



Trinity In Touch

July 2026

Pastor Mike.....	1-2
Ministry Spotlight.....	3
Outreach & Advocacy.....	4
Church Family	4
Engage.....	5-10
Youth	9
Community Ministries.....	10

Mission

Our Mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Vision

We strive to be an inclusive faith community that extends God's love in our neighborhood and world.

Core Values

**Diversity & Inclusiveness:
Seeking to affirm every person as a child of God.**

**Scripture, Tradition, Experience and Reason:
Searching for truth in our faith community.**

**Peace & Justice:
Striving for positive social change in our neighborhood and world.**

**Trinity UMC
1100 Lake Drive SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49506
616.456.7168
office@grtumc.org**

Behind the Worship: Rituals and Relevance

When you are young, you don't spend a lot of time thinking about what rituals and symbols mean. You take them for granted. Like standing up with your classmates every morning to recite the pledge of allegiance. It was just what you did. A simple, patriotic thing that students could do for their country. Most of us never thought any deeper on it than that.

It was the same with taking off your hat, putting your hand over your heart, and singing the national anthem at the start of a ball game. Personally, I enjoyed those rituals. They helped me feel connected to something bigger than myself. In almost exactly the same way as singing hymns in church, or praying the Lord's Prayer together.

And that is where the danger lies. It is far too easy to conflate the two. Love of God and love of country. To wrap our faith in the flag of a nation and treat them as one and the same. They aren't.

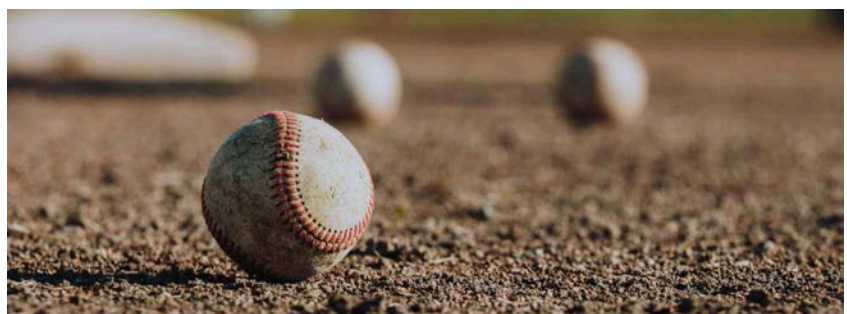
The Christian faith does not belong to any one nation. It bows to no flag. Its allegiance is to Christ alone. The moment we, as Christians, take a step back and actually think about the rituals and symbols, we can see the danger of letting nationalism take root in our congregations, and how hard it becomes to untangle once it has.

Add to that the political division in our country, the fact that one party has, for all practical purposes, weaponized patriotism and national pride, it becomes even more important for us, as followers of Jesus, to distance ourselves from toxic politics and from the reorienting of patriotic symbols into symbols of fear and isolation.

It got to the point where I felt that singing the national anthem would be a betrayal of my faith and my principles. So I stopped singing it at ball games. I stopped flying the flag outside my house. Not because I had stopped loving my country, but because those symbols had started to mean something I did not recognize, and did not want to be confused with.

Then, at the end of June, a bunch of us from Trinity went to a Whitecaps game. As game time drew near, we were asked to stand and remove our hats for the national anthem. A young woman stepped up to lead us, and when they announced her name, I smiled instantly. I felt some pride. I knew this person. My girls had done musical theater with her. And in that moment, something clicked.

Psalm 145 says God's compassion is over all that God has made. Not just the people who look like us, worship like us, or vote like us. All. That kind of love does not recognize a border. It is bigger than any nation could ever be, and it owes no allegiance to a flag or an anthem. That is the love I owe to God first, and it is not the same love I have for my country. It was never supposed to be.



But in those stands, listening to that friend of my daughters sing, I noticed something smaller and more human happening too. National pride, at its best, isn't about borders, or militaries, or political parties. It is about the people. Pretty much exactly like the church. Out of many, one. Not one party, not one religion, but many people, doing the hard, ordinary work of trying to belong to each other.

sang the anthem that day. Not because I have made peace with what the flag and the anthem have come to mean in the mouths of people who use them to attack and diminish others. I haven't. But because those things can only be stolen from us if we allow it, and I wanted to reclaim a little of that innocent love of country from my youth. The kind that has nothing to do with political parties and everything to do with the friends and neighbors who make up this country of immigrants and refugees.

Love God with everything you have. That love bows to nothing else. And love your country too. But love it for what's actually worth loving about it. Not the flag. Not the symbols or rituals. The people standing next to you, hats off, singing.

Grace and peace,



Pastor Mike

Queer & Christian Event Review

On June 9th, we welcomed our community for a meaningful and engaging evening with pastor, theologian, and scholar Brandan Robertson for a conversation around his book, *Queer & Christian*. With **nearly 70 attendees**, the event created space for thoughtful dialogue about faith, identity, belonging, and the intersections of spirituality and sexuality/gender identity. The conversation continued during a reception filled with connection, reflection, and community-building. Attendees also created more than **20 affirmation cards** for Point of Pride to support members of the Trans and nonbinary community. A heartfelt thank you goes to all of our volunteers whose hard work, hospitality, and care helped make this event such a success. We were even featured in the Spotlight of Vitality in the MIFaith conference newsletter!



Ministry Spotlight

Discipleship Volunteers: Councils, Leaders & More

Last September, we kicked off the 2026-2027 program year with Discipleship Sunday. Pastor Mike & Laura co-preached a message about discipleship. What is it anyway? We decided it's safe people & safe spaces, it's community & relationships, it's classes & small groups for kids, youth & adults, it's mission trips & justice work, it's faith in action, it's simply choosing to let your life resemble Jesus.

Each of us is on our own discipleship journey, but we're also on a journey together as a community of disciples who believe the gospel is not just something to hear, it's something to live. And there are many folks living out that mission here at Trinity right now. Specifically, we want to use the Ministry Spotlight this month to thank our 2025-2026 Discipleship volunteers...

Adult Ministries Council: This team meets monthly and helps create opportunities for adults to search for truth, strive for justice, and live out God's purpose for their life. They plan Adult Faith Formation classes, help facilitate & teach, and provide leadership for the FoRT group. Thank you Penny Murray, Steve Murray & Merrita Tumonong.

Adult Faith Formation: A special thank you to all the others leaders who also helped facilitate adult faith formation classes & events this past year including but not limited to: Jenna Chisholm, Jann Myers, Kip Smalligan, Ruth Stevens, Sue Vanderlaan & Pastor Mike.

Children's Ministry Council: This team meets several times a year with the goal of showing all children the amazing love of God and empowering them to love themselves and others. They provide feedback on Sunday morning faith formation schedules, help plan special events, and assist with visioning. Thank you Jackie Garvin, Kristen Gifford, Ellen Mange & Sue Sundheimer.

Children & Worship Leaders: This team helps schedule, plan curriculum for, and facilitate our PreK to 2nd grade faith formation class. They show up for our younger kiddos with compassion, patience, and thoughtfulness each week! Thank you Vicki Blubaugh, Greg Longworth & Annie Slabaugh.

Kids Connect Leaders: This team helps schedule, plan curriculum for, and facilitate our 3rd to 5th grade faith formation class. They bring just the right balance of fun & faith formation! Thank you Jane Hazle, Amy Hineline & Jessie Takala.

TrinityKids Leaders: These volunteers assist with gym & game time during faith formation hour for kiddos ages PreK to 5th grade. They bring energy, a willingness to play, and just the right amount of structure to our fellowship time. Thank you to all our TrinityKids volunteers including but not limited to: Carmen Andert, Carol Ashcroft, Becky & Matt Bosker, Jenna Chisholm, Amy Hineline, Ben Johns, Dani Patrick, Tori & Brian Szubinski, Jessie Takala, and Karrmin Temple.

Youth Group: These folks assisted Youth Director Annie Slabaugh, serving as second adults in Youth Group or as guest speakers in our What's Your Story series. Their willingness to have deep discussion & playful moments with our 6th to 12th graders is so appreciated! Thank you Carol Ashcroft, Bonnie Czuhajewski, Greg Longworth, Penny Murray, Stephanie Myers, Dani Patrick, Eve Ricketts, Jessie Takala, Merrita Tumonong, David & Ellie Walborn-Henry, and Pastor Mike.

These lists are only the beginning though... other volunteers assist with special events & programs, help prepare marketing materials, organize, pull & put away supplies (looking at you, Carol Ashcroft), and so much more. Thank you to ALL OF YOU who help create community here at Trinity – in Discipleship and beyond. It is an honor to be in ministry with each of you. For those of you reading this and wondering how to get involved, please reach out to me. We have a place here for you and we want you to find connection, build relationships, and grow closer to God & each other.

Love, Laura Johns (Director of Discipleship)





Trinity UMC celebrates the beautiful diversity of the human community. We affirm the sacred worth of each person as a recipient of God's love and grace. As followers of Christ, we are an open and inclusive congregation. We live this out by welcoming into full participation all persons regardless of gender, race, national origin, physical or mental abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, marital status or economic condition.

Church Family

ALTAR FLOWERS

July 5 - Laura Slade in memory of Joan Patterson.

July 12 - Susan Ilka in memory of her husband, Richard.

July 19 - Steve & Vicki Blubaugh in honor of their 45th wedding anniversary.

July 26 - OPEN

Reach out to the office at office@grtumc.org if you would like any of the open July dates.

CONDOLENCES

Condolences to Stephanie Wiltse and the Wiltse family as Ric passed away over the weekend on June 20, 2026.

stephanie.wiltse@gmail.com

1046 San Juan SE

East Grand Rapids, MI 49506



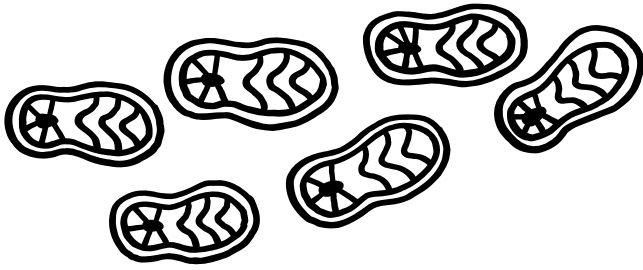
Outreach & Advocacy

Thank you to Natalie Wiersma, Kathy Zeichman, Steve Murray, Cynthia Swedish, Jim Zeichman, and Kip Smalligan for cleaning and putting final touches on a renovated home for a new family through Inner City Christian Federation (ICCF) Community Homes.

When you talk with anyone about affordable housing solutions in Grand Rapids, ICCF is always a part of the conversation. We enjoyed doing a small part to advance their work and mission.



Opportunities to Engage



Designed for Trinity families & friends ages 18 & up, **God's Naturehood: Adult Edition** is a great opportunity to visit a new park, get to know members of your Trinity family better, and get your daily steps in. The details for our next two summer walks are below:

Friday, July 17 from 1:00pm-2:00pm

Dwight Lydell Park at 4040 Leland Ave NE, Comstock Park, MI 49321.

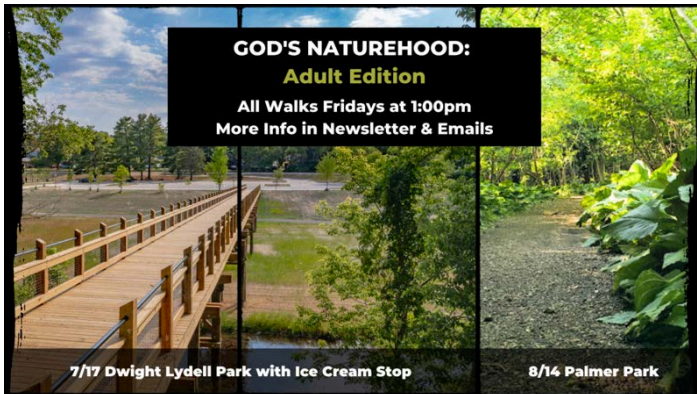
Park in large park lot on northwest side of the park and meet near the large open shelter with bathrooms. We'll walk several loops of the short paved trail and include an ice cream stop at one of the local ice cream spots!

Friday, August 14 from 1:00pm-2:00pm

Palmer Park at 1275 52nd St SW, Wyoming, MI 49509.

Enter off of 52nd Street SW. You'll drive through part of the golf course before turning left on the first available park drive and parking in the spots near Picnic Area B1. Laura will share more detailed directions with maps and photos via email.

RSVPs are requested but not required. Contact Laura Johns at ljohns@grtumc.org to RSVP or to get added to the email list for additional details.





Acolyte Updates

New Acolyte Training

Sunday, August 17 at 11:30am
Meet in Playgrounds

Sign Up for Summer & Fall 2026

SignUpGenius Now Available at:
<https://tinyurl.com/TUMC-AcolyteFall2026>

Is your child interested in helping to light the candles on Sunday mornings? Attend a 30 minute training together on **Sunday, August 16 from 11:30am-12:00pm!** Kiddos must be at least Pre-K to acolyte. Grown-ups need to attend the training with their children as there are important jobs for them too. Meet Ms. Laura in the Playgrounds after worship to find out more!

Already have a trained acolyte? Sign them up for summer & fall using our SignUpGenius:
<https://tinyurl.com/TUMC-AcolyteFall2026>

Questions? Email Laura Johns at ljohns@grtumc.org.



Monthly Mahjong

First & Third Wednesday of Each Month at 1:00pm

Gather in Fireside on the first & third Wednesday of each month for an opportunity to practice your mahjong skills or learn new ones.

All ages & abilities are welcome - beginner to expert!
Contact the Office for more information.

Now Twice a Month!

Additional small groups meet during the program year (September – May) so watch future newsletters for opportunities to get involved!

Calling all Pre-K to 5th Grade kiddos! Come upstairs to the TrinityKids Room after Children's Moment on select Sundays this summer for a class with Ms. Laura, Ms. Annie, and other Protection Policy certified leaders.

We'll learn about what God has made by examining different parts of creation, digging into amazing science facts, and (when weather permits) spending time outside exploring the Naturehood right around our building! There will be crafts, games, science, stories, and more.



Grown-ups: Pick-up will be in the TrinityKids Room upstairs at 11:15am. If service ends early, please come check-out your kiddo before heading outside for Lemonade Stand.

Sunday Kids Edition will be offered June 14 & 21, July 12 & 19, August 9 & 16. Weekly programming will return in September.

Questions? Contact Laura Johns at l.johns@grtumc.org.

Call to Ministry! We still need grown-ups to help facilitate this class. It's a great opportunity to get to know our Trinity kiddos better without a long term commitment. Help out one week this summer or one week a month – it's up to you! Contact Laura for more information.

**TRAVELIN' WITH TRINITY
Summer Camp**

Stay Connected with Your Trinity Family All Summer Long!

WORKBOOK
Activities & Challenges For All Ages

READ PRACTICE CONNECT

Trinity United Methodist Church | Grand Rapids, MI

ALL AGES ACTIVITIES

Hey friend. Yes YOU!
How is your workbook going?
Have you completed badges?
What are you doing next?
Looking forward to hearing all about your summer adventures, and awarding some awesome prizes, at Party in the Park on August 20th!

The graphic is a colorful poster for a summer camp workbook. It features a wooden sign at the top with the title, a central image of children in a park, and a bottom section with three buttons: READ, PRACTICE, and CONNECT. To the right, a grid of small images shows various activities. A large speech bubble on the right contains text about the workbook and a party on August 20th.

Stay connected with your church family this summer as we take you on a journey of reading, practicing, and connecting with the goal of building deeper relationships with each other and with God. Pick a few Summer Camp activities or do them all - the choice is up to you!

Travelin' with Trinity is designed for all ages and for multiple learning styles with the goal of keeping you engaged and inspired all summer long. Get a paper copy in the Narthex or Parlor, print THIS COPY at home, or save THIS DIGITAL COPY for checking off badges virtually. Workbooks are available starting June 7th and are due August 20th.

Finish activities to win prizes! All prizes will be distributed at Party in the Park at Hager Park on Thursday, August 20th. If you cannot attend, select prizes may be available the following Sunday (August 23rd) after worship. See the workbook for more details or contact Laura Johns at l.johns@grtumc.org.



Come on out for a Party in the Park on Thursday, August 20 from 5:30pm-8:30pm at Hager Park in Georgetown Township.

Yes... you read that right! We're heading to a new park this year but the PARTY will be much the same.

Come celebrate all things summer with a delicious BBQ dinner, jamming out with the praise band, and then doing all those fun park things. At Hager Park you can find a smaller playground and a huge all-ages zipline near our site, a lovely walk in the woods, and (across the park) one of the largest wooden playgrounds around.

Trinity has rented the picnic building at Hager so we have an indoor space for music & our BBQ dinner. We will not have access to the inside of the building before 5:00pm so plan to arrive between 5:30pm-6:00pm unless you just want to check out the various trails & playgrounds on your own. The approximate schedule is as follows:

5:00pm-5:45pm:
Setup Crew Arrives & Prepares Building

5:30pm-6:00pm:
Park Activities & Gathering Time

6:00pm-7:00pm:
BBQ Dinner in Picnic Building

7:00pm-7:45pm:
Worship with Praise Band

7:45pm-8:30pm:
Park Activities & Clean-Up

The BBQ dinner will feature hot dogs, brats, and sides. Beverages and tableware will also be provided. Suggested donation of \$8 per person. Pay online ahead of time or bring cash/check to the park.

Haven't been to Hager Park before?

The park is located about 25 minutes southwest of Trinity. The address is: 8212 28th Ave, Georgetown Township, MI 49428.

We have reserved the picnic building which can be found near where the main park drive dead ends. Upon entering the park, continue down the drive past the DeVries & VanderLaan Rooms, the wooden "Age of Discovery Playground," and into the more wooded section of the park. A park map can be found here: <https://miottawa.org/wp-content/uploads/HagerParkMap.pdf>

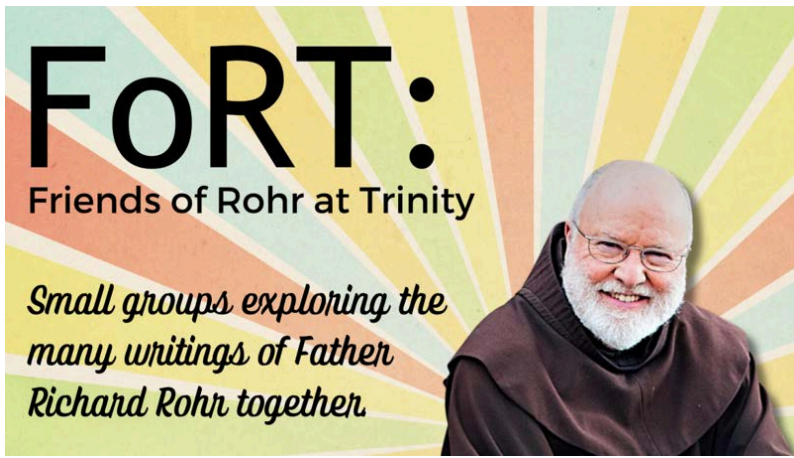
The building does not have air conditioning, so plan to dress for the weather. There will be seating available inside & outside the picnic building. Modern restrooms including barrier-free stalls are connected to the building and the building is fully accessible.

Lend a Hand:

We're looking for a few folks to help out with this event! Bring a baked good for dessert, help with BBQ set-up or clean-up, serve as grill master, or bring a yard game from home. Check out the SignUpGenius here for info: <https://tinyurl.com/TUMC-PITP2026-Volunteers>

RSVPs & Questions:

Contact Laura Johns at l.johns@grtumc.org with questions and to RSVP for dinner. An online registration form is also available that allows you to RSVP, communicate any dietary restrictions, and pay for your dinner(s). Find it here: <https://tinyurl.com/TUMC-PITP2026>



Perhaps you've heard or seen a reference to FoRT (Friends of Rohr at Trinity). We are folks of Trinity who enjoy studying Father Richard Rohr's writings on Sunday & Thursday evenings during the program year. This summer FoRT is finding fun ways to stay connected while our weekly classes are on hiatus. You're invited to join us!

See our Summer Program Flyer for all the details. A PDF copy is available [HERE](#) and paper copies are in the Narthex. Brief details on our two upcoming events are below:

Sunday, July 12 at 5:00pm - [Connect at the Cottage](#)

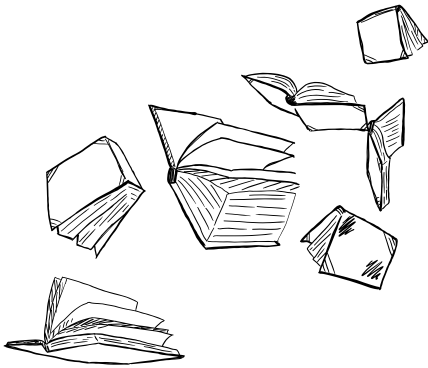
Join Sara Smolenski and Linda Burpee at the Cottage for a Summer Potluck! Linda and Sara will provide brats and burgers including vegetarian options as well as soft drinks, ice tea, etc.

Thursday, August 27 at 7:00pm - [Annual Ice Cream Social](#)

We will wrap our summer up with the 4th Annual FoRT Ice Cream Social on the Trinity Lawn. Bring friends or family as we enjoy cold treats, share about summer adventures, and prepare ourselves for another amazing year! The church will provide paper goods, water, and the ice cream.

FoRT Friends: Please RSVP as soon as possible for both the events above. This helps us with planning for seats & treats and ensures our hosts know what to expect.

If you have questions about upcoming events, FoRT offerings in the summer, or opportunities in the fall, please reach out to the Fort Leadership Team: Laura Johns, Penny Murray, Steve Murray & Merrita Tumonong.



Sacred Justice Book Club

2026-2027

Join us as we dive into a variety of different non-fiction justice titles!

Meetings are every three months on Tuesdays at 7:00pm.
Come for deep conversation, meaningful action, and dessert!

The Sacred Justice Book Club is thrilled to be back again this year for great conversation, deep discussion about activism, and fun fellowship. Our 2026-2027 book list is as follows:

August 4, 2026 | [Radical Inclusion: Seven Steps to Help You Create a More Just Workplace, Home, and World](#) by David Moinina Sengheh

November 3, 2026 | [The Land Is Not Empty: Following Jesus in Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery](#) by Sarah Augustine

February 2, 2027 | [The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together](#) by Heather McGhee
This is a longer book but there is a shorter version adapted to youth readers that could be read instead if you wish. The Library Team hopes that by putting this in the winter, we can all use the colder months to work through this important study of the economic impacts of racism.

May 4, 2027 | [My Body Is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church](#) by Amy Kenny

Join us in the Library at 7:00pm on select Tuesdays. Questions about Sacred Justice Book Club? Contact the Library Team: Laura Johns, Hannah Marshall & Dani Patrick



Milestone Sundays

SHARING MILESTONE MOMENTS
IN THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCH FAMILY

BACKPACK BLESSING - SUNDAY, AUGUST 23

SHARE MILESTONES AT: [TINYURL.COM/TUMCMILESTONE08-2026](https://tinyurl.com/TUMCMilestone08-2026)

STUDENTS & TEACHERS:

BRING YOUR BACKPACK OR SCHOOL BAG FOR BLESSING!



BACK
TO
SCHOOL!

A milestone is a meaningful, memorable moment in the life of an individual, family or community. Here at Trinity, we want to recognize those moments, share them together, and find God's presence in the everyday. We will be lifting up milestones during worship every few months, but we need your help. Let us know if there's a milestone in your life we can celebrate together!

Our third Milestone Sunday of 2026 is August 23 and we will be celebrating any milestones from June to August 2026. Our Milestone Moment will be Blessing Backpacks & Teachers as our children, youth & educators start another school year so bring your backpack or school bag for blessing. We will also post select honorees on the screen and do a group blessing for all honorees.

Share Your Milestone:

Let us know if there's a milestone in your life we can celebrate together! Fill out our online form at <https://tinyurl.com/TUMCMilestone08-2026>, email Laura at Ljohns@grtumc.org, or put a note on your Connection Card.

Well hi, Trinity Friends and Family!

Can you believe it's already July?! This summer just seems to be flying by! I hope that everyone's summers so far have been filled with lots of laughs, good food, and friendship. Over here at good old Trinity, Laura and I are working hard to flesh out what the upcoming semester is going to look like and I am getting so excited. We'll have some new friends joining us as well as some old and a whole new curriculum! But I shouldn't be jumping ahead as we've still got lots of summer left and lots of summer activities for our amazing youth to gather in fellowship and fun!

Check it out...

Youth Beach Party Adventure

Mark your calendars for our Youth Summer Adventure on **Saturday, July 18th 10:30AM - 2:30PM** (with a rainy day backup on **Saturday, August 1st**). We'll be meeting at **Millennium Park** that day for a **Beach Party!** More details will be coming to an email near you soon but if your youth is interested, make sure you put it in your calendars now!

Youth Lemonade Stand TAKEOVER (& popsicles)

We're going to beat the heat and help our Trinity Family do the same! We are taking over the summer Lemonade stand on **Sunday, August 16th** and afterward I will have popsicles for us to munch on while we catch up on what everyone has been up to this summer!

Party in the Park

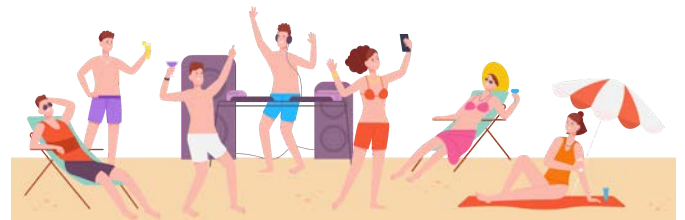
Our annual Party in the Park will be on **Thursday, August 20th** this year to celebrate the end to an amazing summer! I will be there and hope to see you there too! Check out the rest of the newsletter for all the details.

Annie Slabaugh, Youth Director - a.slabaugh@grtumc.org

The Youth Connection Corner

YOUTH EVENTS FOR THE MONTH OF

JULY





Trinity continues to update the policies and procedures that protect our children, youth & vulnerable adults! Before our next program year begins in September, we'll be offering a training on all the latest information. We'll discuss everything from Protection Policy (formerly Safe Sanctuary policy) to first aid basics to emergency procedures.

Everyone involved in programming at Trinity is asked to attend...

- Sunday morning Children & Worship, TrinityKids & Youth Fellowship volunteers, this means you!
- Wednesday evening Community Ministry volunteers, you too!
- Folks who help with hospitality or who are part of Congregational Care – you too!

Even if you do not currently volunteer in any of these areas or other related ones, this is a great training to attend as it will give you the latest information on how we as a congregation work together to protect our most vulnerable members.

The training is **Sunday, August 30 from 11:30am-1:30pm**. Please save the date and plan on attending! Lunch and childcare will be provided. If you plan to use the childcare, let us know so we can staff accordingly.

An online version of the training is available for those who cannot attend in-person. A make-up class may also be offered.

Please note, we are entering our fourth year of using Safe Gatherings to run our background checks & online trainings. As such, **anyone who completed their training in the first wave (fall 2023) will be due for a renewal soon**. Laura will be circulating more information on that process via email and sharing it at this training. We appreciate you all taking the time to update your trainings to ensure our compliance with our policies and the safety of our vulnerable populations.

Please RSVP for the training and send any questions to Laura Johns, Director of Discipleship, at L.johns@grtumc.org.

Community Ministries

Where is Trinity outside of the church walls?



You will often hear me talking about community, but what does that really mean? Is it a place? Is it an action? Sometimes it's something people just say. For Trinity...what does it mean to be in community outside of Sunday mornings. Where are we showing up in our community Monday-Saturday?

To me, community is such a deep, all-encompassing word. It's about the relationships we build and nurture with Congress Elementary School teachers and staff, the local shop owners who work tirelessly to be part of THIS community and help shovel out a neighbor whose car is stuck in the snow. It's not only the big gestures to the community, it's about the small things, done with great love over time. The Community Ministries Program is one way that Trinity extends its love to the community but as we look forward to the upcoming program year, what are other ways we can be part of the fabric of the community where we serve and worship?

So let's dream, walk, eat, visit and celebrate with our neighbors. Summer is a great time for exploring and East Hills and Eastown is a wonderful place to be! Things like summer celebrations, the Pride Festival, Eastown Street Fair and concerts in Cherry Park to name a few.

There is a **East Hills Summer Concert at Cherry Park**, coming up on **July 16th from 6-9pm** with the band Cabildo. Let's get a group and go to this family-oriented, free event in our church's neighborhood and enjoy the time together. More info is coming soon!

So, if you're interested in finding ways to represent Trinity in the community, please reach out the **Community Ministries Program, Matt Witkowski at 616-550-2418** and let's get some people talking more about community and finding ways to represent Trinity UMC in it!

