on Monday, January 30, 2017 at Our Savior's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1132 W. Southern Ave., Muskegon. Meet and greet time will begin at 6:00pm. The business meeting will begin at 6:30pm. At the end of the business meeting we will have a guest speaker, Joellen Rhyndress, LMSW from HealthWest. She will be speaking on Psychological First Aid, a model which offers supportive, practical assistance to anyone who has recently experienced exposure to serious stressors or traumatic events. It includes assessment of needs and concerns, listening and helping people connect to information, services and supports.

HeathWest has a Psychological First Aid (PFA) team comprised of HealthWest staff and community partners which responds to traumatic events in Muskegon County. This service is open to anyone and offered free of charge. Examples of traumatic events include: suicide, homicide, unexpected death, accidents, personal crisis, work place violence and violent threats.



**Martin  
Luther  
King, Jr.**  
remembered

Muskegon's MLK Celebration is a collaborative weekend event. The Day of Service is a way to transform Dr. King's life and teachings into community action that helps solve social problems. That service may meet a tangible need, or it may meet a need of the spirit. Through this weekend of events, it is the desire to strengthen our community, empower individuals, bridge barriers, and create solutions. The theme is "Dare to Dream!" Events begin on Friday, January 13<sup>th</sup> with the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Unity Breakfast at MCC's Collegiate Hall. The speaker is Alvin Herring, the director of racial equity and community engagement at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Contact Dan Rinsema-Sybenga at 231-777-0569 for more information and the cost of the breakfast.

Sunday, January 15<sup>th</sup> – A service hosted by Mt. Zion Church of God in Christ will be held. Monday, January 16<sup>th</sup>, hosted by 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC of Muskegon Public Schools and the Downtown Clergy, a mobile pantry will be at the Hackley Administration Building, 349 W. Webster from 10-11:30am. Registration along with donuts and hot beverages will be served inside the Hackley Administration Building. A spaghetti lunch will be held from 11:30-12:30 at First Congregational UCC, 1201 Jefferson St. which is free to the community. At 12:30 the MLK Program will begin. There will be essays, the MLK Youth Choir, and a Mass Choir will perform. The final rehearsal for the mass choir will be on January 6<sup>th</sup> at Holy Trinity COGIC, 2140 Valley St., Muskegon Hts. from 6:30-7:30pm.



**We would not exist without your generous support.** Contributions have been received during the last 2 months from the following individuals: Lawrence & Julie Ayers, William & Avis Boelkins, Cindy Curran, Calvin Deur, Bernadette Glover, Lynne Gordon & Jack Kennedy, Dan Leaver, Bill & Loyce Page, Phyllis & John Wahlberg, Nancy & James Waters, Bobby Whitlock. Congregations: Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, First Presbyterian Church, Lebanon Evangelical Lutheran Church, McGraft Memorial Congregational Church, Muskegon Church of the Brethren, Sacred Heart and Unity United Methodist Church.



January 4	12:30-1:30	Calvin College video program at Frauenthal, see pg. 4
January 10	5:30-8:00	Strengthening Families Program at Reeths-Puffer MS, see pg. 3
January 13		Martin Luther King Jr. Unity Breakfast at MCC, see pg. 5
January 15		MLK Service at Mt. Zion COGIC, see pg. 5
January 16	10:00am	Mobile Pantry Food Truck at Hackley Adm. Bldg., see pg. 5
January 16	11:30am	Spaghetti lunch at 1 <sup>st</sup> Congregational UCC, see pg. 5
January 16	12:30pm	MLK Program at 1 <sup>st</sup> Congregational UCC, see pg. 5
January 26	5:00pm	MCCC Board of Directors' Meeting at Catholic Charities Bldg.
January 28	11am-3pm	Show Me the Money Day at Christ Temple Apostolic, see pg. 3
January 30	6:00pm	MCCC Annual Meeting at Our Savior's Lutheran, see pg. 5
February 11	6:00pm	Muskegon YMCA Black Tie for the Y, see pg. 4
February 20	1:00pm	Final Day for March-April Branches articles
February 23	5:00pm	MCCC Board of Directors' Meeting at Catholic Charities Bldg.