



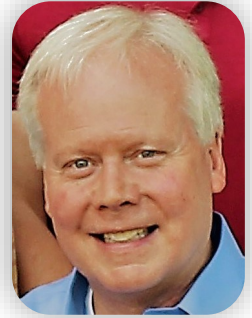
# The Allegan Congregationalist

July 2023

Our church exists to introduce people to Jesus Christ and train those who already know Him.

## Memories of Baptisms

by Greg Carlson



### Calendar Events:

- 7/10, 11, 12  
Joint VBS at the  
River Church  
from 6-8:30 PM
- 7/15 Unity in the  
Community  
Concert
- 7/23 Quarterly  
Meeting
- 7/30 Annual  
Picnic & Outdoor  
Service

In order to illustrate the meaning of baptism, I want to share some stories of those I've been privileged to baptize both in the Upper Peninsula and in South West Michigan.

The first baptism I remember was my own at 7 years of age. The pastor took me down into the water and pulled me up saying, "God bless you, son." In my mind, God was pleased with me just as he was with his Son when Jesus was baptized. God said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

The first baptism I conducted was in a lake on a chilly November day in Curtis, MI. Roger Shoemaker, Jim and Eric Mongene insisted I baptize them – they didn't want to wait for spring. So down into the frigid water they went, obeying Christ's call to baptism without delay. The photos after showed the four of us with blue lips, quivering in the cold. The rest of the church family got a kick out of that, Yoopers as they were.

Danny Rowan was an addict who dealt drugs on the streets of Wichita, KS. Several of his friends had overdosed or been murdered. His father and mother prayed for him from their home in Michigan. He finally came home to lay on his parent's couch close to death when he trusted in Christ as his Savior. He was eventually able to go out to breakfast with me in my convertible and soon came to church to tell his story of salvation. A few weeks later, as he identified with Christ's death and resurrection, Danny's baptism was symbolic of his spiritual deadness replaced by new spiritual life in Christ (see Romans 6-8). He and his parents were so full of joy.

Howard Smith trusted in Christ during retirement after, as he put it, "playing church" all his life. He attended church for social reasons but didn't know Christ as his Savior. He talked about some hard days when he thought about taking his own life by steering into the path of an oncoming logging truck. But now he was committed to living his life as a new creation. When I brought him up from the baptismal water, Howard was so joyful that he leaped up and down, raising his arms in sort of a chicken dance, hooking his arm in mine and twirling us around. He was so happy to have found the great treasure of Christ and new life.

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Jim MacMeekin was the Warden (administrator) of the State Correctional Facility in Newberry, MI. He took a call at his desk from his wife Tay who was sitting in the twisted metal of her SUV after being hit head on by another vehicle on Highway U.S. 2. Now she was calling on her cell phone to say goodbye to her husband. Both Jim and Tay thought she was dying but she made it to the ER Room, then entered two years of rehab before she could walk and use her hands. During that time, I visited with them for prayer. They both professed Christ as their Savior and wanted to publicly identify with Him and His church as they were baptized.

Karyl Mulder told me she wanted to be baptized by immersion but was deathly afraid of water. She had never had her head under water. She had always put off being baptized even in her retirement years but wanted to follow Christ in obedience. I encouraged her from 1 Thessalonians 5:24 – “Faithful is he who calls you who also will do it.” I assured her that “If Christ brings you to it, he’ll see you through it.” So into the lake we went. She confidently quoted the verse over and over, keeping her phobia at bay. Down she went with head under water, then up again full of joy, saying, “Christ did so much for me. I wanted to do this for him.”

There are too many baptism stories for me to tell here. It is always a time of blessing for the family, church family, and God himself when a believer identifies with Him in a public way. If you’ve not followed the Lord in making a personal statement of faith through baptism, I’d encourage you to let me know of your desire and join us for the morning service, baptism and picnic at Little John Lake on Sunday, July 30, at 10:30AM.

## An Update on Our Journey

by Todd Wagner

With summer in full swing, we take to the great outdoors to enjoy the warmth of the sun, celebrate accomplishments, and gather with friends for outdoor activities, especially barbeques. Yep, there’s nothing like getting together for a good outdoor BBQ, where we wait in anticipation (sometimes impatiently I might add) for that entrée that comes directly from the grill or smoker. I think you know what I am talking about, and it certainly isn’t just hot dogs and hamburgers. It’s the entrée of slowly roasted and basted beef briskets, pork butts, and ribs.

Any good outdoor chef will tell you that when you embark on preparing a good barbeque, you better prepare yourself for a lot of time, effort, and patience. Certain foods that go on the grill or smoker just cannot be rushed. For instance, if you just toss a rack of ribs on the grill with hopes of eating in just 15-20 minutes, you will most likely end up disappointed. The meat will be tough and lack flavor. To cook a great rack of ribs, or any other meat for that matter, takes time and preparation. The meat must be cared for, prepped, seasoned, marinated, and cooked slowly at the right temperature to achieve the perfection the chef is looking for. You know, the kind that is tender, tasty, and has you desiring more.

Six months ago, church leadership and the pastoral search committee worked together to seek out an interim pastor to serve here at First Congregational Church. Time was taken and options for calling someone were carefully explored. We literally took to heart the saying, “Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” While that took some time, we

### Perfection takes time and patience!



## An Update on our Journey (continued)

arrived where God had led us and called Pastor Greg Carlson as our interim pastor. He wasn't just to be an interim, his call is to serve as an "intentional" interim pastor: someone who carefully looks at our church and works with the people of the church to fix problems, help with healing, and develop the church and its people to grow. Currently, Pastor Carlson has been with us for just six months and had his first evaluation by the leadership to determine if we were on the right track.

Last week, I stood before our congregation to give everyone an update on how things were going. I did this because I felt it was wise to keep everyone updated on things going on within the church, but also to be completely transparent about the work that was being accomplished. Many times, the average churchgoer doesn't know what is going on behind the scenes and can ask themselves, "What's that man doing behind the curtain" (Wizard of Oz). While only a couple of people have asked how things were going (and rightly so), I felt this was a good time to share what that man has been doing behind the curtain.

As I explained from the podium, I view Pastor Carlson's time here in phases. I also don't count December towards his work here since he was thrown into the fire during one of the busiest theological times of the liturgical year. My intent in this article is to "show" you how things are progressing and the vision for the future. While I/we may have a visionary timeline, I/we must remind ourselves that we're to submit to God's timing, as His timing is always perfect. That said, here we go –

**Phase One** – This is the introductory phase where the pastor can begin to settle in. While Pastor Greg needed to know how things operate around here, he also needed to know with whom he would be operating. This time was given to Greg to slowly get to know the people of the First Congregational Church. He was able to accomplish this by meeting and conversing with people on Sundays, along with scheduling times to come and visit with them, either at home or another location. He has also made time to get to know our shut-ins and minister to their spiritual needs. This is something I strongly desired to do, but just couldn't fit into my schedule of responsibilities here, at my secular job, school, and family. I am thankful that Pastor Greg can share the yoke and minister to the needs of the people in our church. Plus, in addition to that, he has met and worked with church leadership (Deacons and Trustees) to determine how things go here, and he has picked these things up rather well and adjusted for the benefit of the church.

**Phase Two** – This phase is where Pastor Greg will roll up his sleeves and get to work. Before this church can think about calling another person to shepherd God's faithful, it needs to have a firm foundation. Because of our doctrinal beliefs, we have the greatest cornerstone any church could have, Jesus Christ. We hold firmly to the teaching of Scripture and that helps keep us secure. The rest of the foundation to which I speak is that of our F.C.C. doctrine, our constitution, bylaws, etc. These documents and statements are what help a church stay steady. It was determined that before anything else should be done, this foundational work should be examined, and if needed, changed, modified, and strengthened. If



Thanks to Patricia  
**DEAR GOD, PLEASE GIVE ME PATIENCE ...  
 AND I NEED IT RIGHT NOW!!!**

## An Update on our Journey (continued)

by Todd Wagner

you read what we currently have, you should be able to clearly see some of the things that need to be addressed beyond the grammatical errors. Currently, Pastor Greg is well on his way through these documents, adding suggestions and comments for the church to consider. This work began roughly around April, and we hope to finalize it by August.

**Phase Three** – This phase consists of conducting a SWOT analysis. An analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) is essentially a detailed pros-and-cons list. It helps you gather your thoughts about the state of your organization (our church) and organize them. During this time, a church survey would be conducted (if needed) and tools would be implemented for church development. Now, the good news here is that the church leadership and search committee already did some of this work while looking for an interim. This enables Pastor Greg to have a great lead on this endeavor. I would project this would occur sometime toward the end of summer and be completed in a few months.

**Phase Four** – I envision this phase as the time when Pastor Greg leads the church leadership and the pastoral search committee through the actual pastor search process. This phase may take some time, as it should. Like that succulent choice of meat off the BBQ we desire, we want to carefully examine everyone who would be a viable candidate. This means being patient, faithful, and forbearing in our desire to call someone. We must place complete faith in God to lead us, for the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts and point us to the person God has chosen to serve here at F.C.C. During this time, I would ask everyone to be faithful in prayer, expressing your needs and desires to God.

**Phase Five** – This is what I would call the transition phase. This will occur once the church has come to a decision on whom they would like to call to lead the First Congregational Church. It will be a time for “pastor-next” to move into his role here, to become settled, and for Pastor Greg to slowly pass the torch of spiritual leadership to the new pastor. It also allows time for the church to get to know the new pastor. It also allows us time to be certain that this is the pastor for us. Once all matters are settled, then Pastor Greg’s time here will be completed.

Though I mentioned some timelines, I don’t care to establish any firm timeline for this process. Instead, work as the Holy Spirit moves and guides us. Some things will be easier than others and come faster than others. Again, all good things come from God and His goodwill. God’s timing is always perfect, His choices are always perfect, and we will receive what He feels we need. Let us praise God and give him all the glory!

**Vacation Bible School is back on July 10, 11, & 12**

**from 6 PM to 8:30 PM.**

We’re partnering once again with Christ Community and The River Church. Pre-registration is encouraged for kids from age 4 through 5th grade.

**We’ll be learning that God’s Plan for us is Jesus!**





### Our 165th Anniversary!

Photo credit: Elsie Jones

On Sunday, June 11, FCC celebrated our 165th Anniversary. In everything, God is faithful. His beloved church, not a building, but a people, celebrated his goodness. Period dress was encouraged. Pictured at right: Theresa Prolo, Elaine Cochran, Sue Belden, Ivy Belden, Sarah Belden.



Pastor Greg Carlson's message from Matthew 16:18 encouraged us to remember the chief cornerstone of the church, Jesus Christ. He is the builder and the foundation who purchased the church with His own blood.

*I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

Photos and memorabilia were displayed in the lounge.



*And the celebration continued!*  
The Harris family hosted fellowship time after the service in honor of Geraldine's 90th Birthday!



## Ladies' Retreat Recap

*You are loved as you are. You are not alone.*

*We always have hope.*

On the weekend of June 3, Gull Lake Ministries hosted their 2023 Women's Conference and four ladies from FCC attended. Bible teacher, Mary Shannon, flew in from Arizona to the beautiful campus at Hickory Corners to fill our hearts with laughter and a lesson from the Word. We need laughter, because life is hard. Mary lost her son in 2020 and wove her testimony with the story of Hannah (1 Samuel). In Hannah's culture, being barren was considered as good as dead. According to Walter Bruggman, "Barrenness is an effective metaphor for hopelessness. There is no foreseeable future and no human power to invent a future." Today, the world will tell us we are not enough (spend some time on any social network.) The world said the same thing to Jesus. God loves us as we are, not as we should be. Our worth is not found in what we do, produce, or achieve. It is not found in the opinion of men. It is found in the heart of God. Our heart is only safe when filled by God first. Only He can fill our cup. At the burning bush, God introduced himself to Moses as I AM. Mary shared that is the best name she could ever know. "Whatever it is you need, I AM. I AM the source of all things. You need a friend, I AM. You need a hiding place, I AM. A strong tower, a redeemer, a savior, a King, I AM that I AM. I AM all you need. Anything that is out of your control, is still in mine." In the midst of her deep grief, the truth of heaven was made real to Mary. To Whom else would she go? Nowhere. Nothing, neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate her from God. Mary concluded, "The Word of God is the anchor to my soul. The Word of God reminds me that I have a God that loves me so much He gave His only Son. And that is why I have the hope of a future, not only with Jesus, but, with my boy. Don't ever lose hope. Because our Hope is a Person. Our Hope is Jesus Christ."

To hear her story or others from the conference, search for Gull Lake Ministries podcast on Spotify.

## Community Event: Free Concert

You're invited to a free family friendly event.

Join musicians: Tommy Brandt, 5ive, JP got Saved, and

Jean Watson on Saturday, July 15.

The concert begins at 7 PM on the Riverfront Plaza.

# REMINDER

There will be a quarterly church meeting after the service on Sunday, July 22. Board chairs please have a verbal report prepared.

WESTERN DAYS MINISTRIES & CHANGED IN CHRIST PRESENT

Tommy Brandt 5ive JP got SAVED Jean Watson

Unity in the Community 7:00PM

SATURDAY JULY 15

CHANGED in Christ # come join us

FREE FAMILY FRIENDLY EVENT

223 RIVERFRONT PLAZA, ALLEGAN, MI 49010



*Happy Anniversary*

7/24 Mark & Carrie Lovett

7/13 Leah VanOrder

7/23 Sarah Belden

7/18 Alida Letts

7/29 Pam Johnson

7/18 Beren Klein

7/20 Annika Hansen

7/20 Evie Klein



*July*  **2023**

Please call the office if there is an anniversary or birthday you would like to add to the list.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
2 10:30 Worship CE Mtg	3	4	5	6 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Dinner	7 8 Food Warehouse	8 8:30 Men's Breakfast 
9 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship Trustee Mtg	10  6 VBS Begins	11 6 VBS 	12 10 Grief Group 6 VBS  5:45 Prayer Mtg	13 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Dinner 7 Diaconate Mtg	14 8 Food Warehouse	15 7 Unity in the Community Concert
16 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship	17	18	19 5:45 Prayer Mtg	20 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	21 8 Food Warehouse	22
23 9 Sunday School 10:30 Worship 	24	25	26 10 Grief Group 5:45 Prayer Mtg	27 9:45 & 12:30 Food Warehouse 3-5:30 CK Take-out Dinner	28 8 Food Warehouse	29
30 10:30 Little John Lake Pavillion 	31					<b>LITURGIST:</b> Jeff P. <b>GREETER:</b> Jeff B.

## The First Congregational Church of Allegan

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Website: [fccofallegan.weebly.com](http://fccofallegan.weebly.com)

**Worship with us on Sundays at 10:30 AM!**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

## Fight Fear & Hold Fast

youversion devotional

It seems there's always something to worry about: natural disasters, current (and potential) wars, shaky finances, relational brokenness, unmet expectations, divisions, our kids, our jobs, our health, and more. We can't always control what happens to us, but we can choose our response. You can constantly be worried, negative, anxious, fearful, critical, and bitter. Or, you can be known for seeing the good in people, choosing joy, offering encouragement, looking for God's fingerprints, and always finding something for which to be grateful. In either case, the cycle feeds itself. Like hummingbirds are attracted to sweet things while vultures scour the earth for dead things, we will always find what we are looking for. Why? Because darkness and light both exist. Good and evil are everyday realities. And we must decide who we'll trust, and how we'll spend our lives.

There are plenty of scary things happening in the world, but—because of Jesus—there is always good. Even on our darkest days, Jesus is the light of the world. He's already carrying the weight of the world on His shoulders, which means we don't have to. He has already made a way where there was no way, which means we can follow the path He has blazed. The Holy Spirit is already compelling us and leading us and teaching us and comforting us, which means we're not alone.

The hope we have in Christ isn't just wishful thinking or positive vibes. It's hope that's based on truth—on facts and faith. So what can we do? The Bible says: "Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up." Proverbs 12:25 NIV We can fight anxiousness with hope. We can ward off worry with truth-filled encouragement. We can resist fear by offering life-giving words. We can refuse to settle for living scared. We can expose the darkness to light. So the next time you feel anxiety and fear weighing down your heart, ask God for help and encouragement. Remember, He is closer than a prayer away.