

The Grapevine

A PUBLICATION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF OKEMOS

From Pastor Lisa Schrott



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Deadline for September Grapevine is Monday, August 24.

All In - Committing to God and Each Other

Now may you be committed to the Lord our God with all your heart by following God's laws and observing God's commands, just as you are doing right now. -- 1 Kings 8:61-63 (CEB)

For much of our summer worship, we have focused on growing deeper in our faith through commitments to spiritual practices. As our Play, Pray, and Read July Sabbath draws to a close and we resume the rhythms of more regularly scheduled church programming, my prayer is that we hold on to some of the spaces we have created for intentional time with God. And some of the intentional relationship building we have done with each other.

All In is our 2026 Stewardship Theme and it flows from the commitment to grow *Deeper in Faith* and it flows from the *Stories of our Faith*, our worship series for August. Aaron and I will be preaching scriptures from Genesis and Exodus that remind us that our individual stories are part of a much bigger story, stretching back through millennia and forward into an unknown future.

The staff, including our newest member the Rev. Aaron Punt, met for a planning retreat in the end of July. We are **All In** to work together as a team to support the ministry you all do, for you are the hands and feet and voice of Christ.

Aaron will be taking the lead in Faith Formation programming, working with children, youth and adults as we seek to live into our Journey to 2030 vision to be a truly intergenerational and welcoming church.

Anna Thiel is taking on some new responsibilities, moving into a position as Office Manager and Business Administrator. Doug Paterson, our bookkeeper extraordinaire for many years, has been training Anna this summer to take over some of the bookkeeping functions. Jacob Meland, our Media Specialist, will be taking on some of the work Anna did in preparing material for the livestream of our services. As Aaron, Anna, and Jacob learn the ropes of their new and expanded positions, please support them with love, patience and grace.

Not to forget our other dedicated staff... Music Director and Organist Dr. Marlene Brewbaker and Choir Director, Shelby Laird are already at work planning wonderful music for the fall, including A Service of Lessons and Carols, a highlight of the year. Sexton Edward Ennen has been diligently keeping our facility in great shape, as our infrastructure projects are underway. We have a new, beautiful roof to keep us safe and dry. Lighting upgrades are next up!

Are you ready to be **All In**? I am excited by the opportunities for deepening faith and community as we enjoy all of the glory Michigan summers bring and as we plan for the beginning of the next church program year. I hope you will make a commitment to be **All In** as well!

Summer Pick-Up Choir

Sunday, August 9

Meet in the Sanctuary at 9 a.m.

Have you thought about singing with the Chancel Choir but don't have time to attend weekly rehearsals?

This summer we have one more chance to join in making a joyful noise. Chancel Choir Director Shelby Laird will lead anyone and everyone who shows up through songs to be sung during the service.

Grant to Fund Program Developed by PCO Member

PCO has been awarded a grant from the Presbyterian Church (USA) to implement "Welcoming the New Neighbor: A Dialogue for Christian Congregations."

Welcoming the New Neighbor (WTNN) is a six-week adult Sunday School curriculum that guides congregations through conversations about refugees and other immigrants, engaging with the Christian call to welcome the stranger and love your neighbor as yourself.

This curriculum was first tested with our PCO family in the fall of 2023, and with the \$15,325 grant from PC(USA)'s Presbyterian Disaster Assistance Fund we will be able to launch the project in churches around the state of Michigan.

Led by PCO member Stephanie Nawyn, WTNN will involve collaborations with the Presbytery of Lake Michigan and Synod of the Covenant (which consists of 11 presbyteries and over 700 congregations in Michigan, Ohio, and small parts of Indiana, Kentucky, and Wisconsin).

Spreading the Savings Caring for the Earth

As part of PCO's commitment to being one of [PCUSA Earth Care Congregations](#), the church is tithing on the electricity savings received due from our solar panels. This year the church, as well as individual PCO members, contributed to a new rooftop solar installation benefiting Lansing Intentional Communities (LINCS). LINCS is a nonprofit that provides housing and community support for adults with autism.

Members of our Green Teams recently participated with others from the Capital Area Chapter of Michigan Interfaith Power and Light in the dedication of the 5.7-kilowatt solar system, which was installed on a newly remodeled duplex that is home to two LINCS residents.

You can learn more about the project at https://www.miipl.org/capital_area_chapter



Update from Simbolei

Following the worship service on **Sunday, September 20**, all are welcome to a presentation about Simbolei Academy, which will include information about the mission trip planned for June 2027.

Right now, the school is responding to a financial challenge. A regional drought destroyed all of their maize crops, used to help feed the girls and the dairy cows which are kept to provide milk for students.

As Summer rolls on, some activities remain on hiatus at PCO while others continue on modified schedules. Check out the weekly e-Announcements for more up-to-date information about what's happening here at church. Below is information about what's currently scheduled in August.

Retirees in August

The Retiree Group will meet on **Monday, August 17 at noon**. Those who have not had an opportunity to share their favorite vacation will be given the opportunity to do so. We will also discuss the fall meetings and what we might like to include in our programming. Our meetings are in Fellowship Hall and you are welcomed to bring a lunch to enjoy during our meeting. Save the third Monday of each month whether you have retired recently, are working part time, or wish you were retired. We welcome all.

Birthday Cake Sunday

We will celebrate our August Birthdays on **Sunday, August 16**. If you were born in August, please check the birthday list on the kiosk in Fellowship Hall and add your name if it isn't already there. We want to celebrate you!

Caregiver Support Group

The Caregiver Support Group will meet on Zoom 892-3955-1708 **Wednesday, August 26 at 5:00 p.m.** Sharing what is on our hearts, as it relates to life as a caregiver for a loved one, and offering support to each other is the purpose of each meeting. Members talk about experiences, resources, and what has helped them over the month. Please join us for this discussion on the fourth Wednesday each month.

Adult Education & Fellowship

Password for Zoom meetings unless otherwise noted is 48864. Days and times are subject to change.

SUNDAYS

Adult Education – On hiatus for the summer

Writing Life's Stories – Usually 1st Sundays, 2:00 p.m., Zoom 848 6124 7191 – August meeting is **Sunday, August 11**.

Birthday Cake Sunday – 3rd Sundays following worship unless otherwise noted. This month will be on **Sunday, August 16**.

Women's Connection – On hiatus for the summer. See you in September!

MONDAYS

Women's Dinner Out – 1st Mondays unless otherwise noted, 5:30 p.m. This month was **Monday, August 3**.

Retirees – 3rd Mondays at 12 noon in person at PCO. This month will be on **Monday, August 17**.

TUESDAYS

Men's Group – Weekly at 8:00 a.m. on Zoom 813 7514 8286. Hybrid (In-person and on Zoom) was **Tuesday, August 4**.

PCO Crafts Ministry – No regularly scheduled meetings for the summer. Watch e-Announcements for possible impromptu meetings.

Artists Circle – No regularly scheduled meetings for the summer. Watch e-Announcements for possible impromptu meetings.

WEDNESDAYS

Conversation & Contemplation – On hiatus for the summer.

Caregiver Support Group – 4th Wednesdays unless otherwise noted at 10:00 a.m. on Zoom 892 3955 1708. This month will be **Wednesday, August 26**.

THURSDAY

Bible Study – On hiatus in August. See you in September!

Start-Up Sunday is September 13.

Sunday School & Adult Education scheduled to resume.

For the Young and Young at Heart

**Back to School Kick-Off
Children, Youth & Parents**

**Sunday, August 16
5:00 - 7:00 p.m.**

**Friends Welcome!
Watch email for sign-ups**



Seeking an Elementary Sunday School Teacher

Have a heart for children?

**We are looking for a second teacher to work with an
established teacher. Background check required.**

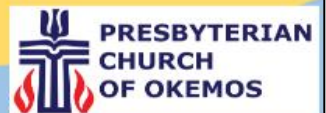
Interested? Please reach out to Pastor Aaron for more information.



PCO YOUTH CALENDAR

AUGUST 2026

- **HOMEWORK & HANGOUT (WITHOUT THE HOMEWORK!)**
 - **TUESDAY, AUGUST 11 FROM 2-4 PM**
 - **NEW LOCATION: THE FLAKY CROISSANT**
- **SUNDAY AUGUST 16: YOUTH GROUP KICK-OFF PICNIC 5 – 7 PM**
 - **BRING A FRIEND!**
 - **WATCH FOR AN EMAIL WITH SIGN-UPS**
- **SATURDAY AUGUST 22: LANSING LUGNUTS GAME AT 7 PM**
 - **THIS IS AN ALL-CHURCH, ALL-AGES EVENT**
- **SUNDAY AUGUST 30: YOUTH GROUP 5 – 7 PM**



New this year:

Tickets must be reserved and paid for by Wednesday, August 12.

Payment can be made by cash or check to the envelope on the kiosk in Fellowship Hall or to the church office.

Sign-up to attend on the kiosk or check the e-Announcements for a link to an online sign-up.

PCO Out on the Town
Saturday, August 22 at 7:05 PM.



Playing the Peoria Chiefs
Pre-game Faith All-Star lineup!
Fireworks follow the game!

Tickets are \$12.

Missions and More

Messages from Mission Partners

Dear Congregation,
This summer, you made the decision to invest in the lives of your fellow community members. On behalf of Catholic Charities of Ingham, Eaton & Clinton Counties (CCIEC), and the people we serve, we thank you for supporting our vision.

Your gift will support our Immigration Law Clinic.

Elizabeth Fisher, Board President

Dear Okemos Presbyterian,
On behalf of Meridian Cares, thank you for your generous contribution of \$400.00 to the Emergency Needs Fund.

Your support ensured that residents of Carriage Lane apartments were able to purchase food to restock the refrigerators after they lost everything during the power outage.

We are truly grateful for your kindness and commitment to strengthening our community. Thank you for making a meaningful difference.

Katie Love, Human Services Specialist

Dear People of Presbyterian Church of Okemos,

Thank you for your support of UKIRK/MSU this past school year. The students had an outstanding year. Not only did they find a religious home but they were active in the greater community. The children's book give away program exceeded 10,000 books. The University found UKirk/MSU worthy of an honor.

UKirk/MSU Board

Policy Report by Ellen Hoekstra

The Michigan Legislature finalized the '26-27 budget process without meeting its July 1 deadline but much sooner than last year. PCO members were among the hundreds who participated last spring in a faith-based advocacy day focused on food insecurity. This effort, led by Michigan United Methodists, was fruitful. The budget retained the current \$12,045,000 for the Food Bank Council of Michigan, the nonprofit "wholesaler" for seven regional food banks that supply pantries in churches and elsewhere. Also, the K-12 free school lunch program was retained for both public and non-public schools, with a \$400,000 increase for anticipated cost increases.

Smaller but important items for hungry people included:

- Retaining \$4 million in funding for the Double Up Bucks program at farmers' markets. The one-time \$1 million in the current year's budget was not included.
- Spending \$525,000 to deliver meals to children in low-income households—the "Kids Food Basket" program.
- Adding a new Local Food, Farm, Nutritional Fresh Food in Schools for \$500,000 to the Agriculture budget.

Given the shortfall in state revenue, overall, the news was good for providing food for those in need.

Other items of interest in the \$84 million state budget:

- \$25 million was added to the tuition scholarship program for adults, Michigan Reconnect, and the eligibility age was lowered from 25 to 21.
- Programs designed to improve student reading scores received funding boosts.
- New federal food stamp requirements are expected to reduce participation. Funding the state saves from this reduction is anticipated to be little more than the costs of implementing new federal work requirements for SNAP and Medicaid.

Some other policy highlights:

- You may have heard that a federal law designed to increase affordable housing was enacted despite the President neither signing nor vetoing it. A similar provision in Michigan's constitution also allows bills to become law without the governor's signature.
- 67 policy bills were passed by both chambers during the final marathon session on the budget. This more than triples the number of bills approved prior to that day during this legislative session. All were approved with bipartisan votes.
- According to a Gallup poll, confidence in the efficacy of higher education shows a slight decline from last year.

Book Nook

by Ron Dorr

The Declaration of Independence

For the last 20 years, I have celebrated the Fourth of July by reading aloud the Declaration of Independence. I am a patriot—a critical lover and loving critic of the U. S. A. For the last six weeks, I have thoroughly enjoyed reading, thinking, and talking about the Declaration and its 250th anniversary. Whether the discussions are memories, sermons, essays, speeches, or letters to the editor, one thing is clear. Interpretations vary.

One of my most vivid memories is a 30-minute discussion with Doug Hoekstra, a superb teacher at James Madison College and expert on the American Presidency. He and I identified the subjects and central thesis of the Declaration. Written chiefly by Thomas Jefferson, 33, but revised in one large and 86 small ways, the document proceeds from a preamble, declaration of human rights, and 27 indictments against “the King of Great Britain” to the forceful proposition “That these United Colonies are . . . Free and Independent States.” Doug and I composed a 59-word thesis statement, including all four subjects and concluding with the commitment of lives, fortunes, and “sacred Honor.” Doug praised the Enlightenment “self-evident” truths in the document, and I pointed out the rights and responsibilities of an independent state such as the “Power to levy War, conclude Peace, contract Alliances, [and] establish Commerce.”

Pastors have admitted how difficult it is to preach sermons on or near the Fourth of July. This year, Lisa Schrott admirably preached on “values and practices” in week three of the series, “Deeper in Faith.” She included several meanings of freedom. They included liberation (Luke 4:18-19), liberty of choice (separating from Great Britain), freedom under responsibility (“liberty in law” in “O Beautiful for Spacious Skies”), and Biblical freedom for service (the words of hospitality on the Statue of Liberty and Paul’s fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22).

For the Bicentennial 50 years ago, Ron Byars’s sermon on July 4 provided four models of Biblical thinking about the U. S. and its citizens. “Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” Rely on God as our “rock” and “fortress” in times of panic and anxiety. Travel as the children of Israel did in the Exodus: “by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them ” and “by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.” And look to “Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.”

The most illuminating essay that I read was Walter Isaacson’s essay, “The Words That Made America,” in TIME, July 6, 2026. It explains the context, multiple meanings, and effects of “the greatest sentence ever drafted”: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These words, in Isaacson’s mind, are ambiguous, “quite controversial, even revolutionary.”

The most impressive speech—worthy to be read over and over—was by Frederick Douglass in Rochester, New York, on July 5, 1852: “What to the Slave is the 4th of July?” Proceeding like a three-part symphony, Douglass lavishly praised the founders of the American republic for their courage in separating from their mother country. Then, from a slave’s point of view, he excoriated what Americans had created—a country and culture in which slaves were treated as subhuman. Finally, he provided his customary hope that such a republic could redeem itself. The speech is lyrical, potent, and persuasive. Douglass, I dare say, was the most skillful American orator in the 19th century.

Finally, the most original parody of the Declaration of Independence I have read in years appeared in the STORM LAKE TIMES PILOT on July 3, 2026. In a letter to the editor, citizen Jim Eliason adopted the organizational pattern of the document in 1776—preamble, philosophy of human rights, bill of grievances, declaration of independence, and reliance on “divine Providence.” He included 36 specific grievances but 400 fewer words than Jefferson did.

For those who prefer a more visual art, walk around the soaring “Windlord” sculpture of an eagle at Adado Riverfront Park in downtown Lansing. It was created by Martin Eichinger to celebrate the Bicentennial in 1976.



***‘Winlord’ sculpture at Adado
Riverfront Park in Lansing***

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