

December 2022 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
515-832-2232
<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

“Jesus our Brother, kind and good, was humbly born in a stable rude, and the friendly beasts around him stood...Jesus our Brother, kind and good.”

Do you know this carol? Of course you do! “The Friendly Beasts” has an interesting history that dates back to 12th century France, where it was known as the Latin song “Orientis Partibus” (From the East). The original lyrics were a tribute to the donkey who carried Mary to Egypt in order to escape Herod’s murderous rage, and it was often sung while an actual donkey was paraded into the church! As time went by the emphasis eventually shifted to the donkey’s role in getting the Holy Family to Bethlehem. The current lyrics were written in the 1920’s by Robert Davis as a tribute not only to the donkey, but also to all the other imagined animals who might have been present during Jesus’ birth. Each animal, by “some good spell,” offer what they can to the Christ Child, and as the carol goes, all are “glad to tell of the gift each gave to Immanuel.”

This song has much nostalgic value for me, for my siblings and I would sing this at home around the piano at Christmastime, each of us taking a verse to sing which became our chosen animal (I was the dove). Even now I remember the carol’s sweet gentleness and its timeless Christmas message that any gift sincerely offered to the Christ Child was cherished, implying of course that the gift-giver was cherished as well. That may well be the key to the carol’s charm with children of all ages: even a lowly dove or a sheep is cherished by the Lord of Heaven and Earth, who begin his earth-life in a cattle-shed for a birthplace, and with animals as his birth companions.

And yet in this simple and child-like message there is a hidden power, even as there is a hidden power revealed in the coming of the Christ Child. For an ancient people who were accustomed to imagining their gods as capricious sovereigns who demanded fealty and freely dispensed punishment and death, it was revolutionary to consider that a god could be powerful in gentleness, and reign with love, rather than control through fear. Even the Hebrew God Yahweh, also known as Yahweh Sabaoth (lit. the Lord of Armies) was portrayed in scripture as intemperate (Deut. 9:13-14), jealous (Ex. 20: 5), and violently murderous in anger (1 Chron. 21: 1, 5-14). And while there are other passages which portray God as merciful and abounding in steadfast love, it was not until the coming of the Christ that God could be wholly understood as gentle in power, and powerful in gentleness. Jesus’ tenderness toward the poor and marginal in society; his endless giving of his power to those who needed healing; his willingness to extend forgiveness to all; his repudiation of violence, domination and conquest through his example of gentle compassion, service and radical love for all people...these were new understandings of both the Heart of God and the human heart, which is made in the image of its Creator.

Yet perhaps such an understanding of God’s heart- and our own hearts- is so counterintuitive, so hard to believe and accept in our hardscrabble existence here on earth that we can’t, and won’t, believe it. And so we consign it to children’s stories and songs about friendly beasts even as we continue to cherish the idea that the only real power is POWER, that our value is in what we achieve and take for ourselves, and all that is wrong with the world must be overcome by the fierce force of our will. Even the authors of the New Testament could not accept the full revelation of Christ’s gentle power, and so their testimonies are interspersed with visions of doom (Luke 23:29-30), revenge (Matt. 16:27), destruction (Rev. 14:14-20) and final judgment (Matt. 25:31-46).

And yet even before the words of “The Friendly Beasts” were penned, the gentle refrain “Jesus our brother, kind and good” has come down through the ages ...an almost hidden melody which testifies to the timeless knowledge that God and humans alike belong to love, and love alone:

A love that cherishes All;

A love that seeks to give good gifts to All;
 A love that knows no enemies, only kindred souls sourced and joined in Union;
 A love that leads us to gentleness and to the gentle use of our power, which is born of the knowledge that LOVE is who we really are...knowledge given to us in the birth of a God/child in a stable, surrounded by friendly beasts who miraculously knew the meaning of love.
 May the meaning of this season of Advent preparation bring this way, this truth, and this LIFE—the life of gentle power-- to you as a gift, even as Jesus was given to us all as a gift;
 And may you share this gentle power with all those around you...even as the beasts shared their gifts with the Christ Child!
 Merry Christmas! –Pastor Craig

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

M 8 am - 1 pm
 T 9 am – 1 pm
 W 8 am – 4:30 pm
 Th 8 am – 4:30 pm
 F 9 am – 1 pm

Church Staff	
Rev. Craig Blaufuss , Pastor	
Office: 832-2232	Cell 297-4316
Pastor's email: revcraigblaufuss@gmail.com	
Michele Omgig : Admin. Assist.	269-7210
Church's e-mail: administrative.office@fcuccwc.org	
Dale Olson : Stephen Ministry Ldr	839-5619
Melissa Hindt : Organist	712-351-1074
Curt/Lorraine McCoskey : Cust's.	832-5341
Tracy Wehrhan : Church Treasurer	297-0370
Dale Olson : Financial Secretary	839-5619

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

- 1 - Tracy Wehrhan
- 3 - Alexis Tudor
- 4 - Ron Epps
- 6 - Jamie Roelfs
- 10 - Joyce Gelhaus
- 11 – Kaelyn Butz
- 13 - Susan Meinders
- 14 - Nancy Urich
- 17 - Bob Van Diest
- 17 - Matt Byrne
- 20 - Don Bruner
- 23 - Sara Imhoff
- 26 - Alan Yungclas

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

- 18 - Sharon & Bruce Perry
- 28 - Dale & Gayle Olson
- 30 - Lynn & Debbie Jaycox
- 30 - Ed & Andrea Mosbach

Celebrate the Season at First Congregational UCC!

What better way to deepen your faith than to spend time in church during Advent and Christmas? Here are ways to celebrate the Season at First Congregational UCC during December 2022:

- **On December 4** we will observe the second Sunday of Advent, followed by a Christmas Potluck Dinner sponsored by Women's Fellowship.
- **On December 11** we will observe the third Sunday of Advent, and in the early afternoon we will lead worship at our local care centers. Later that evening we will host a Live Outdoor Nativity, from 6-8 pm. Adults and youth will recreate the first Christmas outside the northwest entrance to the church, and inside cookies and cocoa will be served.
- **On December 18** we will observe the Fourth Sunday of Advent.
- **On December 24** we will hold our Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship service at 5 p.m. Pew Communion will be offered at this service.
- **There will be no December 25 Christmas Day worship service.**
- **On January 1** we will observe the first Sunday of Christmastide in worship. There will be no adult education that Sunday.

Come and share in the beauty and joy of the Advent and Christmas season as we worship God and celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World!

Alternative Giving

Keep the following dates in mind for the Advent season.

- ▶ The 2nd Sunday of Advent we will be sponsoring Stepping Forward Ministries. This is

a camp for Romanian orphans that Steve Mathers, Donna Ryherd's cousin, started many years ago. \$30 provides a child with a wrapped gift with their name on it under a Christmas tree that they provide along with festive food and the Christmas story. The kids make a list and volunteers check it twice, to fulfill at least one desire. This year, due to ailing parents, Steve was unable to send pictures of the individual orphans. You can leave your donation at the church or you can donate on Facebook on the Stepping Forward Ministries website.

► Our third Sunday in Advent features the Native American Heritage Association for our Alternative Giving Fair. This organization serves Native American families on 5 different reservations who live in poverty and suffer from food insecurity and hunger daily. Of the many programs this association administers the one we would like to support is Operation Winter Rescue. The funds will be used to purchase small heating stoves and propane fuel for families on 2 of the reservations in South Dakota who have no heat in their homes. This will allow them to bring the temperature in 1 room up to 50 degrees! If you want to help warm a home this winter by helping to purchase a stove our infamous pickle jar will be available for your monetary donation on Sunday December 11.

► The 4th Sunday of Advent features the Beacon of Hope, men's hygiene kits. We will be collecting supplies for the new admissions when they enter the home. There will be a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall of items you can bring.

Christmas Potluck Dinner

You are invited to celebrate Christmas with our Women's Fellowship on Sunday, December 4, following our worship service! The ladies are hosting a Christmas potluck dinner, and everyone is invited to come, enjoy a delicious meal, and share the spirit of Christmas with one another. Please bring a dish to share with family and friends; you may RSVP by calling the church office or use the sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall.

Christmas Fund

The Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund will be taken at the Christmas Eve service on December 24. For

over 100 years this offering has been a way to ensure the light of love and hope for the faithful servants of our church who find themselves facing unforeseen financial needs. Hundreds of clergy and lay employee lives have been touched over the years by your generosity. Pension supplementation, health premium supplementation, emergency grants, and gift checks are given to UCC pastors and lay workers in need. This will continue with your help. Please give generously this Christmas.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Our December 24 Christmas Eve Candlelight Service will be held in our sanctuary beginning at 5 p.m. Pew communion will be offered at this service. We will also continue the tradition of lighting candles at the end of the service, darkening the sanctuary, and singing " Silent Night." Join us for a beautiful service celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ!

Living Nativity As we approach the season of Christmas, we want to witness to the Good News of the birth of Jesus by offering a Living Nativity to our community. It will be held Sunday, December 11, from 6:00-8:00 pm. There is a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall for the four half-hour shifts beginning at 6:00. You can volunteer to be a specific character — wiseman, shepherd, Joseph, Mary, Angel or be assigned a character. You can sign up for more than one time slot (and warm up with hot drinks and treats between shifts). Costumes will be available in Fellowship Hall.

Poinsettias The Chancel Committee invites the congregation to label and bring their own red poinsettias to the church on Saturday, December 17, by 5 p.m. Those who choose to participate should pick up their poinsettias following Christmas Eve worship, Saturday, December 24. If your poinsettia is in honor of a special person, please notify Michele in the church office 515-832-2232 by December 20 in order for this to be included in the church bulletin.

No KLAB –December 22 and 29

There will be no KLAB on December 22 and 29 due to the holidays.

Angel Tree Gift Program update

I want to thank everyone who so generously responded to our 2022 Angel Tree Gift Program! First Congregational brought in 12 Angels to sponsor, and all 12 Angels were speedily taken by our members. There were a total of 153 Angels city-wide, and 7 participating churches have taken responsibility for securing gifts for them all! As a reminder, the **gifts need to be returned to First Congregational by Saturday, December 3**. Please remember to include the Angel tag with your gifts. On **December 11, from 1-4 pm, members of the Mission Board will be handing out the Angel gifts** to their respective families who will pick them up at the church.

Care Center Caroling

Would you like to share some Christmas cheer with our local care center residents? We have not caroled at our care centers in 2 years due to covid, and it would be wonderful for us to restart this special holiday tradition! An email is going out to the congregation looking for volunteers to gather, carol, and possibly conclude with a meal or refreshments at the church at a date to be determined, possibly Wednesday, December 14. Are you interested in sharing your Christmas joy through song? Please respond to the email, or let Pastor Craig know that you want to participate.

Decorate the Church for Christmas

On November 20 following worship, many hands worked to decorate our church for Christmas! A delicious soup luncheon provided by the Worship Board was enjoyed by all.





PECANS ARE HERE!

You can start planning that holiday baking and include pecan recipes as Haystack Circle decided to order a reduced number of pecans this year. We have 72 bags of pecan halves and 24 bags of pieces. They sell for \$12.00/bag. So be it for gifts or your baking, you can stop by the church and pick up your pecans!

Treasurer's Report

<u>INCOME</u>	<u>October</u>	<u>YEAR TO DATE</u>
Pledges and Offerings	\$16,316.50	\$153,681.28
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$16,316.50	\$153,681.28
<u>EXPENSES</u>		
Outreach and Mission	2,833.34	\$14,166.66
Pastoral Services	8,426.70	82,048.80
Maintenance and Repairs	3,170.20	37,122.09
Church Office	3,756.97	30,665.53
Music Ministry	428.40	3,588.85
Christian Education	41.32	110.11
Local Ministry	0.00	539.98
Misc. Expenses	256.42	1,252.19
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$18,913.35	\$169,494.21

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Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

