



DECEMBER 2023 -
JANUARY 2024

Branches Newsletter



Join us for Worship Sundays at 9:30AM

Engage and **Inspire** all generations to **Connect**
with God through love and service.

Newsletter Highlights

Live Nativity and
Prayer Walk

Homemade
Cinnamon Rolls

Holiday Bake Sale

Hanging of the
Greens

Children's Christmas
Pageant

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
OCONOMOWOC**

815 S. Concord Road

262-567-4461

uccoffice@oconomowocucc.org



by Pastor Matt

"Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light."

This simple line from the Christmas carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem" is the theme of our church's Advent journey this year. With the life of our world being beaten on the rocks of terrorism and war and mass shootings and social-political hostility, we step into the season of Advent more than a little anxious, more than a little concerned. You can smell the whole earth's need to back away from the precipice, the need to lower the weapons, to pause, to breathe, and try to remember what it means to be created in the image of God. Sometimes darkness can be a blanket of quietude we draw around us for healing. Sometimes darkness can be a deep cave of horrible that is impossible to prepare for.

There are a number of opportunities through our church to help you find a more healthy, faith-infused direction this Advent. You can read about them below. Cookies and cinnamon rolls, Live Nativity, Blue Christmas service, Christmas Pageant, Monday night Advent Study, and much more – check them all out in these pages.

One special opportunity I want to highlight: the International Peace Light from Bethlehem (yes, THAT Bethlehem) is being hosted in our church this year.

What is the International Peace Light? Big picture, it is a living symbol of God's peace longing to find a home in our world. Each year, a Scout from Upper Austria fetches the light from the grotto at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem (Palestine) where tradition says that Jesus was born. The light is carried in blast-proof miners' lamps on a jet, from Israel to Vienna, Austria, where it is distributed to delegations from the international community, who take it back, with a message of peace, to their own countries. For more info go to peacelightnorthamerica.org.

If you want that flame shining in your house this Christmas, please bring a safely-transportable lantern or candle to the church for any of the services on **Sunday December 24**. The Peace Light will remain lit at the church through Christmastide Epiphany, and beyond.

Sometimes we think of peace as a luxury in the midst of the hard realities. But, it is NOT a luxury. Peace is how God intends us to live! The dog-eat-dog world is Plan B, since Plan A got scrubbed by two people and an apple – as the story goes. The fallout from Plan B is us being slaves to our own fears and desires – neither of which have ever been very helpful guides. In the birth of Jesus, a reversal is on the way. This is all in God's hands. The last word is not screaming ambulances loaded with shooting victims, nor children and parents and hospital patients as "collateral damage," nor terrorism, nor disease, nor anything else. Period. Even in this present darkness, which echoes the darkness of Bethlehem, God in Christ is bringing a way out of no way. For the whole creation.

On the other side of Advent, at the Christmas celebration, we will read these words from the first chapter of John:

The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The Christ-light gently burning within you, is the sign. So, especially now, friends, let it shine. Let it shine.

SAVE THE DATE

Annual Meeting

Sunday, January 28

following Worship

Moderator Musings

Participation Part II

Last month I wrote about the lack of participation that was demonstrated at our fall All Ministry Meeting. I called on members to reexamine their priorities when it comes to allocating the precious resource of time. In all fairness, I need to walk back some of my comments after witnessing two very impressive church events.

The first was our church's participation in the Oconomowoc Halloween Parade. The effort started with a suggestion at a Leadership Team meeting but grew into multi-generational, well lead, and well received float that promoted both our church but also the fall rummage sale. We were the only area church with a float (we came in second - we were robbed). The amount of imitative, creativity, and effort from individual church members was nothing less than awe inspiring.



December : No Meeting

Join us at 1:00PM in person or Zoom next month. If you prefer Zoom please contact Jean Vercauteren for details. All are welcome to join for any book and discussion.

January 18



The second was the fall Rummage Sale. Because of the size of this event this quickly becomes an all-church on deck effort. With dedicated and brilliant leadership (thanks Jill!), repeat and long term helpers (yeah Rose Mary!), and all the others that come together to make Rummage Sale Saturday a success our church is significantly closer to financial stability. The Rummage Sale not only makes significant money for the church is also raises the church's profile in the community. The perfect example of win, win, win scenarios.

So, on the one hand we as church members don't like to come to meetings but when it comes to actively doing God's work we are hands down great. Sounds pretty human to me.

Yours in Christ,

Chris Mol

Moderator, First Congregational UCC of Oconomowoc



February articles are due no later than

MONDAY, JANUARY 15

to Natalie Gruentzel -

natalie@oconomowocucc.org



SCRIP (RAISE RIGHT) A FUND RAISER TO SUPPORT OUR CHURCH YOUTH PROGRAMS!!

Every Sunday in Fellowship Hall there is someone selling a variety of gift cards. These are sold to help raise funds for our youth programs here at First Congregational UCC.

The cards that are usually in stock are primarily local retailers, but it is possible for you to purchase many others. There are over 750 cards available through Raise Right, and the list is available at the table where the cards are sold as well as in the church office.

If you need a card that we do not carry, it can be special-ordered for you. The same is true if you (or your committee etc.) want a larger number of cards or a different dollar amount of a card than the one we stock.

The Holidays are approaching and if you would like to special order cards please

SUBMIT YOUR REQUEST NO LATER THAN DECEMBER 10 FOR CHRISTMAS!

If you have any questions please contact Cheryl Hoff, Scrip Coordinator

Annual Christmas Party

Hello ladies, it's time to plan our annual Christmas party. I have reserved the Rosecrans Pub at Shorehaven again. Its a fun place. The date is **Thursday, December 14, 2023**. Arrive at **5:00PM** for cocktails, dinner served at **6:00PM**. The menu choice is sliced pork tenderloin in Dijon cream sauce, with rice & mixed vegetables or baked Atlantic Salmon with chardonnay dill sauce, red potatoes, & mixed vegetables. Tiramisu for dessert. Meals include salad, rolls & coffee. The cost is \$18, cash or check **ONLY**, if you live there, it can be charged to your room. Cocktails are separate, please bring cash. Last year we made a donation to the food pantry, & Family Promise. Please select your choice of menu, & I'll be happy to collect in advance. Christmas is right around the corner, its always a fun start to the holiday.



All are invited to have lunch and socialize at
Rockwell's Restaurant (Shorehaven north Campus)
The 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each Month
Menu Options are \$15 each

Tuesday, December 12

(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday 12/4)

The next menu options will be coming out soon, be on the lookout for the half sheets with the information!

Tuesday, December 26

(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday 12/18)

Reserve your spot for a good time!

During Fellowship or call/text Sue Zajac at 414-698-3575. At each meal your cash will be collected by Sue Zajac (or designee) in order to make one payment for the group. Sorry no checks or credit cards—CASH ONLY.



Heritage Quilt

This beautiful heritage quilt hangs in the music room of our church. It is dated July 12, 1989 and was a going away gift for choir member, Barbara Redman, when she moved to Iowa. Each member of the choir completed squares which were then given to Barbara and she made a beautiful quilt which continues to bring joy to all who see it. Barbara now lives in Arizona and recently visited friends here and Oconomowoc. We are grateful for this beautiful treasure.

Live Nativity

AND PRAYER WALK

We are very excited to offer our first Live Nativity and Prayer Walk on December 8!!! Help us spread the word to invite your friends and family but also consider helping us to make it a success! Shifts are only an hour long so you can be apart of it and enjoy it. This isn't your typical Live Nativity, it's an opportunity to come together as a church family and community to prepare for Christmas.

sign up

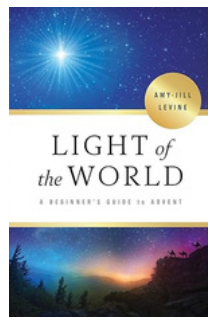


Advent Study

Join us for a weekly Advent Study, *In Light of the World: A Beginner's Guide to Advent*, by Amy-Jill Levine.

Together, we will explore the biblical texts surrounding the Christmas narrative through the stories of Zechariah and Elizabeth, Mary, the journey to Bethlehem, and the visit from the Magi. These stories will open conversations around connections of the Gospel stories to the Old Testament, the role of women in first-century Jewish culture, the importance of Mary's visitation and the revolutionary implications of Mary's Magnificat, the census and the stable, and the star of Bethlehem and the flight to Egypt. We will meet every Monday (**November 27, December 4, December 11, and December 18**) from 6:30-7:30PM.

There is no registration required or fee. Feel free to come to one session, a couple or all of them! We look forward to you joining us for an evening of exploration and preparation for Christmas.



Advent Devotional Calendar

As we journey through this season of Advent together, you are invited to explore Advent scripture showing how light and darkness exist together through an at home weekly devotional or daily calendar (or both). There are printed devotional guides and calendar available on the table in the narthex or if you prefer a digital copy, please contact Amy Drewa at amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org.



Hanging of the Greens

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. Join us on **Sunday, December 3** for a special service of the Hanging of the Greens during the **9:30AM worship service** to prepare for the beginning of Advent. During the service we will gather and place decorations, which will 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.

Mission and 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.



December's Singing Collection

Singing Collection donations in December will be given to The Christmas Fund (formerly Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund). The Christmas Fund is a special offering administered by the UCC that provides direct financial support to those who serve the church and are facing financial difficulties. Active and retired clergy, lay employees, and their surviving spouses are eligible to receive emergency grants, Christmas “Thank You” gift checks, or other financial support. Supporting the Christmas Fund is a wonderful way to give back and say thank you to the clergy who commit their lives to pastoring us. To learn more about the Christmas Fund, visit

https://www.ucc.org/ocwm_special-support/



**Lake Area
Free Clinic**

*Open Hearts,
Open Doors*

January's Singing Collection

Our church has a great relationship with the Lake Area Free Clinic. We have supported the Free Clinic in multiple ways, including providing space to host the Free Clinic volunteer appreciation brunch and providing our beautiful kitchen to offer free healthy cooking classes to clinic patients. Many of our members have been supporting and/or serving at the Free Clinic for years, and in January we have an opportunity to support the LAFC monetarily, through our singing collection.

For more than 20 years, the LAFC has been serving low-income residents of Waukesha County who lack health insurance, providing a medical home, preventive services/specialty care, medications at no cost, reduced fee dental care, and referrals. The Lake Area Free Clinic is a 501(c)3 organization that is funded solely through donations and grants. The LAFC receives no public funding.

Many people think of Lake Country as a very affluent area, but it is estimated that even with the Affordable Care Act, there are 16,000 adults in Waukesha County who are medically uninsured. Many of these individuals work full time but are not offered health insurance or cannot afford the premiums. The Lake Area Free Clinic works to fill this gap, providing high quality comprehensive healthcare to those in need. More information is available at

<https://www.lakeareafreeclinic.org>.

Mission and Outreach

Holiday Giving Tree

Share in the spirit of the holidays by helping those in need! Our congregation will be supporting some families this Christmas through the Waukesha County Christmas Clearing Council and seniors through Eras Senior Network. **Click here** to see how you can make a child/youths Christmas a little brighter. There are gifts ranging from \$5-50. So, pick an item or two and bring it unwrapped to church any time before Sunday, December 3. If you prefer, you can also have your item shipped to the church. In addition to purchasing gifts, we are also looking for a few people to help deliver the gifts to the families. We will be having a "Wrap Sunday" December 10 to wrap all the gifts and get them ready to be sent out to the families. If you would be interest in doing this or have any questions please contact Rania Dempsey (rania@wi.rr.com) or Amy Drewa (amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org).



Family Promise

Family Promise has partnered with Hebron House to run and manage the overflow shelter through the winter. Our church will be providing a meal once per month for clients staying in the shelter. Any interest in helping out with these meals (we could serve up to 35 people), contact Cindy Meckl (themeckls@gmail.com and 262-567-2558) or Deb Bursinger (bursinger@gmail.com or 262-490-7902).



November 5 & December 3

Food Pantry Sundays - First Sunday of Every Month (but welcome anytime)

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. These donations are delivered to the Oconomowoc Food Pantry during the week. Items that the Food Pantry accepts are:

Non-perishables: food items, Baby items - diapers, wipes, baby food, formula;
Personal hygiene items: soap, shampoo, tampons, sanitary pads, deodorant, toothpaste, laundry detergent, toilet paper.

Please be sure before you donate that all perishable items are within their use dates and have not expired.



Live Nativity

AND PRAYER WALK

Join us for this interactive event with FREE

CHILI • HOT CHOCOLATE • COOKIES • CAROLS

DECEMBER 8 from 6:00 - 8:00 PM

First Congregational United Church of Christ Oconomowoc
815 S Concord Road, Oconomowoc, WI 53066

All are welcome to join us as we prepare our hearts for Christmas

For more information: www.oconomowocucc.org/christmas



2023

Bake Sale

CAKES • PIES • COOKIES • & MORE

COMING SOON!

Calling all holiday bakers... Get Set, Get Ready, GO! We have some very good bakers in our congregation. We are looking forward to some wonderful treats!

We will be having our after service Christmas Bake Sales on Dec 3, 10, and 17. For new members, our youth group sells holiday baked goods in December to help defray the costs of their mission trip in July. We are asking for donations of holiday cookies, candies, snacks, etc. You can make whatever you normally make for the holidays and donate to our sale by dropping them off any time before the Sunday service. Please leave them in the kitchen marked "Holiday Sale." I will be setting out Christmas tins, plates, platters, etc. for you to package your goodies on. This year we will also be asking for tins of goodies to be made up for the December 8 Live Nativity & Prayer Walk. We will need baked goods and 1 adult to help for this night. We know that the youth mission trips impact our youth powerfully and also helps them forge new relationships with adults from our congregation.

Our very heart felt "**THANK YOU.**"

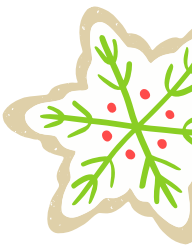
SUPPORTS THE YOUTH MISSION TRIP & CAMP SCHOLARSHIPS



Sundays in December: Dec 3, Dec 10, Dec 17
after our 9:30AM service



Contact Connie Laufenberg (262-690-8459) with
any questions



HOMEMADE *Cinnamon Rolls*



Homemade Cinnamon Rolls, ready for Christmas Morning!

You can send an email to Amy
(amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org) to place your order.

Deadline to order is December 10.

Pre-Ordered, ready to bake cinnamon rolls (\$10 for a pan of 4)
will be fresh and ready to pick up on **December 24**
after the **9:30AM** or **4:00PM** service.

All money from your order will support the Mission Trip!

*Ingredients and supplies
donated by Becky Wilde of*



For more information: [**www.oconomowocucc.org/christmas**](http://www.oconomowocucc.org/christmas)



Children's Christmas Pageant

It's that time of year for our Annual Christmas Pageant which will be held **Sunday, December 17 during the 9:30AM worship.** The children have been working very hard and are very excited to share their talents to retell the story of the birth of Jesus which truly is "A Christmas to Believe In"! We look forward to you joining us, to show your Christian love and support to these children and youth!

Just a reminder rehearsals will take place **Sunday, December 10 from 10:00AM - 1:30PM** (with lunch provided) for all lead/speaking roles, and on **Saturday, December 16 from 12:30-3:00PM** for everyone. If your child still would like to participate and you haven't signed up yet it's not too late, just contact Amy Drewa at amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org or [click here](#).

DECEMBER 17 DURING 9:30AM WORSHIP

First Congregational United Church of Christ Oconomowoc
815 S Concord Road, Oconomowoc, WI 53066

All are welcome to join us as we prepare our hearts for Christmas

For more information: [**www.oconomowocucc.org/christmas**](http://www.oconomowocucc.org/christmas)

Youth News



Youth Group News!

Join us for a Youth Group favorite on **December 3 from 10:30-12:00**! Our youth groups will come together for some fun making Christmas Cookies for our Annual Cookie Sale. There will be a variety of options for youth to get creative with their baking side, work together and have fun! Please reply to Leah Laufenberg quigley116@yahoo.com or Amy Drewa at amydrewa@ocnomowocucc.org if you/your youth are interested in attending.

As we move into January our youth event will be an evening at church with games and fun! Please stay tuned!

Confirmation



We are excited for our confirmands to come together in December to explore the birth, life and teachings of Jesus. Then in January they will explore the Holy Spirit and Trinity. We are excited and honored to work with this group and to watch how their faith continues to unfold.

Sunday School News!

The month of December will be very busy for our children and youth! On **December 3**, our children and youth will be invited to participate in our Hanging of the Greens service. Then on **December 10** our 1-year-olds through 4th grade will have a little Birthday party for Jesus in Sunday School. While our middle and high schoolers will engage in a Christmas Light Show! The following weekend, **December 17**, many of the children and youth will participate in our annual Christmas Pageant. It will be a busy month, but fun and engaging while we celebrate Jesus' birthday!!

As we enter into the new year our 1 year olds through 4th graders will climb into a lions den to explore the story of Daniel in the lions den. Our middle and high schoolers will begin an 8 week study of the different parables of Jesus. Jesus' parables had multiple levels of meaning for his original listeners and for all of us today! We will explore these stories through engaging discussions and fun games.

It is a complete honor and joy to watch our children and youth come together to explore their faith. I am truly excited for our children and youth to continue to explore their faith with their Christian family and friends during this time that is filled with hope, joy, peace and love. May God fill you and your family with awe and wonder during this Advent season! Merry Christmas and a very blessed New Year!

No Sunday School:

December 3 - Hanging of the Greens
December 17 - Christmas Pageant
December 24- Christmas Eve
December 31 - New Years Eve Brunch

God's Blessings, Amy Drewa

HEARTS & HANDS

Celebrating ALL of God's Children



Friday Fun Class



Christmas Friday Fun is **Friday, December 8** from 9:00AM-noon. Cost: \$30

Join us for a special day of Christmas Fun!



Winter - Fridays, **January 12, 19 and 26** from **9:00-11:00AM**. Cost: \$75

These classes are open to ALL children ages 25 months - 4 years old. Toilet Training is never required for any of our programs.

See our website for registration information
www.heartsandhandspreschool.org

Preschool Open House & Fall 2024 Registration- Wednesday, January 31 from 6:00-7:00PM

Come meet the teachers, check out our classrooms and discover all that makes our program one of the top in the area! We have class options for children ages 25 months - 4 years old.

Help us spread the word!!

Preschool Committee Membership - we are looking for 1 more member for our preschool committee! The committee is responsible for all that it takes to run our incredible program! Not only do we do great work, we have fun doing it!

We meet on the **3rd Thursday of each month at 7:30AM** via Zoom. Contact Cindy Meckl for more information or to say "yes" to helping our preschool :)



Voices from God

Pastor Matt showed the kids the organ and talked about how each one of us is given a unique voice from God.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Hanging of the Greens: December 3

Holiday Giving Tree Gifts Due: December 3

Bake Sale: December 3

Live Nativity and Prayer Walk: December 8 (6:00-8:00PM)

Scrip Orders Due: December 10

Cinnamon Roll Orders Due: December 10

Wrap Sunday: December 10

Bake Sale: December 10

Ladies Luncheon: December 12

Annual Christmas Party: December 14 (5:00PM)

Children's Christmas Pageant: December 17

Bake Sale: December 17

Blue Christmas at Dousman Emmanuel UCC: December 20
at 6:30PM

Christmas Eve: 9:30AM Worship, 4:00PM Family
Candlelight service, 11:00PM Candlelight service

Christmas: December 25

Ladies Luncheon: December 26

STAY CONNECTED AND FALL INTO CHURCH WITH US

Rev. Matt Schneider-Adams, Senior Pastor pastor@oconomowocucc.org

Amy Drewa, Director of Children & Youth amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org

Karl Kay, Music Director karl@execpc.com

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

FOR MORE INFO VISIT US AT
WWW.OCONOMOWOCUCC.ORG