



FEBRUARY 2026

# 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

Ash Wednesday  
Service

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Mission Ministry  
Month

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Meditation and  
Prayer

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Bible Study on the  
Gospel According to  
Matthew

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Hearts & Hands Open  
House & Registration

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
OCONOMOWOC**

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by Pastor Matt

In the day or so leading up to New Year's Eve a month ago, I saw a couple of different mash-ups of television news teams or talk-show hosts riffing on the general theme of, "I can't believe it's already New Year's!" Or "Wow, how did we get to 2026 so fast?" Or, "I can't believe it! How is it already January?!?"

Actually, we got here one day at a time. Just like always. There is literally no variation in that pattern. It is the only way we can get to the next year. And, even if you were heavily sedated for months, the surprise lies not in the amount of time it takes to get to the new year, but in our finally seeing the reality that has relentlessly come upon us.

This new year has brought us as a people to a very new time. But, talking about it and within it is not easy for us these days. We are more dug into our trenches on different sides of what some refer to as a "culture war" than we ever have been. The stakes get raised, it seems, weekly. "How did we get here?!?" And with our news coming from single-but-different sources, conversations that could be held reasonably in another time, now are first met with suspicion. For all of us. Which means it is more complicated to communicate with the folks around us than ever before – including in church. And, the stakes are higher for miscommunication than we ever have known.

Being church together, across the divides, is more important than ever - leaning into hard conversations, letting the love of Christ be fuel for the hard climb. I welcome conversation about any of the issues pressing on us these days – from within the church or the wider community. I invite you to drop by Roots Café most Tuesdays, anytime 1pm-3pm, or to call to set up another time to connect with me. My schedule is flexible enough to find all kinds of possibilities.

Lent begins on **Ash Wednesday, February 18, with a 7pm service at First Congregational UCC**, in cooperation with our friends from Good Shepherd United Methodist Church. Beginning the following evening, **Thursday February 19**, there are two offerings. You are invited to a half hour of quiet **Meditation and Prayer beginning at 6pm**. Attend just that, then head home. Or, stay for a **Bible study on the Gospel According to Matthew, beginning at 6:30pm**. Finally, beginning **February 25**, there will be a joint service of worship **each Wednesday at Noon at 1<sup>st</sup> Congregational UCC**, and at **5pm at Dr. Martin Luther Church (325 S. Main, Oconomowoc)**.



*More than ever we are called to be church together across divides both simple and complex. We need prayer, to lay down the angst and let the light of Christ soak into us more deeply. And we need, again and again, to dwell in the life of Jesus walking among us on this earth, to find more clues for how to live as people who follow him and do the ministry he has given us to do in his name.*

We don't get to choose the time in which we live. But we are the only ones who can live in it with faith and good hope. And, whatever we are facing, we don't do it alone. Ever.

## Moderator Musings

I have always felt that starting a new job, whether it is one that provides financial gain or one that provides only non-financial benefits, is a humbling experience. Despite qualifications or previous experience, most of us find out rather quickly how much we don't know. Becoming the Moderator of this congregation is no different. Though I have been a member for 25 years and have served in many church leadership roles, including as Moderator, I know that I have much to learn. I will count on all of you to help me as we begin our next church year and ask for your patience and grace.

Chris Mol has made my new job both easier and harder. He has been a steady hand in guiding this congregation through the challenges of finding a new senior pastor and the frustrations of our insurance claim for hail damage, as well as numerous other day-to-day issues in the operation of this church. Because of his level-headed and wise leadership, I take over the position of Moderator in a time of relative financial and mental stability for the congregation as a whole. That makes my job easier. But Chris is a hard act to follow, so I begin with some trepidation about living up to the high bar he has set. On behalf of the congregation, I extend heartfelt appreciation to Chris for his dedication and hard work over the previous three years. Thank you, thank you, thank you!



At the next Leadership Team meeting, we will develop our goals and priorities for the coming year and publish those to the congregation. We will continue the legacy that Chris leaves of being transparent about what church leadership is doing and communicate openly and honestly with the congregation. We pray that the insurance settlement will finally be behind us this year and that it will allow us to complete the necessary repairs to our building. I want to continue our journey to become a WISE congregation as mental health continues to be a concern for our country and our community. Finally, I hope that we can explore and develop action plans to engage with our neighbors and community. In a time of divisiveness and polarization in our country, it is incumbent on us as Christians to reach out to our neighbors and be a light in the community. I hope that we can all find ways to become more engaged. No one can do everything but we can all do something to extend the love of Jesus to all.

Let's get to work!

Deb Bursinger





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, February 10

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

**Warm Beef & Swiss Wrap:** Warm sliced roast beef, Swiss cheese, mayo, lettuce, tomato, and onion on a flour tortilla wrap, with fresh fruit and a caramel blondie bar.

**Chopped Chicken Salad:** Mixed greens, chopped chicken, tomatoes, carrots, cucumbers, blue cheese crumbles, bacon and candied pecans, with a side of buttermilk ranch dressing and a caramel blondie bar.

## Tuesday, February 24

*(RSVP to Sue Zajac by Monday, 2/16)*

**Oriental Chicken Salad:** Chopped greens, Napa cabbage, pea pods, carrots, cucumbers, grilled chicken, crispy wontons and Sesame Lime dressing, served with a cupcake.

**Beef Quesadilla:** Ground beef and cheese on a grilled tortilla with salsa and sour cream, served with a cupcake.

### 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.

# Mission Ministry Month

## February is Mission Ministry month!

Did you know Mission Ministry supports our church's outreach of time, talent and treasures to more than 50 organizations locally, nationally and globally? A few of the projects/organizations we are directly involved with include Habitat for Humanity, Family Promise, the Oconomowoc Food Pantry, the Christmas Clearing Council and Soles for Jesus. We also support our youth through fundraisers as they travel for their summer mission trips. This year will be an international trip! And, we are actively seeking opportunities for Adult Mission trips in 2026. If you would like to learn how you can get more involved in the outreach efforts of our church, please contact any member of Mission ministry or the church office!

## 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 Singing Collection

February’s Singing Collection is for the Bethany Recovery Center in Oconomowoc. The Center is a branch of Bethany Christian Services, a nationwide organization. Bethany Recovery Center is a rehab center where women can address harmful drug and alcohol use and addiction. The Center provides residential care in a small, caring environment by professionals trained in addiction, trauma and family-centered care. Rehabilitation at Bethany is all encompassing.



The women receive physical, mental and emotional care for both their addictions and their depression, anxiety, PTSD and any other mental health needs. Pregnant women receive health care and those with infants receive care and education in parenting. The care goes beyond their walls as the families of residents watch their loved ones heal and become whole once again. It truly is a wonderful organization that would welcome all forms of support. Please give generously this month and help local women receive the care and love they need.

### 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.



February 1 & March 1

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

# Caring Connection



Caring Connection is a network of volunteers from our congregation who direct God's healing message to church family members in need. Anyone is invited to participate in this meaningful mission, living out their faith through a variety of caring opportunities. The ways you can help are by sending cards, assisting at funerals, giving a meal, praying, knitting a shawl, delivering flowers at Christmas time, driving a member to church and/or visiting those who are home bound or in a retirement community.

This month is special because we have a new Chairperson to lead our group. Her name is **Erica Kiser** and she joined our church in 2023. She loves to volunteer and has recently joined our Membership Group which is under the Welcoming Ministry. She will be a great asset to this group as she's friendly, caring and kind.

Barb Moeller - past Chairperson of Caring Connection



Kudos and grateful thanks to the First Congregational Caring Connection and their wonderful volunteers.

What a delicious way to provide recovery!

Also to the folks in the streaming booth at the back of the church. It's a joy to be able to 'go to church' when you're ill or recovering or traveling and unable to physically get there.

**What a wonderful church. We are SO blessed,**

Maggie Hollis





COME AND JOIN US AT OUR

# BOOK CLUB



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.**





Dearest Members and Staff of First Congregational UCC,



My heart is full!

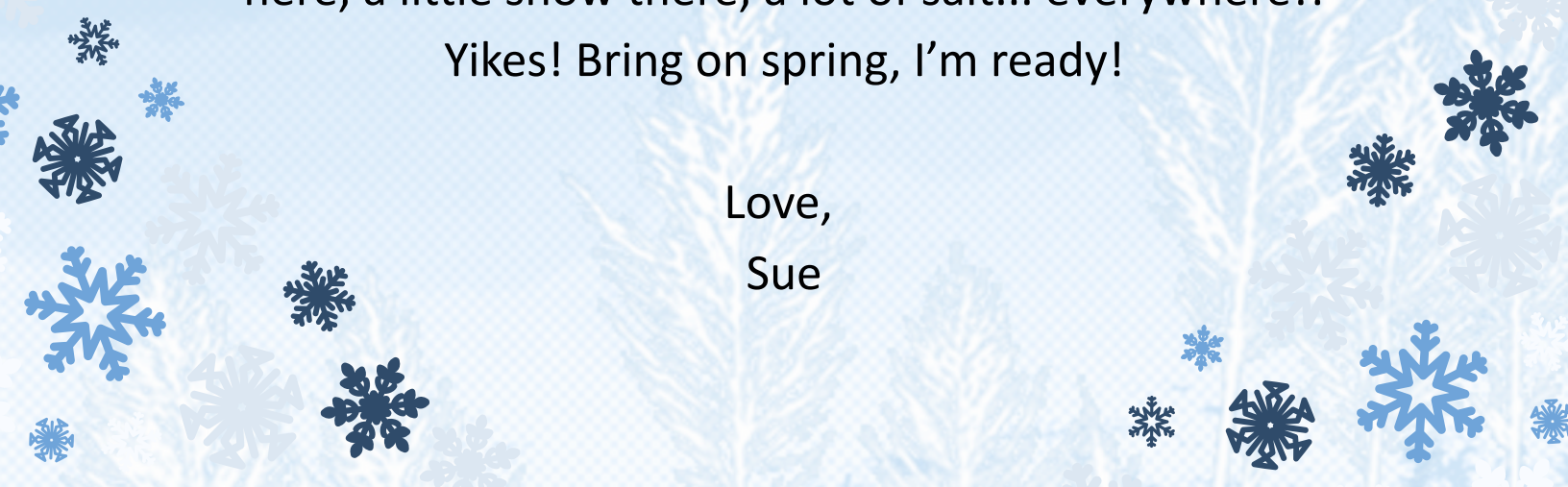


**This past November marked 25 years of service as your custodian.** I have no clue where all the time went. I recently was treated to lunch with staff and presented with a bag full of cards with the most kind, caring, and loving words that truly filled my heart. Those expressions of congrats, gratitude and thankfulness have meant more to me than you can imagine. I am so blessed to be able to serve here for the past 25 years as your custodian (environmental engineer) haha!

This winter has been one for the books! A little snow here, a little snow there, a lot of salt... everywhere!!

Yikes! Bring on spring, I'm ready!

Love,  
Sue





# Coffee with the Pastor

Tuesdays  
1PM to 3PM

Join us at Roots  
Café. A time for  
conversation,  
connection, and  
community.

All are welcome!



## SUPPORT THE OCONOMOWOC FOOD PANTRY

**First Sunday of the month**

Place donations of unexpired food and toiletries in the baskets.

Donations made during the month may be placed in the blue barrel by  
the coat rack in Fellowship Hall.



Thank you for thinking of your  
neighbors in need.



## Youth News

### Sunday School News!

During the month of February, our children and youth 4<sup>th</sup> grade and younger will be exploring the power of prayer in meaningful and hands-on ways through the biblical story of Hannah and her son, Samuel. Together, they will discover how prayer shapes faith, hope, and trust in God. Through engaging story time, creative art projects, interactive games, and fun science activities, our young learners will experience prayer on many different levels!

Our middle and high school students will continue their “YOU” study, grounded in Matthew 5:13–16, as they reflect on who they are and who God is calling them to become in Christ. As the month comes to a close, the group will begin exploring the events of Holy Week. Through interactive games and activities, thoughtful engagement with Scripture, and meaningful discussion, the youth will examine key moments of Holy Week and consider how these stories connect to their lives today.

#### **Important Dates:**

February 1- No Sunday School (Scout Sunday)

### Youth Group

We are thrilled to bring our youth groups together this month for a fun offsite adventure! Join us on February 8, from 10:30 AM to 3:30 PM, as we head to Sunburst for an afternoon of snow tubing. All youth in grades 3–12 are invited to take part in this exciting outing.

Thanks to the generous support of our congregation, there is no cost for youth to attend. If you or your youth would like to join us, please email Amy Drewa, [amydrewa@conomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@conomowocucc.org) by February 2.

We can't wait to enjoy this day of laughter, connection, and winter fun together!



### Confirmation

Over the past couple of months, our confirmands have been diving into the life and teachings of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the mystery of the Trinity. They have been working thoughtfully and faithfully, asking meaningful and sometimes challenging questions as they grow in their understanding of faith.

As we move toward the end of February, the group will turn its focus to learning more about the United Church of Christ and its rich history. Through card games and other interactive activities, they'll explore these topics in ways that are both engaging and fun. We are grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside these youth on their faith journey and are truly enjoying watching them grow spiritually while getting to know each of them more deeply.



## Youth News

### Lenten Opportunities

Lent is a sacred journey of reflection and renewal as we travel toward Good Friday and the joy of Easter morning. These 40 days invite us to slow down, draw closer to God, and prepare our hearts for resurrection hope. Wherever you are on your faith journey, we invite you to travel through Lent with us in a variety of meaningful ways.

#### Packing Away the Alleluias

Our Lenten journey begins on February 15 as we pack our Alleluias away during worship. Throughout Lent, the word “Alleluia” will be set aside in both spoken word and song creating space for reflection and anticipation. During the Children’s Message, we’ll also literally pack our Alleluias into a suitcase as a visual reminder of this season of waiting.

You’re invited to take part by decorating an Alleluia Luggage Tag. You can:

- Pick one up on the table in the narthex
- [Click here](#) to print and decorate
- Or create your own at home

Bring your luggage tag with you on February 15, or anytime during Lent, to add to the suitcase.



Each of us carries different Alleluias within us. Some represent joy and gratitude; others hold grief, longing, or questions. Whatever you’re carrying, write it on your luggage tag and place it in the suitcase. As with any journey, what we pack and unpack matters. We’ll see what becomes of our packed Alleluias when we arrive at Easter morning.



#### A Passport for the Journey (Children & Youth)

As we travel through Lent, our children and youth will explore the events leading up to Easter in a hands-on, engaging way. Each child will receive a Lenten Passport and participate in weekly lessons.

After completing each lesson, they’ll receive a stamp in their passport marking another stop along the journey.

Can’t make it on a Sunday? No worries! Lessons will also be emailed so families can continue the journey at home.

## Youth News

### He Is Risen! Join Our Resurrection Story

This Easter season, we invite you to take part in a beautiful, meaningful project that brings our church family together in a special way. As we celebrate the heart of our faith, the resurrection of Jesus, we will be creating a shared video retelling the Easter story through Scripture.

Together, we will read Matthew 28:1–10, with each participant recording a very short line of Scripture. Voices of all ages are welcome; children, youth, adults, families, and friends! These individual recordings will be compiled into one joyful, faith-filled video celebrating the good news: Christ is risen!

Participating is easy:

- Sign up for a short Scripture line using the link by [clicking here](#).
- Record yourself (or your child, family, or friends) reading your assigned line.
- Send your video by text to Amy Drewa at 262-490-0108 or by email to [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org).
- Prefer to be recorded? Just reach out to Amy, and she'll be happy to help!

This is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the Easter story, share your voice, and celebrate the joy of resurrection together as one church family. We can't wait to see and hear you as we proclaim the Easter story together!

These are just a few of the ways to join us on this Lenten journey. Please keep an eye on your email and announcements for additional opportunities along the way. Wherever you begin, we hope you'll travel with us toward Easter hope.

### Church Camp

This January, we were delighted to welcome Naomi, the Assistant Director from Daycholah, one of our UCC church camps, to worship with us. Naomi shared exciting information about the camp opportunities available and even led our youth in a fun game that definitely built some camp excitement! And now the best part...it is time to start signing up for camp!



We are truly blessed to have two incredible UCC church camps in Wisconsin: Moon Beach and Daycholah. Registration is now open for all campers, and spots fill quickly, so be sure to register soon to secure your place. Between the two camps, there is something for everyone. Options for all ages and interests, including parent-and-me camps and family camps. Whether you're looking for adventure, faith formation, or meaningful friendships, our church camps offer it all.

We are also grateful that our church is able to offer camp scholarships for all youth campers who complete a service log. This is a wonderful way to support participation and ensure every child has the opportunity to experience camp. [Please click here](#) to access the log.

For more information or if you have any questions, feel free to contact Amy Drewa at [amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org](mailto:amydrewa@oconomowocucc.org). Come support our church camps, have some fun, grow in faith, and make new friends. We can't wait to see you at camp!



# HEARTS & HANDS

Celebrating ALL of God's Children



## Open House & Registration

## Eleanor Updates

If you or someone you know, are interested in our preschool, we invite you to join us for our Registration and Open House on **February 3 from 6-7PM.**

Our preschool provides a safe, nurturing Christian environment where children grow socially, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. Through play with purpose and engaging activities, we help children discover their world and build a strong foundation for the future. We would love to partner with you in making your child's preschool experience joyful and meaningful.



*Eleanor turned 1 January 13th and continues to do well!*

## Diamond Monsters

Take a look at a few of our adorable diamond monsters the students made!



## Friday Fun

Come join us for one of our Friday Fun classes! These classes are open to ALL children ages 25 months - 4 years old. For more information or to register, see our website: <https://www.heartsandhandspreschool.org/programs>

### [2025-2026 Friday Fun Class list](#)

Class Topic	Dates	Length	Tuition	Notes
Love	February 20th- March 20th	5 weeks	\$150	This 5-week session will explore all that Love has to offer. God's love and those who love us will be some of the topics covered.
Celebrating God's Creation	April 10th- May 8th	5 weeks	\$150	This 5-week session takes the children through the creation story. God created day & night God created water, air, wind, clouds & sky God created flowers & trees God created birds & insects God created animals & people

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS



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

**Hearts & Hands Open House and Registration:** February 3 (6PM - 7PM)

**Youth Group:** February 8

**Coffee with the Pastor:** February 10 (1PM - 3PM)

**Ladies Luncheon:** February 10 (11:15AM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** February 17 (1PM - 3PM)

**Ash Wednesday Service:** February 18 (7PM)

**Book Club:** February 19 (1PM)

**Meditation and Prayer:** February 19 (6PM)

**Bible Study on the Gospel According to Matthew:** February 19 (6:30PM)

**Confirmation:** February 22

**Coffee with the Pastor:** February 24 (1PM - 3PM)

**Ladies Luncheon:** February 24 (11:15AM)

**All Ministry Meeting:** February 24 (6PM)

**Habitat for Humanity:** February 28

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

**Youth Group:** March 8

**Coffee with the Pastor:** March 10 (1PM - 3PM)

**Ladies Luncheon:** March 10 (11:15AM)

**Confirmation:** March 15

**Coffee with the Pastor:** March 17 (1PM - 3PM)

**Book Club:** March 19 (1PM)

**Coffee with the Pastor:** March 24 (1PM - 3PM)

**Ladies Luncheon:** March 24 (11:15AM)

**Habitat for Humanity:** March 28

**Coffee with the Pastor:** March 31 (1PM - 3PM)

FOR MORE INFO VISIT US AT

**[WWW.OCONOMOWOCUCC.ORG](http://WWW.OCONOMOWOCUCC.ORG)**

**STAY CONNECTED AND FALL INTO CHURCH WITH US**

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

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