

Feeding the Homeless

Bethel United Church of Christ is one of about two dozen southeast Michigan churches that support Detroit's NOAH Project in its mission of providing lunches to the homeless.



A typical Sunday service in Bethel's sanctuary. The current field stone church was completed in 1909. The original log church was erected in 1840 and replaced by a wood frame building in 1857.

Sometimes seemingly small actions can have a far reaching effect, much like that of a stone dropped into a still pond. For example, the NOAH Project in Detroit provides food and social services to homeless people and partners with churches, organizations and individuals for assistance. NOAH stands for **N**etworking **O**rganization **A**dvocating for the **H**omeless. Bethel United Church of Christ is one of about two dozen southeast Michigan churches that support NOAH in its mission of providing lunches to the homeless.



One of several stained glass windows in this early 20th century church.

Bethel is a small rural church located about 20 miles southwest of Ann Arbor. Bethel's congregation provides and delivers 300 bag lunches (and sometimes additional hot foods) about once a month to NOAH. This is no small feat.



Cathy Moore heads up Bethel's NOAH lunch program.



Cathy describes the process of making lunches as "controlled chaos".



Della Smith is one of the lunch program organizers.



In preparation for Sunday's sandwich preparations, empty boxes are labeled the day before to hold the finished sandwiches for transport.

Since food deliveries are usually made on a Tuesday, a small team shops for ingredients and collects food donations from church members the week before. On Saturday a small group begins setting up food production in the fellowship hall.



Cathy, Della and Kristi set out juice boxes and granola bars on Saturday in preparation for Sunday's after service lunch session by the congregation.



Cathy explains the organization process. (above)



Kristi Campbell is another lunch program organizer. (left)

After Sunday service, approximately 30 congregants gather in the hall to begin making sandwiches, bagging cookies/snacks and working on food preparation. The completed bag lunches and sandwiches are refrigerated in preparation for delivery.



300 sandwiches of different types are produced on an “assembly line” by the church members. Here Cathy lays out bread and cold cuts (above) shortly before the end of Sunday service. Congregants then enter the fellowship hall (above right) and begin making lunch (below right).





*Everyone lends a hand making sandwiches.
(above)*



*Adults and children pitch in to bag
cookies for each individual lunch.
(center and right)*



Tables in the hall are organized into work stations. Here volunteers put juice boxes and fruit bars into individual paper bags that will become completed lunches.

In the background, another worker places completed bags into recycled potato chip boxes which will be staged for loading into vehicles. (above)

Young and old join together to bag cookies. (photos at right)





Animal crackers and sandwich cookies are on today's menu. (above)

Here are views looking down the sandwich assembly line. (below and right)





Bags of potato chips are removed from cartons and the empty boxes are recycled to hold completed bag lunches awaiting transport to NOAH in Detroit.





View showing completed bag lunches packed in boxes ready for transport to NOAH. (above and left)



Children help in the assembly process leaving other food prep for adults.



For maximum freshness, tuna salad sandwiches are made at the last moment on Tuesday morning just before all food is delivered to Detroit. (above)

All lunches and perishable ingredients are kept under refrigeration until it is time for loading into volunteers' cars for transport to Detroit. (right)



Should hot foods be included, food prep may continue into the following days. Early in the morning of food delivery day, hot food is warmed and packaged for transport.

Because the weather has been cold, church members decided to include hot chili as part of their February food offering. Hot soup was included in Bethel's April offering.



300 servings of chili and soup requires plenty of tomatoes.



Containers of tomato products are opened and placed into cooking pots.



Cans, cans and more cans of tomato products need to be opened and emptied into large pots.



A celebration is in order after opening the last of many cans of tomatoes, sauce and vegetables used in today's hot food preparation.





*What's chili without onions?
Bags of onions need to be cut.
(left and right)*



*Chopping onions often results
in burning "onion eyes" (center)*





Chopped onions are then diced in a food processor causing more “onion eyes”. (left and center)



Beans and other vegetables are important ingredients in soups and chili. (right)



Many kinds of beans go into soup and chili. They all must be opened, drained and rinsed before being added to the simmering pots.



While work proceeds on the sauce, fresh and frozen ground meat is seasoned and cooked with diced onions in batches. (above)

This process of meat preparation extended over both Sunday and Monday for Tuesday's delivery.

After cooking, the meat mixture is placed on baking sheets and refrigerated until the morning of food delivery. (below)



Of course, all of this food preparation comes with a price -- plenty of scrubbing, washing and kitchen clean-up.





Metal cans and cardboard packaging are emptied and bundled for recycling.





Early in the morning of food delivery day, pots of refrigerated chili sauce are heated to serving temperature. (above)

Simultaneously, the refrigerated meat mixture is placed into large roasters and brought up to temperature. (right)



Next, the sauce and meat are combined. (above)

Finally, a tasting confirms that the chili is "good to go". (right)





At this time, cartons of bagged lunches are loaded into waiting vehicles. (left)



Finally, the load is topped off with sandwiches, clothing and other donations. (right)



After the lunches, hot roasters of chili are loaded next. (center)



On food delivery day, the soup process is similar to that of hot chili. Bag lunches and other cold foods are loaded onto carts and placed into waiting vehicles first. (3 photos)



Roasters are then loaded onto carts and placed into vehicles after cold food items have been loaded. (left and below)



Finally, the load is topped off with sandwiches, clothing and other donations.

The soup has been warming in roasting pans and the vegetables and broth are mixed. Everything is checked and made ready for transport. (photos above)

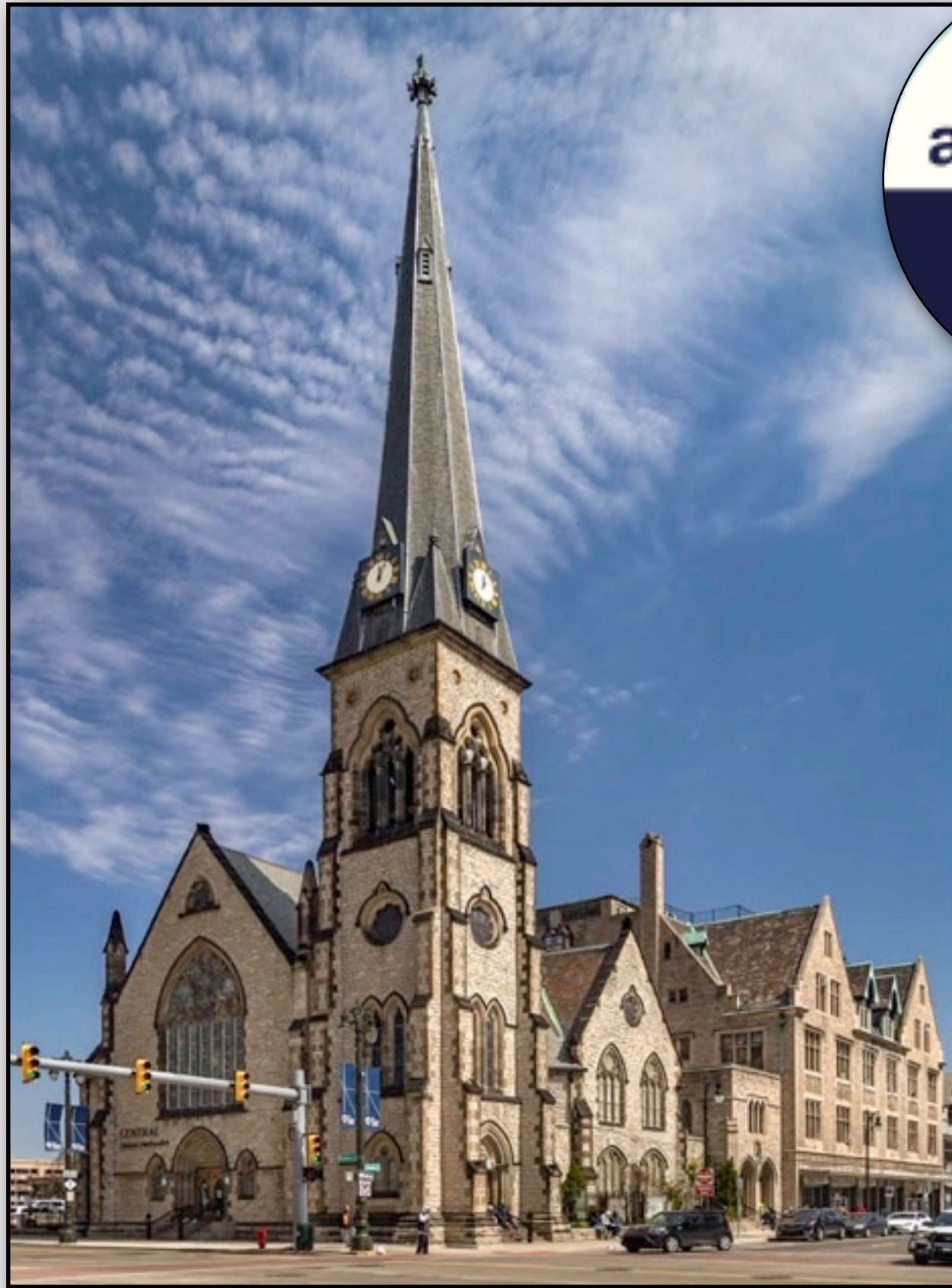


Cars are parked in loading position outside of Bethel's fellowship hall and will soon depart for Detroit's Central United Methodist Church.

The food will be unloaded at the church, unpacked in NOAH's kitchen and served for lunch that day.

Central United Methodist Church is located on the corner of Woodward Avenue and E. Adams Street in downtown Detroit -- about a 60 mile drive from Bethel Church in Freedom Township.





NOAH Project is located in the historic Central United Methodist Church in Detroit. The church is located on Woodward Avenue at Grand Circus Park.

NOAH occupies the second floor of the church annex and has a kitchen, fellowship hall, conference room and storage areas.



Exterior view of church from across Woodward Ave.

View from balcony looking forward in sanctuary.

*Stained glass “I am the good shepherd” window
in the Central United Methodist Church sanctuary.*



*View from pulpit looking
out into the church
sanctuary. (left).*

Central United Methodist Church’s roots date back to 1804 and has long been known as a “Peace and Justice” church. As part of it’s social justice identity, it has hosted sermons by Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The church co-sponsors NOAH and its work with the homeless.



NOAH supports health and wellness initiatives. Pictured above is a mobile shower trailer that frequents the organization's location. Wayne County also provides mobile health and dental services for the homeless.



Four days a week, NOAH provides bag lunches to the needy. Bethel Church has partnered for today's meal. (left)



Here, the Bethel volunteers arrive at the church parking lot and prepare to unload. A NOAH staff member helps move the food and other donations onto carts for transportation upstairs to the second floor. (left and above)



Multiple cart-loads are taken by elevator to NOAH's kitchen. (above)

The food must be unpacked and made ready for distribution. (below and right)





Fresh brewed coffee is always welcomed by everyone. (right)

Sandwiches are laid out and made ready for easy selection. (left and below)





*At 10:30 am,
everyone lines up,
signs in and lunch
service begins.
(above and left)*



*Today hot soup is
on the menu along
with the regular
items. (right)*





People are served quickly and courteously. Everyone is given a choice of what items he/she would prefer. (left)

A look behind the scenes at the serving window shows the array of sandwiches and other lunch items available for selection.

300 lunches including sandwiches are available. About half will be served here. The remainder will be shared with shelters and community outreach volunteers bringing food to the people. (right)





Community members relax and enjoy today's lunch in the fellowship hall. Bethel's work is done...for today.

