

January 2024 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
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<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

“Lo, how a Rose e’er blooming, from tender stem hath sprung...” –Traditional Carol
In the morning, when Jesus returned to the city, he was hungry. And seeing a fig tree by the side of the road, he went to it and found nothing at all on it but leaves. Then he said to it, “May no fruit ever come from you again!” And the fig tree withered at once.—Matt. 21:18-19

I was recently shopping at Fareway, and there in the produce section was a display of Poinsettias and Christmas cacti—all in bloom! I almost bought one (I didn’t, as we already have one, and one is enough with all of the pets we have) because I love Christmas cactuses! I am amazed at how they can remain dormant for much of the year, and then as the season of Christmas approaches suddenly they begin to bud, then gloriously flower as if caught up in the joyous magic of the season. There surely is a sermon in each Christmas cactus flowering! It is a miraculous reminder of what is possible for both plants and people when heaven’s power and heaven’s hope come to earth.

Seeing that miracle unfold in the life of a humble plant reminds me of how that miracle unfolds in my own inner life at Christmastime, year after year. Sometimes the magic comes early, and I feel like I am flowering with joy and goodwill all season long. And while in other years the magic seems to arrive very late, it does arrive...and I am again coaxed into flowering as the best of what is in me comes to bloom, filling me to overflowing with generosity, goodwill, lovingkindness, and a renewed vision of life that is sweet, innocent and fresh; hopeful and confident.

And yet, as with the Christmas cactus, it seems inevitable that as the new year arrives the flowering I experience at Christmas begins to fade, until it becomes only a memory...and a hoped-for, dormant possibility for another year.

As I think about how the magic of Christmas makes both plants and people bloom, I wonder what Jesus would have done to a Christmas cactus—or to me—if he had encountered either of us in our non-blooming states on the road to Jerusalem. Would he have cursed us and withered us as he did the fig tree? Of course that notion is unthinkable. But what does Jesus ask of us in the “off-season” after Christmas, as we return to our more routine states of heart and mind? Certainly more than a cultivated nostalgia for Christmases past...and certainly more than the sad lament “what a blessed place the world would be, if we had that Christmas spirit all year!”

As disciples of Jesus and people of faith, we are called to more than just the rhythmic flowerings of heart and mind that coincide with the right seasons and the best conditions. Unlike the Christmas cactus, we are called by God to bloom and bear fruit in *every* season for the sake of a world hungry for Good News. That means we are called to cultivate the generosity of spirit we feel at Christmas in the coming new year as we actively seek to help and serve others—especially those in deepest need. That means we are called to cultivate the goodwill we feel toward others at Christmas, all year long—even toward the strangers in our midst, and toward our enemies (yes, even them). That means the hope we feel at Christmas should not be lost when the sweetness of Christmas is replaced by the harsher realities of daily life: the not-so-good-daily-news which reminds us that life on planet earth is not all sweetness and light.

And yes, that means on a daily basis we are called to cultivate our capacity to bloom, so that the flowering of our highest selves becomes a lived reality in our daily lives, rather than a seasonal miracle that comes and goes as if we have no part to play in its coming, and no responsibility for its enduring beauty and power. For make no mistake: our blooming and our fruiting are to help others bloom and fruit as well, so that each of us can experience the magic, the wonder, the joy and the possibilities of our highest selves—our “Christ-selves”—blooming with beauty and life-giving good

fruits. That is the highest hope of "Peace on Earth, Goodwill to All" that seems so possible at Christmas, so impossible at every other time of the year...and so needed all year long!

Friends, by the time you read this we will have entered into another new year, and Christmas will be quickly becoming yet another ghost of Christmas past. This year let's outdo our Christmas cactuses and not go dormant, but work at blooming and producing fruit all year long! What a wonderful witness that would be to the power of God in human life! What a wonderful gift that would be to give to the world—and to ourselves! What a wonderful goal to set for our lives in this new year!
–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**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

3 - Alec Tudor
4 - Mary Vavroch
6 - Kayleigh Epps
7 - Kallista Gilbert
10 - Peyton Oberender
10 - Brynley Weig
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

Research has shown that just 5 to 15 minutes of daily meditation is all you need to begin experiencing benefits. It can be meditation lying in bed, sitting in a chair, or walking slowly. Think of it as a form of brain exercise. Just as physical exercise keeps your body healthy; mindfulness meditation keeps your brain fit. These benefits have been found to include diabetes control, emotion regulation, empathy, immune system response, memory, relaxation, and self-esteem.

The UNhanging of the Greens

Many hands made light work on November 26 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 7, you are invited to help take down and put away the Christmas decorations for another year. Please stay and help!

Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting is January 21.

Thank YOU

So many many thank yous to so many individuals in our congregation who helped make our first annual?? silent/live auction such a success. So many different items out for the silent auction and then the fun and fellowship had by all as we had the live auction on the 17th.

First of all thanks goes to Curt McCoskey who brought this idea to the Mission Board back in February- great idea Curt and thanks! Thanks to Curt also for serving as our auctioneer! Next, to all of you who created items and gave them to us to place on the auction table thank you - we couldn't have done this without you. So many creative, talented and giving members we have - thank you! And finally to all who bid on these items, this event could not have been a success without you - thank you.

Because of ALL of you \$1,640.00 will be donated to Go Serv Global to their project of building Sukup Safe T Homes in Haiti. Thank you all for your generosity and making this a fun worthwhile project.
Mission Board

Living Nativity Saturday, December 2

Members of First Congregational witnessed to our community by enacting a Living Nativity on Saturday, December 2. They also were part of the Christmas parade held that day!



Auction

December 17 was a fun day at the church! We enjoyed a baked potato bar for lunch hosted by the Women's Fellowship, and Curt McCoskey was our auctioneer for the live auction organized by the Mission Board. Many members showcased their talents by donating their handicrafts to the live and silent auction!





Treasurer's Report

INCOME	November	YEAR TO DATE
Pledges and Offerings	\$22,612.00	\$183,605.61
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$22,612.00	\$183,605.61
EXPENSES		
Outreach and Mission	2,833.34	\$16,381.33
Pastoral Services	8,287.81	95,230.33
Maintenance and Repairs	3,304.19	44,221.25
Church Office	3,179.28	34,584.84
Music Ministry	483.33	5,091.63
Christian Education	57.25	458.79
Local Ministry	0.00	16.26
Misc. Expenses	41.42	1,053.19
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$18,186.62	\$197,037.62

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Webster City, Iowa

Cabinet Meeting held on December 12, 2023

Members Present:

Moderator:	Wil Groves	Pastor:	Craig Blaufuss
Vice Moderator:	Gayle Olson	Trustees:	Nick Oberender
Finance Sec.:	Dale Olson	Women's Fellowship:	Patty Gescheidler
Treasurer:	Tracy Wehrhan	Mission:	Gayle Olson
Staff/Parish:	Cindy Henning	Worship:	Kurt McCoskey
Christian Ed:	Patty Gescheidler	Clerk:	Stephanie Hill

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm by the Moderator, Wil Groves in Fellowship Hall. Pastor Craig opened the meeting with a prayer. The October Cabinet minutes were read and approved as read. The November Cabinet minutes taken by Cindy Henning were also approved.

Board and Committee Summaries:

Treasurer's Report: November offerings were \$21,712.00 and expenses were \$16,743.62. Offerings for the month have caught up with expenses; however, year-to-date expenses still surpass offerings by \$13,000. December expenses are always high. Tracy Wehrhan moved and Dale Olson seconded a motion that the report be put to audit. The motion passed. **Pastor's Report:** The church requested a recycling tote and received it. The choir and anyone else who wishes to will sing during the Christmas Eve service. Rehearsal will be Wednesday, December 20th at 7:00pm. On December 2nd UCC's Living Nativity was the first float in the Christmas Parade as requested by the Chamber of Commerce. It reminded folks of the reason for the season. It was very successful thanks to Jim Henning and Bob Erickson. After the parade the Living Nativity was also acted at the church between 6pm and 8pm by volunteers taking ½ hour shifts. December 10th is the distribution day for the Angel Tree gifts. There will be a baptism of Bradley and Nicholas Bogenrief on the December 23rd. Care Center Caroling will be on December 13 at 6pm beginning at Southfield – main lobby and assisted living units. Then Crestview and Windsor Manor. Since Pastor Craig will be on vacation on the 31st of December, he prepared a video service. Marjorie Groves will lead the service.

Finance Board: No Report. **Trustees:** Cabinet members discussed the options for repairs to the bell tower which is no longer safe enough to walk beneath. See options in the full report. Bids are being sought. An unexpected expense became apparent after the state inspector visit. Some valves need to be replaced. The \$5900.00 will come out of the Building Fund. **Mission:** The Alternative Giving Fair is moving along well. A display for Week 3 – casseroles and for Week 4 – auction items are up. Auction will conclude on December 17th, during the December Luncheon. The Annual Meeting will be January 21, 2024. There will be a Soup Supper organized by the Mission Board. Cabinet will be asked to provide desserts. **Women's Fellowship:** The December Luncheon duties have been assigned. The next WF President for 2024/2025 is Patty Gescheidler. **Christian Education:** For the Alternative Giving Fair, KLAB kids made tree decorations out of whisks and sold them. They collected \$139.00 in total to be presented to the Cat Hut personnel in January. **Worship:** Josie Greenley will provide

the piano accompaniment for Christmas Eve service. Some of the tree lights are fading out – may need to be replaced. The leadership for decorating the church in the old days was done by rotating through the boards. Right now, only Worship provides that leadership. Discussion followed. No decision reached. Marjorie Groves will lead the service on the 31st of December when Pastor Craig is gone.

New Business Church Directory: New photos may not be necessary or wanted, but updating the information about our congregates is a must. Designing the directory like a yearbook was discussed. Also doing it digitally. This will be a topic for the new year. The meeting was adjourned at 7:45pm. The next meeting is January 9, 2024 at 7:00pm in Fellowship Hall.

Respectfully submitted, Stephanie Hill, Church Clerk

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

MISSION BOARD Alternative Fair Week 1 - Angel Tree - Tree will be up on Sunday, November 12, our church has 6 names for the tree. November 19th bulletin will have information. Gayle in charge of this project. Gayle is also considering trying to take a single mom out, and shop, to get children what's needed, if mother is agreeable. Week 2 - Advent - November 26-December 3 – KLAB. Week 3 - December 3 - 10, casseroles will be delivered – Sherry. Week 4 - December 3 - 17, Auctions item will be on display, baked goods on the 17th. Stephanie will make labels for items. Bidding for silent auction will be open on December 3. December 17 - Women's Fellowship Dinner for all. Silent and live auction. Sherry will ask Will Grove to be auctioneer. (Curt or Dale) if needed for back up. Beacon of Hope meal - November 28 - sign up sheet in fellowship hall. It was discussed that JaMars provides 1 meal each week, chicken dinner, and now with that business closing, it will be a great hardship for the Beacon. They also have problems with some that sign meals, and don't show. Suggestion made to hand some freezer meals casseroles for them in advance, in case needed for a meal – Andrea. Christmas Eve Fund will be taken at Christmas Eve service. Fuller Hall - contact Brianne - garbage cans will be left out during winter months, city will maintain, and empty them. Fellowship Hall shelves cleaned out and items taken to ACE. Pastor handed out information on "Join the Movement " towards Racial Justices. Our church invited to join. We will discuss in 2024. Collaborate with the other churches in WC for thrift sales, since most churches in community have sales. Tabled until later. Homeless people in Hamilton County - County home is full. Collaborate with other churches to find ways to help. Andrea brought up the desire to reach out to members in Assisted Living, or in Nursing Homes, the need to do something for them during the season. The women's circles have taken that project on. Maybe we could do something for Valentine's Day - more discussion in 2024. Next meeting December 6. 5:10pm
Secretary – Andrea

Pastor's Cabinet Report December 7, 2023

Worship: We observed All Saint's Sunday on November 26, followed by the hanging of the greens and a soup luncheon sponsored by the Mission Board. We observed the first Sunday of Advent with communion on December 3. I led Gospel hour at Southfield on December 5. We will lead care center services Sunday, December 10. Christmas Eve service with pew communion will be held at 5 pm, and an informal 4th Sunday of Advent service will be held Dec 24 in the East Chapel beginning at 10 a.m. I will be on vacation after Christmas Eve, and so the Worship Board volunteer will lead the December 31 service which will use a video sermon. On January 7 we will observe Epiphany and then take down the Christmas décor after worship.

Living Nativity: We held the display early this year—December 2-- due to the Chamber of Commerce requesting we hold it in conjunction with “Christmas in the City.” This year our presentation began on a float in the Christmas parade—a first! Thanks to Jim Henning for working with Bob Erickson to make the float possible. From 6:30-8 pm we had volunteers present the Living Nativity to the public, staged in front of our Northwest doors. Patty Gescheidler brought the treats for our volunteers. Thank you to everyone who helped make this special night happen!

WCMA: The Angel Tree Christmas Gifts will be distributed to families on December 10, 2-4 pm. Foster Funeral in partnership with members of the WCMA will host a Christmas Remembrance service on Sunday, December 17, 5 pm at Asbury UMC.

CE Programming: Adult Ed studied “beauty” and we are now studying “keeping Christ in Christmas”. KLAB has made ornaments to support the Cat Hut for our portion of the Alternative Gift Giving Fair during Advent, and now we are studying the Christmas Story and making Christmas decorations. Our last KLAB before Holiday recess will be December 13. Adult Ed will be in recess from Dec. 24 until Jan 7.

Baptisms: December 23 at 11:30 a.m. I will baptize Bradley and Nicholas Bogenrief in our sanctuary. Following the baptism there will be a luncheon in fellowship hall for the family, sponsored by Katie Short.

Care Center Caroling: everyone is welcome to join us in caroling our care centers this Wednesday, December 13, beginning at 6 p.m. in Southfield’s main lobby. At 6:15 we will carol the Assisted Living unit at Southfield, then we will carol in Crestview’s lobby at 6:30, followed by caroling at Windsor Manor at 7 p.m.

Shalom Circle: We continue to gather on Fridays as we can, usually at 6:30 pm.

Vacation: I will be on vacation from Christmas until January 2.

The breakdown of my ministry since November 14:

Worship services led: 5; Christian Ed.: 6; Meetings: 6; Visitation: 7

WOMEN’S FELLOWSHIP Cards – Shirley sent out 1 sympathy cards and 2 get well cards. **Correspondence** – None **Old Business: Kitchen Cleaning** for this year is suspended. It is clean enough. **December Luncheon Duties** – Dec. 17 – Baked Potato Bar – Exec. Board will prep on Sat., Dec. 16 at 9:00 am. Women’s Fellowship will buy potatoes. Patty will get about 50 potatoes. Toppings were reviewed and all have been assigned. Exec. Board members will provide bars. Providence will set tables and the current holiday trees will serve as the table decorations. Joyce will run dishwasher. Joyce will secure Pastor gift.

New Business: WF President for 2024/2025 program year will be Patty Gescheidler.

Next Meeting – Feb. 7th. Submitted by Cindy Henning

STAFF/PARISH We met on Sunday Dec. 3rd. We each reported on our visit with a staff member. Everything is going well. Cindy will write up Annual /report and give to Michele.

MISSION BOARD Alternate giving update --Gifts will be picked up by families on Sunday, Dec.10 at 2:00pm. We will check gifts, and make sure all are at church, before ending meeting. Gayle will make calls to families and give them times for pickup.
--Advocats - KLAB - All whisks from tree are gone, donations made in pickle jar,
--Casseroles - Dec 3 - 10th. casseroles to be put in freezer, with casserole name, and cooking instructions. Sherry will deliver. -- Dec 17 --Women’s Fellowship -- Baked potato bar. -- silent and live auction. Baked goods cash sale. Andrea will bring cash box for change. Baked goods will be on table, under bulletin board. Sherry will be cashier for all items. Curt will be the auctioneer, and possibly Will to help out. Worked on live items details. One live item after prayer. Close silent auction with start of final live item. 5

minute final bids for silent auction. Sunday morning baked goods will be on display before church. --Beacon of Hope -- served about 40 men, and staff.

New Business --Recycling, large new bins are delivered, will store by back door, Pastor will take to curb, when full. Annual meeting --Jan 21 -- Super Bowl -- organized by mission board. Will ask Cabinet to provide dessert. Pastor - Vegetable soup

Gayle -- Cauliflower soup Andrea -- Potato and Chili Stephanie -- Turkey Noodle Sherry -- ?? soup surprise!! Jose -- relish tray Gayle --- crackers

Next meeting Jan 10, 2024 5:10pm Andrea -- Secretary

BOARD OF TRUSTEES The Trustees formally met on Wednesday, November 29th to discuss the report from Schlotfeldt Engineering. We had engaged Schlotfeldt to inspect the entry way and bell tower for safety and soundness as earlier in the year we had opinions from both Chris McNeil as well as a contractor from Woods Roofing express concerns of the safety and soundness of the structure.

His findings (the 6-page report is available in the office) echo the same concerns earlier expressed. There is considerable damage to the studs, bottom and top wall plates and some of the floor joists. This damage – caused by water, most likely from the roof or flashing defects – results in loss of strength.

Options to rectify are:

- 1) To reconstruct the structure. This would entail removing the brick façade, removing, and replacing the wood frame, then replacing the brick.
- 2) The walls of the bell tower could be taken down and not replaced. When looking at the belltower this would be everything above the arched windows. This option would require a new parapet wall to be built (this is the low wall along the top that creates an edge to the roof and adds strength to the structure).

After much discussion we penciled out the following plan:

- 1) While the Engineers Report did not state there was a risk of collapse, we believe it best to keep the doors closed (at least throughout the winter).
- 2) Seek bids to:
 - a. Tear down completely (although Schlotfeldt didn't list this as an option, we must consider the cost of the repairs still needed for the arched windows).
 - b. Tear down the upper portion, replace the roof and parapet.
 - c. Tear off, repair, and replace.

The Trustees then refocused back to the beginning, back to what started all of this. Keeping the rodents out. We need someone to cover the arched windows in the belltower as best (and cheaply) as possible until we can get the other issues resolved. We plan to contact a couple of local contractors for this task. Woods Roofing anticipates completion of the roof repairs later this week (Dec 14-15) when it'll warm up a bit.

We have tuckpointing yet to be done around the belltower, the East Chapel, and the chimney on the east side. There is simply not an easy path forward, nor a quick one.

Respectfully submitted, Laurie Epps, Chair

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of: