

First Congregational United Church of Christ  
November 2019  
Branches Newsletter



**"Give thanks to the Lord for He is good;  
His love is eternal!"  
Psalm 107:1**

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## *From the Pastor's Desk*

November is always a special month in the church year. In the middle of the month we take time to offer our thanks for the many, many blessings, which God has given to us. And toward the end of the month our thoughts turn toward Advent and preparing our hearts to receive the Christ Child anew. November is filled with many wonderful opportunities for worship. Here are a few of the highlights listed below:

**November 3**– The sacrament of Holy Communion will be offered at both services of worship. (Remember that Daylight Savings Time ends and our clock will fall back one hour the night before.)

**November 10**– Stewardship Sunday - As part of our worship service we will celebrate our stewardship program “Let Your Light Shine” as we present our pledges to God for the upcoming year of 2020. Each family will be invited to come forward and place their pledge card in the offering plate and to kneel or stand and receive a short prayer of blessing with the pastor. This will be a service of dedicating ourselves to supporting the work of the church through offering our gifts of time, talent and treasure. The church cannot fulfill the ministries without your support.

**November 24**– Thanksgiving - This service of worship will focus upon Thanksgiving. We will be offering our thanks to God for all the many blessings we have received.

**December 1**– First Sunday of Advent – We will celebrate the beginning of Advent with a special service, “The Hanging of the Greens.” This service was introduced three years ago and was well received. The Hanging of the Greens will be presented at both services of worship.

November is truly a special time of the year. Join us as we celebrate the pledging of our gifts, offering our thanks to God for the gifts we have received and preparing our hearts to receive the most wonderful gift, the Christ Child.

### *Decorating the Church for Christmas*

This year the First Sunday of Advent is December 1. All preparation for decorating (getting out the decorations) will be done on Friday, November 29. On Saturday, November 30, the decorating will begin. We invite all to join in this tradition as we prepare for the birth of baby Jesus. Decorations will be taken down after the 10 a.m. worship on January 5. Those who can stay are asked to help with this.

### *Join us for “The Hanging of the Greens” Sunday, December 1*

The Hanging of the Greens occurs annually at the start of Advent and is a multisensory worship service designed for the entire church family. Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas and preparing ourselves for a new year living in the presence of God through our relationship with Christ. As we prepare ourselves for the beginning of the Advent Season, we gather and place the decorations that tell the story of Christ’s birth in their unique way. We will hear the timeless traditions behind these decorations and sing the beloved, favorite carols, and listen anew to the stories of Christ’s birth as recorded in the gospels. Join us for the Hanging of the Greens at both the 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. services on December 1.

## A Message from Stewardship Ministry



November 10 is Stewardship Sunday. It is a time to reflect on the blessings which we each enjoy and to gratefully, generously, and joyfully give of our Time, Talent and Treasures. A letter from the Stewardship Ministry was sent at the end of October. It contained the Time and Talent Interest form and the Treasures (financial support) Promise card. We ask that the cards be brought to church services on November 10 or returned to church in the envelope provided. An email will be sent if you choose to complete the Time/Talent Interest form electronically. Please let your brightness Shine onto others so that together we bring brightness to the world.

## Thank You for Your Support!

### Roctoberfest

We would like to thank each and every one of you who volunteered for Roctoberfest. We would also like to thank those who donated food, drink or baked items. It takes many hands to put together such a fun event. Tim & Deb Schuyler



### Family Promise

Thanks to all who made our last host week a success as we welcomed 2 families including 4 children to our church. We even hosted our youngest guest ever - 1 week old! Here is a list of the people who either provided food, set up, cleaned up, made dinner, spent time with our guests, and/or spent the night! We couldn't do it without these incredible volunteers:

Amy Middleton, Barb Rux, Barb Moeller, Cindy & Andy Meckl, Deb Groskopf, Deb Bursinger, Jared, Emily, Brynn, Connor, & Wes Steckbauer, Jill Riemann, Julie & Bill Palm, Kris Natalizio, Pam Van Every, Rania, Patrick, Sophie & Johnny Dempsey, Sandy Meyer, and Sue Basile.

## Church News

### Food Pantry Sundays - First Sunday of Every Month



**FEED THE HUNGRY**

On the first Sunday of every month, you are invited to bring items for the Food Pantry and put them in the baskets at the entrance to the sanctuary. The baskets are then brought to the altar during the offering. These donations are delivered to the Oconomowoc Food Pantry during the week. Items that the Food Pantry accepts are: Non-perishable food items; Baby items - diapers, wipes, baby food, formula; Personal hygiene items - soap, shampoo, tampons, sanitary pads, deodorant, toothpaste, laundry detergent, toilet paper.

Did you know that the Oconomowoc Food Pantry: Is a non-profit organization, Is run by volunteers with no paid staff, Receives no government subsidies, 100% of your donations go to servicing those in need. Here are the collection dates through the end of the year so you can mark your calendars: November 3, December 1. Please be sure all perishable donations are within use dates and have not expired.

### Evaluation Survey

A BIG THANK YOU to everyone that participated in the Pastor/Member Evaluation Survey. The Member Survey was designed to evaluate Pastor on his job description/duties and was answered by

91 of the 405 members provided the survey. The survey results for Pastor's job performance evaluation are confidential. However, the Personnel Committee would like to share the results of the members' support of Pastor.

Members were asked to rate their support of pastor as Good, Fair and I don't know. Although the ratings showed good support of pastor, the ratings overwhelmingly stated that the majority of support was fair to I don't know. This response provides opportunities for growth to strengthen members' relationship with Pastor in the following areas:

- Get to know pastor and his family personally
- Provide more volunteer services/hours
- Participate in programs offered
- Be more aware of Pastor's responsibilities and time constraints
- Acknowledge appreciation of Pastor's gifts and talents
- Interact with Pastor in a Christian Spirit
- Provide positive feedback
- Offer solutions to problems
- Quell rumors and don't share gossip
- Pray for pastor and his family
- Participate in strengthening the future of the church
- Communicate patience as Pastor seeks improvement in performance

The evaluation of Pastor reveals many things, but the main theme in all of the surveys and evaluation questions is that greater communication and cooperation is required of Pastor and the members to make the Church thrive and grow. As pastor of First Congregational UCC Church, Pastor Dave is meeting and exceeding expectations and is to be commended on the work he provides for the Church community. No one can accomplish the job duties of Pastor, without the cooperation of membership, and he cannot accomplish the mission of the Church without the support of the membership and staff.

### ***Church Giving Reminder***

Please make checks payable to First Congregational UCC for all special collections and monthly singing collections if you would like them to be included on your annual contribution statement.

Checks made payable directly to a fund beneficiary (i.e. Neighbors in Need, Oconomowoc Food Pantry) will be forwarded to the fund beneficiary for deposit and will not be included on your annual contribution statement.

## ***Opportunities***

### ***Communion Table Flowers***

There are several opportunities available to donate flowers for Sunday services. Dates available include November 3, 17, and 24, and December 15, 22. Please sign up on the kiosk, or call Liz in the church office.

### ***Light the Advent Wreath, Read Prayer and Scripture Verses***

Spirituality Ministry is looking for volunteers to light the Advent wreath and to read the prayer and scripture verses. The prayer and scripture verses will be provided and printed out for the volunteers

to read. We are looking for volunteers for both services on the following Sunday's: December 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd. We will also need volunteers for the three Christmas Eve services at 4:00 pm, 7:00 pm and 11:00 pm. Please contact Susan Perschon, or Pastor Dave in the office if you would like to help with this beautiful tradition.

## **Giving Tree**

Mission Ministry is once again having a Giving Tree for the Christmas season. This year, there will be tags for:

- Gifts for 5 local families from the Christmas Clearing Council
- Some items for ERA's Senior Network
- \$10 Gifts for each of our Head Start children



The tree will be put up in Fellowship Hall by Sunday, November 17. Gifts will need to be returned by Sunday, December 8. Any questions, please contact Rania Dempsey at 262-719-3037 or [rania@wi.rr.com](mailto:rania@wi.rr.com).

## **Habitat for Humanity**

The following are Saturday work dates for Habitat for Humanity for Washington and Dodge Counties from 9 am - 3 pm: November 9, November 30, December 14, December 28, and January 18. Please follow this link to sign up <https://timecounts.org/hfhwadovolunteers/events/22415>.

## **Red Cross Blood Drives**

The Red Cross is looking for adults or high school students interested in hosting blood drives next February and/or August at the church. If you are interested, please contact Jenelle Blavat, Donor Recruitment Account Manager at [Jenelle.Blavat@redcross.org](mailto:Jenelle.Blavat@redcross.org).

## **Food for the Body and Soul**

A group of men meets religiously every Wednesday morning at 8:00 am. at the Rockwell restaurant located at Shorehaven Lutheran Homes. A free-flowing conversation always takes place as there is no agenda, just good companionship and camaraderie.

The group first met in 1967, according to the booklet, Journey of Joy, which chronicles the history of First Congregational Church. Yikes, that means that this group has been getting together for 52 years. Obviously, these men are not the original members, but what a tradition!

We are an open and welcoming group and encourage anyone to join the Wednesday Morning Men's Breakfast Group. You do not need a reservation, just come with an open mind and empty stomach.

## **Wednesday Women's Bible Study**

Please join us as we study the weekly scripture lessons and discuss how the Word of God impacts our daily lives. We laugh, we share, and we offer prayerful support to one another.

We meet from 1:00 – 2:30 pm each Wednesday afternoon in the Music Room. You may bring your own Bible or use one from the pews at church. Hope to see you there!

## **Family Promise**

Our next host week is Dec 1-8th. The sign-up will be available soon. If you'd like to volunteer, but need training, contact Cindy Meckl 262-567-2558 or [thameckls@gmail.com](mailto:thameckls@gmail.com) for details.



## Women's Connection

Women's Connection meets from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the church building (specific room TBD for each meeting) and is open to women of all ages. We offer women an opportunity to connect with God and each other through sharing fellowship, stories, and support. Each session centers around a different topic or project and is "stand alone," so drop in when you can! Mark your calendars for 2019-2020 dates: Nov. 3, Nov. 24, Jan. 12, Jan. 26, Feb. 9, Feb. 23, Mar. 15, Apr. 19, (April 26-off site brunch-no regular meeting), May 3, and May 17. Please contact Emily Steckbauer ([emily.steck@gmail.com](mailto:emily.steck@gmail.com)), Cindy Meckl ([themeckls@gmail.com](mailto:themeckls@gmail.com)), Sarah Erickson-Bhatt ([sarah.e.bhatt@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.e.bhatt@gmail.com)), or Rania Dempsey ([rania@wi.rr.com](mailto:rania@wi.rr.com)) with any questions!

## Women's Gathering

Barb Moeller, Carolyn Crom, Sally Burdick and Barb Bleecker looking fancy at the Monthly Women's Gathering. The women had a blast modeling some pretty stylish outfits during their October gathering! Join them every fourth Thursday and see how much fun you will have!



## Calendar of Events

### Singing Collection

Every time we worship, loose coins in the offering are donated to a Mission Partner. Because the coins in the metal plates make a "joyful noise," we call this our Singing Collection.



The November Singing Collection will be for the Christmas Fund. For decades, the Christmas Fund — formerly known as "Veterans of the Cross" — has helped provide supplemental monies for pension and health insurance premiums to low-income retirees. At Christmas, the offering provides gift checks to hundreds of annuitants, but one of the unique aspects of the Christmas Fund is that the funds provide direct financial assistance to individual UCC clergy, lay church employees, and their surviving spouses/partners—the funds do not support programs or institutions, but people. With your continued generosity, more individuals will receive the support of the Church in their time of need.

### Branches Newsletter Deadlines

Please send articles for both December and January to Liz Mueller at [liz@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:liz@oconomowocucc.org). The deadline is **Friday, November 15** for the December/January issue of *Branches*.

### It's a Pre-Wedding Party and You're Invited!

Join us on Saturday, November 9, from 5:00-7:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall.

Abby Schnepf and Patrick King are getting married in Louisville, Kentucky in December and, because most of us can't make it there in the winter, we are having a party to celebrate their upcoming wedding! It's a Barbeque/Western Theme and we will even have a person to teach us some line dancing for those that are so inclined!



RSVP to Lynn Zwaska at [lzwaska@firstweber.com](mailto:lzwaska@firstweber.com) or 414-651-9392 so that we are certain to have enough food for everyone attending! If you would like to help with the evening, please let me know. Abby and Patrick are registered at Target and Bed, Bath & Beyond.

## Women's Gathering Christmas Party

At the last gathering, we thought it would be fun to have a Christmas Party. The beautiful Rockwell Restaurant at Shorehaven will be happy to accommodate our group. The best date would be Thursday, Dec. 5th, at 5:30 p.m. It would be fun to have a small gift exchange, no more than \$5.00, homemade is great, or whatever works for you. If you could please RSVP to Carolyn Crom, 262-567-9093, or 262-227-1489 (cell) or [ckcrom@yahoo.com](mailto:ckcrom@yahoo.com), or Carolyn Frick at 414-699-9050, or [carolynfrick@gmail.com](mailto:carolynfrick@gmail.com). We look forward to hearing from YOU.

## UCC Annual Cookie Sale

Our Annual Christmas Cookie Sale is quickly approaching. This year it will be held on Saturday, December 14 from 9-11 a.m. and **Bakers are Needed!** Watch for the sign-up in fellowship hall.



## Youth News!

### Confirmation



Our small but mighty Confirmation group is underway and doing well. Our next session will be held on Sunday, November 10, when we dive more into the Bible and God. As always, we look forward to a faith filled journey with these individuals and their mentors!

### Youth Group News!

Our High School Youth really enjoyed our brunch which was held on October 20. Fourteen of our high school youth came together and made "geode" refrigerator magnets, enjoyed some waffles, and played a few games of gaga ball. For the month of November our Junior Youth (**3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade**) will be meeting **November 10** from **11:15-1** and the High School (**9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade**) group will come together **November 17** from **11:15-1**. They will be working on another project to spread kindness, enjoy lunch together, and participate in a game/activity. Please mark your calendars to join us, and watch your email for more information! Youth are always allowed to invite friends to join in on any of these events. These are great opportunities for our youth to build lasting meaningful relationships with their friends from church. All youth attending any youth group gathering need to have a registration form filled out. **Please click here to register today.**



## Annual Christmas Pageant



Our Christmas season is quickly sneaking up on us and we are already in planning mode. Our Annual Christmas Pageant will be held on **Sunday, December 15** during the 10 a.m. worship. Rehearsals will take place **Sunday, December 8 from 11:30 - 3** (with lunch provided) for all lead/speaking roles as well as dancers, and on **Saturday, December 14 from 12:30-3** for everyone.

This year we are looking for several children and youth who are interested in a variety of roles. There are both speaking and non-speaking roles. As for speaking roles we are looking for: two to three

youth who would like to do the welcome poem and speech, Mary the narrator (middle school age), Joseph (middle school age), Angel Gabriel, three Innkeepers, Lil' Donkey, two to three Lead Shepherds, The Star, and three Kings. Some non-speaking roles include Mary, Angels, Shepherds, Lil' Camel, and Dancers. We are also looking for volunteers to setup lunch/snack, costumes and supervising children the day of the pageant. If you or your child(ren) are interested in any of these roles, please contact Amy Drewa, sign up on the form by the Sunday School sign in table, or [click here](#). We look forward to all the help and support on the production of another wonderful Christmas Pageant!

## **Mission Trip**

If you haven't heard our 2020 Youth Mission Trip has been announced! Join us **July 25-August 1** as we travel to **Virginia Beach, Virginia** to work with those who are living in struggling communities. The work will include general home repairs, painting, deck and wheelchair construction, and building relationships with one another as well as the community members. If you're interested in attending, pick up a registration form on the kiosk in the stairwell in the lower level. Please register by December 31. After December 31, available spots will be opened to non-church members.

Mission Ministry is pleased to announce that there is a scholarship available for participants to apply for. If you would like to apply for a scholarship, please email a one page essay to Amy Drewa at [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org) explaining why you would like to attend this trip, what you hope you will get out of it, and why you think mission trips are important. All essays need to be sent no later than **December 1**.

## **Sunday School News!**

As we floated through October learning about Noah's Ark, we are now heading into a lion's den! During the month of November the children will be exploring the story of Daniel in the Lion's Den. But before we enter the Lion's Den, we will come together on November 3 for Family Worship.

Family Worship is offered twice a year and is a great opportunity for our children and youth. There is no Sunday School held on these particular Sundays. This gives our children and youth the opportunity to sit in worship with us instead of Sunday School. This is a great experience; they learn so much that we don't realize. Through these opportunities for maturity, the children learn how to sit in church, the order of worship, the sights and sounds, and not to mention what they take away from the sermons, prayers or even songs. After the service, take the opportunity to ask your child(ren): What did they learn? What was one new thing they discovered in worship? What did they like most?



The Sunday after our Family Worship we will come back together for a fun-filled month of Sunday School learning about Daniel in the Lion's Den. Each week the children will be learning a little more about the story through a different activity. Not only will they be hearing that story, they will also learn about the power of prayer! They may get a little messy making a lion's den or playing with fire (slime, playdough, or shaving cream).

As for our High School class, they will be exploring topics that relate to Christian teens. Each week it's



a different topic/theme with a video that supports it. These discussions help give our youth the Christian language, ideas, or support as they travel their faith journey as a teen.

We are very excited for our children and youth to join us each week, and the opportunity to assist them as they put more pieces of their faith puzzle together. We look forward to another fun filled month!

### **Thank you!**

We would like to thank our September and October Sunday School Volunteers. Without each of you we couldn't have kicked our Sunday School year off to a great start. We are truly blessed for all those who join us by teaching in some capacity! Thank you to: Rochelle Behling, Rachel Bona, Randy Bourdo, Darla Corbe, Kit Dailey, Pat Evans, Abbey Kaszubowski, Cindy Meckl, Barb Moeller, Caty Schmitt, Deb Schuyler, Emily Steckbauer, and Jenny Wallace.

### **Sunday School Volunteers are NEEDED!**

As we continue to roll through our Sunday School year, we need some wonderful helpers. We are looking for a lead teacher in the Game Room, a Shepherd for the 3 - 5 year-olds and 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> graders for the month of December. There is **no teaching experience required!** With Rotation, it takes a village, and parent-involvement makes a big difference! Please consider joining our fun by helping out and [click here](#) to sign up today! If you have any questions, please contact Amy Drewa at [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org).



# Hearts & Hands Christian Preschool



## **Third Classroom Added for Friday Fun Classes!**

Starting Friday, October 25th, the preschool will be using the nursery as our 3rd classroom for our Friday Fun classes. Thanks Kris Natalizio and Cindy Meckl for adding a fresh coat of paint! The carpet has been cleaned, toys organized, and supplies purchased to welcome our students on the 25th. To top it all off, the first class, "Going to the Zoo" is FULL. We do have room in most of our regular preschool classes if you know a 2.5 year old to 4 year old looking for some fun (and learning too!)

See our website ([www.heartsandhandspreschool.org](http://www.heartsandhandspreschool.org)) for details

For more information check out

- our website ([heartsandhandspreschool.org](http://www.heartsandhandspreschool.org)),
- our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/heartsandhandsconomowoc/>),
- our Instagram ([hearts\\_hands\\_preschool](https://www.instagram.com/hearts_hands_preschool/)),

or contact Cindy Meckl ([themeckls@gmail.com](mailto:themeckls@gmail.com) or 262-567-2558)

## **Wish List – iPad**

Are you getting rid of an old iPad that needs a new home? We'd love to use it in the classroom for taking pictures and communicating with preschool parents!



On Wednesday & Thursday, October 16 & 17, the preschoolers made muffins for their moms. What a fun morning we had making muffins, serving our moms, and playing on the playground! This is a fun tradition that is enjoyed by all.



Sue Zajac brought her therapy horse, "Bear", to preschool! The kids (and especially the teachers) loved his visit! Thanks Sue & Bear!



The preschoolers went on a fall hike around our gorgeous property! What a beautiful fall day we had to enjoy God's Amazing creation!

## ***Staying Connected ...***

**Pastor Dave Schnepf:** pastor@oconomowocucc.org

**Amy Drewa, Dir. of Ed. & Youth:** amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org

**Liz Mueller, Administrative Assistant:** liz@oconomowocucc.org

**Cindy Meckl, Hearts & Hands Preschool:** themeckls@gmail.com

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## **Fall Worship Schedule**

### **Traditional**

8:00 a.m.

### **Connections**

10 a.m.

### **Sunday School**

3K - High School

Held during the

10 a.m. service

## **Upcoming Events:**

- **Family Worship (no Sunday School):** Sunday, November 3, 10 a.m.
- **Communion Sunday:** Sunday, November 3
- **Food Pantry Collection:** Sunday, November 3
- **New Member Brunch:** Sunday, November 3, following 10 a.m. service
- **Women's Connection:** Sundays, November 3 and 24, 11:30 – 1 p.m.
- **Schnepf/King Pre-Wedding Party:** Saturday, November 9, 5 - 7 p.m.
- **Habitat for Humanity:** Saturdays, November 9 and 30
- **Stewardship Sunday:** Sunday, November 10
- **Articles for December/January Branches Due:** Friday, November 15
- **Thanksgiving Worship:** Sunday, November 24
- **Decorating the Church for Christmas:** Friday/Saturday, Nov. 29/30
- **The Hanging of the Greens:** Sunday, December 1, at both services
- **Family Promise Host Week:** Sunday, December 1 – Sunday, December 8
- **Food Pantry Collection:** Sunday, December 1
- **Women's Gathering Christmas Party:** Thursday, December 5, 5:30 p.m.
- **Annual Cookie Sale:** Saturday, December 14, 9 – 11 a.m.
- **Christmas Pageant:** Sunday, December 15, during 10 a.m. worship