



SEPTEMBER 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

Join our Sunday  
School Team!

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Sewing Event

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Rally Sunday

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Call to Care Prayer  
Chain

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Coffee with the  
Pastor

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
OCONOMOWOC**

📍 815 S. Concord Road

📞 262-567-4461

✉ [uccoffice@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:uccoffice@oconomowocucc.org)



In chapter 7 of Mark, Jesus heads to the VERY Roman coastal resort city of Tyre. He went into a house, trying to lay low. Only someone found out. A woman, whose little girl was in the grip of an unclean spirit, came right into the house, bowed low at his feet, and implored him to cast the demon out of her daughter. Jesus, tired and maybe a little hangry, said, "Let's feed the (Israelite) children first. It's not fair to throw the children's food to the dogs." But that mom came right back at him: "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." Jesus caught himself. He said, "Because of that answer, go home and you'll find that the demon has gone out of your daughter."

This mom would not take no for an answer. She'd cried too many tears. It was time for a big change for the little one she loved. She trusted Jesus could make something good happen. And notice, Jesus credited HER attitude for the positive healing. Pause right here.

We dive into a new school year with all kinds of "stuff" happening. Maybe we can no longer ignore a problem in our body, or our job, or our home life, or one more piece of rot happening to vulnerable people in our country. A heavy weight hangs over each new day, over every decision. It's easy to get sucked into pessimism. Psychologists have found that we humans carry within us what's called a "negativity bias." It's a survival mechanism passed down from our ancient ancestors. Our brains are hard-wired to focus on fear and negativity. Long ago this helped us defend against saber-tooth tigers. But now, that same "negativity bias" is fuel for everything from general crankiness to depression to conspiracy theories, and much worse.

The mom who barged-in on Jesus had no guarantee that he could do anything for her daughter. But she had a hunch. She'd heard stories. And, when at first, he dragged his feet, she leaned in: "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." She pushed beyond her "negativity bias" and grasped the moment with a hopeful uncertainty.

"Hopeful uncertainty" is another way to say "faith." The Letter to the Hebrews describes faith as, "The assurance of things hoped-for, the conviction of things not seen." We cannot see what we hope for. It is not in our hands. But we trust that the Lord we barge-in on is true to all we have heard about him. We may be very uncertain, but we trust that Christ will act in some way to unblock positive energy, or pull us through, or expose the fatal weakness of the demonic power that seems to own the day.

For people of faith this is a choice. We can choose negative uncertainty, angry uncertainty, or hopeful uncertainty. Uncertainty is given. The way we approach it is not. Our approach is a choice, and it is either a choice for faith, or it is a choice for anxiety, fear, or resignation. Faith finds a home in our lives not by magic, but by our choices. And, in those choices, the Holy Spirit moves, breaking up log jams within us, changing things, bringing new life.

In addition to the full range of Fall activities you are reading about in this issues of Branches, here's a new thing: If you'd like a judgment-free space to hang with me over coffee, to talk about faith issues, and feed the hopeful part of the uncertainty we are all navigating these days, please join me at **Roots Café in downtown Oconomowoc, 1PM - 3PM Tuesday afternoons.**

With hope and gratitude,

Pastor Matt

## Moderator Musings



Summer is winding down and the church is gearing up for another year of outstanding programming. There are two items right now on my mind that I want to bring to the congregations attention.

1. After several meetings and some long discussions Stewardship Ministry has decided to delay any Capital Drive kickoff until early next year. It was determined that a lot of foundation work was still necessary and that the hiring of a consultant should be considered to help us with the overall process. Therefore Stewardship will be conducting their normal annual pledge campaign this fall with Commitment Sunday scheduled for November 9th. Background work on the Capital Drive will begin late this year with a vote to move forward on a campaign probably at the Annual Corporate Meeting in late January.

2. I don't usually like to shout out individual members for their contributions since we all are doing God's work but three people have recently stepped up big time and I think they need a little recognition.

- **Rich Steffens** - as chair of the Golf Outing Rich has been putting in some serious hours and effort along with the Golf Outing Committee. The phrase, 'herding cats' comes to mind.
- **Barb Bleecker** - when asked if she would lead the church's outreach effort at the Festival of the Arts food booth Barb put up her hand and said, "Here I am Lord, pick me".
- **Natalie Gruentzel** - hired as our communications coordinator I don't think Natalie realized what she was getting into. Recently I saw some of her work product (the Golf Outing dinner program) and I couldn't believe how professionally prepared it looked and how quickly she completed it. We are truly blessed to have her in our church office.

I hope you can feel the positive vibes, as I do, coming from our church. I believe we are moving in the right direction and doing what Jesus called us to do. Let the good times roll!

Yours in Christ,  
Chris Mol  
Moderator, First Congregational UCC

Reminder

October articles are due no later than **September 15** to [natalie@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:natalie@oconomowocucc.org)



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, September 9

*(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday 9/1)*

## Tuesday, September 23

*(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday 8/18)*

*Once we have received menu options for September, they will be printed and on the narthex table!*

### Reserve your spot for a good time!

See Sue Zajac during Fellowship or call/text her 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.



## Call to Care Prayer Chain



The prayer chain is urgent and confidential. You can start the process of prayers by calling the church office and talking to Pastor Matt, Amy Drewa, or you can call Sue Zajac directly (414-698-3575).

If there is not an urgent need, or no need to be confidential, then you can call the church office and ask to be listed in the weekly announcements and concerns in church. Occasionally, our members choose to be on both.

Our prayer group is expected to pray daily for a minimum of a week. If anyone has a desire to be on our Prayer Chain group, you may sign up on Time & Talent sheets during pledge time in November.

Please reach out to Sue Zajac if you have any questions.





## 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.

### September Singing Collection

The STRONG program is a day treatment program that provides intensive mental health services to children and adolescents (ages 5-14) in a safe and structured setting. It is housed in Milwaukee and was formerly The Holton Youth Family Center.

Since opening its doors in early 2021. The STRONG program has been inundated with referrals for children in need of mental and behavioral health services. Referrals come from school counselors and parents.

STRONG stands for **S**uccessfully Treating and **R**eaching **O**ur **N**ext **G**eneration. The STRONG program recognizes the unique value of each child and acknowledges that each child deserves a chance at a successful future.



The goal of the STRONG program is to partner with schools and families to provide these children the best treatment available, allowing each child to reach their full potential.

This is achieved by using treatment combined with the love and values of Christ. Including God’s love and grace into treatment allows them to reach children on all levels as they help them grow STRONGer emotionally, behaviorally and spiritually.

Please consider thoughtfully, this much needed Mission during the month of September



August 3 & September 7

### 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.**

# 

Pastor Matt and the Membership Committee will hold an informational meeting for those interested in learning more about our church and for those interested in becoming members of our church family on **Wednesday, September 10 at 6:30PM** in the Church music room.

*Please contact the Church Office at 262-567-4461 to let us know if you are planning on attending to ensure that we have enough supplies.*

On **September 21**, New Member Sunday will be held during which time those interested in becoming members of our church family will be warmly welcomed into our membership. *Please contact the Church Office if you are interested in attending the September 10th meeting and/or in becoming a member.*

## Join Our Sunday School Team!

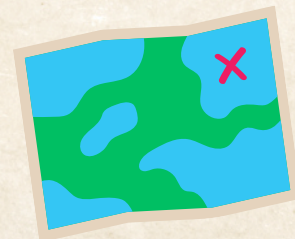
*"The most rewarding volunteering I do is working with our Sunday School children."*

-RANDY BOURDO



Do you have a heart for children and a few hours to give each month? We're looking for caring volunteers to help teach Sunday School for the upcoming school year.

- Commitment: Just 1–2 Sundays per month
- Flexible Scheduling
- Work with Any Age Group
- Easy-to-Follow Curriculum Provided



Whether you're a seasoned teacher or brand new to volunteering, we'd love to have you on the team!

Interested in learning more? Contact Amy Drewa today—we'd love to talk with you!





# Sewing Event

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 17

1:00PM - 3:00PM

Fidget  
Mats

Book  
Bags

Sewing &  
Chatting



It's time for another social sewing event! Let's use those threads that connect us to make book bags for Book Ahead and fidget mats for dementia patients at Summit Aurora hospital.

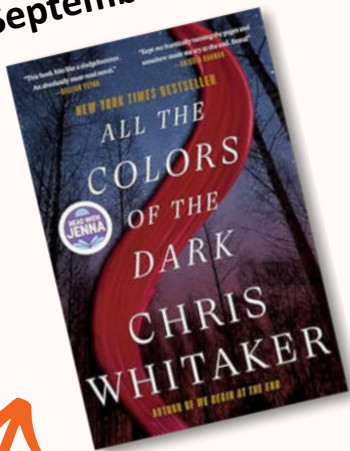
Book Ahead is a local nonprofit dedicated to ensuring all children own their own books. Since 2021, the organization has reached over 6,000 children in Milwaukee and Waukesha counties, distributing over 20,000 books. The bags provide a safe and reusable way to supply the books. Kids love the various fabric patterns. Please bring your own thread and scissors, and a sewing machine if you have one.

People with dementia, Alzheimer's and autism often struggle with anxiety. Fidget mats and muffs can have a calming and relaxing effect. Let your creativity loose with buttons, zippers, ribbons and more. Supplies will be provided for fidget mats. If you plan to crochet a fidget mitt, directions will be given, but please bring your own supplies.

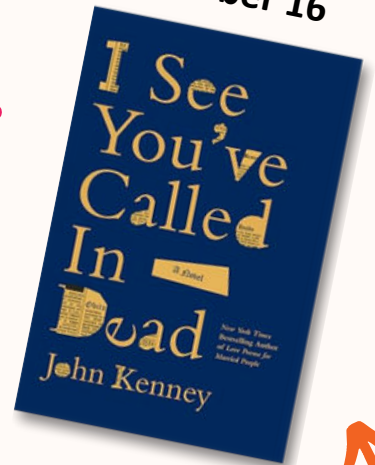
We can use many skills – crocheting, ironing, rotary/scissor cutting, machine sewing, pinning and chatting. No fancy sewing knowledge required! Bring your skills and any supplies (if you have them) on **Wednesday, September 17 from 1:00 to 3:00.**

**Please sign up in the office.**  
If you'd like more information,  
contact Susan Steffens at  
262 227-9919.



**September 18****COME AND JOIN US AT OUR**

# **BOOK CLUB**

**October 16**

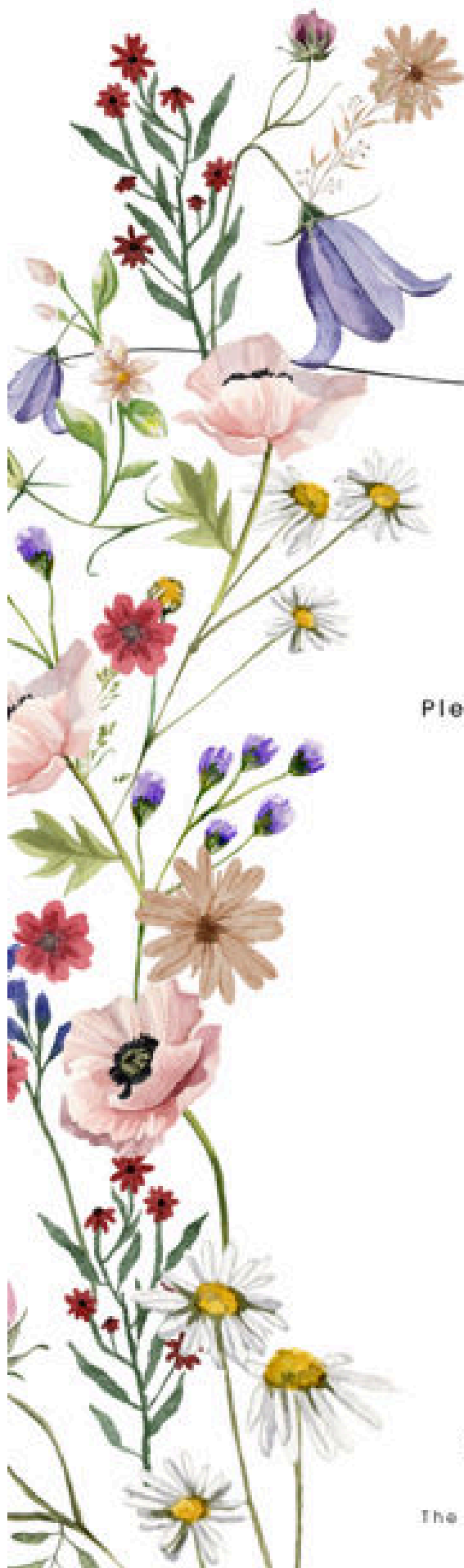
Socialize and form friendships by joining us for an immersive experience at Book Club. Book Club gives you a chance to get to know people you may never have had contact with otherwise! We enjoy reading and respectfully discussing a broad range of viewpoints as we seek to grow in our understanding of 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.**







# CELEBRATION *of Life*

Please join us as we celebrate the life of

**JUDY SCHUYLER**

September 6th, 2025 | 11:00am

## SERVICE AND DEDICATION

First Congregational Church  
815 S. Concord Road  
Oconomowoc, WI 53066

## RECEPTION

First Congregational Church  
12:00 pm | Pavilion

We will gather together after the  
service for a light lunch and desserts.

The family requests any memorial donations be made in  
Judy's name to the First Congregational UCC.

## Youth News

### Sunday School News: A New Year, A New Adventure!

Summer may have flown by, but we're filled with excitement as we prepare to return to Sunday School and continue growing in faith together!

We're thrilled to welcome everyone back on **Rally Sunday, September 7**, as we kick off another meaningful and joy-filled year of learning, connection, and spiritual exploration. This year, we embark on a brand-new theme: **"An Adventure with God."** Through engaging Bible stories, hands-on activities, and community-building experiences, children and youth alike will deepen their understanding of faith and what it means to walk with God.

As a community of faith, our 4<sup>th</sup> graders and younger we'll begin the year focusing on the sacred practice of Communion. Together, we'll reflect on the story of the Last Supper and explore the meaning of this sacrament through interactive discussions and appropriate age activities designed to bring the story to life.

Our Middle and High School Youth will come together each week to build lasting connections with one another and strengthen their personal faith journeys. Centered around the idea of "Connecting"—with each other, with Scripture, and with God—students will grow through open conversation, engaging lessons, and dynamic experiences that nurture both faith and friendship. We are truly excited to begin another amazing year of Sunday School and can't wait to share this Adventure with God—and with YOU!

[Click here](#) to register for Sunday School!

For questions or more information, please contact: [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org).

Let's make this year one to remember. See you soon!

#### Save the following dates:

**September 7** - Rally Day with a Celebration after Worship

**October 5**- World Communion Sunday & Family Worship (No Sunday School)



### Rally Sunday Celebration- Sunday, September 7

Mark your calendars to join us for a new Adventure as we kick off the start of another great Sunday School Year! There will be a special service welcoming everyone back and per our tradition, all 3rd Graders will receive their bibles during worship. We will also celebrate and bless the beginning of another school year. So, students, preschool through adult, bring your backpacks or lunch boxes or water bottles to worship. During the services we will lift our children and students of all ages through prayer as we begin a new school year.

## Youth News

### Youth Group Kickoff: Brunch & Build – September 7

With a new school year underway, we're excited to kick off another year of Youth Group gatherings! We can't wait for our youth to get together for some fun and exciting events! We will have two separate youth groups, a Junior Youth Group (3rd-8th Grade) and High School Youth Group (9th-12th Grade). Our first gathering is **Sunday, September 7, from 10:45–11:15 AM**, and it's all about Brunch & Build. During this short but meaningful time, each group will enjoy a tasty brunch and begin shaping their Youth Group year—dreaming up events, activities, and service opportunities they want to lead and be a part of.

We're looking forward to a year filled with fun, friendships, faith-building, and service—and we can't wait to support the creative ideas our youth bring to the table. Bring your ideas, thoughts and hungry tummy's!!!!

If you/your youth plans to attend any Youth Group gatherings this year, please be sure to [register here](#) so we can keep you updated.

### Confirmation

We're thrilled to begin an exciting new season of Confirmation with a group of youth eager to reaffirm their baptismal vows and grow deeper in their faith. Our journey officially begins on **Saturday, October 11**, with a Parent Meeting and a fun team-building session to get things started.

This is a meaningful time of learning, reflection, and spiritual growth, and we can't wait to walk alongside these young people as they explore what it means to claim their faith as their own.

If you have a youth in 9th grade or older who is interested in participating and you haven't received information by mail, please reach out to Amy Drewa at [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org).

Let's get ready for a faith-filled journey ahead!

### A Joyful Kickoff to a New Sunday School Year!

Mark your calendars and join us for an exciting Rally Sunday Celebration as we launch into another wonderful year of Sunday School! This special day will be filled with joy, tradition, and community as we continue our **"Adventure with God."**

During worship, we will extend a warm welcome to all returning and new families. In keeping with our cherished tradition, all 3rd graders will receive their very own Bibles—a meaningful milestone in their faith journey. We will also offer a special Blessing of the Backpacks, lifting up students of all ages—preschool through adult—as they prepare for a new academic year. So don't forget to bring your backpacks, lunch boxes, water bottles, or anything you carry into your learning spaces as a symbol of your journey!

After worship, while our 3rd–12th grade youth head off to their Brunch & Build time, we invite children in 2nd grade and younger—and all adults—to gather in Fellowship Hall for a joyful Rally Sunday Celebration!

Enjoy delicious treats, fun activities, and a wonderful opportunity to reconnect and celebrate the start of a new season in community. We can't wait to see you there and kick off this exciting new year—together!



# HEARTS & HANDS

Celebrating ALL of God's Children

## Fall Classes

We have a few spaces left in both our 2.5's program and our Friday Fun classes.

Registration information is available on our website: [www.heartsandhandspreschool.org](http://www.heartsandhandspreschool.org)

## New Staff Member

Welcome Nyla M. to the Hearts & Hands staff! More about Nyla coming in the months to come. She will bring energy, youth, and much enthusiasm for what she calls her "dream" job!

## Teresa Schmeling Retirement

We had such a blast celebrating Teresa Schmeling's retirement with a tea party hosted by the preschool board at Jill Riemann's home! Reminiscing, game playing, good food, and tasty tea all made for a perfect send-off for Teresa after her 16 years at Hearts & Hands. She will be missed but we are sure she will love retirement!



[CaringBridge page](#)  
[Apparel shop](#)  
[GoFundMe page](#)

**Whatever prayers and support you can give this family is much appreciated!**

Eleanor continues to amaze everyone around her with her determination to beat all of the odds! She received a heart transplant on June 14th. What an absolute miracle this beautiful little girl is <3





# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Labor Day - Office Closed:** September 1

**Coffee with the Pastor:** September 2 (1PM - 3PM)

**First Day of Preschool:** September 3

**Rally Sunday:** September 7

**Ladies Luncheon:** September 9 (11:15AM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** September 9 (1PM - 3PM)

**New Member Informational Meeting:** September 10 (6:30PM)

**Work Saturday:** September 13 (9:00AM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** September 16 (1PM - 3PM)

**Sewing Event:** September 17 (1:00PM - 3:00PM)

**Book Club:** September 18 (1:00PM)

**New Member Sunday:** September 21

**Ladies Luncheon:** September 23 (11:15AM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** September 23 (1PM - 3PM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** September 30 (1PM - 3PM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** October 7 (1PM - 3PM)

**Fall Congregational Meeting:** October 12

**Ladies Luncheon:** October 14 (11:15AM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** October 14 (1PM - 3PM)

**Book Club:** October 16 (1:00PM)

**Work Saturday:** October 18 (9:00AM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** October 21 (1PM - 3PM)

**Ladies Luncheon:** October 28 (11:15AM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** October 28 (1PM - 3PM)

FOR MORE INFO VISIT US AT  
**[WWW.OCONOMOWOCUCC.ORG](http://WWW.OCONOMOWOCUCC.ORG)**

## STAY CONNECTED AND FALL INTO CHURCH WITH US

Rev. Matt Schneider-Adams, Senior Pastor [pastor@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:pastor@oconomowocucc.org)

Amy Drewa, Director of Children & Youth [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org)

Karl Kay, Music Director [karlkay@execpc.com](mailto:karlkay@execpc.com)

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