



Portal

December 2023

Rev. Dr. Shawnthea Monroe,
Senior Pastor
Rev. Haley Hansen,
Associate Pastor

ON MY MIND

A recent UK poll revealed that the #1 most hated Christmas song is Mariah Carey's 1994 hit 'All I Want for Christmas Is You.' I'm not sure why this modern holiday classic inspires such animosity. Perhaps the poll was only for retail workers who must weary of this ditty, which seems to play non-stop in every store. Or maybe George Michael fans skewed the results just to make sure 'Last Christmas' didn't take the top spot. (That soppy ballad finished at #5.) Personally, Brenda Lee's 1964 stinker 'I'm Gonna Lasso Santa Claus' gets my vote, but luckily it doesn't get much air time.

If you think about the song's lyrics, it's a very sweet message:

"I don't want a lot for Christmas, there is just one thing I need. I don't care about the presents underneath the Christmas tree. I just want you for my own, more than you could ever know. Make my wish come true. All I want for Christmas is you."

The message of this song is kind of countercultural considering that Christmas has become little more than an excuse to shop. It begins the night of Thanksgiving, when the Black Friday sales begin. That's the start of the Christmas retail season and it's called Black Friday because sales on that day put merchants in the black. In fact, many investors use Black Friday sales figures as a predictor of overall economic health.

As a pastor, I must lament the crass commercialization of Christmas, yet one of my fondest memories of childhood is sitting with the JC Penney's catalog making a list of all the things I wanted (read *needed*) for Christmas. My own children did much the same thing with the Amazon catalog and I loved buying their presents. Even now, I keep a little list year round of "Christmas present ideas" because I like buying gifts that make people happy.

Yet when my children ask me what I want for Christmas, I don't know what to say. My worst Christmas was in 2021. My Aunt Jane had died in February and my father had died in November. COVID prevented my sister's family from visiting and my mother couldn't travel. Worst of all, my daughter Clara couldn't leave Germany. That Christmas, the empty chairs around our table broke my heart. I would have traded all the gifts under the tree to have my whole family with me. So what do I really want for Christmas? Sing it with me, Mariah: *All I want for Christmas is you!*

And isn't that the true meaning of Christmas? For God so loved the world that God gave us Jesus, the one and only Son, so we might believe in him and have eternal life. (John 3:16) In other words, all God wants for Christmas is *you!* I bet you'll never listen that song the same way again!

May the true meaning of Christmas light your way this Advent season and may all your Christmas dreams come true.



-Rev. Dr. Shawnthea Monroe

FROM OUR ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Of all the characters in the New Testament, none feel quite as alive, quite as vivid, or quite as strange as John the Baptist.

During Advent, we read the story of John's father, Zechariah, and his prophecy that John will be the one to "prepare the way" for the coming of Christ. John, however, is a strange choice for an opening act. John is a little rough around the edges. He isn't big into warm fuzzies or making people comfortable. He's got a weird diet (wild honey and locusts) and strange clothing. He uses colorful words like *vipers* and *wrath* and *repentance* to make his point.

The preacher Barbara Brown Taylor says that John always seems to her like the Doberman Pinscher of the gospel. He's there nipping at your heels, growling for repentance. "Before he's through, our heads are pounding with vipers, wrath, axes, and unquenchable fire, when all we wanted was a chance to sing "O Holy Night,"" Brown Taylor writes.

And yet we can't avoid John the Baptist. Although only two of the Gospels — Luke and Matthew — tell the story of Jesus's birth, all four Gospels mention John the Baptist. So, year after year, we meet John in the Advent season. While his message is surely daunting, it's a message that's a necessary part of our faith: "Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" (Matthew 3:2 CEB).

And yet this way of change can be challenging. Change, we know is inevitable, it's baked into our natural rhythms. The days get longer and shorter, the seasons and weather patterns change throughout the year. Nevertheless, change can be challenging. We sometimes find ourselves resistant to change. After all, there's a sense of comfort in staying the same.

But John the Baptist tells us that if we want the fullness of Christmas, if we want to experience God as fully as possible, we have to be willing to change our hearts and our minds. After all, the Kingdom of heaven is a strange place. It's a place where our old ways no longer work. It's a place where Jesus upends all of our ideas about power, love, and justice.

While change can sometimes feel uncomfortable, the change that God spurs us toward is always for the better. John invites us to look inward, to change our mind and hearts so that we might make more room for the coming of Christ this season.

"Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!" May God be with us all in this season of waiting, hoping and change.

Yours in Christ,
-Rev. Haley Hansen



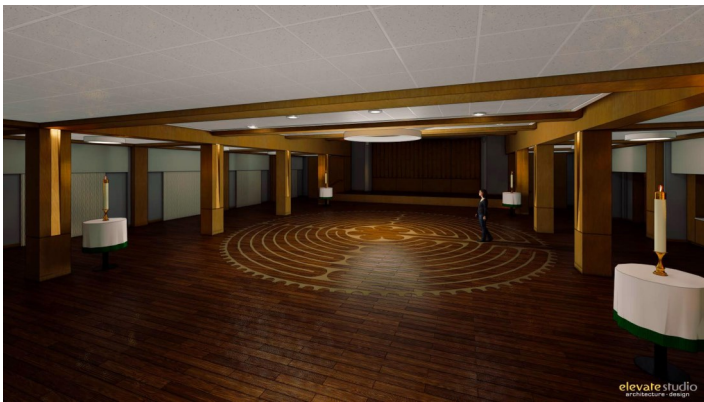
CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

On Sunday, January 21, 2024, a special meeting of the congregation of The Peoples Church will be held after the 10:30 a.m. service. This special meeting will be for the purpose of voting on the proposed Capital Campaign.

Those who will be out of town, or are physically unable to attend this congregational meeting on January 21 can pick up a 'Request for Absentee Ballot' at the church Welcome Desk, or have one mailed upon request. Those who are subscribed to the church's weekly email newsletters also have the option to scroll down in those emails to the Capital Campaign announcement and print out their own ballot request at their convenience.



Get a glimpse at some of the renovation projects proposed in the Capital Campaign in the renderings below. To learn more about the proposed Capital Campaign and these projects, please visit www.thepeopleschurch.com/capital-campaign-1.



CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

SUNDAY SCHOOL: Participation in Sunday School has been booming! We are so pleased to welcome all our new Sunday School kiddos.

For the past several weeks, students have been practicing the Lord's Prayer each week. In October and November, students were busy reading stories from Genesis and working on outreach projects, including cards for the Thanksgiving baskets the church organized, as well as a fall wreath art project for the residents of Burcham.

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT: This year's pageant is "The Reluctant Innkeeper." Rehearsals started in September when Carol Choir resumed. We look forward to putting on the pageant during the 10:30 service on Sunday, December 10. Our annual cookie party will follow the service. If you are interested in donating cookies to the cookie party, please contact me by phone or by email.

VALENTINES OUTREACH CARDS & CARE PACKAGES: Starting in January, Sunday School students will make cards to include in care packages that get delivered to elderly or homebound members of our church. We will need volunteers to make baked goods and to deliver the care packages. Baked goods are due by February 11 so delivery can take place that week.

Please reach out to me for more information, or to volunteer for any of these programs and activities by calling (517) 332-4447, or by emailing me at ahayes-murray@thepeopleschurch.com.

Peace and Blessings,
-Alexa Hayes-Murray, Children's Ed. Director

PEOPLES CHURCH PRESCHOOL

Congratulations to Peoples Church Preschool for achieving national accreditation once again for 2023! The preschool has been continually nationally accredited since 1998. Every four years the preschool staff spends a year preparing classroom and program portfolios for validators from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and then goes through classroom, program, operations, and policy review and observations. In October, we were granted national accreditation through 2028.

Congratulations to Assistant Director Michelle Clingenpeel and Office Administrator Lindsey Bramlet for their work anniversaries of working for the Preschool for 20 years and 10 years respectively. Both milestones were achieved this fall.

-Dana Johnson, Preschool Director



EARTH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE

Make your holiday shopping a “just” experience for all. Buying Fair Trade products provides the creators — farmers, laborers, and artisans — fair prices and stable incomes. This approach also reduces poverty, creates better working conditions, and promotes environmentally sustainable practices. It’s a just and good deal for all!

Choose earth-friendly gifts that keep giving, such as the following examples: a shampoo bar, a package of wooden clothes pins to use instead of plastic “chip clips,” jams or other preserves from local farmers, a roll of bamboo toilet paper from ‘Who Gives a Crap,’ a bracelet made of plastic recovered from an ocean, a bamboo toothbrush, a packet of seeds for native plants or wildflowers. Sustainable gifts spark good conversation.

Purchase children’s gifts with sustainability in mind. Will the toy sustain the child’s interest? Is it made of sustainable materials? Will it be something that can eventually be passed along to another child?

We’ve been learning to take our own reusable bags to the grocery store. The same principle works in retail stores. Carry in your own bags, politely decline the plastic ones provided by the store, and tell the clerks you are cutting down on single-use plastic. It’s your gift to the planet.

If purchasing clothes for Christmas gifts, read the labels. Avoid fossil-fuel-based synthetics (polyester, nylon, acrylic, spandex, lycra). When washed, the synthetics release microplastics that enter the water systems and then the food chain, harming marine life and ultimately humans. Choose items made of natural fibers (organic cotton, linen, wool, silk, hemp, bamboo), recycled fibers, or sustainable plant-based materials.

Thinking big this Christmas? Consider appliances, solar panels, a tankless water heater, low-flow water-saving faucets and toilets, replacement windows, additional insulation, LED lights, or even an electric car. Prioritize decisions that contribute to energy efficiency. Upgrade your house to care for our home: Earth.

Finally and most importantly, give presence, not just presents. Give an adventure — an experience that can be shared, talked about, and remembered long after the usual “stuff” has been covered over in the landfill.

Tips offered by the United Methodist Creation Justice movement

FROM OUR FACILITIES DIRECTOR

The internet is something that we use at The Peoples Church every day. As more devices are connected to the internet, networking systems need to be improved to handle the demand. With video conferences increasing in popularity, and more people connecting to the internet, there is a demand for faster internet connectivity throughout our church. The preschool uses the Wi-Fi every day to use software via iPads and laptops to track the children. By having better internet connectivity, students will be able to study in all corners of the building.

Lack of Wi-Fi and slow internet connection throughout the building led us to revamp our system. This allows simplicity in adding future devices, and includes Wi-Fi access points, cameras, and other devices. We replaced our firewall, NVR, and four switches. Housing the security camera NVR in-house has freed up bandwidth for faster internet speeds and reduced management fees going forward.

Some other projects we have redone in order to improve our networking in the church include the ceilings. We have redone the hallway ceilings outside the church office and on second-floor. In total, almost 4,000 square feet of ceiling was replaced. A new 2x2 suspended ceiling with LED light fixtures replaced the tongue and groove ceiling with fluorescent lights. This made running the new data cabling possible as we are now able to access above the ceiling.

Zack Matthews, Facilities Director

FINE ARTS COMMITTEE

Holiday Concert

The Michigan State University Brass will perform a concert of holiday, classical, and popular music at The Peoples Church on Sunday, December 10 at 7 p.m. This perennial family-favorite event, which is sponsored by The Peoples Church Fine Arts Committee, will include talented student musicians and their professors from the MSU College of Music.

The program will feature the top quintets from each of the freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate classes. Each quintet includes two trumpets, a horn, trombone, and tuba. The concert will also include performances by other brass combinations. Following performances by each of the individual classes, all the musicians join together to close out the concert with rousing renditions of familiar Christmas songs.

The performance is free of charge, and at intermission concert-goers will be treated to an offering of Christmas cookies and hot beverages provided by the Fine Arts Committee. Come join us for a wonderful evening of holiday music. Bring the family and invite your friends!

New Art Exhibit at The Peoples Church

If you ever sat in a theater marveling at the set design, costumes or scenery and wondered how it all was created, the Fine Arts Committee's new exhibit provides an inside look at theatrical design at its finest.

'The World of the Play: A Creative Process' offers a glimpse of behind-the-scenes design and technology from past and present MSU Department of Theatre productions and class work from faculty and students. It includes an assortment of pieces in both theoretical and practical formats. Ranging from costumes and masks to scenic models and renderings, as well as faux scenic painting, lighting design, and stage properties, this exhibition captures the creative process of theatrical design from page to stage.

The unique theatrical art display was created by a team of three designers from the MSU Theatre Department: Design & Technology, including Kirk A. Domer, Professor of Scene Design; Karen Kangas-Preston, Senior Academic Specialist of Costume Design; and Thalia Lara, MFA in Theatre – Design Candidate.

The new exhibit will be on display in the halls around the church Sanctuary, the Rotunda, the Thomson case, and Friendship Hall until March 7. Pick up a catalog for the exhibit across from the Welcome Desk.

If you would like to know more about theatrical design, come to the Voices of the Community presentation by Kirk Domer on January 7. He will speak about the process of designing and producing the sets, lighting design, scenery, and costumes for a theatrical production. He will also answer your questions about the current exhibit and the inspiration behind it.

NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

	<p>Keep Up with Our Denominational News!</p> <p>Subscribe to our denominations' newsletters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• www.umnews.org/en/• michiganumc.org/subscribe/• ucc.org/news/• www.michucc.org/news• www.abc-usa.org/news/• abcofmichigan.flocknote.com• www.pcusa.org/blogs-eneewsletters/• lakemichiganpresbytery.org/news-events/ <p>Or follow our denominations on social media!</p>	
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Merry Christmas

The pastors, staff, and the council of elders at
The Peoples Church wish you and yours
many blessings and a very Merry Christmas.

“For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son given;”

Isaiah 9:6



Holiday Concert

Meridian Community Band

The Peoples Church of East Lansing

December 11 | 3 p.m.

Free
Admission

THE SHAKY STRING BAND IN CONCERT



Wednesday, December 6

7 p.m.

In The Peoples Church
Social Hall

EDGEWOOD VILLAGE CHRISTMAS GIFT PROJECT

Share Christmas joy by providing a gift for a child at Edgewood Village. If you would like to purchase a gift for a child, or if you would like to support this program financially, please contact Emily Anderson via e-mail, anderson2910@icloud.com, or by phone, (517) 648-0632. She will provide all the information you will need: gender and age of the child, item the child wishes, and details for delivering the gift.



CHRISTMAS POINSETTIAS

Don't miss the opportunity to dedicate a poinsettia in the sanctuary this Christmas season. Order your poinsettia before December 10 by signing up at the Welcome Desk, or by emailing office@thepeopleschurch.com. Poinsettias are \$20 each. They will be on display until Christmas Eve.



