

First Congregational United Church of Christ  
February 2020  
*Branches Newsletter*



***“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and, Love your neighbor as yourself.”***

***Luke 10:27***

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## From the Pastor's Desk

For my article this month, I would like to share a few items of interest with all of you.

First, on Friday of this last week we signed a contract with Digital Media Lab, which is located in Delafield. Digital Media will begin construction of a new website for our church. Today, most young families look for a new church home on the Internet. Therefore, a powerful internet presence is a key to congregational growth. Our present site needs to be upgraded and changed in its orientation. The new site will focus more of the needs of people and less upon what we as a church have to offer. This new website will be paid for through the gift given to congregation last summer.

Second, Liz Mueller turned in her letter of resignation the week before Christmas. Ever since, the staff has been hustling to keep everything running smoothly. Shortly afterward, a hiring team was formed to search for a new Administrative Assistant. The position was advertised on Indeed.com and on Facebook. We received 40 resumes. We interviewed three qualified candidates for the position, and have extended an offer to an individual. It is our hope that she will begin working with us in the middle of February. The Leadership and Personnel teams are working on a financial package. We will be sharing more about our candidate in the near future after the details have been finalized.

Third, in 2019 we celebrated together the two marriages of our daughters, Rachel and Abby. In 2020, my dad, Rich, passed away. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the friends and members of First Congregational Church for the many ways in which you have shared your love and support to our family. Many of you have sent cards, made phone calls, sent text messages, or sent flowers.

We appreciate everyone for your thoughtful expression of love and support.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave

## 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.*



## February's Singing Collection will be The Lake Area Club

The Lake Area Club or Lake Alano Club, located at N60 W35878 Lake Dr. Oconomowoc is a recovery club for people suffering from the disease of alcoholism or other chemical dependencies, their families, or persons interested in the arrestment of said diseases a place to meet and socialize. They specialize in twelve-step recovery groups such as AA, NA, CA, GA, etc. There are open meetings where anyone can come to listen to a speaker meeting and hear someone's recovery story. For more information, visit [www.lakeareclub.com](http://www.lakeareclub.com).

**Thanks to all who drop coins into the offering plate to make them "SING!"  
In the last two years, a total of \$18,224.23 was raised!**

**Singing collections for 2020:** January - Jam for Jamaica, February - Lake Area Club, March - Hearts and Hands Preschool, April - Church World Service, May - Family Promise, June - Lake Area Free Clinic, July - Christmas Fund, August - Youth Mission Trip, September - Christmas Clearing Council, October - Habitat for Humanity, November - Fisher House, December - Oconomowoc Food Pantry



## What is Lent? And why do we observe it?

For those in the Christian faith, the Season of Lent is typically considered to be the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, and is often characterized by abstinence from certain kinds of food or activities. The period is most commonly thought of as a symbol of the 40 days and nights Jesus spent struggling with the devil in the wilderness. Lent is a time of preparation and self-sacrifice through fasting, and often giving up worldly desires.

## The History of Lent

The practice of Lent likely has its origins in practical reasons. In agricultural societies (as most Christian cultures were, in the fourth and fifth centuries, when Lent is first mentioned in historical context), winter crops were often scarce. Correspondingly, a period of fasting may have been a spiritual response to a physical need. The excesses and revels of Shrove Tuesday (also known as Mardi Gras), the day before Ash Wednesday, were, in all likelihood, a response to the same phenomenon, as people wanted to consume perishable goods (like meats, eggs, dairy products, and sweets) before they spoiled.

As the practice of Lent evolved, it began to take on the added significance of a preparation of new church members for the baptism of Easter Sunday. In the spirit of Christianity as a community of living faith, all Church members eventually embraced this period of fasting and preparation. Additionally, Lent was once referred to as quadragesima, which is Latin for the fortieth day before Easter. The word "Lent" it is thought to come from a Germanic root, lenct, which initially meant "spring" and, later, "fast."

## Why 40 Days?

Lent's duration is actually 46 days. However, as Sundays represent Christ's resurrection, they are not commonly counted in the tally between Ash Wednesday and the Easter vigil. The primary meaning of the fast is considered to be a way of identifying with the suffering of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, and of acknowledging his substitutionary death for the sins of humankind. The meaning of the season is further enriched by other biblical occurrences of the number 40 -- Moses and Elias spent 40 days in the wilderness, in a similar manner to Christ, the Jewish people wandered for 40 years, as recorded in Exodus, and Jesus spent 40 hours in the tomb, prior to his resurrection.

## Colors and Decorations of Lent

For the Lenten season, purple, red, and dark violet are often the favored colors, symbolizing the pain of Christ's crucifixion. Gray, the color of ashes, is often used for Ash Wednesday, and this practice is sometimes extended throughout the entire fast. Furthermore, some churches avoid flowers during the season, reintroducing them at Easter with a flowering cross. Other congregations choose to use a roughly hewn wooden cross as a focal point throughout the season, symbolizing of Christ's pain and martyrdom.

***For Christians of all colors, Lent continues to symbolize the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ.  
The season of Lent serves as a reminder of the sorrow and joy of the Resurrection,  
and the truly loving and compassionate spirit of Jesus.***

## Ash Wednesday

**Feb. 26 at 7 p.m.**

This year we will join the congregation of Good Shepherd United Methodist Church for worship. Good Shepherd is located at 800 Lake Drive, in Oconomowoc (next to Nature Hill Intermediate School).  
[www.oconomowocchurch.com](http://www.oconomowocchurch.com)

***Come and join us! Prepare your hearts as we walk toward  
the passion and ultimately the resurrection.***



## Our Vision Statement

A few of you have asked, what is a vision statement? Why is it necessary to have one? So please let me try to explain. A vision statement is an organization's statement of its mid-term and long-term goals, stating what they want to become in the future. Vision statements act as a goal for a company to strive toward.

Vision statements are often confused with mission statements. Mission statements focus on the present, giving a statement that declares what continually drives a company forward. Mission statements can be thought as how a church will achieve their vision statement.

Here is an example of a vision statement from Amazon: *"Our vision is to be earth's most customer-centric company; to build a place where people can come to find and discover anything they might want to buy online."*

First Congregational has had a mission statement for many years. However, very few people knew that it existed or where to find it. We will use our new vision statement to guide the direction of our church. We have tendency to try to be all things to all people. Each ministry team will be asked to match their idea against the vision statement in order to determine if the idea is something that will advance the work of our church. ~ **Pastor Dave**

Here is our new Vision Statement, introduced during our annual meeting on Sunday, Jan. 26, 2020:

First Congregational United Church of Christ of Oconomowoc

*Our Vision*

**Engage and inspire all generations  
to connect with God through love and service**

*Our Mission*

We are a welcoming Christian community who joyfully unite to love, honor, and worship God. We gather to share God's Word, seek the ways of Christ, be renewed through the Holy Spirit, and are sent out as Christ's disciples to serve others.

*Our Values and Behaviors*

**Welcoming** – Welcome and value all people  
**Christianity** – Live a Christ centered life  
**Relationships** – Connect with your church family and those we serve  
**Outreach/Mission** – Generously offer your time, talent and treasures  
**Youth Centered** – Embrace, inspire and engage our youth on their faith journey  
**Multi-generational** – Respect and appreciate everyone's needs and contributions  
**Music** – Praise God through song

*Your Challenge*

**What will you do differently to live out our vision?**

**What mission work excites you?**



## Upcoming Church Events



### Souper Bowl!

**Sunday, February 2 from 9:30 a.m. to Noon**

The 2020 Youth Mission participants will be holding a Souper Bowl Fundraiser. There will be over 10 different soups/chilis to try in which we will need your vote to help us name the 2020 Souper Bowl Champion! The cost is \$5 to participate in this fun event!

### Join us for BINGO!

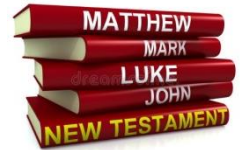
**Sunday February 2, noon to 1 p.m. following the "Souper Bowl" event**

Start by sampling some delicious soup and then join us for BINGO fun! Cards will cost \$1 each to play with all proceeds going to the Youth Mission Trip! This will be a great way to start Super Bowl Sunday! Invite your friends - all ages and skill levels welcome!

### Step by Step through the New Testament

**Sundays, 9:15 to 9:45 a.m. in the Music Room**

The 27 books of the New Testament present the life of Christ and Jesus' continuing work through the church. You are invited to join us for an exciting journey that will illuminate the life of Christ, as well as the lives of significant people, events, places, themes, and messages of the New Testament. This is a wonderful opportunity to have fellowship with the people that you do not normally see on Sunday morning because they attend the other service. Please join us!



FEED THE  
HUNGRY

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

**Sunday, Feb. 2** You are invited to bring items for the Food Pantry and put them in the baskets at the entrance to the sanctuary. These donations are delivered to the Oconomowoc Food Pantry during the week. Items needed are non-perishable food items, baby items, and personal hygiene items.

### Scout Sunday

**Sunday, Feb. 9** - We will need some scout volunteers to help with that service. Please sign up on the kiosk in Fellowship Hall.

### Women's Connection

**Sundays, Feb. 9 & 23 from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

We offer women of all ages 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 2020 dates: Feb. 9, Feb. 23, Mar. 15, Apr. 19, (April 26-off site brunch), May 3, and May 17. For information, 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)





## Women's Gathering

**Thursday, Feb 27 at 5 p.m.**

Join us Thursday, February 27 at Rockwell's Restaurant, located on the Shorehaven campus, for a "Blahs Party!" Think spring/summer and wear appropriate clothing or hats to go with it. Please RSVP as soon as possible to Carolyn Crom at [ckcrom@yahoo.com](mailto:ckcrom@yahoo.com). Think SUMMER!!!

## Rummage 2020 - April 25

Please consider working your travel around this date so you can join us. Set up will begin on Sunday, April 19. Additionally, please be sure to bring us your used items throughout the year. The unfinished space is available for drop offs. Stop by anytime the church is open and grab a key from the office to enter the space. If you need to come after hours, contact Jill Riemann at 262-719-3823 and she'll arrange to meet you at church. Thank you!

## Opportunities to Get Involved!



### Our next Host Week is February 16-23

Here is the link to sign up to help out: <https://signup.com/go/tmWJRTC>

If you know someone who is interested in helping, but they have not been trained, there are now regular training sessions scheduled, held at the Wales/Genesee Fire Department at 9 a.m. Training Session Dates: March 14, May 9, June 13, Aug 8, Sept 12, Oct 10, and Nov 14. There will also be Family Promise Training at St Jerome Catholic Parish in Oconomowoc on March 7 at 9 a.m.

Thanks for all you do to support homeless families in our area. For more information or to volunteer to help, contact one of our Volunteer Coordinators: Deb Bursinger at [bursinger@gmail.com](mailto:bursinger@gmail.com) or Cindy Meckl at [themeckls@gmail.com](mailto:themeckls@gmail.com)

### From the Family Promise Executive Director, Joe Nettesheim:

*In 2019 there were 2,809 reasons why we serve families experiencing homelessness. This is the number of nights that a child is not sleeping in a car, it is a night that mom and dad can take a breath and know their child is safe, it is a night that families know someone cares for them in the moment. We provided this 2,809 times in 2019! Thank you for giving of yourselves and caring for families in need.*





## Shopping with Scrip

Scrip can help make your shopping a bit simpler. You can view a list of participating retailers at [www.shopwithscrip.com](http://www.shopwithscrip.com) at the Scrip table on Sundays, or in the church office during the week. We have Scrip cards available for local businesses, restaurants and more! Questions? Please contact Cheryl Hoff at [cheryl7147@att.net](mailto:cheryl7147@att.net).

**Branches Newsletter Deadline ~ Monday, February 17** for the March issue of Branches

## Youth News!



During February, we will be exploring the story of Joseph and his brothers, and the related topics of love, forgiveness, and frustration through discussions, activities, and games. The younger children will be working on colors, while the youth will be learning about and creating hieroglyphics.

Our STEM room will be digging deep into the feelings Joseph's brothers had and at times we do, too. They will be exploding things outside so they will need to bring a coat with them to Sunday School this month. We are excited for another fun month and watching the children, as well as the volunteers, engage in our lessons and put the puzzle pieces of their faith together!

## Confirmation

Our 2020 Confirmation class is still going great! Our confirmands are continuing to dive deeper into their spiritual journey. Towards the end of February we will be gathering together to learn more about the UCC and the history of it. They will be engaged in card games and other activities to make the learning of it a little more fun. We are thrilled to continue this journey with these two young women and are having fun watching them grow spiritually.



## Junior Youth Group (3rd-8th Grade)

Ready to jump some energy out?!?! Join us for a trip to SkyZone Sunday, Feb. 9 from 11:15 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. If your youth is interested in attending, please contact, Amy Drewa by Feb. 2.

## High School Youth (9th-12th Grade)

Join us on Sunday, Feb. 16 from 11:15 a.m. to 1 p.m. for a fun afternoon of fellowship and finding another way to spread kindness. Please join us and bring a friend for a yummy lunch, time to strengthen your relationships with your church friends and to spread a little kindness. Contact Amy Drewa at [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org) if you are attending.



## Youth Mission Team Fundraising Efforts!

This year we have two Summer Youth Mission Trips. There are 27 youth attending the week-long **Virginia Beach trip**, and one youth attending the 2½ week **Wisconsin Conference German Exchange**. It is our goal to make these mission trips affordable for all who attend. With our fundraising efforts and the generosity of our church members we are able to do so. We are all very grateful to all who support our fundraising efforts to make these trips possible for our youth!



# Hearts & Hands Christian Preschool

## Fall 2020 Class Registration



### Registration for our Fall 2020 preschool classes:

**Current /Alumni Families:** Thursday, Jan. 30 starting at 9 a.m.

**Church Members:** Sunday, Feb. 2 after 10 a.m. service

**Open House/Public Registration:** Tuesday, Feb. 4 at 6 p.m.

**We have classes for kids ages 25 months - 4 years old.**

### Our 2nd preschool room now has a sink!

One of our preschool families donated \$1000 and an anonymous church member donated another \$1500 to help us pay for the project. We are so thankful for these generous donations. Thanks also to Joe Leinen from the Administrative Ministry for taking the lead on this project. We've wanted to have a sink in the classroom for many years and it is a dream come true to finally have one.



### Did You Know?

**Our students play outside EVERY day that it is not raining, and the temperature and wind chill are above 10?**

We are so blessed to have a 22-acre "yard" to explore! Whether we're playing on the playground, finding pine cones in the woods, sledding down the hill, raking and jumping in the leaves, tracking deer prints, feeding birds, or just enjoying the sunshine, outdoor time is so important to all of us!



### For more information check out ...

- **Website** - [www.heartsandhandspreschool.org](http://www.heartsandhandspreschool.org)
- **Facebook page** - <https://www.facebook.com/heartsandhandsconomowoc/>
- **Instagram** - hearts\_hands\_preschool
- **Contact Cindy Meckl** - [themeckls@gmail.com](mailto:themeckls@gmail.com) or 262-567-2558





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

**Pastor Dave Schnepf:** [pastor@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:pastor@oconomowocucc.org)

**Amy Drewa, Dir. of Ed. & Youth:** [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org)

**Cindy Meckl, Hearts & Hands Preschool:** [themeckls@gmail.com](mailto:themeckls@gmail.com)

**Like us on Facebook!!**

*God is still speaking,*  
**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



## ***Regular Worship Schedule***

**Traditional Service - 8 a.m.**

**Connections Contemporary Service - 10 a.m.**

**Sunday School - 3K through High School**

Held during the 10 a.m. service

## ***Upcoming Events:***

- **Food Pantry Collection:** Sunday, Feb. 2
- **Souper Bowl Taste Testing Fundraiser:** Sunday, Feb. 2 - 9:30 a.m. to Noon
- **Souper Bowl BINGO:** Sunday, Feb. 2 - noon to 1 p.m.
- **Women's Connection:** Sundays, Feb. 9 & 23 - 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
- **Family Promise Host Week:** February 16 - 23
- **Articles for March Branches Due:** Monday, Feb. 17
- **Ash Wednesday Service:** Feb. 26 - 7 p.m. at Good Shepherd United Methodist
- **Women's Gathering:** Thursday, Feb. 27 at 5 p.m.