

HOSPITALITY—WITHOUT MAKING IT WEIRD

At United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County, we create welcoming, affirming, diverse spaces where everyone can belong, thrive, and experience Christ's love. This is more than an aspiration—it is a commitment that should shape how people experience our worship, ministries, and shared life.

Hospitality is at the heart of the gospel. Jesus crossed social and religious boundaries, welcomed people who had been excluded, shared meals with those others avoided, and made room for people who had been pushed to the margins. His hospitality communicated through both words and actions: *You are seen. You are valued. There is room for you here.*

Hospitality does not, however, require us to make things weird or cringy. A new person does not need to be surrounded by six people, interrogated about why they came, or recruited for three committees. At the same time, they should not be ignored while everyone else talks with the people they already know. Genuine hospitality is as simple as:

- wearing a name tag
- introducing yourself
- learning (and remembering) someone's name
- helping a guest find what they need
- inviting them to sit with you—while also giving them room to breathe
- welcoming the sounds and movements of children
- avoiding assumptions about anyone's identity, family, background, abilities, or beliefs

Hospitality is not a performance or a recruitment strategy. It is a way of living together. It means paying attention, making room, and helping people know that they truly belong—without making it weird.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR A NURSERY SUPERVISOR

United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County is seeking a caring, dependable individual to serve as Nursery Supervisor at our First Church campus. This is a part-time, paid position supporting our nursery during Sunday morning worship and other services or activities as scheduled.

Our nursery ministry is an important part of the welcome we extend to young families. The Nursery Supervisor will help provide a safe, nurturing, and engaging environment where our youngest children know they are loved and their parents and caregivers can participate fully in worship.

The ideal candidate will enjoy working with infants and young children, communicate reliably with families and church staff, and be committed to maintaining a safe and welcoming nursery. A background check and current CPR and First Aid certification will be required prior to employment.

If you or someone you know might be a good fit for this ministry, please contact Barbara Erb or Pastor Jeremy for the complete job description and information about applying. Please also help us spread the word!

ASK THE PASTOR

Have you ever heard a Bible passage and wondered, What does that actually mean? Maybe you have a question about United Methodist beliefs, Christian history, theology—or something you have heard Pastor Jeremy say during worship. Now is your chance to ask!

“Ask the Pastor” will be part of worship at the North Campus on August 2 and at the Downtown Campus on August 2 and 9. Questions can be deep, thoughtful, curious, or even a little silly.

Please send your questions to Pastor Jeremy by Friday, July 31. There are no guarantees that he will have a perfect answer—but we can guarantee an interesting conversation!

What's Happening

SUNDAY, JULY 26

9AM - Worship @ Paris (North) Campus
10AM - Worship @ First Church (Downtown) Campus
Fellowship and Coffee immediately following the worship service

MONDAY, JULY 27

6-7:30PM - Teen Book Study (*ch. 6-10*) @ Downtown Campus

TUESDAY, JULY 28

9AM - Director's Meeting @ Downtown Campus
3PM - 6PM - Good Company @ Hemlock Park

WEDNESDAY, JULY 29

12PM - Table Talk: Politics & Following Jesus @ Downtown Campus
(Chapter Four: Avoiding “The Big One”)

THURSDAY, JULY 30

5:30PM - Community Dinner @ Downtown Campus

ICE CREAM, SCHOOL SUPPLIES, AND COMMUNITY!

Join us for the second annual UMMMC Ice Cream Social on Sunday, August 9, at 1:00 p.m. at our Paris Campus! This year, we are inviting the wider community to enjoy an afternoon of ice cream and connection while providing free school supplies to local students.

You can help by selecting a school-supply tag—or several—from the bulletin board in Fellowship Hall at the Downtown Campus or the display at the North Campus. Each tag lists a specific item and quantity needed. Please purchase the supplies and return them to the church by Sunday, August 2.

Volunteers are also needed for preparation, setup, serving, welcoming guests, distributing supplies, and cleanup. Whether you can help before, during, or after the event, your participation will make a difference. To volunteer, contact Jane Pedelty at the Paris Campus or Paden Clevenger, Director of Family Ministry and Community Outreach.

Come enjoy some ice cream, welcome our neighbors, and help local students begin the school year with confidence!

MARK YOUR CALENDAR: Family Meeting & Potluck, August 30 @ 11:15AM

STAFF CONTACT INFORMATION

Barbara Erb - Director of Administrative Services
barbara@ummecosta.org - (231) 796-7771 ext. 1

Kathy Bell - Director of Congregational Care
kathy@ummecosta.org - (231) 224-6177 ext. 3

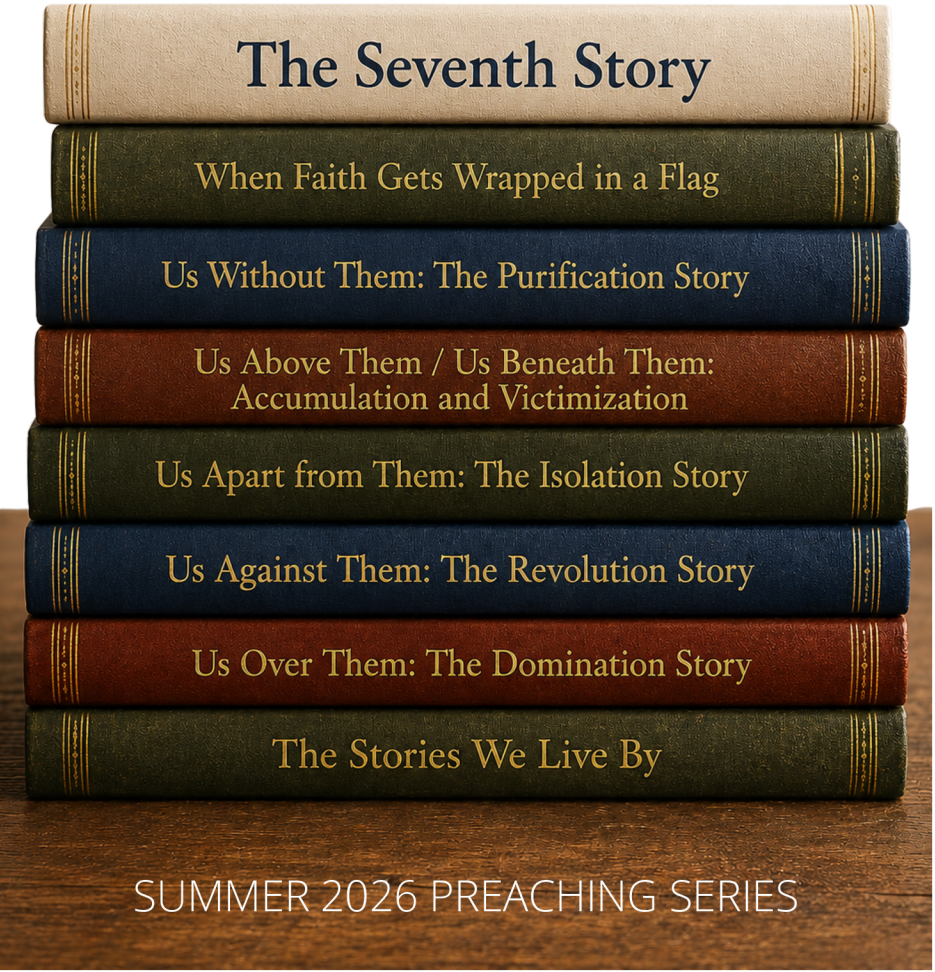
Paden Clevenger - Director of Family Ministries & Community Outreach
paden@ummecosta.org - (231) 796-7771 ext 4

Rev. Jeremy Wicks - Executive Pastor
jeremy@ummecosta.org / (231) 796-7771 ext 2 / (231) 224-6545

To schedule an appointment with Pastor Jeremy, contact Barbara Erb or schedule online @ calendly.com/jeremy-ummecosta

Week of July 26 - August 1, 2026

Family News



SUMMER 2026 PREACHING SERIES

UNITED METHODIST MINISTRIES OF MECOSTA COUNTY
304 ELM STREET, BIG RAPIDS MI 49307 • (231) 796-7771 • WWW.UMMECOSTA.ORG

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE HOURS: TUES - FRIDAY, 9AM - 3PM
PASTOR AND MINISTRY STAFF AVAILABLE BY APPOINTMENT

NORTH CAMPUS - PARIS 109 Lincoln St Paris, MI 49338 ummecosta.org/paris Worship Gathering in-person Sundays @ 9:00AM	DOWNTOWN CAMPUS - FIRST 304 Elm Street Big Rapids, MI 49307 bigrapidsfirst.org Worship Gathering in-person and live online, Sundays @ 10AM www.facebook.com/brfumc services Archived Weekly: www.youtube.com/@brfumc
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Order of Worship - July 26, 2026

Prelude

Welcome & Announcements

* Call to Worship (Reader / *People*)

We gather to worship the God who has not abandoned the world to the stories of fear, violence, division, and despair.

The world tells many stories.

Us over them, against them, apart from them, without them, above them, and us beneath them.

But Jesus tells a better story.

A story where power becomes service, mercy crosses every boundary, the excluded are welcomed, the wounded are healed, and enemies are no longer called “them.”

In Christ, God is making all things new.

So we come to worship, not as people trapped in the old stories, but as people being reconciled, liberated, and made whole.

Let us worship the God whose story is love.

* Hymn - “I Love to Tell the Story”, UMH #156

Children’s Message

First Reading - 2 Corinthians 5:16–20 (NRSVUE)

Hymn - “The Gift of Love”, UMH# 408

Second Reading - John 17:20–23 (NRSVUE)

Message - “The Seventh Story: Love Is the Protagonist”

Pastoral Prayer

The Lord’s Prayer

* Doxology, UMH #95

* Blessing and Sending

* Hymn - “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”, UMH #133

Postlude

Altar flowers are given in honor of Peggy Rambadt.

* PLEASE RISE IN BODY OR SPIRIT

Welcome to First Church!

Welcome to First Church, the downtown campus of United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County - we’re so glad you’re here! This is a community where every person belongs, every story matters, and every question is welcome. If you’re new or exploring, we’d love to get to know you. You can learn more about who we are and find helpful information for your first visit at bigrapidsfirst.org.

Need directions? Curious about something? Our welcome team is nearby and ready to help. Truly, we’re delighted to worship with you today.

NOTES:



Check In Here

SERVING TODAY - JULY 26

Reader: Marlene Rodgers
Ushers: Rex & Cheryl Richardson
Greeter: Betsy Curtis
Nursery: Paden Clevenger, Julie Tessin
Fellowship Host: Marlene Rodgers
Organist: Shirley Jernstadt
Accompanist: Kathy Bell
Tech Team: Ken Draves, Gary Poole

SERVING NEXT WEEK - AUGUST 2

Reader: Emmanuel Jadhav
Ushers: Pat & Marion Williamson
Greeter: Nancy Spedowski
Nursery: TBD
Fellowship Host: Brenda Chaffee

THINK ABOUT IT - LOVE IS THE PROTAGONIST

This week, we come to the final message in The Seventh Story series. We have spent the summer naming the stories that divide us: us over them, us against them, us apart from them, us without them, us above them, and us beneath them. These stories are powerful because they are familiar. They show up in our politics, our relationships, our communities, our churches, and even in our own hearts.

But Jesus followers are not called to live by the world’s old stories - we are called to live by the story of Jesus. The Jesus story is not about domination, revenge, isolation, exclusion, accumulation, or victimhood. It is the story of reconciliation and liberation. It is the story where love is stronger than fear, mercy is stronger than resentment, and grace is wider than the boundaries we draw.

In Jesus, God shows us that there is no “them” beyond the reach of love.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- Which of the old stories do I most easily fall into?
- Where do I still divide the world into “us” and “them”?
- What would change if I remembered that love—not fear, power, resentment, or scarcity—is the true center of the story?
- Where is Jesus inviting me to live a better story this week?

PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

Pay attention to the stories shaping your thoughts, words, and actions. When you notice yourself thinking in terms of “us” and “them,” pause and ask: What story am I living right now? Then ask: What would Love do next?

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

God of the better story, free us from the stories that divide, diminish, and destroy. Teach us the way of Jesus: love that serves, mercy that crosses boundaries, truth that heals, and grace that makes us whole. Help us live as people of reconciliation and liberation, until there is no longer “us” and “them,” but only your beloved creation, held together in love. Amen.

HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF UMMMC

United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County is seeking individuals from both the First Campus and the Paris Campus to serve on our Leadership Team. The Leadership Team is the governing body of UMMMC. They care for the church’s resources, discern long-term priorities, ask important questions about the future, and ensure that our ministries and finances remain aligned with our mission, vision, and values. If you believe this may be a meaningful way for you to serve—or if you would simply like to learn more—please contact Pastor Jeremy to schedule a conversation.

JULY MISSION GIVING: OUR BROTHERS KEEPER

Throughout July, our mission giving will support Our Brother’s Keeper, Big Rapids’ shelter for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. OBK offers more than a safe place to sleep. Guests receive meals, showers, clean clothing, compassionate support, and assistance as they work toward stable housing and greater self-sufficiency. At a time when the need for emergency housing continues to grow—including among families with children and older adults—this ministry provides safety, dignity, and hope to some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Thank you for giving generously and helping Our Brother’s Keeper remind every guest that they are not alone.

Your generosity makes a difference! To avoid any confusion in our giving systems, please make your checks out to **First Church. Thank you for your continued support!**