

The Grapevine

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OKEMOS

From Pastor Lisa Schrott



From the Manger: Advent and Christmas 2024

What are you hungering for this Advent season? Quality time with family and friends? Continued winning streak for the Lions? More snow? Less snow? Time to prepare for Christmas without feeling rushed? As we prepare our hearts for Christmas this year, we are taking a look back at that first Christmas.

Jesus was born into a world with complicated politics and resources that were unequally distributed across the population. Jesus was born into a world that was hungry – hungry for hope and hungry for peace amidst the false promises of a Roman military world order. A world hungry for a bit of joy amidst the darkness of winter gloom. And a world desperately hungry for love – for love that transcended all of the divisions humans are so good at putting in place.

As the creators of the *Illustrated Ministry* material *From the Manger* note: “Hunger is a universal human experience, drawing attention to our most basic needs for food and nourishment and our more complex needs—peace, liberation, and meaning in this life. So, it’s no wonder that the story of Jesus—the one who came to feed the hungry—begins, ends, and centers around food. *From the Manger* gathers around the birth story in Luke, embracing the playful symbolism of a newborn Jesus being laid down to sleep in a feeding trough in a town called *House of Bread*. “

Throughout the Advent season there will be opportunities to be fed through Sunday worship and intergenerational Advent workshops and an **all-ages pageant on December 22**. We will be fed by Advent devotionals for all ages, as we dig deeper into scripture through a special **Advent Bible study** (see page 2), and the soaring music of **Lessons and Carols** (see page 4). We will feed our souls and hearts at a **Longest Night Service on Wednesday, December 18 at 7:00 p.m.** as we recognize the complicated emotions that accompany the holidays. And we will be fed as we celebrate the birth of the Christ child as a community fed on hope, peace, joy, and love at a single **Christmas Eve service on December 24 at 7:00 p.m.**

We welcome all! Invite a friend or family or a neighbor who is hungering for community to join us at PCO this year as we explore what it means to be fed *From the Manger*.

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**Deadline for the
January Grapevine
is Friday, December 20th**

Education for All Ages in December



SUNDAY EDUCATION HOUR

ALL AGES

11:30AM-12:30PM

DEC 1 ADVENT WORKSHOP

Make your own nativity scene.
Materials, instructions, and guidance provided.
Learn the scripture verses to go with each part!

DEC 8 NATIVITY DISPLAY & SCAVENGER HUNT

View nativity displays collected by church members and friends from around the world.

Share your nativity scenes:

- Bring them to the church by Wednesday, December 4
- Include your name and where the nativity is from
- Optional: write a 2 or three sentence description about its where you got it or its meaning to you.

Help set up the display

- Friday afternoon December 6 around 2pm
- Contact Laurie Harkema or Rebecca Mattern

DEC 15 CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS FROM AROUND THE WORLD AND YOUR HOME

DEC 22 TIME OF FELLOWSHIP FOLLOWING THE PAGEANT IN WORSHIP

Brown Bag Advent Bible Study

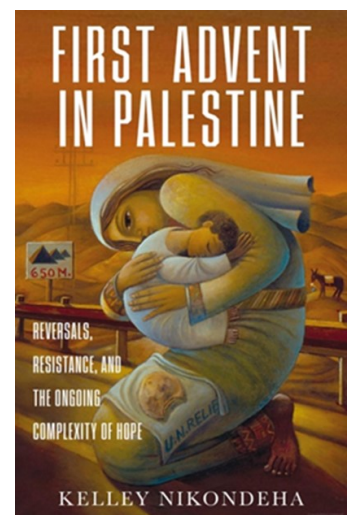
Thursdays, December 5 & 12 from 6:00—7:15 p.m.

Pastor Lisa will be leading a study using material from *The First Advent in Palestine: Reversals, Resistance, and the Ongoing Complexity of Hope* by Kelley Nikondeha. This study will complement our worship series *From the Manger* focusing on the Gospel of Luke. You are invited to bring your dinner with you and we will share a meal as we discuss these topics.

December 5: The focus will be the Jewish context of the time of Jesus' birth. We will discuss the "intertestamental period" and read some text from 1 and 2 Maccabees.

December 12: The focus will be the Galilee region where Jesus was born, the Roman census, and Joseph and Mary's return to the ancestral home of Jerusalem.

This study will be in-person only.



Special December Services

Longest Night Service
Wednesday, December 18th
7:00 p.m.
In the Kehde Chapel & Online

Join us for prayers, Scripture reading, candle lighting and silence. This service is for all who feel the weight of the holiday season

Christmas Eve Service
Tuesday, December 24th
7:00 p.m.
In the Sanctuary & Online

Join us for Christmas carols, Scripture reading, & Holy Communion in celebration of our Savior's birth.

A Little Child Shall Lead Them

Christmas Pageant

Worship December 22 10:00am

Led by children and youth

with invitations for the whole congregation to participate!

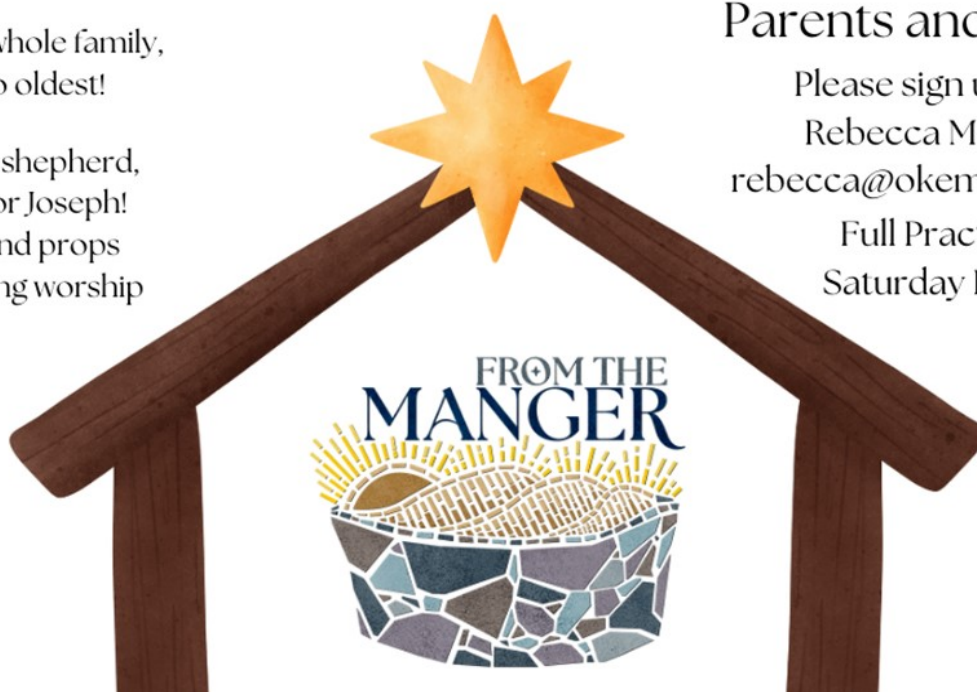
Perfect for the whole family,
youngest to oldest!

Be an animal, shepherd,
angel, Mary or Joseph!
Costumes and props
provided during worship

Parents and Youth:

Please sign up with
Rebecca Mattern
rebecca@okemospres.org

Full Practice:
Saturday Dec 21



Happening in December

Annual Evening of Lessons and Carols



The PCO tradition of An Evening of Lessons and Carols continues at 7:00 p.m. on **Sunday, December 15**. The event will take place in the sanctuary at 2258 Bennett Road and online on the PCO website and YouTube channel.

This year's program will feature the PCO Chancel and Handbell Choirs joined by a brass ensemble and singers from the MSU College of Music. The service will include readings, carol arrangements, and congregational singing in the format of the traditional King's College Lessons and Carols.

Please come with family and friends to enjoy this beautiful tradition and to support Advent House's service to the greater Lansing community.

Mission through Music

For more than thirty years, Advent House Ministries has provided assistance for mid-Michigan's most vulnerable and at-risk individuals. Advent House provides a weekend day shelter offering food and safety for countless families and individuals. Other services include a street outreach program, job readiness training, a prison re-entry program, and employment assistance for homeless veterans. The Shared Housing Intervention Program continues to offer assistance for the epidemic of school age children who lack permanent housing.



The Giving Tree is UP in Fellowship Hall

Giving Tree
to support refugee families
through St. Vincent's
Catholic Charities
November 24 - December 8

Take an ornament from the tree
Purchase the items
Complete the back of the tag

*Place your unwrapped gifts,
along with the ornament, under
the tree in Fellowship Hall by
Monday, December 9*

Update from APNC

The APNC asks for continued prayers for the committee's work and those seeking a call. Our collective discernment continues, even into and beyond the holiday season. We appreciate your support and prayers.

Brett, Candy, Jerri, Laurin, Zach K. and Zach N-H

PCO Family Christmas Dinner

Christmas Day, December 25

2:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall

Would you like to share the day with other PCO members and friends? It's become a tradition to gather in celebration on Christmas Day for food and fun. Sponsored by Parish Life, a ham will be provided. Participants are requested to bring a side dish, perhaps one of your family's favorite recipes.

Please sign up on the church website (link coming soon—see e-announcements), on the kiosk, or by calling Shirley Rumminger 517-655-4123, who will answer any questions you may have.



Retirees in December

The next meeting of the PCO Retirees is scheduled for **Monday, December 16 at noon** in Fellowship Hall. Please bring a snack to share. Our special guest will be Rebecca Mattern, PCO's Interim Director of Faith Formation.

The Retiree Group is open to all who are retired, semi-retired, or who wish to retire.

Women's Dinner Out

The next Women's Dinner Out will be on **Monday, December 2 at 5:30 p.m.** at Mitchell's Seafood Market at 2975 Preyde Boulevard in the Eastwood Towne Center in Lansing. If you are planning to attend, please rsvp to Barb Hoevel at 517-927-6311 by Sunday, December 1.

Birthday Cake Sunday

We will celebrate our December Birthdays on **Sunday, December 15**. If you celebrate your birthday in December, please check the December Birthday List posted on the kiosk in Fellowship Hall and add your name by Sunday, December 8 if it is not there.

Adult Christian Education & Fellowship Opportunities

** Check with your group leader and the weekly e-Announcements for schedule changes due to Christmas and New Year holiday.*

SUNDAYS

Writing Life's Stories—Monthly, 1st Sundays, 2:00 p.m. Zoom # 848 6124 7191. Next meeting is **Sunday, December 1**

Education Hour—Weekly, 11:30 a.m. in person only. Zoom option is suspended until January.

Birthday Cake Sunday—Monthly, 3rd Sundays, following worship. **December 15**

Women's Connection— *on hiatus in December . See you in January!*

MONDAYS

Women's Dinner Out, Monthly, 1st Mondays at 5:30 p.m. **Monday, December 2**. See left column for more info.

Retirees Group Monthly, 3rd Mondays 12 noon. Next meeting is **Monday, December 16**.

TUESDAYS

Men's Group on Zoom at 8:00 a.m. every week on **Tuesday**. Zoom #813 7514 8286. Hybrid meeting is **1st Tuesday, December 3**.

Crafts Ministry, Monthly, 1st Tuesdays, 6:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall, Next meeting is **Tuesday, December 3**.

Artists Circle, Monthly 2nd Tuesdays, 1:00—3:00 p.m. at PCO. Next meeting is currently scheduled for **Tuesday, December 10**.

WEDNESDAYS

Conversation & Contemplation, Weekly, 10:00 a.m. on Zoom #905 709 104 (*no meeting 12/25 or 1/1/25*)

Caregiver Support Group-Monthly, early this month due to holiday, at 5:00 p.m. on Zoom. **Wednesday, December 18**. Zoom # 517-329-2320; **Passcode hello**

THURSDAYS

Adult Bible Study— Weekly, 9:30 a.m. Zoom: <https://msu.zoom.us/j/5147440526>

Youth Parents Night Out, Monthly, 3rd Thursdays, 7:00 p.m. Next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, December 19**. Location TBD.



YOUTH CALENDAR



SUNDAY DEC 1

youth group 5pm-7pm. middle school

SUNDAY DEC 8

youth council 4PM senior high room

youth group 5-7pm all youth shopping for senior residents of Edgewood Village

SUNDAY DEC 15

youth group 12:30-3:30 go out for lunch together and hike at Legg Park

lessons and carols

SUNDAY DEC 22

youth group christmas party 5-7pm all youth. Bring a wrapped Christmas mug to exchange

Update on Seminarian Jonathan Townley

Congratulations to Jonathan Townley for receiving a Synod of the Covenant 2024-25 Higher Education Scholarship for \$1000. The Synod provides this financial assistance to promising students so that they might better focus on their studies and prepare for a vocation supporting the Gospel call from Matthew 25.

Jonathan is a student at Vanderbilt University's Divinity School under the care of the Presbyterian Church of Okemos and the Presbytery of Lake Michigan, and will be preaching at PCO on **Sunday, December 29th**.



CHRISTMAS JOY SPECIAL OFFERINGS

LEADERSHIP: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Prepare the Way

ISAIAH 40

We will collect this offering on Sunday, December 22. The offering provides assistance to current and retired church workers and their families and develops future leaders.

Mission Work Updates

The congregation of PCO has long supported missions in the immediate area and around the world. The Mission Committee states "The way we show our love for God and gratitude for his presence in our lives is through service to our siblings in the world, especially those in need. As Christians we join as community to fulfill this mission. As part of the PCO family we join together to feed the hungry, heal the sick, clothe the naked, promote justice and peace and bring Christ's love to ALL people."

Below are just some of the results of activities the in which the church has been involved in Autumn of 2024.

Alternative Christmas Market

A big **Thank You** to those of you who attended the PCO Alternative Christmas Market. There were 16 vendors this year and within the four hours of our market the vendors made over \$6000 to help their charities. Our PCO knitters group were at the top for sales. Thank you to them for all their hard work. Attendees enjoyed great food from Bread Bites and the Noosh Food truck.

A special thank you should be given to **Pastor Lisa, Becky Gillespie, Barbara Scott and Sally Belloli** who helped with planning and marketing the event. More kudos to **Edward, Keith Camann, Rebecca and the youth Group, Zach and the Meland Family** for helping take down tables.

It was a fun event!

Jayne Zuhlke

From Pastor Lisa—And thanks so much to you, Jayne, for your tireless efforts!



MERIDIAN
Cares Making a Difference



Thanksgiving Baskets

Thanks to PCO's generous support, 38 local families received \$75.00 Food Gift Cards for their Thanksgiving dinners. As in past years, we partnered with Meridian Township to provide this food assistance to families in Haslett and Okemos. This is part of the Meridian Cares Program, which helped a total of 284 families this Thanksgiving. Meridian Cares also provides housing and other critical support services.

Thanks for your generous support to these families.

2024 CROP Walk Totals

A big thank you to all who walked, rocked or rolled in the CROP Walk this year. And a special Thank You to all who financially supported the walkers, rockers, and rollers, especially those who supported the PCO Youth who participated in this year's walk.

We had 20 members at the actual walk on October 13th, with others walking at other times. The preliminary count from the Mission Committee puts us close to raising \$14,000.

Thank You, Thank You, Thank You!



Coming in January

Martin Luther King Jr. Day will be celebrated on **Monday, January 20, 2025**. PCO will again be hosting a table at the Lansing Center, 11:00 a.m. for the Day of Celebration, sponsored by the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commission of Mid-Michigan. Last year we heard from Ruby Bridges, whose bravery at 6 years of age helped pave the way for Civil Rights action in the American South. While this year's speaker has not been announced, we are sure they will be inspiring. This year's theme is "I Have a Dream that One Day this Nation will Rise Up and Live Out the True Meaning of its Creed – We Hold these Truths to be Self-evident: That All Men are Created Equal." – Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

If you would like to be a part of the PCO group, please sign-up on the Kiosk or let Kent Workman know. Watch the e-Announcements for a link to sign up online. *(As of this writing, the price for tickets has not been set, but was \$60.00 last year)*

We hope you will join us as PCO shows our support of this important event.



PCO will again take part in the 2025 Day of Celebration event put on by the MLK Jr. Commission of Mid-Michigan.

Public Policy Report

By Ellen Hoekstra

At the state Capitol, we are deep into lame duck session, with the legislature returning after Thanksgiving. As typically happens when either chamber loses a majority, we can expect a lot of legislative action with the current majority (Democrats) trying to accomplish as many of its policy goals before the new session in January. Some issues include opening the governor's office and legislature to public records requests, setting state standards for cash bail during pre-trial hearings for low level/nonviolent crimes, and school safety legislation.

The school safety package includes measures to outline safety and security training for all security personnel, requirements that all intermediate school districts employ a mental health coordinator as well as an emergency and safety manager, and requiring tips sent to the OK2Say student safety program to be forwarded to school authorities within 24 hours. Other firearm safety issues that may come up include regulations on ghost guns, industry accountability, Medicaid expansion for hospital intervention programs

- Michigan has seen an explosion in problem gambling, considered attributable to the legalization of online casino games and sports betting in 2021. Calls to the state's 24 hotline have increased from 1341 in 2018-2019 to 4543 in 2023-24, with two-thirds of the callers being male. In response, the state has doubled funding for problem gambling prevention and treatment.
- On a brighter note, the state has seen a decline in deaths due to drug overdoses, though 3000 still die every year. One new procedure helping save lives is STORM (Swift Toxicology of Overdose Related Mortalities) that can identify not only the particular drug or additives such as fentanyl and a veterinary tranquilizer used by drug dealers to expand their profits.
- Michigan has also created an online mapping tool to help people seeking substance abuse treatment find Medicaid providers. The tool is searchable by ZIP code, city, and county.
- A program making school breakfast and lunch free for all students has increased the number of students eating school meals—by almost 26% for school breakfast and nearly 20% for lunch. Michigan is one of eight states providing such a program.
- Legislation prohibiting firearms near polling places has passed both chambers and was presented to the Governor on November 20. The bills, HB 4127-28, were introduced by Rep. Penelope Tsernoglou (East Lansing) and Rep. Stephanie Young (Detroit) respectively and are likely to be signed into law.
- Safe Homes, Safe Schools bills have passed the House. HB 5450-1 (Rep. Julie Brixie-Okemos- and Rep. Sharon MacDonell-Troy) would require public and private schools in Michigan to send parents information annually regarding safe storage of firearms. Unsecured firearms can not only lead to accidents and increase suicides but 70% of school shootings involve a firearm owned by a family member.

BOOK NOOK

By Ron Dorr

Gratitude

by Oliver Sacks

Gratitude is a modest book that succeeds well and wisely. It is not Oliver Sacks' "autobiography of sorts," On the Move, but rather an elegiac summing up. The tone of the book is engaging. "I am now face to face with dying, but I am not finished with living."

Born on July 9, 1933, Sacks lived a little over 82 years. "In the last two years of his life," according to his assistant, Kate Edgar, and his gay partner, Bill Hayes, he faced "aging, illness, and death with remarkable grace and clarity." Among other things, he wrote four essays that were published in the New York Times. Gratitude links together all four essays.

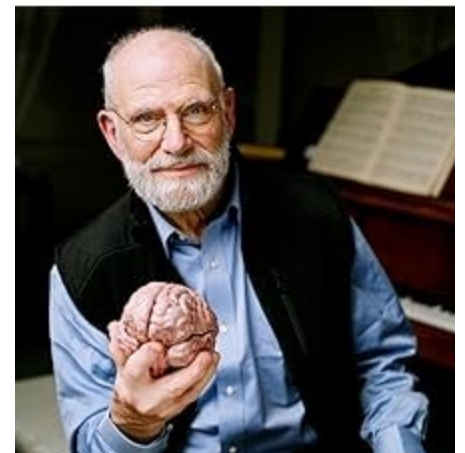
"Mercury," the first essay, appearing on July 6, 2013, is filled with playfulness and seriousness. He remembers saying, at 11, "I am sodium" (element number 11 in the periodic table), and at 41, hiking alone in Norway, falling down a mountain, and breaking his leg badly. Assailed by such memories "both good and bad," and nearly 80, he feels "glad to be alive" and "not at all old." He can still love and work and create; he hopes he can die "in harness." His body is decaying, and he admits having wasted too much of his life. "Whatever has a beginning," he realizes, "must have an end." A double vision prevails.

The second essay, "My Own Life," published on February 19, 2015, focuses on the last 18 months of Sacks' life. At 81, a new diagnosis surfaces: melanoma in his right eye has spread to his liver. He is actively dying. "I have to live for the richest, deepest, most productive way I can." Sacks' renewed appreciation of life is both detached and involved. The trinity of time involves considerations of the immediate future, imperatives in the present, and enduring memories of the past. Not without some fears, his "predominant feeling is one of gratitude. I have loved and been loved. I have been given much and I have given something in return. I have read and traveled and thought and written. I have had an intercourse with the world, the special intercourse of writers and readers. Above all, I have been a sentient being, a thinking animal, on this beautiful planet, and that in itself has been an enormous privilege and adventure."

The most original touch in Sacks' third essay, appearing on July 24, 2015, is the photograph of his own "Periodic Table," including mercury, element 80. Since he was six, "numbers became my friends," and at ten "the elements and the periodic table became my companions." He has loved physical sciences: leaping lemurs, the sky "powdered with stars," the "heavens' beauty," and a sense of eternity and transience. He feels "not a remission but an intermission, a time to deepen friendships, to see patients, to write, and to travel back to my homeland, England." He celebrates his 82nd birthday "in style." In July, the cancer metastasizes beyond the liver.

In "Sabbath," the fourth essay, published on August 14, 2015, Sacks comes full circle. In England, his Orthodox Jewish mother had not accepted his sexual identity. In the United States, however, he had found meaning and connection in his work with patients: he "cared for them deeply and felt something of a mission to tell their stories." He became a gifted doctor, teacher, and storyteller (see Awakenings). His cousin, Robert John Aumann, brings Sacks back to the Jewish roots of his childhood. Aumann invites Sacks and his gay partner, Billy Hayes, to celebrate the opening meal of Sabbath. "I felt embraced by my family in a way I had not known since childhood."

"The peace of the Sabbath, of a stopped world, a time outside time, was palpable. . . . Now, weak, short of breath, my once firm muscles melted away by cancer," he explains "what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life. . . . I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest." Having lived and loved, worked and renewed well, Oliver Sacks died on August 30, 2015.



**Author and physician Oliver Sacks
1933—2015**

Presbyterian Church of Okemos

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