

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

*“Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care, and fit us for heaven, to live with Thee there.”— “Away
in a Manger”*

I was recently touched by a video of a man named Howard Storm who claims to have had a near death experience. In his recounting of the experience, he shared that he had died and found himself at the gates of heaven and in the presence of Jesus! He was hoping to enter paradise, but Howard was dumbfounded when Jesus told him he had to return to earth. When Howard pressed Jesus as to why he couldn't proceed into heaven, Jesus responded that Howard *hadn't lived a life on earth that would prepare him for that holy place.*

He then asked Jesus what he must do, and Jesus simply said: “love the person you are with.” This answer wasn't satisfying to Howard, so he countered by asking “What good is that going to do?” Jesus replied “if you actually love the person you are with, they might get some love and then pass it on.” That answer wasn't satisfying either, so Howard protested, saying there are billions of people on earth and only millions who really know how to love in this cruel world. To this Jesus simply replied, “It is God's will.” Hearing this, Howard stopped protesting, and he now lives trying to share the love he has with others. He acknowledges that he is not perfect at it, but his life's attitude and work are now directed by this encounter, and by the simple command to “love the person you are with.” (To view the clip yourself, here is the link: <https://youtu.be/qtbYoSO7nj4?si=QvdLSXU80KM6Zad6>)

So is this how Jesus “fits us for heaven” by asking us, by *commanding* us, to love the person we are with? Is it an act of mercy or futility to fit us for heaven in this way? Have you ever tried that in an intentional way?

I can understand why Howard was balking. It is not natural to most of us to do this, and even if we did, what could we reasonably expect will happen? The billions of people who are crowding this planet will not have their lives transformed by the paltry love of a few million souls who are imperfectly practicing this form of love! Truth be told, it can take all our energies just to love the few special souls in our lives: family, close friends, some co-workers and church friends. Most of us mingle with many people and rub elbows with many strangers. Are we to love them, too? Love the gals who staff Dollar General? Love the cashiers and baggers at Fareway? Love the server and the other diners at the Gridiron? Love all the strangers I see on the street, or crowding into Kwik-Star? I know nothing about them. I don't know if I would even like them. Should I feel compelled to love them, too?

Friends, the first Sunday of Advent is December 1, the beginning of a season that is to prepare us for Jesus Christ's birth. I think nearly all of us love this time of the year for many reasons, but ultimately it is our love of Jesus, and our love of his message and teachings, that could and should open our hearts to the grace and beauty and depth and purpose of Christmas. This is a season of gifts and gift giving, and Howard's testimony reminds us yet again that the single greatest gift we can give to anyone and *everyone* is what we all need the most: LOVE. Not a toaster, not a video game, not a box of candy or a sweater or any of the countless gifts that we share during this happiest of seasons. What we ALL NEED is love!

And if we as Christians really believe this, then we need to practice loving the people we are with *in every circumstance*. For Jesus came to earth and did just that...and above all else we are celebrating his birth *because he did just that*. He loved all people. He made love his purpose and vocation. And if he died to “fit us for heaven” (John 12:32) it was so we could see in him the supreme virtue in all of life; the supreme virtue of God and God's realm...which is love!

So...for Christmas this year, why not give the gift we all need; the gift that will fit us for heaven while bringing a bit of heaven to earth? Why not listen to a man who died on a cross and returned from the dead? For that matter, who not also listen to a man who nearly died, had an NDE, and came back to remind us of our need to love? What could make Christmas merrier for others, for Jesus, and for our own souls—than love? May you have the merriest of Christmases as you share what is best in you with all people, which is the greatest gift you have received, and the greatest gift you will ever give: LOVE! –Pastor Craig

Annual Reports are due December 14

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
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

- Vision problems
- Foot pain or poor footwear
- Home hazards such as broken or uneven steps, throw rugs or clutter

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 2024:

- **On December 1** we will observe the First Sunday of Advent, and share the sacrament of Holy Communion. That evening beginning at 5 pm everyone is invited to a Christmas Remembrance/Blue Christmas service at Faith UMC.
- **On December 8** we will observe the Second Sunday of Advent.
- **On December 15** we will observe the Third Sunday of Advent, and following the service we will enjoy a baked potato bar Christmas Luncheon courtesy of the Women's Fellowship, and participate in a silent and live auction of donated goods sponsored by the Mission Board.
- **On December 22** we will observe the Fourth Sunday of Advent in our sanctuary.
- **On December 24** we will hold our Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship service at 5 p.m. Holy Communion will be offered at this service.
- **On December 29** we will observe the first Sunday of Christmastide in worship. Pastor Craig will be on vacation, so we will enjoy a video sermon that day, and pre-recorded music. There will be no adult education that Sunday.

Come and share in the beauty and joy of the Advent and Christmas season as we

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 - 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:

28 - Dale & Gayle Olson
 30 - Ed & Andrea Mosbach

Parish Nurse News

Risk factors for falling

- Lower body weakness
- Vitamin D deficiency
- Difficulty with walking and balance
- Use of medicines such as tranquilizers, sedatives or antidepressants

worship God and celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World!

Angel Tree Gift Program update

We want to thank everyone who so generously responded to our 2024 Angel Tree Gift Program! There was a total of around 350 Angels city-wide, and 7 participating churches have taken responsibility for securing gifts for about half of them. Volunteers from the American Tap are buying gifts for 110 Angels this year, with the proceeds from their very successful Angel Tree Ride! As a reminder, the **gifts need to be returned to First Congregational by Sunday, December 8.**

Please remember to include the Angel tag with your gifts. On **December 15, from 2-4 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.

Living Nativity Returns Saturday, Dec. 7

As part of the “Christmas in the City” celebration sponsored by the Webster City Chamber of Commerce, First Congregational will again share our “Living Nativity” on Saturday, December 7, from 6:30-8 p.m. We will stage the nativity in front of the northwest entrance to the church. You are encouraged to drive by and enjoy this annual gift to the citizens of our town! It will be a festive and meaningful evening for us all, and a contribution to the “Christmas in the City” celebration that reminds us all of the reason for the season. **The signup sheet is out in Fellowship Hall, please sign up for a shift or two and help make our Living Nativity a success!**

KLAB Christmas Fundraiser

Starting early in December, there will be a tree in Fellowship Hall hung with colorful silicone spatulas with a special treat attached! The KLAB Christmas fundraiser that is part of our Advent Alternative Gift-giving fair will be to sell these useful ornaments to raise money for the Webster City Cat Hut—a feline rescue and adoption shelter. The suggested donation for an ornament is \$5. They would make a great kitchen addition—especially for cat lovers!

Care Center Caroling

Would you like to share some Christmas cheer with our local care center residents? 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. 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.

Advent Candle Readers Needed

Sunday, December 1 is our first Sunday in the season of Advent, and we are again asking for volunteers (families or groups of friends) to lead the Advent Candle Liturgy. If you are willing to help with this important part of our Advent worship please sign up in Fellowship Hall.

Church Officers

We have several boards and committees to ensure smooth operation of the church which need new members. Please consider joining a board for 2025. Most boards have a two-year term and you can serve two consecutive terms. You can be on more than one board. There is a sign-up sheet in Fellowship Hall, please consider signing up. We need YOU!

Alternative Giving Fair 2024

The Alternative Giving Fair is returning this year with 4 non-traditional ways of giving during the Advent and Christmas season. These four weeks are dedicated to helping make this season a little more festive for folks outside our normal spheres.

December 1st marks the first week. Tags for the Angel Tree tags are now available. Make a child’s Christmas Day joyous by getting a tag and supplying items/gifts requested by the child. The upper limit to spend is \$100.00 per child. (You don’t have to spend that much.) There are still many, many tags left to be filled both here and at Kendall Young Library. The unwrapped items with the tags are due to the church named on the back of the tag by December 8.

December 8 marks the second week. For this week the KLAB group at UCC will have a kitchen ware tree featuring spatulas for sale to benefit the Cat Hut. Thinking about replacing your spatulas? Take advantage of this tree and help cats too.

December 15 marks the third week. This week features the very popular Live and Silent Auction. As we did last year, we are asking for hand crafted items from you, our church family,

to be donated for this event. Non-food items are due to the church by December 1 and will be displayed in Fellowship Hall for silent bidding. Food items are due by December 14. There is a sign-up sheet out that is already filling up. The funds raised will be used for the belltower repairs. Please communicate with a Mission Board member for any questions.

December 22 marks the fourth week. This week will benefit UDMO. We are asking for donations of paper towels to be used to make a paper towel tree. So while out there grocery shopping, just pick up an extra roll of paper towel or 2 to help create a festive tree for UDMO.

Adult Education: "Personal Christology"

Advent is the season when we prepare for the birth of Jesus Christ, and the Adult Education topic we have begun is "Personal Christology: understanding our beliefs about Jesus Christ." Every Christian holds some beliefs about Jesus the "Christ" (the "anointed" one, the Messiah). Many of these beliefs are given to us through: the Biblical witness; the Universal church and its history of doctrines; the particular churches we have attended with their catalogs of preachers and teachers; our parents, relatives, friends, and other church members; society at large, including the media. It would be impossible to be a Christian without the transmission of beliefs about Jesus through various sources, since none of us were alive when Jesus was alive and therefore none of us had direct, firsthand contact with him while he was "in the flesh." But we as Christians also take what has been given to us about Jesus and we form our own ideas about him. This is our own "personal" Christology (beliefs about Jesus Christ)—which in turn shapes our relationship to him. In this study we will explore our personal beliefs about Jesus, rather than recounting the official doctrines of the church (although those doctrines will have something important to say to all of us about Jesus.) Through this exploration we will more clearly understand our "understandings" about Jesus, while opening us up to other possibilities and visions of this unique figure of human history who is the cornerstone of our religious tradition. *Join us at 9 a.m. in the Lower Level of the church! The coffee will be on!*

Ringling Holiday Bells!

It is beginning to look a lot like Christmas! The Webster City Ministerial Association is putting together their teams to ring bells from November 29th thru December 22nd. Each "Ringling Holiday Bells" team will be ringing bells on Friday, Saturday, or Sundays from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at 3 stores in town—Bomgaars, Hy-Vee, and Fareway. Just know that you are helping people in Webster City who are homeless or experiencing a difficult time in their lives. Remember that Jesus is the reason for the season. Jesus was our example of how to help others. Thank you for caring and reaching out to needy in our community. *God Loves You and so do we!*

2024 Christmas Remembrance/Blue Christmas Service

Faith UMC will host the 2024 Christmas Remembrance/Blue Christmas Service beginning at 5 pm on Sunday, December 1 (the first Sunday of Advent.) There will be an opportunity to light a candle for departed loved ones, and following the service there will be a soup supper in Faith's Fellowship Hall. Everyone is invited to come, light a candle for a loved one who has died, and honor their memory during this special time of the year.

Dishwashers Needed

We are looking for some people to learn how to run the dishwasher. Jim Henning will be available to teach you. It is not difficult, it just looks daunting. There will be a booklet showing each step, with picture locations. Call Jim or Cindy Henning at 515-297-0422.

OH, NUTS!

Haystack Circle is selling pecans at \$12 a bag. You will find them in Fellowship Hall. If you're paying with a check, please make it out to Haystack Circle and leave it with Michele in the church office. Enjoy!

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!

Dear Members of First Congregational United Church of Christ,

As the holiday season draws near, we're reminded of the gift of giving that Jesus himself embodied. This Christmas Eve, we invite you to share that spirit by supporting the United Church of Christ's Christmas Fund offering. For over a century, the Christmas Fund has been a vital source of support for UCC clergy and lay employees who have served faithfully and find themselves in need of assistance. Through the gifts of congregations across the country, we are able to extend a hand to those who have dedicated their lives to ministry.

The Christmas Fund provides four critical forms of care:

- Pension Supplements: Helping retired clergy and their spouses maintain a basic standard of living.
- Health Premium Assistance: Offering support to retired ministers with high medical costs.
- Emergency Grants: Providing funds to help meet unexpected expenses in times of crisis.
- Christmas "Thank You" Gift Checks: Spreading holiday cheer to those who have served the church with dedication and sacrifice. Your generosity ensures that the Christmas Fund can continue supporting those who have supported us all through their ministry, guidance, and love. Together, we can reflect God's compassion by giving hope and peace to those who need it most.

This Christmas Eve, please consider making a special offering to the Christmas Fund. Whether large or small, every gift matters and brings us closer to embodying the spirit of Christ's love. May our collective offerings be a source of light and blessing for our extended UCC family.

Thank you for your faithfulness and care. Let us be a church that not only celebrates the joy of Christmas but also shares it.

With blessings and gratitude,
Members of the Mission Board

The Piecemakers are a Happy Group!



The KLAB kids made this banner reminding us all to give thanks!



Treasurer's Report

INCOME	October	YEAR TO DATE
Pledges and Offerings	\$20,695.00	\$186,760.40
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$20,695.00	\$186,760.40
EXPENSES		
Outreach and Mission	1,250.00	\$12,500.00
Pastoral Services	8,096.59	82,892.80
Maintenance and Repairs	1,098.55	34,213.89
Church Office	4,186.98	34,643.69

Music Ministry	567.25	5,147.50
Christian Education	0.00	209.35
Local Ministry	0.00	0.00
Misc. Expenses	<u>259.34</u>	<u>2,441.21</u>
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$15,458.71	\$172,048.44

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

