

**November 2024 Newsletter**  
**First Congregational United Church of Christ**  
**1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595**  
**515-832-2232**  
**<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>**

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”-- Matthew 5: 4*

A few years back my mother sent out an email with some Christmas gift ideas for her, and on her list was a new address book. She went on to explain that her old one had been increasingly filled with names and addresses that had an “X” through them...the X’s signifying that the individual had died. She said she wanted a new address book because it was getting increasingly difficult to use her old one, for when she would open it, she would see all the crossed-out names of the people she had known and loved who were now dead...and it would make her sad. I know the feeling, and I’m guessing you do as well. If you’ve had an address book long enough, not only will you see all of the changes that have gone on in the lives of folks you know, you will also see the names of people who are important to you who are now no longer with the living...and you also will feel sad.

Now most days we are pretty preoccupied and armored, or we try to be. We encounter those X’s in our address books, or we see deceased loved ones in our photo albums or on our phones, and we push it to the back of our minds. We tell ourselves “That’s life—people die.” But inevitably death does strike us in a visceral way when the memories of the people we have known and loved come back to us, and our sense of loss and sorrow comes back to us...and that makes us sad; that makes us “mourn.”

When Jesus said “blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,” he wasn’t sugar coating the sting of death and the pain of mourning over the loss of those we love. Jesus never promised that there would be no mourning in this life, but he did promise that mourning would not have the last word in our lives. For our faith teaches that even in the midst of the pain of losing our loved ones there is an ancient promise that is true: the promise that love and life are stronger than death, and our loved ones who have died will experience the wonder of new life beyond the grave and know for themselves the Good News that death is not the end, but a new beginning!

And our faith teaches that there is not only life after death, but also love after death! Those we love whom we have lost are not lost to us forever, for we are promised that we will see them again in the fullness of time, and in this reunion our joy will be full, and our love will be complete. This Good News is wondrously comforting!

My Mom did get a new address book for Christmas that year. But as she continues to use it there will be more X’s made in it...until the day that her name and address are in turn X’d out in others’ address books. Our faith doesn’t promise that loss and mourning will cease in our earthly lives, and this can be a hard truth to bear. But in our mourning we have the comfort that comes from knowing that the Living God who has loved us into being blesses us, and comforts us, even as we mourn.

On Sunday, November 3<sup>rd</sup> we will observe All Saints Sunday, and during the service everyone will be invited to come forward, speak the names of their loved ones, and light candles in their memory and honor. As we do this, it will be good for all of us to remember that these candles not only represent our love for them, our memories of them, and our mourning for them...they also represent the light of our Good News that death is not the end, and the Good News that our separation from our loved ones will be only for a time; not forever.

May this Good News be our great comfort--even as we mourn--on this All Saints Sunday, and every day! --Pastor Craig

**Congregational Meeting** to vote on the budget November 3 following morning worship. We will also vote on a proposal by the Trustees to replace the louvers in the bell tower.

## Church Staff

**Rev. Craig Blaufuss**, Pastor  
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Pastor's email: [revcraigblaufuss@gmail.com](mailto:revcraigblaufuss@gmail.com)  
**Michele Omvig**: Admin. Assist. **269-7210**  
Church's e-mail: [administrative.office@fcuccwc.org](mailto:administrative.office@fcuccwc.org)  
**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**

## 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:

5 - Joely Gilbert  
9 - Keith Holdgrafer  
11 - Dilcia Franco  
13 - Holly Riemenschneider  
13 - Katie Sonsalla  
13 - Oliver Sonsalla  
13 - Andrea Mosbach  
24 - Maggie Kennedy  
20 - Jayleen Burgos  
27 - Glenda Wehrhan

## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

22 - Tom & Holly Riemenschneider

## Parish Nurse News

Advice from the Night Sky

- See the big picture.
- Be a star.
- Keep looking up.
- Don't be afraid of the dark.
- Stay full of wonder.
- Expand your horizons.
- Turn off the lights!

## OH, NUTS!

That's right! Pecans have arrived, and Haystack Circle is ready to sell them at \$12 a bag. You'll find them in Fellowship Hall. We have two options - pieces or halves. Same price. Be sure to stock up for making pecan pie, pecan rolls, pecan-topped sweet potatoes and more for Thanksgiving. Pecans also make great

Christmas gifts for baking or snacking. If you're paying with a check, please make it out to Haystack Circle and leave it with Michele in the church office. Enjoy!

**All Saints Sunday November 3** All Saints Day is a time to remember those departed saints who have shaped and blessed our lives in so many ways. On Sunday, November 3 we will observe All Saints Sunday during worship by reading the names of our departed congregation members who have died in the past year. Following their remembrance, individuals and families will be invited to come to the front of the sanctuary to light candles in memory of loved ones and friends who have departed. The departed saints of this congregation whom we will remember during this year's All Saint's Sunday are: Kay Harfst, Mary Worthington, Mary Vavroch, Howard Stearns, and Susan Andrew.

## Hanging of the Greens

'Tis the season to be jolly! Be sure to stay after the worship service on November 24 as we transform the sanctuary for Christmas. Those tasked with putting together the brand-new artificial Christmas trees will silently – or maybe aloud – bless the smaller trees, replacing unwieldy-to-assemble, aging (although lovely and large) faux evergreens. Strong, ladder-climbing folks are needed, as well as those who recall what went where in past years. No matter your age or agility, stay for lunch! The focus is on soups: cheeseburger, turkey taco soup, potato, and gluten-free white bean or black bean soup. Also on the menu: milk, cinnamon rolls, gluten-free French bread, relishes, Saltines, cornbread, and chocolate chip cookies. Welcome the Advent season! – Worship Board

**Bells** Webster City Ministerial Association invite you to help ring bells to raise money for homeless and families in crisis. It is a fact that Ecumenical Human Needs Committee will run out of money by the end of January 2025. Our homeless population has increased and we are getting more applications for families in crisis situations. The cost of food, rent, utilities, and gasoline continues to increase. Crisis families may go without food, electricity, or be evicted

because they cannot pay their rent. We do not want families to suffer.

We will "Ring Holiday Bells" between Thanksgiving and Christmas. Fareway, HyVee, and Bomgaars have agreed to let us come on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Our church's day to ring the bells will be Friday, December 6, at all 3 locations from 3-7 pm. You can ask a family member or a friend to ring bells with you. Our crisis clients will receive 100% of the money collected to help them get back on their feet.

**Find Your Niche** Please prayerfully consider making a one-year commitment to help smooth the transition from pastor Craig's retirement in March 2026 to the next phase of our church life together. A poster and sign-up sheet is now available. Meanwhile, please be thinking of how you will help keep First Congregational continuing its 169 year history of faith, love, and service!

### **Alternative Giving Fair Live and Silent Auction Return**

After the fun and success we had with our auction items during Advent 2023 our auctions will be returning for a repeat performance! We are again asking for hand crafted items from you, our church family, to be donated to this event in December. We are asking that those who want to donate and be a part of this fun event to please do 2 things: first let a member of Mission Board know what you are planning to contribute, and two please limit your donations to no more than 3 items. Mission Board will again make decisions as to silent auction items and live auction ones. The auction is being planned for Sunday December 15 so get those creative juices flowing so your items will be ready by the first of December!

### **Ecumenical Human Needs Committee Needs Your Help**

Greetings to All from the Webster City Ministerial Association. The WCMA consists of clergy from 9 churches in Webster City. A facet of our Association is a relief program called the Ecumenical Human Needs Committee. The Ecumenical Human Needs Committee assists Webster City residents with financial assistance for deposits, rent or utilities. There are guidelines which require these recipients to

have a steady income. This last year we have seen an increase in the number of persons/families in need of emergency assistance, as well as an increase in the dollar amounts needed to assist persons facing an emergency situation. The EHNC program is funded primarily by 2 grants and funding from our collective churches.

This fiscal year, only one of the 9 churches has donated funding to the Ecumenical Human Needs Committee. Also, the awards of the grants were less this year than they have been in the past. We recently audited expenditures for this year. The trajectory indicates EHNC will run out of funds in January of 2025.

The Webster City Ministerial Association is calling upon our collective congregations to consider making an offering to the Ecumenical Human Needs Committee. 100% of the money that goes into EHNC is used for our clients. EHNC is staffed solely by volunteers. Please consider helping us help our community members who face financial hardship and who need assistance to get back on their feet. We appreciate your consideration of this worthwhile ecumenical ministry offered to our community.

### **Some Takeaways from 2024 JAM**

September 27-28 Pastor Craig and I represented First Congregational UCC of Webster City as delegates to the Joint Annual Meeting of the Tri-Conference of Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota. It was a full two days of business for the Tri-Conference and the Iowa Conference, learning and worship held at the huge Countryside Community Church in Omaha.

We met Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, head of the national UCC staff in Cleveland. She is in her second year in this job. Rev. Thompson had been with the national office 14 years in justice and in disaster relief assignments. She spoke of radical inclusion, love your neighbor, not just people like yourself. She noted that Covid brought changes to our churches. We learned to learn in nontraditional ways. When the Congregational Church reorganized in 1957, uniting with a number of other denominations to become the United Church of Christ, something died so something

new and radical could live. We continue to hold on to old ways with nostalgia. For example, are we willing to let go of Sunday morning to try something new?

The new Tri-Conference Minister will be announced soon when some details are finalized.

Tri-Conference finances have improved. Interim Conference Minister Phil Hart has balanced the budget by reducing full-time staff and brick and mortar office space. He has hired Resource Deacons 5 hours a week to work with churches assigned to them.

The Iowa Conference had a quorum for our business meeting. Pastor Craig and I learned ours is not the only church looking for a pastor now or in the future – but we seem to be among the more organized.

The Webster City UCC is still a 5-for-5 church, supporting four mission offerings and OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) for the Conferences and national ministries. You'll see the certificate on the bulletin board outside of Pastor Craig's office. However, the OCWM report for our congregation and most others is wrong; the corrected report will be distributed in coming months. The new accountant for the Tri-Conference was to start work the Monday after the JAM closed.

In the "Age-Conscious Ministry" workshop led by Rev. Beth Long Higgins, director of the United Church Homes Center for Abundant Aging, we learned that very few churches have all the young people they want. However, have we maximized bringing in people 50-plus who could use what churches offer? Connection and belonging – conversing with others, singing, helping, sharing their skills? Aging can bring loneliness and isolation, with health implications similar to risks of smoking. Rev. Higgins recommended the book *Who Do You Want to Be When You Grow Old? The Path of Purposeful Aging*, by Richard Leider and David Shapiro. I have ordered the book. I also can share the 107-page JAM "booklet" of reports, financials, and other Tri-Conference information.

Thank you for sending me as your lay delegate to the Joint Annual Meeting. Marjorie Groves

## The KLAB Kids had their Halloween party October 29, and they had a great time!



## Treasurer's Report

<b>INCOME</b>	<b>September</b>	<b>YEAR TO DATE</b>
Pledges and Offerings	\$19,356.79	\$166,065.40
Other Income	0.00	.00
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$19,356.79</b>	<b>\$166,065.40</b>
<b><u>EXPENSES</u></b>		
Outreach and Mission	1,250.00	\$11,250.00
Pastoral Services	7,847.06	74,796.21
Maintenance and Repairs	5,727.53	33,115.34
Church Office	3,165.32	30,456.71
Music Ministry	492.25	4,580.25
Christian Education	0.00	209.35
Local Ministry	0.00	0.00
Misc. Expenses	53.71	2,181.87
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$18,535.87</b>	<b>\$156,589.73</b>

### First Congregational UCC Cabinet Agenda October 8, 2024

ATTENDANCE: Moderator Gayle Olson

Financial Secretary: Dale Olson

Trustees: Nick Oberender

Christian Education: Cindy Henning

Treasurer: Tracy Wehrhan,

Clerk: Kolleen Taylor

Women's Fellowship: Patti Gescheidler

Staff/Parish Relations: Carol Crystal

Moderator G. Olson opened the meeting at 6 p.m. D. Olson led cabinet members in prayer. Taylor read the minutes from the September meeting. D. Olson made a motion to approve the minutes as read, seconded by Henning, all approved.

Treasurers report: Wehrhan reported that the income exceeded expenses by \$250.

Tracy made a motion to put the report to audit, D. Olson seconded, all approved.

Pastors report: Pastor Craig was absent to attend his mother who was having surgery. Henning read the pastors report.

- World Communion Sunday was celebrated on October 6, and we took up our Neighbors in Need offering. All Saints Sunday will be observed on November 3; letters and texts are being sent out to the relatives of church members who died this past year. Advent will start on December 1, and the Hanging of the Greens will be held November 24. We led care center worship services Sunday, October 6, and offered communion by intinction at all 3 services in honor of World Communion Sunday. I led Gospel Hour at Southfield on Oct 2.
- **WCMA:** The Angel Tree Gift program has now started, with applications being placed at various locations. Those applications must be into the library by Oct. 31, and on Nov. 4 a work group will gather to make up the Angels and get them placed on trees at Kendall Young library and People's Credit Union. The deadline to select an Angel, purchase gifts, and get them to the assigned church is Sunday, December 8. Pickup of gifts will be Sunday, Dec. 15, from 2-4 pm. There will also be Bellringing to raise funds for the EHNC during the Advent season. Our turn to ring bells will be Friday Dec. 6, 3-7 pm at Bomgaars, Hy Vee, and Fareway. Letters of solicitation have been sent out to all area churches in the WCMA asking them to consider intentionally gifting the EHN Fund. Our next meeting will be held at the "House of Restoration" on Thursday, Oct. 10. There will be a city-wide "Blue Christmas" service held at Faith UMC on Sunday, Dec. 1, beginning at 5 pm.

- **Tri-Conference:** Marjorie Groves and I attended JAM (joint annual meeting) of the Tri-Conference (with individual state conferences breaking out in sessions at the meeting) on Friday, September 27 and Saturday, Sept 28. It was held at Countryside Community church in Omaha, and the NW Association of Iowa was well represented! We were told that the search committee is getting close to securing a nominee as our new Tri-Conference executive. We also had the opportunity to meet our new Tri-Conference deacons who will be local liaisons between the Tri-Conference and local churches and church leadership. A new Treasurer has been elected who will be straightening out our books! The workshops on creating worship services and “Age Conscious Ministry” seemed well attended. The Eagle Grove UCC church is disbanded, Clarion UCC is searching for part time pastor, Humboldt UCC is looking for a pastor and so is FC of Fort Dodge. Chris Burtnett of Algona UCC retires Aug 31 of 2025, and we currently have only 6 licensed pastors in the NW Association.
- The breakdown of my ministry since Sept. 6: Worship services led:10; Christian Ed.:10; Meetings:12; Visitation:13; Memorial Service:1
- 2 weeks vacation Dec. 25-Jan 2, June 22-29

### **Boards & Committees:**

**Finance:** The Finance Board met on Oct. 2 to review proposed budgets, reviewing reviewed all lines and after discussion voted to approve the budget to forward to the cabinet. Wehrhan noted that there are several line items that will need to be discussed by the cabinet.

**Trustees:** Oberender reported nothing new. Wehrhan is getting a cost from the structural engineer who has inspected the Bell Tower.

**Mission:** G. Olson summarized their plans through December for the Alternate Giving displays. In addition, they are promoting the Angel Tree, KLAB fundraising for the Cat Hut, the December Home made goods auction which will go to help raise funds for the Belltower repairs, in addition there is an UDMO paper goods drive, and the Beacon of Hope Meal which is October 16. November 10 they will host the Fellowship coffee with a pickle jar to collect donations to the Hurricane Relief fund. Bell Ringers are needed for the December 6 Ecumenical Human Needs fundraiser at HyVee, Fareway and Bomgaars. Our church has also been asked to do the Living Nativity for the Dec. 7 Christmas in the City event and in the parade.

**Women’s Fellowship:** Profits from the Thrift sale are approx. \$1,900 The next sale is April 25 & 26. They are reviewing the Funeral Policy. The Christmas luncheon will be on Dec. 15 after Worship, with a potato bar and dessert, during which the Mission boards auction will happen.

**Worship Board:** The September 8 opening for Sunday school went well but had a small number of children.

- **Task Force Recruiting Worship Leaders:** Pastor Craig noted that there likely will be time between his retirement in March 2026 and when there’s another person in the pulpit. If the decision is made to look for another pastor, it would be good to do a profile asap. Pastor Craig says there are several leadership options that may be available to us in the future, including hiring an interim pastor, finding dedicated pulpit supply preachers, or yoking/sharing leadership with other churches. The topic of church leadership will remain on the agenda for future meetings.
- Considering having additional Saturday night services in 2025: Hangin’ of the Greens: will be after the worship service on November 24. The lunch after decorating will focus on soups. Board terms were discussed. Pastor Craig will take

time off after Christmas Eve service, and has additional vacation to schedule. Next meeting may be held on November 7 if needed.

**Christian Education:** Did not meet since the last cabinet meeting. Pastor Craig reported the Adult Education class is now studying "religious and spiritual trauma."

**KLAB** has been meeting since Sept. 10, and currently there are 6 kids attending. While the weather has been good we have focused on nature and the wonder and beauty of creation. Due to school early out there will be no KLAB on Oct 22. Oct. 29 will be our annual Halloween party!

**Staff Parish Relations:** Met to discuss the budget. Concerned to retain the people we have working for the church.

**Old Business:**

- Bell Tower update: Waiting on a quote from Structural Engineer
- Safe Church policy: Will be meeting end of the month.

**New Business:**

- 2025 Budget: The cabinet reviewed all the budget requests. The Finance Board made several recommendations to increase or decrease budgets. The following adjustments were made to the requests:
  - A motion was made to increase church insurance to \$21,000 by Henning, seconded by Gescheidler, all approved.
  - Taylor made a motion to increase maintenance repairs to \$7500, D. Olson seconded, all approved.
  - D. Olson made a motion to increase lease /Maintenance agreements to \$7,000, Henning seconded, all approved.
  - A motion was made by Henning to approve the total 2025 Church budget of \$234,583, which includes the above changes. Seconded by Crystal, 7 voted to approve, 1 against.
- Budget Meeting date was set for November 3 after church.
- Documents for Health Insurance and Pension for our Pastor have been received, and need a signature. A motion was made by D. Olson for the Moderator to sign the documents, seconded by Taylor, all approved.

After some discussion about moving the meeting time, it was suggested that we might not need a meeting in November. If we do have one, it will be November 19 at 7:30 p.m. (note time change).

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Kolleen Taylor, Church Clerk

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Address Service Requested

God is still speaking  
to everyone in the home of:

