



MARCH 2025

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

Lent Schedule

Youth Group Bowling

Egg My Yard

Carnival Party Sunday

2025 Youth Mission
Trip

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
OCONOMOWOC**

📍 815 S. Concord Road

📞 262-567-4461

✉ uccoffice@oconomowocucc.org



by Pastor Matt

Christians have marked the weeks before Easter as a time of preparation since somewhere deep in the fourth century. Lent is that time – whether to prepare for baptism, or to be reunited with the church after being called out for serious ethical/moral lapses. Thus, the scriptures for the Sundays in Lent are challenging, on purpose. Like the gospel for the Third Sunday in Lent:

“At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.’”
(Luke 13:1-5, NRSV)

A politician enjoying the power of violence? A tower falling on innocent people? Sounds like 2025. The people believed that bad things happened to those Galileans because they were worse sinners than others, and that those eighteen people wound up under the wrong decrepit tower as payment for their sins, receiving God’s judgement by the invisible hand of bad engineering. Or dry rot.

Sure, we best the ancients when it comes to digital tech and choices on the candy aisle. But just like them, we often assume that bad things happen to bad people. Even when the evidence points the other way. Even when the scriptures are really clear that, “The rain falls on the just and the unjust alike.”

Last summer way too many of the “faithful” were ready to blame the human tragedy of wildfires and hurricanes on the sins of Californians, Carolinians, or just America itself. More personally, people say similar things about cancer patients, or victims of domestic/sexual abuse, or rape. “They must have done something to deserve it.” Which of course is garbage; garbage because it is not true, garbage because it exactly opposes what Jesus taught. Confronting our self-righteousness, he says, “Unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” Here, Jesus is the Word that is “sharper than any two-edged sword.” To bring us alive.

Lent is about more than the Friday night fish fry. If these words of Jesus are other than museum relics, if they live at all, then they certainly call us in Lent to strip off the self-righteousness that seduces us into “helping” God do a job which belongs to God alone. The reign of death shows up not only in tragedies or mass shootings, disease or injustice. It also shows up whenever our words or deeds oppose the grace by which God heals and makes things new.

The truth is, if my hope is built on some decrepit sense that I am less offensive to God than somebody else, that I am licensed to point the finger, then the tower is already crumbling down on top of me. But, if my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ cross, then I am set free to give my full attention, not to another sinners’ past, but to the glory of God bringing them alive out of a stone-cold tomb. Which, it turns out, is a great way to get ready for Easter.

We offer a variety of ways to resource your own Lenten preparation. Join us for any or all!

Moderator Musings

A challenge many churches face today is the inability for individual ministries or committees to look outside their own specific responsibilities for opportunities to collaborate with other groups within their organization. During my time in corporate America we called this internal focus “silo syndrome”. All organizations are susceptible to this and our church is no exception.

To combat “silo syndrome” our church recently held an All Ministries Meeting where all the elected leaders of the church came together to work on the 2025 church calendar. Not only does this give a chance for leaders to see who is serving on the other ministries but we added an extra twist to the process. As we worked through the calendar each ministry was challenged to find at least one new opportunity to either assist or ask for help from another ministry. An example of this type of crossover is decorating the church for Christmas. Traditionally this had been a responsibility of just the Spirituality Ministry but it has now become a shared task between Spirituality and Welcoming. As 2025 progresses look forward to other shared ministry endeavors.

By working “outside our boxes” we can spread the work and develop new, innovative ideas for improvement. It isn’t always easy to look over the edge of the silo. Sometimes you have to climb up a ways to reach the edge. But once you do look over that edge of traditional responsibilities and get a view of the breathtaking opportunities for sharing you won’t ever want to climb back down.

Yours in Christ,

Chris Mol
Moderator, First Congregational UCC

WISE-MINDFUL MOMENTS

Our congregation has formed a mental health task force to provide educational opportunities for the congregation regarding mental health and explore the possibility of becoming a WISE congregation.

What is WISE? WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive and Engaged in mental health) is a process and designation developed by the UCC to guide congregations in educating members about mental health and learning how to be supportive of individuals in our congregation and community with mental health issues.

In May 2024, we hosted an event with Dr. Brad Riemann at our church, "The Perfect Storm: The Mental Health Crisis in the U.S." Dr. Riemann discussed the rise in rates of anxiety, depression and addiction experienced in the U.S., the effects on youth, and the impact COVID-19 had on us all. This was a well-attended event and very informative.

On February 9, 2025, a representative from NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) certified twenty-six members of our congregation in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer), a training to recognize individuals in need of mental health assistance and appropriate action to take. The task force will provide monthly tips in the Branches and additional educational opportunities to encourage self-care and care of others.

If you have questions or are interested in joining the task force, please contact Amy Drewa at amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org or Tom Stone at tnbstone@gmail.com



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, March 11

(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday 3/3)

Mushroom Swiss Burger, on a Brioche bun with lettuce, tomato and onion, served with fresh fruit and a lemon lime bar.

Asian Crunch Chicken Salad, with chopped greens, crispy chicken, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, pecans and Sesame dressing, served with a lemon lime bar.

Tuesday, March 25

(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday 3/17)

Cranberry Turkey Melt, on grilled Sourdough bread with Cheddar cheese, served with fresh fruit and an apple crisp bar.

Chicken Cobb Salad, with chopped greens, egg, avocado, tomato, chicken, cheese and bacon, with Cucumber Ranch dressing and an apple crisp bar.

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.

Community Garden Plots



1st Congregational UCC Community Garden is set to begin its sixteenth year of operation and welcomes new gardeners. Individual plots are 10' by 10' and are rented on an annual basis for \$25.00. Water, and access to a garden shed with basic tools are included in the price. Community

Gardeners practice organic growing methods without chemical pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides. In addition to having the reward of growing fresh tasty vegetables, Community

Gardening offers opportunities to enjoy the outdoors with like-minded gardeners.

For more information or to reserve a garden plot(s), contact **Tom or Shirley Depies at 262-567-7254** or the church office 262-567-4461.

Tom Depies, Community Garden Coordinator



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.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

Hebrews 13:2

March’s Singing Collection

March’s singing collection is the Waukesha County UCC Refugee Resettlement Coalition.

A coalition of Waukesha County UCC churches are working together and with Lutheran Social Services (LSS) to support the resettlement of a seven-member family from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The family spent twelve years in a refugee camp in Malawi after fleeing their homeland.

The coalition team, which includes volunteers from our church, St John’s UCC Merton, Redeemer UCC Sussex, Emmanuel UCC Dousman, and First Congregational UCC Hartland, have helped the family to obtain clothing and household items in addition to teaching them to navigate language, healthcare, grocery shopping, school, employment, laundry, transportation, and other aspects of our culture and life in the US. It has been a learning experience, not only for the family but for all of the volunteers as well.

The family’s financial assistance from LSS will come to an end in March. Our regular support of the family will continue through Easter. The family has been so kind and appreciative of all the support and assistance they have received.

Though refugee resettlements to the US are currently on hold, the team hopes to continue its work in the future to assist families who come to the US looking for a safe place to live and raise their families.



February 2 & March 2

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.



Don and I would like to thank everyone who sent birthday cards to help celebrate our 90th birthdays. What a wonderful thing to have happen. I also would like to thank the person who anonymously provided flowers at church in my honor. We are so blessed to be involved with such a wonderful congregation.

Thank you!
Peg McCollum



April articles are due no later than

Saturday, March 15

to Natalie Gruentzel -

natalie@oconomowocucc.org



The rummage sale will be Saturday, April 12

All church set ups will be Sunday, March 30 and Sunday April 6 after each church service.

Please mark calendar for these dates. Any time you can come and help set up during the two weeks prior to the sale is much appreciated. A sign-up genius will be forthcoming.

Areas of greatest need:

- We have a new opportunity for someone who loves the idea of "owning" a retail shop. Become the room ambassador for the girls room.
- We also could use some additional help with the candles and vases area.
- As food prices soar, we can use monetary donations to help cover the cost of feeding the volunteers on the two set up days and on the day of the sale.

It's not too early to start cleaning out closets, basements, or garages. Items can be dropped off Monday through Friday from nine to one or by contacting Jill for alternate times. Encourage your friends and family to donate to our rummage sale in this way as well.

Contact Jill at 262-719-3823 to discuss your interest in any of these things.



March 20



COME AND JOIN US AT OUR

BOOK CLUB

April 17



Socialize and form friendships by joining us for an immersive experience at Book Club. Book Club gives you a chance to get to know people you may never have had contact with otherwise! We enjoy reading and respectfully discussing a broad range of viewpoints as we seek to grow in our understanding of our Lord and one another. Join us to gain knowledge, creativity and community. Everyone in the Book Club gets a chance to pick a future book of the month. Come help us discover something new!

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.





JOIN US FOR

CARNIVAL

Party Sunday

SUNDAY, MARCH 2

Let us come together to celebrate Jesus' Transfiguration and prepare for Lent. Come dressed up in a costume, bring your favorite treat for fellowship hour and stay to enjoy some carnival games after worship!

Youth Group Bowling



March 9 at 11:00AM
AT THIRSTY DUCK IN SUSSEX

On **March 9** our youth 3rd-12th grade are invited to participate in a different type of bowling....Duckpin Bowling!! Join us as we head to the Thirsty Duck for a fun afternoon of bowling and fellowship. Friends are more than welcome to join us too! Please reply to Amy Drewa at amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org or Leah Laufenberg at quigley116@yahoo.com if you/your youth will be attending by **March 7**.

Space is limited so sign up today!!





You are invited to experience the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Bible Study take place every Monday at 6:30PM from March 10 – April 7.

**First Congregational UCC
815 S. Concord Road
Oconomowoc, WI 53066**

**Wednesday, April 5 –
Ash Wednesday**

- 7:00PM Joint worship at Good Shepherd United Methodist Church

**Sunday, March 9 –
First Sunday in Lent**

- 9:30AM Worship

Wednesday, March 12

- 12:00PM Worship Wednesday
- 5:00PM Joint worship at Martin Luther Church

Sunday, March 16

- 9:30AM Worship

Wednesday, March 19

- 12:00PM Worship Wednesday
- 5:00PM Joint worship at Martin Luther Church

Sunday, March 23

- 9:30AM Worship

Wednesday, March 26

- 12:00PM Worship Wednesday
- 5:00PM Joint worship at Martin Luther Church

Sunday, March 30

- 9:30AM Worship

Wednesday, April 2

- 12:00PM Worship Wednesday
- 5:00PM Joint worship at Martin Luther Church

Sunday, April 6

- 9:30AM Worship

Wednesday, April 9

- 12:00PM Worship Wednesday
- 5:00PM Joint worship at Martin Luther Church

Sunday – April 13 – Palm Sunday

- 9:30AM Worship

Thursday, April 17 – Maundy Thursday

- 7:00PM Worship

Sunday, April 20 – Easter Sunday

- 9:30AM Worship



everything [in] between

Join us as the Gospel of Luke guides us through Lent. Jesus' ministry was grounded in relationships that disrupted the social, religious, and political divides of his time. Jesus intentionally pointed out cultural and political extremes to emphasize the powerful and surprising love of God. As we study these stories in their different contexts, we'll explore how they mirror the divisions many of us experience in our families, churches, and communities today. And, we'll see how God is present in between.

Our Lenten theme this year; *"Everything In Between,"* invites us to navigate the divides in our lives with more faith and purpose. So come and explore "Everything In Between" through these Lenten opportunities that will begin the week of March 9:

- Take a Lenten Journey by **exploring "Everything In Between" at home**. There are devotional booklets along with devotional cards that will help guide you. Pick them up at the table in narthex.
- **Coffee and Conversations**, Sunday's at 8:45AM in the High School Sunday School Room. Start your week off with some coffee and brief conversations! Together we will connect, read the In Between Devotional, and share in prayer for one another.
- **Meeting the In-Between**, Mondays at 6:30PM in the High School Sunday School Room. Discussions will focus on passages from Luke's gospel and things In Between.
- **Faith and Conversations**, Wednesdays at 1:15PM in the Music Room. Join us as we check-in midweek and to take a look at the passages from Luke.
- **Explore the Stations of the Cross** around the church property on Sunday, April 13. Prepare for Holy week along our beautiful outdoor path by interacting with 12 interactive prayers stations of Jesus' Journey to the cross.





2025 Youth Mission Trip

Destination

Join us as we travel to east Asheville, North Carolina to assist with the cleanup efforts from Hurricane Helene. Helene hit western North Carolina leaving record breaking rainfall causing flooding, mudslides and devastation in her path. Let us join in the relief efforts with our time and gifts to bring God's grace and hope to a hurting community by rebuilding homes and helping families re-establish their lives.

July 20-26, 2025

Included

- ✓ 6-night stay at a local school
- ✓ Daily breakfast, lunch and dinner
- ✓ Transportation
- ✓ Work based projects
- ✓ Nightly Worship and Activities

Highlights

- ✓ Engaging with the Community
- ✓ Building new and growing old relationships
- ✓ Learning new skills
- ✓ Life altering experience
- ✓ Serving God and building your faith



Estimated cost is \$800 without fundraising

Spaces are limited for this one-of-a-kind experience. Reserve your spot today and get ready to see what God can do with your skills and time.



REGISTER TODAY

<https://forms.gle/xqDuTvkFv2pNjeaM7>

OR SCAN THE QR CODE





Order prefilled candy
eggs to surprise your kids,
neighbors, & friends.
Let our bunnies do the
work for you!

FUNDRAISER

book your
spot today!

Eggs can be hidden in your yard the night before Easter OR you can
pick them up at church to hide yourself on Sunday, April 13.

25 eggs

\$30

50 eggs

\$45

75 eggs

\$60

For more information or to place an order, please call or email
Amy Drewa at amydrewa@oconomocucc.org or 262-567-4461.

ALL PROCEEDS BENEFIT THE 2025 YOUTH SUMMER MISSION TRIP!

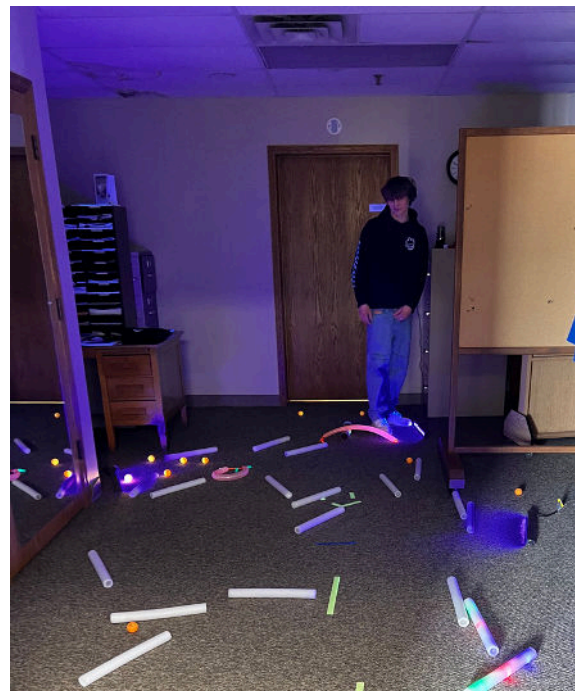


Youth News

Youth Group (3rd - 12th grade)

February our church was transformed into an 18 hole Miniature Golf Course! The youth had fun adding to the course, playing it and learning about the different outreach opportunities we have at church.

On March 9 our youth 3rd-12th grade are invited to participate in a different type of bowling....Duckpin Bowling!! Join us as we head to the Thirsty Duck for a fun afternoon of bowling and fellowship. Friends are more than welcome to join us too! Please reply to Amy Drewa at amydrewa@economowocucc.org or Leah Laufenberg at quigley116@yahoo.com if you/your youth will be attending by March 7. Space is limited so sign up today!!



Youth News

Mission Trip Fundraiser

Our Youth Mission Team have started their fundraising efforts for their 2025 Mission Trip! This year 15 participants will be traveling to Asheville, North Carolina to assist with the cleanup efforts from Hurricane Helene. It is always our goal to make these mission trips affordable for all who attend. With our fundraising efforts and the generosity of our church members we can do so. This month we are offering a few different opportunities for you to support our youth mission team over the next couple of months.

Let our mission team help with your Easter needs by filling eggs and “egging” your yard or you can pick them up on March 13 after worship. Stop by the Mission Table in fellowship hall to place your order. Take a look at the flyer for more details!

Back by popular demands our youth mission team will be selling a variety of flats, 4 ½ inch annual pots, planted porch pots, hanging baskets and much more! These beautiful and high-quality flowers are from Shady Lane Nursery and are available for you to order and support our Youth Mission Team. Stop by the Mission Table in Fellowship Hall after church beginning March 23 through April 20 to place your order. All orders will be available for pickup on May 9 or after worship on May 11.

While you’re at the Mission Table consider investing in our mission trip by purchasing Stock Shares. Our mission team is selling shares of stock for any amount (\$5, \$20, \$50 or more). By purchasing a share, you are helping a participant serve in a way God has called them that could potentially be life altering. We pray that you will prayerfully consider Investing in our Youth Mission Team today!

Sunday School

As we begin our journey through Lent our children and youth 4th grade and younger will focus on the journey of the prodigal son and that we can celebrate God’s love no matter our journeys. Through discussions and interactive activities the children and youth will explore this story and things In Between.

As for our middle and high school youth they will be working together to create a worship service which they will conduct on April 6. Together they will write prayers, explore scriptures and discuss what it means to them and how it pertains to us today to create the sermon. We are very excited to work with them on this and to see what they put together!

Camp Scholarships

I know it’s only March but it’s time to start registering for Church Camp! The UCC has two amazing church camps in Wisconsin: [Moon Beach](#) and [Daycholah](#). Registration has opened for all campers. If you are interested in attending, make sure to register before your favorite camp gets filled up. Between the two camps there are a variety of options for all ages, interests as well as parent and me or family camps! Check out the links and register today! If you register by April 30 you will receive a 5% discount! Come and support our church camps, have some fun and meet new friends!!!

We are very blessed that our church is able to offer scholarships to all youth campers who fill out a service log. Please [click here](#) to access the log. If you have any questions, please contact Amy Drewa at amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org.

HEARTS & HANDS

Celebrating ALL of God's Children

Now Registering!

Now Registering for Summer and Fall 2025.

We have classes for ages 25 months - 4K!

See our website for all of the details:

www.heartsandhandspreschool.org



Keep in mind that church members get 20% off tuition!

Thank you!

- A HUGE thank-you to Rich Steffans who installed a sink and faucet in our new classroom! There were many unforeseen issues with this project and he conquered them all! Thanks Rich!!
- Thanks Jen Kollath (high school HSED teacher) who stepped in to help us get kids ready for our emergency evacuation due to the natural gas leak on February 14th! Extra hands sure were appreciated as we got 21 kids out the door quickly!



The kids had so much fun making ice luminaries for our Open House!



One of our preschool families had a baby a month ago that is now in need of a heart transplant due to a congenital heart disease. The family has set up a [CaringBridge page](#) to follow Eleanor's progress.

They would love any and all prayers they can get. From the latest post: *"Eleanor is so strong and it's inspiring to see how well she is able to persevere. She's a bulldozer that keeps pushing through every challenge set before her."*

Here are 2 other ways you can help if you are interested: Eleanor's Aunt Megan and Aunt Rachel put a lot of effort into creating a beautiful "Eleanor's Army" logo and organized an [apparel shop](#). If you're interested in supporting Eleanor check out the link below. They can be picked up in Oconomowoc or shipped (select your preference at checkout). They even did multiple graphic options suitable for men, women, or children!

Last, there is also a [GoFundMe page](#) in Eleanor's honor

Whatever support you can give this family is much appreciated!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Carnival Party Sunday: March 2

Ash Wednesday Joint Worship at Good Shepherd: March 5 (7:00PM)

Coffee & Conversations: March 9 (8:45AM)

Youth Group Bowling: March 9 (11:00AM)

Bible Study: March 10 (6:30PM)

Ladies Luncheon: March 11 (11:15AM)

Worship Wednesday: March 12 (12:00PM)

Faith & Conversations: March 12 (1:15PM)

Joint Worship at Dr. Martin Luther Church: March 12 (5:00PM)

Coffee & Conversations: March 16 (8:45AM)

Bible Study: March 17 (6:30PM)

Worship Wednesday: March 19 (12:00PM)

Faith & Conversations: March 19 (1:15PM)

Joint Worship at Dr. Martin Luther Church: March 19 (5:00PM)

Book Club: March 20 (1:00PM)

Coffee & Conversations: March 23 (8:45AM)

Bible Study: March 24 (6:30PM)

Ladies Luncheon: March 25 (11:15AM)

Worship Wednesday: March 26 (12:00PM)

Faith & Conversations: March 26 (1:15PM)

Joint Worship at Dr. Martin Luther Church: March 26 (5:00PM)

Coffee & Conversations: March 30 (8:45AM)

Bible Study: March 31 (6:30PM)

FOR MORE INFO VISIT US AT
WWW.OCONOMOWOCUCC.ORG

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