



FEBRUARY 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

All  
Ministries/Leadership  
Meeting and  
Calendar Planning

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Carnival Party Sunday

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Celebrate the Season  
of Lent

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Mental Health Task  
Force

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Intergenerational  
Game Day

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
OCOMOWOC**

📍 815 S. Concord Road

📞 262-567-4461

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



by Pastor Matt

When Moses first brought the Ten Commandments down from the mountain, things did not go as planned. He stumbled into a desert rave party - which was not how things were supposed to work. In anger he threw down the first set and they broke apart. Then, when Moses brings down the second set of stone tablets, it's a different story. The golden calf and the DJ were long gone. The people were back on a strict diet of manna, but there was something strange about Moses: his face was shining. After being in God's presence, he was radiating light. It was WEIRD. So, after he gave them the new set of commandments, Moses put a veil over his face. Because the shining was too much for people to bear.

A similar thing happens to Jesus on the mountain of the Transfiguration, when Peter, John and James see Jesus standing with Moses and Elijah. A strange glowing cloud descends on them. A voice is heard coming from nowhere and everywhere, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!"

I have seen people light up a room when they walk into it, but I have never seen real light radiating from a face. At least the kind of light that made me uneasy. I wonder if this face-light from being in God's presence is like a battery is charged from electricity coming from beyond itself? Or, is this light something that we all have naturally within us? Do we naturally shine with light, but over time learn to veil it – so that others won't freak out when we are freely and openly being who we are in the world?

We celebrate moments like these on Transfiguration Sunday, which this year is February 11. So, on the 11th, come to worship dressed in costume – be a monster, dancer, cow-hand, Ariel, the Mario brothers, Harry Potter, or anything else you can imagine! In the service we will bury our Alleluias. Then, bring your favorite decadent sweet-dessert-thing to share for coffee hour. And be prepared for games.

Three days after this Transfiguration "Carnival Party Sunday," we step into Lent on Ash Wednesday. To prepare for the transforming grace of Easter, we will come through a time of taking off our masks and becoming more truthful about ourselves – to God, to each other, AND to ourselves.

It is easy to accept the labels that others put onto us, or to stick others with labels that don't reflect who they really are. It is easy to believe the failures OR the fantasies we tell ourselves. A large part of the turning (or "repentance") involved in Lent is the shedding of these false stories about ourselves or others, which are the root of "the sin that clings so closely," as Paul says. Because by repeating them, we mask others' light AND we mask the light shining from within us. The labels, the names, and the negative self-talk swallow the light that is meant to shine. Lent begins in ashes and ends in the upper room. Along this path we have a new opportunity to take off the masks and let the light do what God means it to do.

I pray for each of us a real encounter with God, whether on a mountain or in a valley, at the peak of awesome or in the depths of humdrum. Because God doesn't NEED a mountaintop to catch us by surprise, and bathe us in grace, and send our lives in new directions. All God needs is a crack in the hard shell, and a longing for something better. So, let Grace find those cracks. Take-in the light that God wants to give. And bring the shine!

## Moderator Musings

I always thought that one of the hardest jobs in our church was not being Moderator or a Ministry Chair but was being in charge of getting people to serve on the church's various ministries or committees.

Normally this function is handled by the Nominating Committee but this year, after many years of service, the Nominating Committee's last member stepped down. According to the church constitution if the Nominating Committee is vacant it befalls on the Leadership Team to fill that function and thus, as your current Moderator, I also became the Chair of your Nominating Committee.

My first action was to figure out which members of the various ministries and committees were in mid-term, which were eligible for another term, and which had served the maximum number of years and needed to be replaced. Given our current organizational structure our church currently has roughly 70 positions that need to be filled annually. Around 1/3 of those serving are mid-term meaning that they are in the second of their 2-year terms. Another 1/3 are eligible to continue serving but need to be re-elected for another term. The final 1/3 have served three 2-year terms and are no longer eligible for re-election to the same ministry or committee (our church constitution limits most positions to a 6-year limit). Those members need to be replaced with someone new.

So having determined who needed to be reelected and who needed to be replaced I reached out to the various chairs and asked them to query those members who were eligible for reelection if they were willing to continue serving and for those who were terming out who might we ask to join a ministry or committee. I am gratified and humbled to report that nearly all those who could have indicated that they will continue to serve and for those positions that members have termed out we have had others offer to step up. There are only a few "open" slots!

Maybe you have felt it too but I am becoming more aware of a new energy that is permeating our church. Usually getting members to take on positions is hard. This year it was relatively easy. It is apparent that the Spirit is moving among us and there is a new commitment to doing God's work. Maybe this nominating job isn't that hard.

Yours in Christ,

Chris Mol

Moderator, First Congregational UCC of  
Oconomowoc

## All Ministries/Leadership Meeting and Calendar Planning

**February 28, 2024 in Fellowship Hall**

**Potluck - 5:30 p.m. Meeting - 6:30 p.m. Duration of meeting - 2 hours of planning**

Invitees: All Officers; Leadership Team; Ministries, Committees,  
Sub-Committees Members and Special Project/Event Leaders

Purpose: Fellowship, Communication, Information - Development of the 2024 Church Calendar.



Lent is a time of spiritual renewal and reflection in preparation of Good Friday and celebrating Easter Sunday. These 40 days are an opportunity for us to draw closer to God. Journey with us through Lent with a variety of opportunities.

We will begin with burying our Alleluias during worship on **February 11**. We will stop using the word Alleluia in worship and in song for the duration of Lent. We will also literally bury our Alleluias as we won't be using the word.



Each of us carry different Alleluias within ourselves and at times we bury them within our souls. Maybe it's something your grieving, maybe it's something you're celebrating. Whatever it is, write it on an Alleluia seed and bury it in our Lenten flowerbed to offer to God. As our Alleluias germinate we will see what happens to them when we celebrate on Easter Sunday. Alleluia Seeds will be available on the narthex table or you can print them at home and bring them with you to church. You can bury your Alleluias anytime throughout Lent.

You can also journey through Lent with us with a Lenten Calendar. Each day will be provide a different idea or activity to help you draw closer to God. Lenten Calendars will be available on the narthex table.

Beginning **Monday, February 19** Pastor Matt will begin a Lenten Monday Night Bible Study beginning at 6:30PM in the music room. Please watch your emails as more information will be available. We look forward to you joining us! Lent is a time to draw you closer to God, but it is also a time for you to draw closer to others. Join us on **February 25** as we come together as a church family for a Game Day! What better way to draw closer to others than playing a familiar game you know or learning a new one.

As we travel through Lent and approach Holy week there will be a prayer walk through the stations of the cross along the walking path outside on **March 18**. After the Breakfast with the Easter Bunny come travel in prayer through the stations of Jesus' final earthly moments. The stations will be set up in Fellowship Hall and the music room the week of **March 24** for those who prefer to walk through them indoors.

These are only a few options for you to partake in during the season of Lent. Please continue to watch your emails for other opportunities.





# Mental Health

Did you know that one in every five adults experience a mental illness. One in every three young adults (18-25) experience a mental illness. And one in every 6 youth (12-17) experiences a major depressive episode. When you are sitting in church you are most likely sitting next to or near someone who is or has experienced a mental illness. These numbers are staggering and as a church family we can offer support.

We have formed a Mental Health Task Force who will begin to discuss ways that our congregation can learn how to talk and listen with others about mental health, recognize warning signs, and to be supportive. Together we will become WISE about mental health and support those experiencing it. So please watch your emails for upcoming sessions.

*If you feel a calling to help more with this initiative than please consider joining our Task Force. You can contact Amy Drewa, Tom Stone or Susan Steffens.*



**It's a SEW-CIAL!**

**We're making fidget mats. Please come even if you don't sew.**

What is a Fidget mat? It's a collection of things to feel and fidget with. Mats and muffs are calming for people with Alzheimers and dementia. They are easy and fun to make. Bring your sewing machine, yarn or fabric and trimmings (zippers, ribbon, elastic, rick rack, buttons, etc) and we'll make some to be delivered to Evin Senior Living in Oconomowoc. I'll bring a bin of buttons and bobbles to share. Don't sew or crochet? Come for some coffee and fellowship, and help design a mat.

*Please sign up on the signup sheet in fellowship hall so we know you are coming.*

*If you need a ride, let Susan Steffens know.*

**Thursday, February 22, from 1:00 to 3:00**





## VOLUNTEER TO BE A

Buddy

The purpose of "Buddies" for new members of our church is to assure that new members feel welcomed for the first months of their membership. We would like Buddies to accompany new members at the time of their being received into the church family on New Member Sunday and take them to and sit with them during Fellowship hours following church services.

Buddies will be available to answer questions and address concerns of new members. They will invite new members to attend church activities and events.

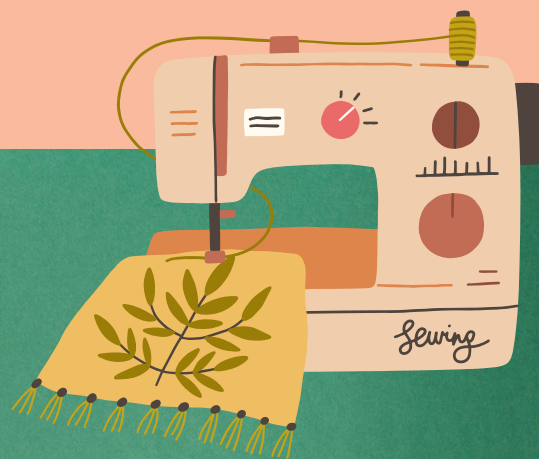
The Buddie's significant role will be to serve as companions for the first six months following New Member Sunday to assure that new members feel welcome and know that they are an important part of our congregation.

To volunteer to be a Buddy, please contact Linda Davis at [pldvais.pd@gmail.com](mailto:pldvais.pd@gmail.com) or 207-985-9186. It is a wonderful way to get to know new members.

## A Book Ahead

Thanks to all of you who are sewing bags for A Book Ahead! The need for book bags for "A Book Ahead" is ongoing. In case you haven't heard about this organization, the goal is to provide books to underserved children in Milwaukee and Waukesha counties to ensure all kids own their own books. **WE NEED 3000 BAGS by April of 2024!** Precut kits with instructions for these easy to sew bags are located in the purple bag by the mailboxes in the office. You may return sewn bags there.

*Questions? Contact Susan Steffens.*





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, Feburary 13

*(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday 2/5)*

**Cranberry Turkey Melt**, on grilled Sourdough bread with Cheddar cheese and Cheddar, 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.

## Tuesday, February 27

*(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday 2/19)*

**Crispy Chicken Wrap**, with fried chicken strips, lettuce, tomato, onion, bacon and Ranch dressing, served with fresh fruit and a chocolate chip cookie.

**Shrimp Caesar Salad**, with chopped Romaine lettuce, tomatoes, parmesan cheese, croutons, Caesar dressing, sautéed shrimp, and a chocolate chip cookie.

## 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.



February articles are due no later than

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15**

to Natalie Gruentzel -

[natalie@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:natalie@oconomowocucc.org)



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.

## February 15







New members right to left are : Mary Krebs, Glenn Kees, Midge Kees, Brenda Seroka, daughter Katrina, and Scott Seroka. Welcoming presented yellow roses to each new member which symbolize friendship and support.



Huge thanks to Russell Frey who used his woodworking skills to build and install pull out drawers in the Fellowship Hall cabinets making it so much easier to access supplies for Fellowship hour. THANK YOU, Russell!



Join us for  
**ASH**  
 WEDNESDAY  
 February 14



## 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.

### February’s Singing Collection

February’s Singing Collection is dedicated to Family Promise of Waukesha County. Our church has been involved with Family Promise for years. It is a staple of our mission and community outreach. Family Promise’s mission is simply worded but deep in its commitment: help low-income families and families experiencing homelessness achieve sustainable independence through a community-based response. All families deserve respect, dignity, empathy and support as they maneuver through challenging, dark times. Family Promise is there to be a beacon of hope... and First Congregational UCC of Oconomowoc helps with the mission.

Through the years our church has donated time, money and talents to help Family Promise thrive as it responds to those in need. They assist in rent payments, run shelters for families and single women, collect furniture and ensure that everyone is safe and comfortable. We are proud to be a part of that commitment! Let’s continue to give generously in 2024!



#### 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](mailto:themeckls@gmail.com) and 262-567-2558) or Deb Bursinger ([bursinger@gmail.com](mailto:bursinger@gmail.com) or 262-490-7902).



November 5 & December 3

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

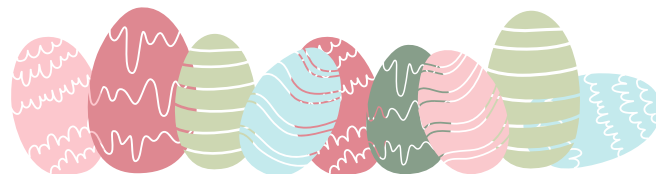
The first Sunday of every month, you are invited to bring items for the Food pantry and put them in the baskets at the entrance to the sanctuary. These donations are delivered to the Oconomowoc Food Pantry during the week. Items that the Food Pantry accepts are:

**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.**



Beginning **February 18** we will be selling tickets for our Breakfast with the Easter Bunny! Join us Sunday, **March 17 from 10:30 till noon** with an egg hunt at noon.



## Mission Trip Fundraisers

Our Youth Mission Team is starting their fundraising efforts for their 2024 Mission Trip! This year 15 participants will be traveling to Biloxi, MS to work with Back Bay Mission which is affiliated with the UCC. We will serve in their housing rehabilitation, food pantry and low-income family day center. It is always our goal to make these mission trip affordable for all who attend. With our fundraising efforts and the generosity of our church members we can do so. We will be offering a few different opportunities for you to support our youth mission team over the next couple of months.

At the Mission Table we will also be selling Stock Shares. Become an investor in our 2024 Summer Mission Trip by purchasing a share of stock. After each worship at the Mission Table we will be 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. By purchasing a share of stock you will receive an invitation to a Stock Share Holders Breakfast which will be held in the summer. We pray that you will prayerfully consider Investing in our Youth Mission Team today!

Caring Connection is a network of volunteers from our congregation who direct God's healing message to Church Family members in need. Our volunteers send cards, help out at funerals and give meals to those in need. We also participate in a confidential prayer chain, drive members to church, visit those at home or in a retirement community or rehab and take cards and plants at Christmas time to members who are homebound, bereaved or in a retirement facility.



## Caring Connection

This month we are highlighting our group that 'visits' church members in need of a friendly face and comforting conversations.

*If you are interested in visiting a church member on a monthly basis please contact **Kim Caudill, 262-490-9855**.*



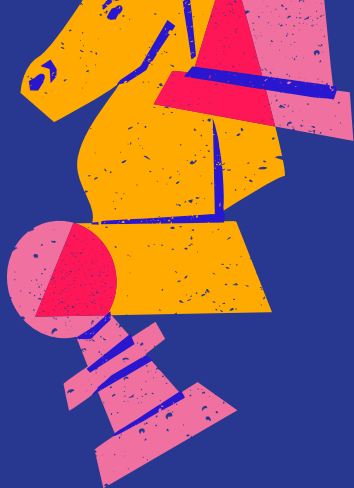
JOIN US FOR

# CARNIVAL

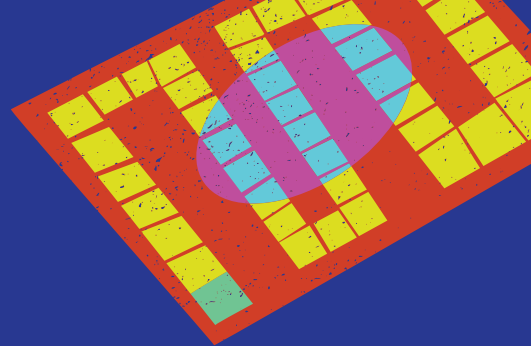
*Party Sunday*

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11**

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!



*Join Us*



# INTERGENERATIONAL GAME DAY

**Sunday, February 25  
from 10:30 to noon**



Let us come together as a church family to play and learn a variety of games. Bring your favorite board game, card game or any church appropriate game to play after church.





# Brunch with the Easter Bunny

**AT FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UCC**

815 S CONCORD ROAD  
OCONOMOWOC, WI 53066

**SUNDAY, MARCH 17, 2024**

**10:30 AM—NOON**

**WITH AN EGG HUNT AT NOON**

Join us for a delicious pancake and egg brunch with fun activities for the kids and kids at heart. Get your picture with the Easter Bunny and stay for the Easter egg hunt!

**Advance Tickets:** \$15 for adult (12 & up)  
\$10 for children ages 3 to 11 (Children ages 2 and under are FREE)

**Tickets at the door:** \$17 per adult  
\$12 for children ages 3 to 11 (Children 2 and under are FREE)

**Get your tickets today after worship in Fellowship Hall or in the church office.**

This is a Youth Mission Fundraiser.  
Please come and support our Summer Youth Mission Team at this  
Family Fun Event!





# *Intergenerational* **Service Day**

Join together with members of our congregation on **Saturday March 9** to volunteer at the Kinship Community Food Center (formerly Riverwest Food Pantry) in Milwaukee. Whether or not you volunteered at the Kinship urban farm in October, this is an opportunity to really experience the impact of Kinship as you help distribute food to members of the community who experience limited access to healthy foods. All ages and abilities are invited to participate and there are tasks for everyone, from welcoming, to stocking shelves, to entertaining children whose parents are selecting food. Families, singles, seniors, and children of all ages welcome, but children under age 10 must work alongside a parent or guardian.

**Saturday, March 9**  
**Kinship Community Food Center**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO SIGN-UP, PLEASE CONTACT RANIA:**

✉ [raniadempsey@gmail.com](mailto:raniadempsey@gmail.com) ☎ 262-719-3037 🌐 <https://www.kinshipmke.org/>

## Youth News



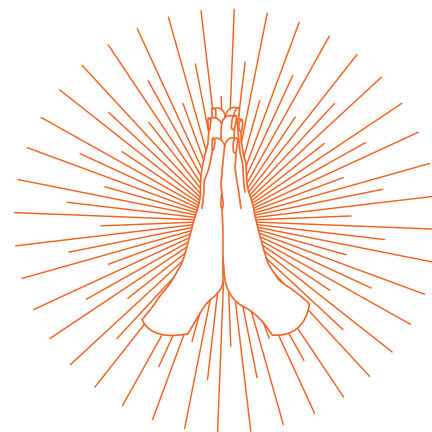
### Youth Group (3rd-12th Grade)

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 11 from noon to 4:00 to go snow tubing. All youth in 3rd-12th grade are invited to join us. 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 [quigley116@yahoo.com](mailto:quigley116@yahoo.com) by February 4. 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!!



### Confirmation

In February our confirmands will explore the history of our church and the UCC through engaging activities and discussions. This is Chris' favorite unit and can't wait to surprise and stump the youth. We can't believe how quickly this journey is going and how much they are growing in their faith in such a short amount of time!



## Sunday School News

Prayer is an important part of our faith. We find ourselves praying throughout the day building a relationship with God. Prayer isn't a natural habit, it is learned. During the month of February our children and youth 2 years old through 4th grade will learn how to pray and the power of prayer. They will learn and grow deeper in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples and the importance of prayer through fun and engaging activities

Our middle and high school youth will be exploring the events of Holy week the next two months. During these sessions the youth will engage in a game or activity, explore a specific event of Holy week through scripture and discuss how it relates to them today.



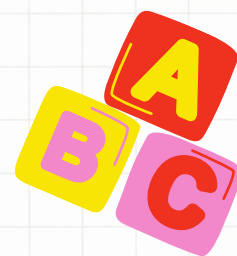


# HEARTS & HANDS

Celebrating ALL of God's Children

YOU ARE INVITED

*Fall Registration*



As a church member, you get priority registration for classes. On **Sunday, January 28th after service**, registration opens for all church members! Cindy Meckl will be in Fellowship Hall before and after service to answer questions and help you register!

**If you register on January 28th, you will receive 25% off the registration fee!**

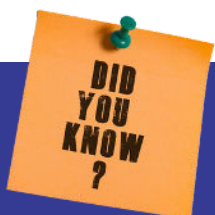
**Help us Spread the Word about our upcoming Public Open House & Registration  
Wednesday, January 31 from 6:00 - 7:00PM.**



What a blast the kids had while sledding. The church front lawn is the perfect place to enjoy the snow:)



Button snowman made by the kids



**As of December 2023, the preschool has given \$72,289.71 back to the church since we started tithing in 2007!**



# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Carnival Party Sunday:** February 11

**Youth Group:** February 11

**Ladies Luncheon:** February 13

**Ash Wednesday Service:** February 14

**Book Club:** February 15

**Confirmation Class:** February 18

**Breakfast with the Easter Bunny Tickets Sales:**

February 18

**Lenten Monday Night Bible Study:** February 19 (6:30PM)

**Sew-cial:** February 22 (1:00-3:00PM)

**Intergenerational Game Day:** February 25 (10:30 - noon)

**Lenten Monday Night Bible Study:** February 26 (6:30PM)

**Ladies Luncheon:** February 27

**All Ministries/Leadership Meeting and Calendar Planning:**

February 28

## **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 [karl@execpc.com](mailto:karl@execpc.com)

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

FOR MORE INFO VISIT US AT  
***WWW.OCONOMOWOCUCC.ORG***