

February 2023 Branches Newsletter



First Congregational United Church of Christ

To engage and Inspire All Generations to Connect with God through Love and Service

815 S. Concord Rd.
Oconomowoc, WI 53066
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A Message from Pastor Barry: Faucet or Drain ?

Are you a faucet or a drain? In your life, for those around you, do you fill their spirit? – their self-esteem? - their souls? Or are you a drain on their life-force? - their self-worth? - their passions? Do you find yourself treating those around you with compassion and empathy? Or are you cold and unconcerned? In other words, are you a Faucet Person, or a Drain Person? Faucet People fill other people to the brim – and even overflow! Drain people leave a hole, a parched emptiness in those they encounter. Faucet People spill over with love. Drain People leave others waterless, like dry, cracked earth in a draught. Jesus was a Faucet Person. He filled every person encountered. When he interacted with people, they left free and abounding in happiness. Their sins were forgiven. Their conscience was pure. If they were confused or troubled Jesus answered their questions. If they were suffering, they were healed. In my life I often wonder how I leave others. Are they left free and happy? Have I filled them? Or did I drain them? Might you wonder the same? Do the people you encounter leave feeling free and happy? – overflowing with the love you shared? Did you fill their life- force? - their self-worth? - their passions? Or did you drain them of life-force? -- Submitted for your reflection Rev. Dr. Barry W. Szymanski



Pastoral Search Committee

It's been almost 2 years since the Committee first met in March of 2021.

While there is a similar submission for the January 29, 2023 Annual Meeting Report, it seems more fitting to provide a comprehensive overview of the search process since the committee was formed.

We **developed a detailed church profile**, which included conducting an all church survey to assess the priorities of church members. Based on the results of the survey, we determined the congregation is interested in finding a pastor with skill sets to assist the congregation in:

- Focusing on growth through meaningful sermons and faith education programs that engage and connect through multiple generations.
 - Increasing our membership through reaching out to the community and those searching for a church home.
- Finding ways to increase our congregation's involvement through church activities such as volunteering on a committee and assisting with weekly needs.

The church profile was posted to the UCC's ministry opportunities site on Sept. 1, 2021. Since then we have:

- **received 66 candidate profiles**, who all received an initial acknowledgement email from us
- had at least one zoom **meeting with 19 candidates** (and up to three meetings with some candidates)
- **hosted in-person visits with four candidates** and their significant other, spending several days with three of them. (Special thanks to Fred who has been a very gracious "Uber" driver and tour guide for our visitors).
- **extended "offers" to two of the candidates**. Both offers were declined due to personal reasons that were not attributed to our church or committee. Interestingly, both candidates accepted pastoral positions in Michigan.
 - One pastor's fiancée had better educational opportunities in her field in Michigan and stronger healthcare for her pre-existing health condition.
 - The other pastor and spouse felt a more urban setting was a better fit for their lifestyle.

Additional information you may find interesting.

- *18 candidates did not respond to our initial email.*
- *11 candidates were removed from consideration by us (some before we met, others after we met)*
- *32 candidates withdrew their candidacy (some before they met with us, others after meeting with us)*

(Continues top of page 3)

Our committee meets, on average, at least 2 hours per week. We did not receive many profiles this past summer so we spent time updating our profile to reflect changes that have occurred since our profile was initially published. We continue to receive very positive feedback from the candidates that our profile is well-written and that it is transparent regarding “who” our church really is, our strengths and our challenges.

Things we have learned through this process:

- Housing (real estate and/or rentals) has been a big concern. Many candidates have been living in parsonages and don’t have a current home to use as equity or to offset necessary down payments. It is difficult for candidates to find affordable housing on a pastor’s salary in our area due to price and availability.
- Our church not having an Open and Affirming (ONA) designation is difficult for some candidates. Some pastors have expressed that if our church went through the ONA process of education and determined not to become ONA, it would be difficult for them to stay here.
- Pastors value the “interim process” and are hesitant to pastor a church that has not addressed issues related to the departure of previous pastors. Though Pastor Barry has been an amazing Bridge Pastor, an interim has additional responsibilities to ensure a smooth transition to a new Senior Pastor.

We are in contact with our Associate Conference Minister, Pastor Rachel Bauman, on a regular basis. She and her predecessor (Pastor Ted) have provided us with much-needed advice and support during this process.

Pastor Rachel was recently at a national conference and shared some updated information that may be of interest:

- Typically, there are around 100-125 positions open denomination-wide at any one time. Currently, there are over 300 openings.
- Within the Wisconsin UCC Conference alone:
 - About 30% of the total pastoral positions in churches are open.
 - Prior to the past couple of years, Conference would receive 20-30 or more profiles each week that were forwarded to appropriate churches. Lately (the last couple years and certainly right now) they have been receiving one or two profiles each week and often these candidates are interested in positions that do not fit our profile.
- On average, it’s taking 1-3 years for churches to find a settled pastor.

We appreciate you keeping our committee in your prayers. We hope to be blessed soon with a strong candidate who decides to lead our church into the future. Thank you for entrusting us with this very important responsibility.

If you have any questions or concerns, members from our committee will be available during Fellowship Hour next Sunday, February 5 for informal conversations.

Or, you may call or email anyone on our committee.

Deb Bursinger (*Co-Chair*), bursinger@gmail.com, 262-490-7902

Jack Buss, Jack.Buss3@gmail.com, 262-443-5815

Kit Dailey, kitdailey1@gmail.com, 414-232-0246

Stephanie Hogan, stephanichogan64@gmail.com, 262-269-5273

Andy Meckl (*Chaplain*), amecklpse@gmail.com, 262-720-1876

Jason Rheineck, jrheineckholzmotors@gmail.com, 262-470-5195

Jill Riemann (*Co-Chair*), jillr480@gmail.com, 262-719-3823

Tim Schuyler, tschuyler.ts@gmail.com, 262-490-4197

Fred Steinke, fredsteinke1@gmail.com, 414-531-9489

Youth News

Sunday School News!

During the month of February our children and youth (3 years old-4th grade) will be exploring how special Jesus is through the story of when He walked on water. The children will explore that when we keep our eyes on Jesus by loving others and praying we too can walk with Jesus on water. There will be plenty of engaging activities throughout the month!

Our middle and high school youth will be finishing up their salt and light series based on Matthew 5:13-16 and explore a session on Love and Lent. During these sessions the youth have fun with a game/activity, engage in a discussion based on the scripture readings and build relationships.

God's Blessings, Amy Drewa

Young Adult Weekly Gathering

Hey young adults.....after taking a holiday break lets get back to our Young Adult Zoom gatherings! If you haven't joined us yet or it's been a while, I invite you to join us as you can on Tuesday evenings at 7 p.m. beginning again on February 21. This is an opportunity for us to come together as a Christian family from many different paths scattered all over to connect with one other. We take the time to catch up, offer our Christian support to each other, receive support, engage in a brief Lenten devotion, and conclude in prayer. Pop in for a quick moment or stay as long as you can. [Click here](#) to access the meeting or go to the Zoom app and enter Meeting ID:859 4199 6806 and Passcode:044377. Contact Amy Drewa at amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org with any questions. We look forward to seeing you!!



Confirmation

In January our confirmands explored the life of Jesus and asked some very tough questions which helped them deepen their faith on a different level. In February they will come together again to engage in a fun, interactive lesson on God. The last few months together have been fun and watching these young adults grow in their faith so much already has been an honor to be apart.

Youth Group News!

We are very excited for our youth groups to come together this month for an offsite excursion!

Join us as we head to The Rock Snowpark, February 19 from 11am-3pm to go snow tubing.

All youth in 3rd-12th grade are invited to join us and bring a friend. With the generosity of our congregation there is no cost to our youth to attend this fun event. If you/your youth are interested in joining us, please email Leah Laufenberg at guigley116@yahoo.com by February 5. We could also use a couple chaperones so if you would like to join in the fun too, please let Leah know. We are so excited for this FUN outing together!!

Ash Wednesday- February 22, 6 pm at Emmanuel UCC, Dousman

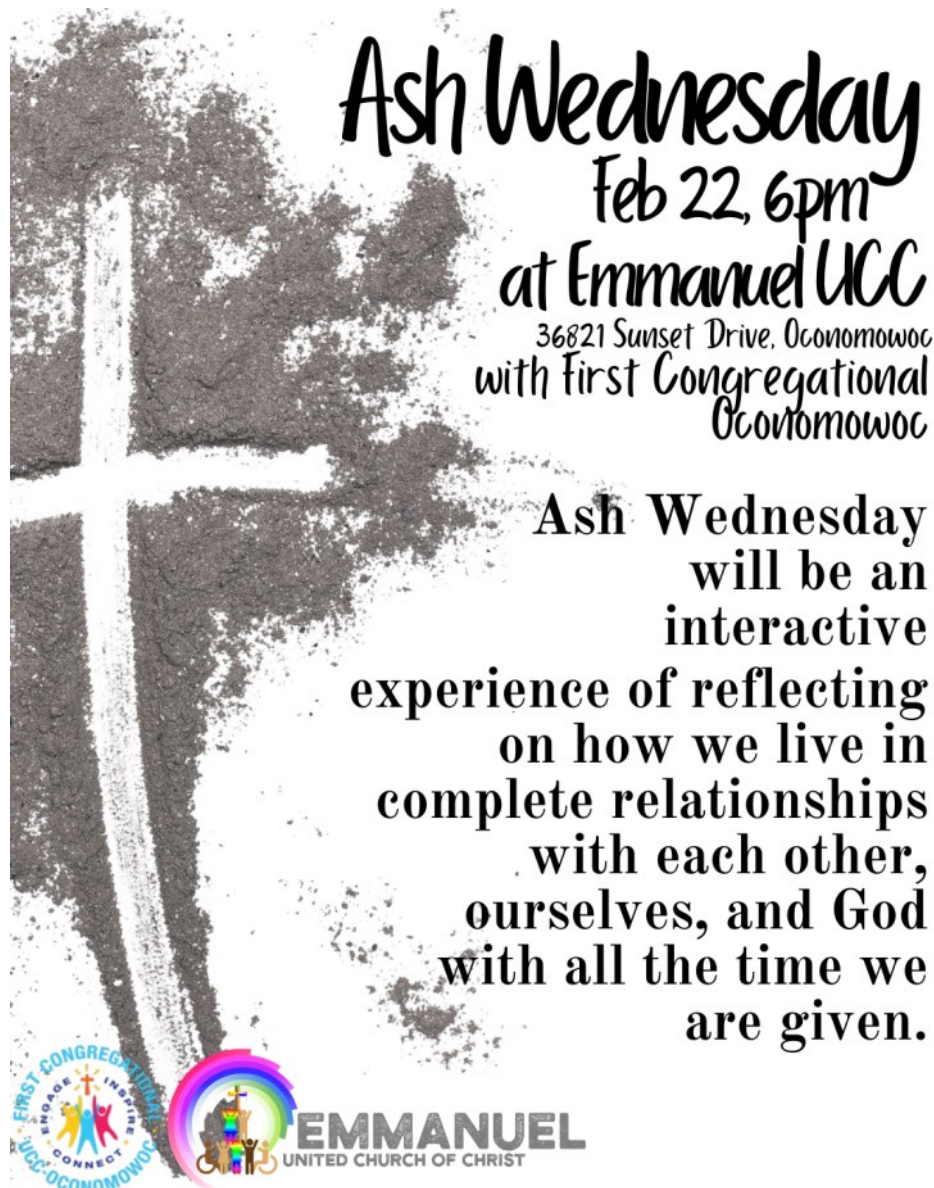
One of the gifts of our faith and science is that we claim we are made of the same stuff of the stars and that we are but dust. Our lives are long enough to change our corner of the universe, but they are also fleeting.

On Ash Wednesday, we remember all of that, we embrace that part of life is death, and we enter Lent setting right what has gone before and aim to live well in light of the resurrection.

This Ash Wednesday will be an interactive, hands-on, Messy Church-like experience of thinking about how we live in complete relationships with each other, ourselves, and God with all the time we are given.


40 Hours Together

Typically, during Lent individuals give up something or say yes to something...it's just one more "thing" to do or stress about for 40 days (actually, 47 if we count the Sundays). In life we have enough to do and stress about. So let us recognize an hour a day during this season of Lent to be together to engage in spiritual practices. These will be forty hours together, not forty hours together muddling through activities that are not speaking to your souls. *Watch your emails for more information.*



Ash Wednesday
Feb 22, 6pm
at Emmanuel UCC
36821 Sunset Drive, Oconomowoc
with First Congregational
Oconomowoc

**Ash Wednesday
will be an
interactive
experience of reflecting
on how we live in
complete relationships
with each other,
ourselves, and God
with all the time we
are given.**



Mission & Outreach



Singing Collection

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

In February our singing collection supports Lake Area Free Clinic

The Lake Area Free Clinic is an amazing place where residents of Waukesha County who lack health insurance and the ability to pay can receive free medical care, medication and practical information needed to improve their and maintain their health. Since the doors opened in July, 2001, the Lake Area Free Clinic has welcomed individuals and families who lack health insurance and whose income is below 250% of the federal poverty level. Many of these individuals work full-time, but are either not offered health insurance, or cannot afford the premiums.

The Medical Clinic was started 21 years ago by concerned and compassionate health care professionals who saw a need to offer Primary Health Care to the poor and uninsured outside of the Hospital Emergency room. Since its beginning, LAFC has served more than 8,000 patients; had more than 58,000 patient visits; had community volunteers contribute 119,000 hours of service; and secured more than \$4.1 million in free medications for patients. It is staffed by four full-time equivalent employees and more than 260 volunteers. ProHealth Care provides lab and x-ray services, and Advocate Aurora Health provides CT and MRI imaging services. Clinical rotations for health care students from Waukesha County Technical College, and other colleges and universities are also provided.

For an informative tour or if interested in volunteering check out their website www.lakeareafreeclinic.org

Sponsors for New Members Needed

Sponsors are needed for new members. Please contact Linda Davis at pldavis.pd@gmail.com or call 207-995-9186 if you are interested in sponsoring a new member family following their joining our church family. If you or a family member are interested in learning more about becoming a member of First Congregational UCC Church, please contact Linda Davis at the above email address or phone number.



Meeting New Members

Rich and Susan Steffens - Joined 12/4/22

They have lived in Oconomowoc for 3 1/2 years and have 7 children and 17 grandchildren! Rich loves woodworking and Susan is a quilter and reader. She's already joined our monthly Book Club. Both of them like to travel and bike.

WELCOME TO OUR CHURCH FAMILY!

If you haven't met Rich and Susan Steffen, please introduce yourself to these new members that joined during Advent.



Rummage Sale News

HUGE Annual Rummage Sale

Date set for April 29 from 8am-2pm

Please mark your calendars to be as involved as possible with this major fundraising event for our church. Important dates are not only the date of the sale, but also the two previous Sundays, April 16 and 23 to help with large group set up. We also need you from 2-5 pm on the 29th to help restore our church into a beautiful space to hold worship in the next day!

There will be a rummage planning meeting in the music room directly after the church service on Sunday, February 19. This is for anyone who is willing and able to help out in any capacity that goes even slightly beyond taking a shift the day of the sale. We appreciate all of our volunteers and hope to see you there!

If you typically are one of our volunteers and know now you will not be able to help in your previous capacity, please contact Jill Riemann at 262-719-3823.

Food Pantry Sundays - First Sunday of Every Month



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. Please be sure all perishable donations are within use dates and have not expired.

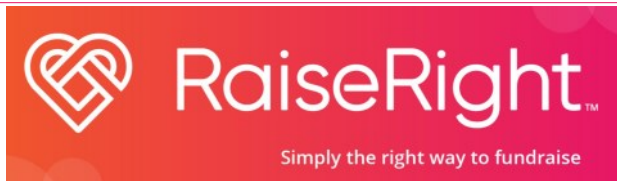
January	1
February	5
March	5
April	2
May	7
June	4
July	2
August	6
September	3
October	1
November	5
December	3



We need your announcements, articles, news, and/or thank you notes you wish to communicate to your church family and friends!

We have created a Communication Submission Form to guide you on the various ways you can spread your news, along with timing and due dates. [Communicate Here](#)

Questions: rochelle.behling@gmail.com or Jennifer@oconomowocucc.org



Formerly called Scrip

Here are a few changes to the Raise Right/Scrip program that have occurred in recent months:

Finally, **Walgreens** cards are back! They had been unavailable for several months during 2022. We will keep a supply of \$25 cards on hand. If you need a larger denomination, \$100 cards can be ordered.

Note that we also now have cards for **McDonalds**, **Kwik Trip grocery only**, **Visa** (no activation fee needed), and **Total Wine**. If these, or any, cards do not sell in a reasonable length of time we will stop ordering them unless specifically requested.

Bruegger's has discontinued their participation in the Raise Right program so their cards are no longer available.

Special orders can be done but please note that going forward we would appreciate payment *when the order is placed rather than when it is picked up*. A list of cards that may be ordered is available on Sunday mornings at the table where cards are sold and in the office throughout the week.

Thank you to all the people who purchase gift cards. You continually contribute to the support of our Youth Programs.

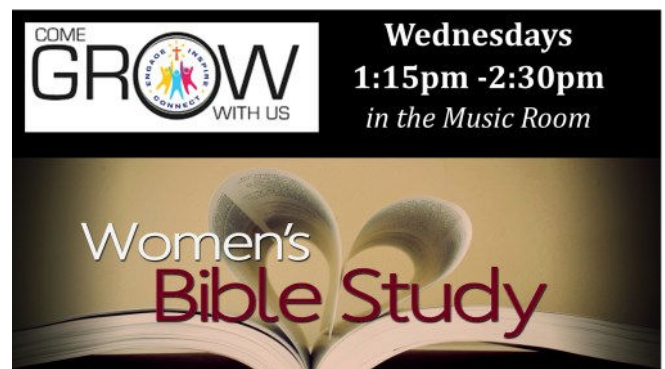
Thanks also to each of the ones who volunteers to sell cards on Sunday mornings. You are greatly appreciated!! If there are others who would like to assist, please contact Cheryl Hoff in person or at clhoff@gmail.com or 290-490-1411

Saving Pull Tabs

Please remember to save your pull tabs !
Please bring them to Church. The contain is outside the Church office. The tabs help support the Ronald McDonald House.

Piggly Wiggly Receipts

Please remember your Piggly Wiggly receipts.
In order for us to receive monies, we need to collect and turn in. There is a collection area in Fellowship Hall or drop them off in the Church office.



Contact Cindy Meckl for more details :
(themeckls@gmail.com or 262-567-2558




Ash Wednesday
Feb 22, 6pm

at Emmanuel UCC
36821 Sunset Drive, Oconomowoc
with First Congregational
Oconomowoc

Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Psalm 51 vs 10-12

We begin this holy season by acknowledging our need for repentance and our need for the love and forgiveness shown to us in Jesus Christ. We are invited, therefore, in the name of Christ, to observe a Holy Lent, by self-examination and penitence, by prayer and fasting, by practicing works of love, and by reading and reflecting on God's Holy Word.



Thank You! for Volunteering your service

YOU make our community stronger.

Contact for each area is listed below

<u>Barb Rux</u>	<u>Cheryl Hoff</u>
Greeter,	Raise Right (Scrip)
Welcome Center	<u>Rochelle Behling</u>
Fellowship	Worship Service Areas (Sign-Up Genius)

Volunteers Needed with Fellowship Hour

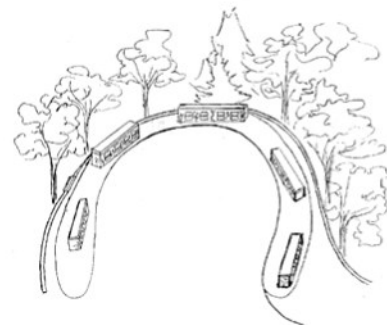


Faith & Fellowship
"To grow together..."
Join us for Coffee Hour!

	Greeter	Welcome Ctr	Fellowship
Jan 29	Lois Jackson	Deb Groskopf	C Hoff & J. Robbins
Feb 5	V Williams	Sally Burdick	P McCollum
Feb 12	Kristi Staus	Ziegenhagen	Welcoming Ministry
Feb 19	Jeff & Lynn Van Dam	L Jackson	Mens Breakfast
Feb 26	Pat & Dave Evans	J Vercauteren	Pam & Mick Van Every

Memorial Garden Sidewalk Proposal

The Memorial Garden Committee has been approached by several church members who desire a paved pathway to the Memorial Garden from the upper parking lot. The Memorial Garden is a beautiful final resting place for members and friends of First Congregational Church. The Garden is located near the outdoor worship area on the northeast corner of the Church grounds. Any person that uses a walker or wheelchair has a very difficult access down a grass covered grade, and the purpose of this concrete sidewalk is to make it easy to visit and spend time with a loved one that is now at rest.



The committee has a proposal from church member Gary Phillips to construct a five foot wide walkway with a turn area in the garden. We will be accepting any contributions for this project with a cutoff date of April 30. Our plan is to prepare the site and install the sidewalk before the end of May, 2023. Prior to announcing this fund raising project we have already received pledges that will pay for the majority of the costs involved. The Memorial Garden is in sound financial shape and also has monies set aside for building projects if needed. Should you desire to contribute to this project please make a check out to First Congregational Church for any amount that you desire. Please note on the notation line of the check "Memorial Garden Sidewalk".

God's Blessings, the Memorial Garden Committee

Kim Herro, Glenn Welnak, Sue Zajac, Bob Johnson, Mick Van Every, Fred Steinke, Aari Roberts



Book Club— 3rd Thursday each month

Our next meeting is February 16, 2023

1pm in-person or to Zoom, please contact Jean Vercauteren
920-366-0053 or jeanvercauteren@yahoo.com.

February 16 The Book Woman's Daughter by Kim Michele Richardson

The book has been on the New York Times' paperback bestseller list. The book portrays powerful courageous women from Appalachia area who fought against ignorance, misogyny, and racial prejudice.

Praise for *The Book Woman's Daughter*: "In Kim Michele Richardson's book she once again paints a stunning portrait of the raw, somber beauty of Appalachia, the strong resolve of remarkable women living in a world dominated by men, and the power of books and sisterhood to prevail in the harshest circumstances.

—Sara Gruen, #1 New York Times bestselling author of *Water for Elephants*

March 16	April 20	May 18	June 15	July 20

ALL ARE WELCOME Join any discussion

You can purchase books on Amazon.
You can even use Scrip cards
(Amazon, Books & Co.)
which donates to church as well.



Hearts & Hands Preschool



For more information: e-mail: preschool@oconomowocucc.org

To schedule a private tour, contact Cindy Meckl 262-567-2558
or themeckls@gmail.com.

Community Helpers

Our next Community Helpers starts February 24 and runs every Friday through March 24th from 9-11am. This 5 week class is open to ALL children ages 24 months - 5 years old and the cost is \$125. Keep in mind that church members get 20% off of tuition meaning church members can take this class for \$100!

Public Open House & Fall Registration

February 1st from 6:00-7:00

Come meet the teachers and see our newly updated classrooms! Register for a Fall 2023 Class during Open House **and receive 25% off the Registration Fee!**

[Click here](#) for 25% off coupon

Church members can start registering for fall starting on Sunday, January 29th after service.

We welcome ALL children ages
25 months - 4 years old.

More information can be found on our website
heartsandhandspreschool.org

**Any questions, call Cindy Meckl
262-567-2558 or email themeckls@gmail.com.**

Class Offerings 2023-2024

2 1/2 -Year Old Preschool Class

- Tuesdays AND/OR Thursdays 9:00—11:00am
- At least 2 1/2 years to start class
- Maximum teacher: student ratio 1:8

3-Year Old Preschool Class

- M/W 9:00—11:30 OR T/TH 9:00-11:30 OR
- M/W/F 9:00—11:30 OR T/TH/F 9:00-11:30
- At least 3 years old on Sept. 1, 2020
- Maximum teacher: student ratio 1:10

4-Year Old Preschool Class

- M/W/F 9:00—11:30
- At least 4 years old on Sept. 1, 2020
- Maximum teacher: student ratio 1:10



Cindy, Joyce, Deb & Teresa

***Behold, children are
a gift from the Lord
Psalm 127:3***



Staying Connected ...

Rev Dr. Barry W. Szymanski, Bridge Pastor bws1mp@gmail.com
 Amy Drewa, Dir. of Ed. & Youth amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org
 Jennifer Arnold, Office Admin. jennifer@oconomowocucc.org
 Cindy Meckl, Hearts & Hands Preschool themeckls@gmail.com

Date	Preaching	Event
Jan 29	Chris Mol	4 th Sunday after the Epiphany, Scout Sunday Annual Congregational Meeting (after worship)
Feb 5	Barry & Amy	5 th Sunday after the Epiphany <i>with Holy Communion</i>
Feb 12	Rev Barry	6 th Sunday after the Epiphany
Feb 16		Book Club (1pm) <i>The Book Woman's Daughter</i> by Kim Michele Richardson
Feb 19	Chris Mol	<i>Last Sunday after the Epiphany</i> Rummage Sale Planning Meeting
Feb 22	Rev Rose & Pastor Amy	Ash Wednesday, First Day of Lent @ Emmanuel UCC
Feb 26	Rev Barry	<i>1st Sunday of Lent, Farewell Fellowship for Rev Barry</i>
Mar 1		All Ministries Meeting (6:30pm in Fellowship Hall)
Mar 5	Rev Barry	<i>2nd Sunday of Lent with Holy Communion</i> <u>LAST SERMON</u> by Rev Barry
Apr 2		Palm Sunday
Apr 6		Maundy Thursday
Apr 7		Good Friday
Apr 9		Easter Sunday
Apr 16		Rummage Set-up (after worship service)
Apr 23		Rummage Set-up (after worship service)
Apr 29		Rummage Sale (8am-2pm)

Branches Deadlines:

If you have an item or info to submit, please email it to Jennifer@oconomowocucc.org

Submission of articles: Must be received by the 15th of each month.
 Distribution of newsletter: Last Friday of each month.