

**January 2014 Newsletter**  
First Congregational United Church of Christ  
1000 Willson Avenue  
Webster City, Iowa 50595  
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<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>



Pastor's Voice

***In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God has come near."—Matthew 3:1-2***

Once on New Year's Day a friend of mine asked me this question: "How was Advent for you?" The question caught me off guard, for my thoughts were focused on the new year that was coming rather than on the Advent season that had just recently ended, and so I gave the usual assortment of answers that you would expect: it was busy; it was colorful; it had a lot of positive experiences; it was emotional, etc.

Then my friend started speaking to me about her Advent. She told me this had been an important Advent season for her, and she shared that the words of John the Baptist had been inspirational for her. Now I was really caught off guard, because if you're like me you don't normally give John the Baptist much thought, and so I wanted to know more about what she heard from John that made such a difference in her observance of Advent.

What she told me went something like this: *"This is been a difficult year for me. My health has deteriorated, causing me to lose my job. I'm having a difficult time getting disability, and so money has been tight. I feel that God is calling me to a new vocation, but that really isn't taking off as I hoped it would. I guess I was going into Advent looking at all the negative things in my life: the things that were happening to me that I didn't like; the things that were not happening in my life that I was counting on."*

*"But one Sunday in Advent I heard the words of John the Baptist calling the people of his day to repentance ... and his call to "turn away" from the old and the negative and turn toward the Light was exactly what I needed to hear. I realized that I wasn't looking for the Light because I was looking at all the things going on in my life that I didn't like, and I realized if I didn't turn toward the Light...how would I receive its coming?"*

I thought that was pretty good! So often we hear the words of John the Baptist and his call for repentance and assume that he's talking about feeling sorry for the bad things we've done. But in reality the Greek word translated as "repent" really would be better translated as "turn around!" John's call for repentance, or turning around, is more than a call to feel sorry for our "sins" ... it's a call to release the things in our lives that are holding us captive-- the things and events that are keeping us from turning to see the Light. My friend's story was a good reminder that we can get so bogged down and lost in regrets, old grudges, painful memories, and undesirable life circumstances that we stop believing that there is still Light available to us... and we don't turn toward the Light to find the New Life that it is offering us.

In January we will celebrate Epiphany—which means the "manifestation" of the Light of God to the world through the birth of the Christ Child. This celebration has its roots in the appearance of the Light in the form of a star, which caused the Magi to turn from their daily lives in order to turn toward that divine Light. Our celebration continues 2000 years later not only because the Light once appeared to ancient Jews and a handful of Wise Ones, but because the Light of God still shines for us—even here, even now, in our time and place. Whether we are struggling with misfortune and hard times, or basking in the good times while wondering if there is something more for us to do with our lives...we are all called to live our lives turning toward the Light and living in the Light as best we can. That is what we as Christians are always called to do: to "turn around" wherever we are at in our lives, and seek the Light of God as the Light for our journeys.

Are you willing to do that? Are you ready to do that? It's not an easy thing to do...but then, neither is living in despair, dissatisfaction, aimlessness, or boredom! And we have additional Good News to celebrate: *like the Magi of old we have each other for company as we turn our lives around and seek new ways of living and being that are in accord with the Light of God, our Highest Good!*

January is the start of a new year and the annual making of New Year's resolutions. What better resolution could we make this year than to hear the call of John to "turn around!" and seek the Light of God-- the Light which promises to each of us New Sight, New Hope, and New Life. That should go far toward making this a Happy New Year for each of us! —Pastor Craig



**Common-sense stress relievers:**

- Do things simply.
- What you focus on becomes your life.
- If what you are doing isn't working, try something else.
- Spend at least 60% of conversation time listening to others.
- Be less busy and more effective.
- Challenge yourself to slow down and be more productive.
- Learn something from someone with whom you disagree.



**HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:**

- 1 - Lynn & Sherry Leksell
- 4 - Don & Gene Royster
- 12 - Keith & Dawn Holdgrafer
- 17 - Wil & Marjorie Groves
- 22 - Dale & Shirley Hillyer

**CHURCH OFFICE HOURS**

- M 8 am - 1 pm
- T 9 am - 1 pm
- W 8 am - 12:30, 1 pm to 4:30
- Th 8 am - 12:30, 1 pm to 4:30
- F 9 am - 1 pm

**HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:**

- 4 - Mary Vavroch
- 6 - Kayleigh Weig
- 7 - Dick Burtnett
- 7 - Toni Epps
- 8 - Christa Stirling
- 10 - Robin Myers
- 12 - Amanda Strahl
- 13 - Jennifer Struchen
- 14 - Marjorie Groves
- 14 - Keegan Del Klaver
- 14 - Travis Wearda
- 18 - Mike Tudor
- 21 - Beverly Rickabaugh
- 21 - Mary Mertz
- 23 - George Groves
- 27 - Al Fiala
- 28 - Jennifer Brim
- 29 - Andy Brim
- 29 - Kristi Schmidt
- 30 - Adam Burtnett
- 30 - Jenny Maass
- 31 - Heather Kuhlman
- 31 - Kolleen Taylor

**Church Staff**

- Rev. Craig Blaufuss, Pastor**  
Office: 832-2232 Cell 297-4316  
Pastor's email: [revcraigblaufuss@wmtel.net](mailto:revcraigblaufuss@wmtel.net)
- Michele Omvig: Admin. Assist.** 838-2989  
Church's e-mail: [fcuccwc@wmtel.net](mailto:fcuccwc@wmtel.net)
- Sharon Perry: Stephen Ministry Ldr** 832-5435
- Nancy Shelton: Choir Director** 835-0208
- Myra Maxon: Organist** 832-3662
- Mary Van Diest: Pianist** 832-3754
- Curt/Lorraine McCoskey: Cust's.** 832-5341
- Myra Maxon: Financial Secretary** 832-3662
- Luverne Bierle: Church Treasurer** 832-4752

**ATTENDANCE**

<b>December 1</b>	75	<b>December 8</b>	115
<b>December 15</b>	91	<b>December 22</b>	121
<b>December 24</b>	151	<b>December 29</b>	66

**Souper Bowl and Annual Meeting**

Join us January 26<sup>th</sup> for the Annual Meeting following our 10:30 am worship service. After the meeting make sure you stay and take part in our annual Souper Bowl.

For the January UDMO Appeal, Mission Board is planning to host a Souper Bowl Sunday. Plans are underway to have a variety of soups and sides available. Details will be forthcoming in the Sunday bulletins. Plan to join us in fellowship to support a great cause.



## MEALS N MORE

Join us for Meals N More on January 8 at 5:00 pm. It is hosted by Haystack Circle.



## Second Saturday Worship Resumes January 11

Mark your calendars! Our next “Second Saturday” worship service begins at 5 p.m. January 11, and it will be a special occasion in the life of our church. That Saturday our new Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Brigit Stevens, will be a guest in our worship and will preside at our communion table. But that’s not all! Following the service, all members and friends are invited to a pizza supper in Fellowship Hall to meet Rev. Stevens, who would like to speak with us as a congregation about our common life and ministries. This is her way of getting to know the churches and the people she is called to serve. This is an opportunity to hear news of our Conference, ask questions, and share what you love about our church! Please plan to attend, and please pass the word on to anyone who may have missed hearing about this special event. As with all of our Saturday Services, there will be children’s Sunday School following the children’s message, and there will be NO Sunday School or church the next day.

## Book Study in January: The Book of Awakening

Soon the deep part of winter will be on us, and to help with the winter doldrums I am inviting you to join me in a 2 week discussion of The Book of Awakening, by Mark Nepo. Mark is a poet, a seeker, and a cancer survivor whose life radically changed as a result of his battle with cancer. His book is filled with 365 inspired readings that glean wisdom from every tradition in order to offer many insights into “living the life you want, by being present to the life you have.” Each short reading is followed by a guided exercise designed to help you

practice the key insight of the day’s reading--a very valuable tool to help you claim his insights as your own. The Book of Awakening is available at Amazon.com for \$12.97 plus shipping for a new copy, and used ones are even cheaper.

This will not be a conventional book study; rather, we will gather and share a few of our favorite passages from Mark’s book and use that as a springboard for deeper conversations about Life. It is not necessary to have read the entire book before we gather; just come with a few favorite passages marked for sharing. And if you don’t have time to read it, and just want to come and “listen in”—that would be fine, too! The dates I have selected for our gatherings will be Wednesdays, January 15 and 29, beginning at 6 p.m. Come to one, or come to both, as the Spirit leads you. To give you a taste of Mark’s work, here’s an excerpt: *“I often think of Nicodemus, the one Pharisee who secretly believed in Jesus and who would meet with him anonymously at night to have deep spiritual conversations, but who would never acknowledge his questions of spirit or his association with Jesus in the light of day. Of course this did nothing to the essence of Jesus, but it traumatically thwarted and plagued Nicodemus for the rest of his days. This story shows us the quiet pain that comes from not honoring what we know to be true, even if all we know to be true are the questions we are asking. It is even more useful to realize that we each carry a Nicodemus and a Jesus within us; that is, we each have a divine inner voice that opens us to truth, and a mediating social voice that is reluctant to show its truth to others. I know that every time I see or hear the truth but hold to the old way—of being or thinking or relating—I am giving my life over to the Nicodemus in me. And in so doing, I embark on a divided life, in which I listen to the divine inner voice secretly at night, but deny it day after day.”*







**Christmas Program December 8, 2013**

**FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
**Webster City, Iowa**  
**Cabinet Meeting-December 10, 2013**

Members Present:

Moderator-----	Pastor-----Rev. Craig Blaufuss
Vice-Moderator---Verna Bierle	Trustees-----Joyce Gelhaus
Treasurer-----Luverne Bierle	Women's Fellowship----Dalene Schlitter
Finance Sec.-----Myra Maxon	Mission-----Lorraine McCoskey
Finance-----	Worship-----Holly Riemenschneider
Staff/Parish-----	Evangelism-----
Christian Ed-----	Clerk-----Mary Van Diest

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by the Vice-Moderator, Verna Bierle. Dalene Schlitter moved and Holly Riemenschneider seconded to accept the board and committee reports. Luverne Bierle moved and Lorraine McCoskey seconded to accept the current agenda with one addition. The Treasurer's report by Luverne Bierle stated that the Nov. 31, 2013 offering was \$10,555.08 and expenses were \$12,665.41. As of this date 76.91% of income to budget has been collected and 86.81% of expenses to budget has been spent. Luverne moved and Joyce Gelhaus seconded to put the treasurer's report to audit. Under pending business: Verna reported that the nominating committee had completed filling all the vacancies on the boards and committees; the committee reports are due Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>; the Annual Meeting will be Jan. 26<sup>th</sup> with a "Souper Bowl"; a visit from our new Associate Conference Minister, Bridgett Stevens, will be held on a second Saturday church of a month to be determined in the future and followed by pizza. Verna informed the cabinet of the passing of Kathy Hohl. Dalene moved and Mary van Diest seconded to send a floral arrangement for her funeral service.

## REPORTS OF PASTOR AND COMMITTEES

**Pastor's Report:** On November 17, the choir went immediately after our worship service to sing for the First Baptist church as part of their worship service. Many of them also went to the Care Center Services in the afternoon. Thanksgiving Sunday/All Saints Sunday was held November 24. Members had the opportunity to light candles in memory of loved ones. On that Sunday evening we hosted the Community Thanksgiving service. The church was decorated for Advent following the worship on December 1<sup>st</sup>. Our children presented "Christmas Magic" as the centerpiece of our second Sunday of Advent, December 8<sup>th</sup> worship service. The Christmas Eve candlelight service will be held at 5:00 pm with pew communion served. On Sunday, December 29<sup>th</sup>, lay readers will lead a service of scripture, reflections, and carols while the pastor is on vacation. The church has signed a year contract with Webster City Living to place monthly ads in that periodical. Look for the next ad on December 19<sup>th</sup>. Gretchen McGlynn represented the church at the ACE Festival of Trees with a tablescape for the holidays. The church has received notice that the Webster City School system will again host a summer lunch program for our community. Lori Hartnett is asking us to again consider volunteering to help with this program. Southfield requested assistance with their Wednesday morning Gospel hour program. Our pastor will be leading that service once per month. Our Eastern Cluster subcommittee met with Rev. Jim Cunningham and the Congregational UCC Church of Eagle Grove for a discussion of their congregational health and their vision for the future. Pastor Jim is now 80 years old and has been

a licensed pastor of that church for some time now. The comments from church representatives regarding Jim's ministry were very warm and positive. In the Christian Ed department the adults are still working through the Life after Death material but will soon be finished with that topic. The KLAB students have been diligent in rehearsing for the Christmas program. They will finish up the year with a Christmas craft and caroling at the care centers. Pastor Craig reported that our mission team served Beacon of Hope on November 20<sup>th</sup>. After a lengthy remodeling period, the shelter has a new and very functional kitchen.

**Staff Parrish:** Concerns were shared about Betty Broshar, Ina Cormaney, Stacy Lahr and baby, Luna. The pastor was with Ina while she was awaiting surgery. Staff evaluations have been completed. Kolleen Taylor visited with organist, Myra Maxon, concerning tempering volume of the organ presentations. Board felt there has been improvement in this regard. Sherry Leksell moved and Shirley Yungclas seconded a motion to approve changes made to the administrative assistant's salary and contract as discussed at the last meeting. This will include two weeks of paid vacation. Motion carried. After an error of 1% was discovered in Pastor Craig's pension figure, Kolleen checked with the national pension board and the state U.C.C. Office and learned that it should be 14% instead of 15%. A motion was made by Glenda Wehrhan and seconded by Mark Vance to make the change. Motion carried. Kolleen will compile the yearly report.

**Worship Board:** The communion schedule is as follows: Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> intinction with Mary Vavroch in charge; December 24<sup>th</sup> served in pew with Mary Vavroch in charge and using disposable cups; January 5<sup>th</sup> intinction with Gretchen McGlynn and Holly Riemenschneider in charge. We will continue with the once a month Saturday evening service beginning again in January. Pastor Craig will check with the Christian Ed. Board to see if they have any concerns. Mary will put information concerning this in the newsletter and Sunday bulletins. As the Pastor will be gone on Sunday, December 29<sup>th</sup>, he has prepared a service outline for us to use. Mary, Gretchen or Holly are willing to help with this, unless there is a volunteer from the congregation. Mary will not be returning for another term. Troy Stockdale will be returning for another term. The next meeting is scheduled for December 12<sup>th</sup>. Mary will not be here for the January meeting.

**Evangelism:** Wilma Reinsel continues to send cards to those within the church that are having health issues. Wilma and Donna Ryherd are organizing the "Family Ornament" tree. It is becoming more difficult to find ornaments on which one can engrave a name. Stephen Ministry Update: Dr. Ann Kennedy spoke in October on stages of depression; Kenrick Weinschenk talked in Nov. on how people with disabilities have normal feelings and needs as others do; Dale Olson's registration has been sent to Stephen Ministries for training in January; in 2014 planning to lead 3 to 4 support groups a year for people of the community who have experienced a death in their family; also in Jan. Stephen Ministers will evaluate their relationship with the Stephen Ministry program and determine if they are willing to continue to serve God and our congregation as a Stephen Minister. The last Sunday in January will be Stephen Ministry Sunday.

**Women's Fellowship:** The Alternative Giving – UDMO Angel Tree tags have all been taken. Connie Gustafson will have Hessian jewelry on display and for sale on December 15<sup>th</sup>. December 8<sup>th</sup> was the last day of SERV V Sale. So far sales have totaled approximately \$1000+. A complete report will be given in January. Three new card tables have been purchased by the Memorial Committee. A charge of \$6.00 will be collected for the Christmas Luncheon. Men are welcome to attend. The musical program will be provided by Peter Amstalden. Resource Committee is in charge of devotions. The Haystack circle decorates while the Morning Star

circle hosts. A \$100 gift card to a grocery store will be given to a needy family in our own church family. A reminder was given to remember to honor our honorary members.

**Trustees:** no report.

**Christian Ed:** no report

**Finance:** no report

**Christian Ed:** no report

Next meeting date is January 14, 2014 at 7:00 pm.

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 pm.

Mary Van Diest, Church Clerk

10:30 A.M. WORSHIP 9:00 & 9:15 A.M. SUNDAY SCHOOL
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### Treasurer's Report

<u>INCOME</u>	<u>NOVEMBER</u>	<u>YEAR TO DATE</u>
Pledges and Offerings	\$10,555.08	\$140,969.37
Other Income	274.13	1,125.19
Memorial/Special Income/Interest	6,536.30	40,393.81
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$17,365.51</b>	<b>\$182,488.37</b>
<u>EXPENSES</u>		
Outreach and Mission	\$1,417.00	\$16,371.96
Pastoral Services	5,115.41	72,668.02
Maintenance and Repairs	2,020.77	29,965.32
Church Office	2,938.90	26,009.98
Music Ministry	589.58	6,625.38
Christian Education	138.10	497.43
Local Ministry	16.38	2,838.56
Mem. Funds Distribution	0.00	25,447.86
Misc. Expenses	429.27	4,152.66
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$12,665.41</b>	<b>\$184,577.17</b>
<b>Difference</b>	<b>\$4,700.10</b>	<b>(\$2,088.80)</b>

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**Address Service Requested**

God is still speaking  
to everyone in the home of: