

January 2023 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
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<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

"Change the former way of life that was part of the person you once were, corrupted by deceitful desires. Instead, renew the thinking in your mind by the Spirit and clothe yourself with the new person created according to God's image in justice and true holiness." --Ephesians 4:22-24

"Happy New Year!"

By the time you read this article you may have already used this time-honored greeting, even if it was only at midnight on January 1 as you watched the giant ball fall in Times Square for the umpteenth time. I have seen that ball fall more times than I care to count, and I will admit that as I get older it becomes more difficult for me to generate the same kind of enthusiasm I had for the event when I was younger. Perhaps the reason for that comes from watching the news on January 2, or observing how my best intentions at the start of a new year too often tend to remain just that—intentions!

Yet it seems to me that as Christians we are called to greet the New Year with a spirit of celebration...a spirit that is hope-filled but not naïve; a spirit that neither glosses over the problems and evils facing us, nor succumbs to despair and hopelessness. Yes, the human story's tragic tales of hatred, violence, and oppression will continue in 2023; yes, our personal shortcomings and issues may well continue to work against us in the coming year; yes, our collective human foolishness and selfishness will almost assuredly bring more painful challenges into our world; and yes, our continued aging may well bring more challenges to our everyday living. Yet the very basis of faith is our trust that God will continue to be present in every circumstance of our lives, calling us from death to life; from darkness to light; from despair to hope...and the one whose birth we so recently celebrated continues to remind us of God's steadfast, ongoing presence in the larger human story! His example offers us the encouragement to believe that life itself is a gift and a blessing even in the midst of troubling times. Surely that is something to celebrate!

One way we historically celebrate the New Year is with a New Year's Resolution (or several) that we hope will make the new year better. While some of us applaud the idea of a fresh start to a fresh new year, most of us have broken so many of our resolutions that we have difficulty taking them seriously. Yet the idea of choosing to improve our lives is central to our human calling to co-create a better world with the Master Creator, God. So rather than just resolving to lose weight (a very popular New Year's resolution!), exercise, or watch less TV, perhaps it would be a wise thing to resolve to live each day as a gift—a gift that is meant to be shared with others. Toward that end I have put together a short list of resolutions that may help point the way toward living the days of 2023 as such a gift. Any one of these resolutions would bring positive changes into your life, and into the life of the world—even if imperfectly practiced.

CB's Suggested New Year's Resolutions:

- To let go of that which no longer serves the Highest Good of myself and others.
- To appreciate at least one thing of beauty in every day.
- To spend some time every day in communion with God.
- To treat what I have received in this life with respect and gratitude.
- To be gentle with myself and others.
- To listen more, and speak less.
- To accept that the search for meaning and value in my life is my responsibility, and to believe that I am guided in this quest.

As we all move into a New Year, may we be filled with new hope and a new resolve to make the most of the greatest gift we have received from a loving God: the gift of our *lives*.

I wish you all a very Happy New Year!! And yes, an exclamation point or two is called for after such a promising greeting!
–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 Omvig: 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**



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS & ANNIVERSARIES HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

3 - Alec Tudor
4 - Mary Vavroch
7 - Kallista Gilbert
10 – Peyton Oberender
12 - Amanda Maass
13 - Jennifer Gilbert
14 - Marjorie Groves
14 - Travis Wearda
18 - Mike Tudor
21 - Cooper Askelson
28 - Jennifer Brim
30 - Jenny Maass
31 - Kolleen Taylor

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

1 - Lynn & Sherry Leksell
4 - Don & Gene Royster
12 - Keith & Dawn Holdgrafer
17 - Wil & Marjorie Groves

Parish Nurse News

Tips on How to Avoid Illness as COVID and Flu Viruses Surge

Get your shots.

Wash your hands, cover your coughs and sneezes

Urge sick people to stay home.

Take a rapid test before an event.

Take events outside or open up windows.

Consider masking.

Sleep, exercise, and manage stress.

Shalom Circle Resumes

Pastor Craig would like to reconvene the Shalom Circle beginning in January. The Shalom Circle is a group of seekers who come together regularly for a time of meditation, prayer, and sharing, with the intention of cultivating Shalom in our individual and collective lives. At each gathering there will be time to “check in,” a group meditation, an opportunity for prayer, and time to process what participants have experienced. Our group meditations will vary and will include relaxation techniques, guided meditations, creative visualizations, and other techniques. Cultivating a sacred and safe space, confidentiality, spontaneity, and seeking the Spirit's guidance are the essentials of this Circle that will allow each participant to experience the blessings of Shalom.

Everyone is welcome to be a part of the Shalom Circle—no experience necessary! If you are interested in participating, please let Pastor Craig know what days/times you are available.

The UNhanging of the Greens

Many hands made light work on November 20 when members gathered after worship to “hang the greens” and decorate our church for Christmas. Now it is nearly time to UNhang the greens...and so after worship on Sunday, January 8, you are invited to help take down and put away the Christmas decorations for another year. Please stay and help!

KLAB Resumes January 5

After a nice Christmas break our Thursday after school KLAB program will resume January 5. We will continue to enjoy snacks, free time, a bible lesson, and other activities.

Funding Future Leaders

Training ordained clergy is an expensive proposition, leaving many pastors and seminary

students/Members in Discernment deep in debt. You can help reduce the financial burden through scholarships. A special offering supported by the Iowa Conference of the United Church of Christ will be taken January 15 to fund these scholarships. They are for Members in Discernment from Iowa. Please make your check to First Congregational UCC and write "Funding Future Leadership" or "FFL" on the memo line. Online donations are welcome at the Iowa Conference UCC website.

Joseph Dunnwald, Latimer, is one such FFL scholarship recipient. Here's a bit of his story: "For 15 years I worked full-time jobs and worked part-time in the church, trying to use my skills but trying to be a good steward of my finances. I continued to feel called, but it seemed everywhere I tried to make it work, something would stand in the way. Then, in passing at a family holiday, I was told about an opening in a rural church. I began discussing the possibilities, and within 6 months I received a call to serve at the church and attend seminary at the same time. . . . Through the generosity of the church and support from scholarships like Funding Future Leadership, I am more than 60 percent through seminary and have not accumulated debt from it."

The seminary students thank you and the FFL Committee thanks you!

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!

Thank You!

Dear friends at First Congregational, I have missed you all during this Christmas season! But I am thankful for all the cards you have sent to me to keep me informed about your lives! I hope to see you occasionally at church in the coming year. With a grateful heart, Audrey Burnett.

Vicki and I want to express our warmest and sincerest thanks to the members of First Congregational UCC, who have made our Christmas special with so many cards, gifts, and expressions of care during this recent Christmas season. We feel blessed to be in your midst and to be a part of your lives, and we are deeply touched by your kindness and gestures of appreciation. May our mutual ministry continue to bring many blessings in 2023! --Pastor Craig and Vicki

Treasurer's Report

| INCOME | November | YEAR TO DATE |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Pledges and Offerings | \$11,767.21 | \$165,448.49 |
| Other Income | 0.00 | .00 |
| TOTAL INCOME | \$11,767.21 | \$165,448.49 |
| EXPENSES | | |
| Outreach and Mission | 1,416.67 | \$15,583.33 |
| Pastoral Services | 8,046.50 | 90,095.30 |
| Maintenance and Repairs | 2,491.11 | 39,613.20 |
| Church Office | 3,095.85 | 33,761.38 |
| Music Ministry | 265.05 | 3,853.90 |
| Christian Education | 12.04 | 122.15 |
| Local Ministry | 46.33 | 586.31 |
| Misc. Expenses | 16.31 | 1,268.50 |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | \$15,389.86 | \$184,884.07 |

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1000 Willson Avenue
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Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

