

August 2024 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
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<http://www.firstcongregationalwlc.org/>

Pastor's Newsletter Article August 2024

"Do this in remembrance of me." –Luke 22:19

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." –John 13:34

The Olympics are back! Are you watching them? Are you enjoying them?

If you watched the opening ceremonies, you may have noticed a tableau that has received much publicity--and generated much outrage and controversy. It was a depiction of some kind of meal? Party? Revelry? staged by colorful characters, some in drag...in the center a woman wearing a haloed headdress. It seemed to some that this was a disrespectful, even blasphemous, mockery of Leonardo Da Vinci's masterpiece *The Last Supper*. Now the artistic director of the Olympics, Thomas Jolly, has made a public statement explaining that it was intended to be a representation of a pagan party on Mount Olympus, and not a mocking portrayal of *The Last Supper*. The organizers of the Paris Olympic games have offered a public apology to any who were offended by the tableau, stating it was no one's intention to mock any religion or religious representation. Others have pointed to a 17th century painting, *The Feast of the Gods*, as the inspiration for the tableau. Regardless, emotions and opinions have run high, especially here in America where numerous politicians and religious leaders have expressed their indignation and offense at this display, which, to their minds, clearly mocks their Christian faith.

Now to those who felt offended by the display, I am not unsympathetic. I have seen other "variations" of *The Last Supper* that viscerally felt diminishing, trivializing, even down-right blasphemous to me, and seeing these unholy portrayals I duly noted an immediate reaction of offense welling up in me. And to speak out in reaction to that sense of offense is certainly a normal response! Unfortunately, these are not "normal" times (if there even is such a thing) and so it is not hard to wonder if some of the reactions to the tableau at the Paris opening ceremonies were offered to score votes or to continue the narrative of Christian "persecution" or diminishment that seems central to some ideologies. And even if those who are vocally objecting to the tableau are expressing an honest and un-scheming sense of offense at the loose handling of one of our sacraments... *I can't help but wonder if our Christian passions might be better served by serving the Lord, rather than sparring with the French, Thomas Jolly, and the souls who staged the tableau*. It would certainly be more useful to contemplate our own relationship to the sacrament of the Last Supper, and how (or even if) it joins us to Jesus Christ and feeds us with the flesh and blood of his life, teachings, death and resurrection. It would certainly be more useful to focus less on "defending his honor" with our outrage over a possibly blasphemous communion tableau, and instead defend his honor by hearing his voice, following his teachings, and striving to further his work of bringing good news to the poor, releasing the captives, letting the oppressed go free, and announcing the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:16-19). It would certainly be more useful to fulfill his prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:21) by building bridges to others in the wide tent of our faith, and by building bridges of love, patience and forgiveness with all people. And it would certainly be more useful to take deeply to heart the "new" commandment recorded in the Gospel of John, and the example of the foot washing in that Gospel which replaced the Last Supper as the centerpiece of Jesus' last night with his disciples. Jesus said we would be blessed if we did these things (John 13:17), and it would certainly better serve our faith—and our call to follow Jesus—than making a "production" over a production that

would quickly fade into obscurity...if so many voices weren't perpetuating it with their angry, and in some cases, self-righteous outcries.

As I was finishing up these thoughts, I saw a news report that French DJ and activist Barbara Butch has filed several police reports after receiving death threats for her participation in the controversial Olympics opening ceremony tableau. Apparently, she has been threatened with death, torture and rape, and has also been the target of numerous antisemitic, homophobic, and sexist insults! I certainly hope no professing Christian is responsible for these attacks...for here in a nutshell is the crux of the matter: are we as Christians going to show the world we are Christians by our *love*...or by our rush to outrage, insult, and even violence over what others say, or portray, about our faith?

May we all use this newest controversy in the ever-unfolding controversies of our times as an opportunity to show how our faith has made us more *Christ-like* in a world that needs more love, more patience, more understanding, more forgiveness, and more modeling of the New Commandment by *us*: the ones who profess that we follow the Prince of Peace and do *everything* (not just partake of the Last Supper) in remembrance of Him. –Pastor Craig

Church Staff

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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



HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

1 - Madison Babington
5 - Patty Gescheidler
7 - Richard Tudor II
12 - Jan Carden
12 - Howard Stearns
15 - Audrey Burnett
15 - Laurie Epps
16 - Tom Riemenschneider
19 - Allison Yungclas
19 - Mary Van Diest
24 - Nick Oberender
27 - Shari Rothrock
31 - Betty Ploeger
31 - Margy Wood

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

11 - Mark & Jennie Brim
23 - Don & Gretchen Bruner

Parish Nurse News

Stay cool!

- Wear appropriate clothing
- Stay in air conditioned area as much as possible
- If you don't have air conditioning, spend time in the local library or shopping mall
- Use the stove and oven as little as possible
- Take cool baths or showers
- Avoid heavy meals
- Stay hydrated
- Plan activities for morning or late afternoon
- Pace yourself

Website

Our new website is up and running! Check it out at <https://firstcongregationalwc.org/>

Summer Worship Schedule

Summer is upon us and the Worship Board would like to let everyone know we will have 1 more Saturday service on August 24. This service will start at 5:00 pm and will be held indoors. There will be no Sunday service on August 25.

On August 24 we will serve root beer floats after worship. We hope you will stay and enjoy this treat and fellowship.

Magazines for Shari Rothrock

Do you have any magazines you would like to share with Shari Rothrock at Southfield? She loves looking through magazines, and she appreciates seeing new ones. If you have any

you would pass on to Shari, either take them to Shari at Southfield or give them to Pastor Craig. Thanks!

Thanks

Dear Church Family and Friends, words cannot express how grateful I am for all of your prayers, visits, calls, cards, flowers, and other tokens of your love while I stayed at Van Diest Medical Center! I was there for 6 weeks and 2 days, and it meant the world for me to see you and hear from you while I was there. Now I am at Southfield Care Center, room E33, and I am getting used to my new room and my new life here. My cell phone # is 515 985-9624. Thank you all so much for being in my life, and I look forward to seeing you all again in church at some future date. And you are always welcome to stop out and visit! With love, Audrey Burnett

I want to thank you all for the scholarship I received. I'm extremely grateful to have people like you support and believe in this process of furthering my education at ISU this fall. This money will be put towards books within the Psychology Department to help set me up for success! More importantly, I cannot wait to give back to those who have helped me! God is good, all the time. – Bella Nelson

Dear First Congregational, I want to express my gratitude for awarding this scholarship to me and supporting my education and career path. This scholarship is greatly appreciated and genuinely makes a difference in the process I am currently going through. I am currently in my 6th trimester at Palmer College of Chiropractic in Davenport, Iowa with just over a year left. I will always remember your kindness and generosity, and hope to one day pay it forward and help someone else's life. Once again, I want to deeply thank you for this scholarship. Sincerely, Ben Sterler

UDMO would like to thank you for your very generous monetary donation for pool passes and general operations. Thank you for helping so many families in need. We greatly appreciate your continued support. – UDMO Staff

Brownie Sundaes

It was a beautiful and cool evening for our Brownie Sundae Drive-Thru, held on July 19. A hearty thanks to everyone who donated sundae

ingredients, served, observed, and drove through to support the cause! \$566 was raised for local food pantries!



Scholarships

The following scholarships were awarded on July 21.

Bess Lyons - \$250.00 each to Brynne Crystal, Jonah Hindt, Isabella Hindt, Brandon Lahr,

Sherry Leksell, Zachary Midtling, Bella Nelson, Lauren Stirling and Addison Stearns.
 Helen Poole: No applications received.
 Medical Careers (Ptacek); \$1,000.00 each to Kirsten Hovey and Benjamin Sterler.
 Helen Johnson: \$1,850.00 each to Brandon Lahr and Sherry Leksell.



Treasurer's Report

<u>INCOME</u>	June	YEAR TO DATE
Pledges and Offerings	\$15,375.00	\$117,829.00
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$15,375.00	\$117,829.00
<u>EXPENSES</u>		
Outreach and Mission	0.00	\$6,250.00
Pastoral Services	8,236.83	50,556.23
Maintenance and Repairs	6,318.95	23,227.09
Church Office	2,748.06	19,397.87
Music Ministry	492.25	3,028.50
Christian Education	42.83	209.35
Local Ministry	0.00	0.00
Misc. Expenses	605.17	1,551.49
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$18,444.09	\$104,220.53

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

