



# THE FLAME

Monthly Newsletter

for

**Central and Algonquin United Methodist Churches**

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Editors: Barbara Larson and Sharon Jones

## MARCH 2026

### REFLECTIONS FROM THE PASTOR

#### Making the Most of Lent



Lent has a way of arriving quietly. No decorations in the stores. No fanfare on the calendar. Just forty days stretching out before us—an invitation rather than a demand. For centuries, Lent has been understood as a season of preparation. Not preparation in the sense of “getting it right,” but preparation of the heart—making space to notice God more clearly, to listen more attentively, and to walk a little more honestly.

And perhaps that invitation feels especially timely right now. Many of us are carrying more than usual—concerns about the world, worries close to home, and a general sense that these are not easy or uncomplicated days. Lent meets us there, not by offering quick fixes, but by inviting us to slow down and pay attention to where God is present even now.

**Start Small—and Start Where You Are.** Lent is not about spiritual heroics. It’s not about suddenly becoming more disciplined, more serious, or more impressive. In fact, Lent works best when we begin with modest, realistic intentions.

Rather than asking, “*What should I give up?*” it can be more fruitful to ask, “*What might help me pay better attention to God right now?*” For some, that may mean letting go of something that has quietly taken up too much space—noise, distraction, or habits that leave us restless rather than refreshed. For others, it may mean adding something life-giving: a few minutes of daily prayer, reading Scripture more slowly, or practicing gratitude at the end of the day.

As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, “*Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.*” (Isaiah 40:31) Lent is not about pushing harder. It is about learning how to wait, listen, and receive.

**The Gift of Ordinary Worship.** One of the simplest—and most meaningful—ways to observe Lent is to remain rooted in regular worship. There is something quietly powerful about showing up week after week, listening to Scripture, praying together, singing together, and receiving God’s grace in community. In uncertain and challenging times, these ordinary rhythms can steady us more than we realize. During Lent, you are warmly invited to worship each Sunday at:

**Algonquin United Methodist Church at 9:00 AM, or Central United Methodist Church at 10:30 AM.**

(Continued on the next page)

#### In This Issue

Pastor’s Reflection	1-2
Prayer Wheel	3
Flower Order	3
Notes & Noteworthy	4
Missions	4
Recipe/Congrats	5
Birthdays/Anniv	6
Worship	6
Algonquin UMC	7
Condolences	7
New Members	7
Family Night	8
Travelogues	9-10
Finance Report	11

## Reflections from the Pastor Continued:

Even when life feels busy, unsettled, or overwhelming, gathering for worship reminds us that we do not carry these days alone.

**Walking the Story Together in Holy Week.** Lent also leads us toward Holy Week, where the church pauses to walk through the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry. These services invite us not just to remember the story, but to enter it—honestly and attentively.

This year, we will gather for several special services:

### **Palm Sunday – March 29**

As we begin Holy Week, we remember Jesus' entry into Jerusalem—celebration mixed with tension, hope mingled with uncertainty.

### **Maundy Thursday – April 2, 6:30 PM at Algonquin UMC**

A service centered on the last supper, Jesus' command to love one another, and the humility of servant love.

### **Good Friday – April 3, Community Service at the Presbyterian Church (tentatively 1:00 PM)**

A shared service with neighboring congregations, gathering at the foot of the cross to reflect on Christ's suffering and self-giving love.

### **Easter Sunday – April 5**

We celebrate the heart of our faith: resurrection, new life, and God's final word of hope.

**Central UMC will also host an Easter breakfast at 9:15 AM**, a wonderful opportunity for fellowship before the 10:30 AM service.

Even attending one or two of these services can deepen the meaning of the season, helping Lent feel less like time passing and more like a journey shared.

**Communion and Care Beyond the Sanctuary.** A word as well for those who may find it difficult to attend worship regularly. Whether due to health, mobility, or other circumstances, please know that you are always part of this church community. I am *always* happy to bring **Holy Communion to you at home**, not only during Lent or Easter, but whenever it would be meaningful and helpful. If you—or someone you care about—would welcome a visit and the gift of Communion, please feel free to reach out to the church office or contact me directly.

**Let Lent Do Its Quiet Work.** Lent does not promise quick results. It is a season that works slowly, often beneath the surface. Some days may feel prayerful and focused. Others may feel ordinary, distracted, or even heavy. That's okay. Lent is not about measuring success; it is about remaining open—especially in challenging times. If there is one thing Lent consistently teaches us, it is this: God is often at work in subtle ways—through small acts of faithfulness, honest reflection, and a willingness to stay present.

As we move through these weeks together, my hope is that Lent will feel not like a burden to carry, but like a companion on the way—gently leading us toward the grace, mercy, and new life we celebrate at Easter.

Grace and peace to you in this Lenten season. *Pastor Marty*



## PRAYER WHEEL FOR OUR MILITARY

*Lord, hold our troops in your loving hands. Protect them as they protect us. Bless them and their families for the selfless acts they perform for us in our time of need. We ask this in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Amen.*

We keep our country's military in our prayers, be they young people who are in "for just a hitch" of maybe a few years, or those who choose a military career.

Thank you to our veterans and all those who have served their country.

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**ALGONQUIN AND CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES**  
**MISSION: CONNECTING ALL PEOPLE TO GOD BY BUILDING**  
**BRIDGES OF CARING, OUTREACH AND ACCEPTANCE**

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### Easter Flower Order for 2026

I would like to order a plant(s) to be displayed at Central UMC on Easter Sunday (April 5, 2026).

\_\_\_\_\_ Chrysanthemum (\$20.00)      \_\_\_\_\_ Daffodil (\$20.00)      \_\_\_\_\_ Tulip (\$20.00)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Hydrangea (\$30.00)      \_\_\_\_\_ Lily (\$18.00)      \_\_\_\_\_ Azalea (\$30.00)

Please indicate how you would like the flower dedication listed in the Easter Sunday bulletin. **Please print clearly:**

In honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

In memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

For the glory of Easter: \_\_\_\_\_

By: \_\_\_\_\_ Total Amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Please place the completed form and money in the Sunday morning offering plate, or return it to the church office with the proper payment by **Sunday, March 15, 2026**. Please plan to take your plant after the Easter service.

## NOTES AND NOTEWORTHY

### THANK YOU, THANK YOU!!

Our March "Flame" is sponsored by the **Algonquin United Methodist Women in Faith**. Thank you, ladies. It is much appreciated!

Who would like to sponsor upcoming issues? It is done by donating \$90.00 to cover the cost of a month's issue. The money can be placed in the Sunday offering plate or brought to the church office. Be sure to include your name and mention specifically what the donation is for. You will be recognized and thanked in an upcoming issue.

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### DON'T FORGET TO SET YOUR CLOCKS AHEAD AN HOUR

BEFORE BEDTIME ON MARCH 7<sup>TH</sup>!!!

Remember, Spring ahead, Fall back.

Daylight Savings Time begins on Sunday, March 8, 2026.

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Do you have a **high school** or a **higher education graduate** in your family? If so, please be thinking ahead and submit some information on them so we can recognize them in an upcoming issue of "The Flame." Also include a photo of your high school graduate. You can phone me at 906-632-7958, or send your information via email to [blarson1517@charter.net](mailto:blarson1517@charter.net),

Thanks in advance, Barb Larson

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## MISSIONS

The first Sunday of January, \$92.00 was collected . Some shopping was done and what was donated in our bins was delivered to the elementary school. Since the beginning of the school year, \$820.00 of food has been delivered to the school. We are so grateful for the generosity of our congregation.

The Mission/Outreach committee, along with Sophie and our children, will make kits for the homeless. We will have a list of items for a Homeless Kit (Blessing Bag). There will also be a note of well wishes. The Salvation Army will be willing to keep them and offer to whoever may need them. There will be a white basket for the items donated. We will let you know where it will be located.

We will be setting up a Mitten Tree by the elevator, to include hats and socks for children in need.

There is always a need at Community Action Headstart and the elementary school.

Submitted by Diane Bell

## RECIPE ROUNDUP CORNER

(We know we have many wonderful cooks in Algonquin and Central churches. We invite the sharing of your favorite recipe. Just write them out, include your name and turn them into the box marked for "the Flame" outside of our secretary's office or email them to Barb Larson at [blarson1517@charter.net](mailto:blarson1517@charter.net). It can be desserts, entrees, beverages, appetizers, etc.)

### OATMEAL/PEANUT BUTTER/ CHOCOLATE CHIP BARS

Blend together 2 sticks melted butter, 1 cup peanut butter, ½ cup sugar and 1 cup brown sugar. Sift together 1 tsp. salt, 1 tsp. cornstarch, 1 tsp. baking powder, 1 tsp. baking soda and

1 ¾ cups flour. Mix in 1 cup oats. Add 2 eggs to entire mixture.

Add chocolate chips, butter scotch chips and walnuts.

Spread in a greased 13x9" glass pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.

Submitted by Karen Aikens



## CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Marah and Cora Bell! They were in the I-500 pageant on February 6. Cora was named Princess of Kindness for her division and Marah was named Queen in her division. They are pictured here in all of their pageant finery. Their parents are Nick and Katelyn Bell, grandparents are Ray and Diane Bell and great-grandparents are Linda and Jerry Bell. Again, congratulations!



# BIRTHDAY AND ANNIVERSARY BLESSINGS AND WISHES

## Central Birthdays

March 1 - Mary Beth Aikens

March 2 - Jerry Cook

March 5 - Katelyn Bell

March 6 - Ray Bell

March 11 - Mallory Baier

March 17 - Kathy Bankson

March 21 - Paul Aikens

March 23 - Tom Brown

## Central Anniversaries

March 1 - Julie and Dennis Hill (46th)

March 18 - Kathy and Kevin Larson (31st)



## Algonquin Birthdays

March 18 - Jeff Collia

March 25 - Emily Anderson (24th)

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## WORSHIP COMMITTEE

Lent began on February 18, 2026 and lasts until Thursday, April 2 (Holy Thursday). Palm Sunday is March 29 and the children will be waving palm branches at Central. Maundy Thursday is April 2. A service will be held at Algonquin Church at 6:30 p.m. Good Friday is April 3 and the Presbyterian Church will host the community service at 1:00 p.m. Easter is April 5 with regular Sunday services at Algonquin at 9:00 a.m. and Central at 10:30 a.m. There will be an Easter brunch at Central at 9:15 a.m. in the Fellowship Hall.

Submitted by Robin Myers and the Worship Committee

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*Remember to keep up with your pledge and your giving to our two churches.  
Your continued faithfulness will help us keep current with  
our bills and obligations!!*

# ALGONQUIN UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

1604 W Fourth Avenue  
Sault Ste Marie, MI 49783

Our March Worship Servants are:

March 1 -liturgist is Bev Atkins, communion steward is Bernita Sibbald,  
greeter is Rachel Pratt and usher is Bob Sibbald

March 8 - greeter is Todd Vollick and usher is Mary Beth Vollick

March 15- greeter is Sandy Gaus, and usher is Laura Anderson

March 22 -liturgist is Bev Atkins, greeter is Mary Beth Vollick and usher is Todd Vollick

March 29 -greeters are Bob and Bernita Sibbald and usher is Bob Sibbald

**News to Share:** 1,200 athletes attended the Special Olympics Winter Games held at Grand Traverse Resort on January 27-30, 2026. Joanie Aikens was asked to carry the torch to declare the 2026 Games begin. Joanie is the daughter of Laura and Ted Aikens.

Submitted by Bernita Sibbald

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## WE EXTEND OUR CONDOLENCES....

**Joyce (Ketchum) Craven**, a member of Algonquin United Methodist Church, passed away on February 9, 2026 at Hearthside Assisted Living. She was born on June 17, 1927 in Trout Creek, Michigan. Her children are Donald Craven and Sally (Tom) Stabile of Sault Ste. Marie, and Bonnie (Jack) Rudin of Virginia. Joyce also had grandchildren Andy, Juli, Shawn, Denny and Kerri and 9 great grandchildren.

....*And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes....*Revelation 7:17b

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## NEW MEMBERS WELCOMED

New members were welcomed into Central Church on February 8, 2026. They are pictured here during the coffee hour in the Fellowship Hall. They are **Phyllis Cousino, Kathy Zomer, Wendy and Don Montag**. Welcome !!



## Central United Methodist Church Cheers on

### Sault High Blue Devil Hockey

A group of 21 members and friends of Central gathered at Big Bear Arena on Saturday, January 24, 2026 and cheered on the Sault High Blue Devil Hockey team. The Blue Devils won beating Port Huron with a score of 4 to 2. This event was sponsored by Family Ministries with funding from Endowment. We had a great time and we are grateful for everyone who attended and supported this event.



## FAMILY NIGHT

Our next Family Night will be **March 18, 2026**. Please join us for dinner and a lesson to follow. We would love for children and families to attend. After dinner children will go to worship for a lesson as well. We are excited to begin our new series.

We also seek out opportunities to engage with the community. This month we are doing a family skate at Big Bear Arena on Sunday **March 22**. Open skating is from 2:30 p.m to 4:20 p.m.that day. Please bring your children and family.

We are also taking donations for our Missions/Outreach, which is making Blessing Bags for the homeless. We already have plenty of tooth brushes and tooth paste. Non perishables, razors, wellness items and warm clothing will be graciously accepted. We will have a white bin for donation collections. If you have any questions, please reach out to members of the church. They will be happy to help.

Submitted by Sophie Beard

Sophie came to the difficult decision that she can no longer be able to fulfill the position of Family Ministries Coordinator. Sophie's last day will be Sunday, February 22, 2026.

Sophie and Josh are a delightful addition to our congregation and we look forward to continuing our fellowship and worship together. Submitted by the Family Ministries Team

# TRAVELOGUES

## TRAVELOGUE NUMBER 1

We are happy to bring you two travelogue articles this month! If you have taken a trip you are encouraged to write about it and share it with our church family. Send your article to [blarson1517@charter.net](mailto:blarson1517@charter.net).

### So... About That Alaskan Cruise

Tina and I were part of a wonderful group from **Sault Ste. Marie**—including familiar faces like **Tom and Susan Brown**—who boarded a ship together and sailed to Alaska. We returned with far more than postcards and photos. Somewhere along the way, a group of travelers became a group of friends, and a few people even started planning the next trip before this one ended.

### Seattle: Getting There Early (Highly Recommended)

We arrived in Seattle a day early and stayed in a rooftop suite at the historic Arctic Inn downtown. (Because if you're going to do it, *do it*.) One highlight was visiting the **Chihuly Garden and Glass**. If you're not familiar with Dale Chihuly's work, imagine glass deciding it no longer wants to obey gravity—or common sense. Absolutely stunning. That evening we caught up with my cousin Missy and her family and enjoyed a memorable meal at the Crab Shack. Let's just say seafood was taken seriously.

**Life at Sea:** We sailed with **Holland America Line (HAL)** and had an aft Neptune Suite—which meant two things: The view was incredible. Our cabin stewards appeared to transport from another dimension. Every time we stepped out of the room—*poof!*—they were there. And we grew quite fond of hearing, “Hello, Mr. Marty and Ms. Tina!” Our booking included Holland America's “Have It All” package: tips, drinks, and Wi-Fi. By about Day 3, I concluded that **HAL must really stand for “Have Another Libation.”**

**Alaska... at First Glance:** Early in the trip, Tina looked out at the scenery—eagles, trees, water—and asked the most honest question of the entire cruise: “Why did we pay all this money to see the same things we see at home?” A fair question. Then Alaska decided to answer. And this is where everything changed.

**Glacier Bay National Park** — worth the trip all by itself. Massive glaciers, deep silence, and the sense that time operates differently there. Photos don't even come close. **Whales**, surfacing when you least expect them. **Orcas**, slicing through the water with quiet authority. **Mountains**, rising in ways that make everything else feel very small.

We also walked through National Forests with that low-grade awareness that a grizzly *might* be nearby. (He never showed up. Must be Methodists weren't on the day's menu) Along the way we visited: **Juneau, Ketchikan and Icy Strait Point**. We didn't make it to **Sitka**, thanks to 75-mph winds and 20-foot waves. The sea was clearly reminding us who was in charge. Honestly, it just added to the adventure.

**The Verdict:** The food and service on board were outstanding. Our dining room servers learned our names—and our preferences—almost immediately, which is either excellent hospitality or gentle mind-reading. We loved every moment of the trip. So much so, in fact, that we already have a **28-day Alaskan cruise booked for 2027**. Apparently, seven days was just a warm-up. Alaska has a way of doing that to you. It humbles you. It surprises you. And somewhere between the glaciers and the whales, it reminds you how big God's world really is. Would we do it again? Already are.

Submitted by Pastor Marty

## TRAVELOGUE NUMBER 2

Each year, Marv, Charlene DeWitt and family all meet up somewhere for a week of family time. So far we have met up in Minn, Montana, Arizona, Colorado, Alberta Canada, Indiana, Georgia, Maine, Alaska and in 2025 we went to SWITZERLAND!

Each year either Marv and Charlene, Paul and Laura, or Travis and Philip choose the location and make all of the arrangements in a rotating fashion.

In 2025, it was Marv and Charlene's turn and thus, Switzerland was chosen because Charlene always wanted to go there due to the book, "Heidi," and also she found out her ancestors were from there. So for 10 days we experienced Switzerland, lots of hiking, exploring, and eating the delicious foods. The Swiss people were soooooo gracious. We stayed just south of the Interlaken area in the Alps in a VRBO that had a fantastic view of the mountains. Each morning and evening we could hear the cow bells as the cattle went up to the pastures and then down in the evening. On our hikes, it was always fun to come to a herd of cattle who didn't seem to mind sharing the meadow with us. They were as gentle and friendly as the people. One night we even heard Alp horns. Oh it was soooooo very beautiful and relaxing. Amelia, our granddaughter, was able to imagine where Heidi could have lived. What great memories for all of us. Also some research was done on Charlene's family.

The plans for this year are to meet up in Utah. What a great time we have together since we live in different parts of North America. Marv was not impressed with the Paris airport. But Switzerland was a dream come true for all of us!

Safe traveling, Charlene and Marv

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**A REMINDER:** The deadline for material to be submitted for our next *Flame*, the April 2026 issue, is **March 15, 2026 at noon.**

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**MAY THE ROAD RISE TO MEET YOU;  
MAY THE WIND BE ALWAYS AT YOUR BACK;  
MAY THE RAIN FALL SOFTLY UPON YOUR FIELDS;  
MAY GOD HOLD YOU IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS HAND.**

**(AN OLD GAELIC BLESSING)**

## **FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**

The development of an annual budget for Central is the responsibility of the Finance Committee. Generally numbers from other years are reviewed to provide data to help determine the amounts to place in the various designated revenue and expense items in the current year.

Central's budget for 2026 was completed in early February. It was approved by the Finance Committee and has been submitted to the Administrative Council for their information, review and approval.

Revenue is derived from the pledged and non-pledged offerings, designated giving, items like building use and certain special offerings, such as Christmas and Easter. The total revenue is projected to be \$156,248

Expenses cover salaries, benefits, office supplies, equipment, worship programs, and professional services to name a few. In addition, there are utilities for the church building and the parsonage plus insurance for both. Another expense is the annual commitment to the Michigan Conference Ministries. Expenses total \$206,877.

As you can see from the above figures, the 2026 Budget is in a deficit state again this year; therefore, it is very important that we all try to keep our pledges current.

The Finance Committee appreciates the support of the members and friends of Central.

Submitted by the Finance Committee

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**BLESS US, O GOD**

**THE MOON THAT IS ABOVE US,**

**THE EARTH THAT IS BENEATH US,**

**THE FRIENDS WHO ARE AROUND US,**

**YOUR IMAGE DEEP WITHIN US.**

**(A TRADITIONAL CELTIC PRAYER)**

**HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY!!**



CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
111 EAST SPRUCE STREET  
SAULT SAINTE MARIE, MI 49783-2189

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## **PRAYER QUOTES**

**“HEAVEN IS FULL OF ANSWERS TO PRAYERS FOR WHICH NO ONE EVER BOTHERED TO ASK”**

**Billy Graham**

**“YOU DO NOT HAVE, BECAUSE YOU DO NOT ASK GOD.”**

**JAMES 4:2**

**“TRUE, WHOLE PRAYER IS NOTHING BUT LOVE”**

**St. Augustine**