

December 2019 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
515-832-2232
<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

“Oh Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel...That mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appears...”

This season of Advent is almost here...and I have already had a good cry or two in anticipation of the Holidays. Now perhaps crying seems to you to be an odd way of greeting the “Hap-Happiest season of all”...then again, perhaps it doesn’t seem odd to you at all (maybe you’ve already had a good cry yourself). I don’t have to tell you that the approach of Christmas, especially as we age, often carries with it high levels of stress and sadness as well as joy—and for good reason! There are the ever-present worries of time and money management, and the anxiety that comes with trying to gather with all the relatives over the holidays. There is an abiding concern for the poor, the hurting, and the isolated...which brings a sense of heartache into this season when “Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices.” There are the inevitable losses of loved ones that have forever changed our celebration of the Holidays...making them seemingly less complete, less “perfect.” And of course there are the endless troubles and tribulations of our world, and the ugliness and evil intentions of the human heart that are daily mainstreamed into our lives by the media and social media, which leave us confused, overwhelmed, and often despondent over the state of humanity. With all of these factors looming large as the Holidays approach, is it any wonder that hearts ache, and tears flow...and like our spiritual ancestors we moan in a kind of lonely exile...waiting for help...waiting for hope...waiting for a new day and a better tomorrow?

And yet there is help for us as we approach the Holidays, for the ancient grace of Advent continues to speak to us and aid us in ways that are truly timeless. Advent is a time when we can shed tears and bemoan the state of our souls, and our world—and we can do it together with others who also are feeling these ancient aches. Advent is a time when we can pray for a new spirit of peace and wisdom to come into our lives, so we can, in the words of John the Baptist, “repent” and turn ourselves around to follow a new Way that will lead us to a new way of life. Advent is a time when we can deepen our faith in God, and learn to trust God more deeply and completely—even when the way is hard. Advent is a time when we can rediscover an inner joy that eternally abides in us; a joy that rises to our conscious mind as we attune ourselves to Spirit’s Essence within us...a joy that is not dependent on outer circumstances nor the world’s definitions of what brings happiness. And Advent is a time when we can recommit ourselves to the power and purposes of LOVE, so we can join our lives to the One sent by God and find new power, meaning and purpose for our lives. **When you think of Advent in these ways you begin to realize that this precious time is a great gift, an “early” Christmas gift that is a beautiful answer to the mournful and tearful cries of our souls which ache for an end to our exile from God, from our fellow human beings, and from our highest selves.**

Friends, I urge you this year to make a conscious commitment to *spiritualize* the days that are coming—days that we too often both anticipate and dread. Each day take time for prayer, quiet, and reflection on what makes the Holidays—and life itself—meaningful. Each day look for ways to share your love and goodwill with others, especially those who are feeling isolated and left out by the mainstream of society. Tend to your shopping and Holiday obligations, but *be intentional about not becoming lost in matters that ultimately don’t matter*. Allow yourself to feel your feelings, but ask God to help you hold them in a larger space of unconditional love and peace so that you are not overwhelmed. (and if you need help with your feelings, find someone you trust that you can talk to!) And remember the great cliché that is also the great truth of the Holidays for Christians: Jesus is the reason for the season! For the Son of Man came that we might have Life, and have it in abundance...and to show us what that abundant life could be, he gave all of himself to us! This

amazing gift still has the power to change our lives, and yes—even the life of the world! May we prepare to receive this gift, embrace his coming, and recommit our lives to his calling and our discipleship! –Pastor Craig

Celebrate the Season at First Congregational UCC!

What better way to deepen your faith than to spend time in church during the season of Advent? Here are ways to celebrate the Season at First Congregational UCC during December 2019:

- **During each Sunday in Advent**, members of First Congregational will lead us in the lighting of our Advent wreath, and we will sing traditional Advent hymns and Christmas carols.
- **On December 1st** we will begin our Advent season with Holy Communion, and following the service we will decorate the church for Christmas. The Worship Board is hosting a pizza and chili lunch following the hanging of the greens. That afternoon volunteers will lead Care Center worship services from 1:15 until 3:45 pm.
- **On December 7th** we will host a Live Nativity, from 5:30-7:30 pm. Adults and youth will recreate the first Christmas outside the building, and inside cookies and cocoa will be served to visitors.
- **On December 8th** we will observe the second Sunday of Advent
- **On December 14th** our Stephen Ministers will host a caroling and chili party at the church. Please arrive by 5:45 pm, and we will carol at Crestview and Southfield before returning to the church for a chili and soup supper.
- **On December 15th** we will observe the Third Sunday of Advent, and following our worship service the Women's Fellowship will host a Christmas Potluck and Party.
- **On December 22rd** we will observe the Fourth Sunday of Advent during worship, and our children will present the Christmas program "All My Christmas Friends" during worship.
- **On December 24th** we will hold our **Christmas Eve Candlelight Worship service at 5 p.m.** Pew Communion will be offered at this service.

- **On December 29th** we will gather to worship at our regular time while Pastor Craig is on vacation. There will be no Sunday school that day.

Come and share in the beauty and joy of the Advent and Christmas season as we worship God and celebrate the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World!

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

ATTENDANCE

November 3 73 November 10 81

November 17 73 November 24

Church Staff

Rev. Craig Blaufuss, Pastor
Office: 832-2232 Cell 297-4316
Pastor's email: revcraigblaufuss@wmtel.net
Michele Omvig: Admin. Assist. 269-7210
Church's e-mail: administrative.office@fcuccwc.org
Dale Olson: Stephen Ministry Ldr 839-5619
Sunshine Garth: Choir Director 835-7626
Melissa Hindt: Organist 712-351-1074
Curt/Lorraine McCoskey: Cust's. 832-5341
Tracy Wehrhan: Church Treasurer 297-0370
Dale Olson: Financial Secretary 839-5619



Avoiding post-holiday blues - this December, keep stress in check.

- Keep expectations realistic. A Norman Rockwell Christmas is pure fiction.
- Stick to your budget, A mailbox full of bills is sure to deflate you.
- Don't drink excessively. Stress is magnified by hangover exhaustion.
- Avoid the urge to recreate a childhood Christmas, Commit to a new tradition instead.
- Give yourself some downtime.

Annual Reports due December 18.



- 1 - Tracy Wehrhan
- 3 - Alexis Tudor
- 4 - Ron Epps
- 6- Jamie Roelfs
- 8 - Pat Kesler
- 10 - Joyce Gelhaus
- 11 – Kaelyn Butz
- 13 - Susan Meinders
- 14 - Nancy Urich
- 17 - Bob Van Diest
- 17 - Matt Byrne
- 17 - Tucker Askelson
- 20 - Don Bruner
- 21 - Liz Weieneth
- 23 – Sara Imhoff
- 26 - Alan Yungclas



- 18 - Sharon & Bruce Perry
- 28 - Dale & Gayle Olson
- 29 - Bob & Sandi Weieneth
- 30 - Lynn & Debbie Jaycox
- 30 - Ed & Andrea Mosbach
- 31 - Mark & Connie Gustafson

Thanks

A **HUGE** thank you to everyone who signed up for a board/committee for 2020. We filled a total of 21 vacancies. The Nominating Committee was overwhelmed with the response. We sent out 4 texts and everything else was filled up by people interested in serving. It shows that you care about our church and its ministry. Our congregation is wonderful!!!!

Nominating Committee

Gretchen McGlynn, Nick Oberender, Leah Maass and Pastor Craig.

Taste of Gratitude

The Upper Des Moines Opportunity food pantry needed Thanksgiving dinner items. We relayed that need to you. Within one week you loaded the huge metal mixing bowl and card table with 50 jars, cans, boxes and packages of what makes a Thanksgiving dinner complete: sweet potatoes, stuffing, gravy, pumpkin, cranberries, green beans, Jell-O. Everything has been delivered to the UDMO food pantry. They thank you and so do we. –**The Mission Board**

Christmas Fund

The Light Shines in the Darkness

The Christmas Fund for Veterans of the Cross and the Emergency Fund will be taken at the Christmas Eve service on December 24. For over 100 years this offering has been a way to ensure the light of love and hope for the faithful servants of our church who find themselves facing unforeseen financial needs. Hundreds of clergy and lay employees lives have been touched over the years by your generosity. Pension supplementation, health premium supplementation, emergency grants, and gift checks are given to UCC pastors and lay workers in need. This will continue with your help. Last year we raised \$1,641, can we beat that number? Please give generously this Christmas.

KLAB

Our KLAB students are pen pals with some of the residents of Crestview Care Center, and they would like to give a Christmas gift bag of personal hygiene items to each of their pen pals. To do this they are asking for your help! KLAB has created a display of items they are asking you to donate to fill 10 Christmas gift bags. Thank you in advance for your help! -- from your KLAB Leaders

Alternative Giving Fair returns for the Advent season!

Mission Board is again sponsoring the Alternative Giving Fair this year. This is an opportunity for you to shop for loved ones and help others while doing this. We will have a different opportunity for you to check out for the 4 weeks until Sun. Dec 15.

The first week, Nov. 24, there were angels from the Webster City Angel Tree.

On December 1 there will be a variety of products that will allow you and those on your shopping list to live a more plastic free life. Come check out our table and maybe find something to help eliminate some single use plastic in your life!

December 8 is hats, boots, and mittens. Sherry Leksell teaches language arts and literature in Eagle Grove. Mrs. Leksell learned that her students and their younger siblings — particularly the newcomers in all grades — need items for warmth. For the most part, they have coats or jackets but could use warm mittens or gloves, boots (especially for the elementary students) and hats or caps. (Lip balm and hand lotion would be nice, too.) Please have any or all the new or gently used items to the church by December 15.

Mrs. Leksell thanks you, the students thank you and we thank you!

December 15 is Stepping Forward Romania ***The Mission Board***

Advent Begins—December 1

Sunday, December 1 is our first Sunday in the season of Advent, and we are again asking for volunteers (families or groups of friends) to lead the Advent Candle Liturgy. If you are willing to help with this important part of our Advent worship please sign the sheet that will be posted by the church office.

Decorate the Church for Christmas—December 1

Mark your calendars! Following worship on Sunday, December 1, we will again bring out the Christmas decorations and spend some time beautifying our church in preparation for the birth of Jesus. Please plan to stay and help with one of the most enjoyable activities of the year!

Recycle for a Good Cause

Caps for Love is a non-profit organization that turns plastic bottle caps in and uses the money to buy wheelchairs and repair wheelchairs for children. Any color plastic lid is accepted except black. Coffee, creamer, pop, water, laundry soap, salad dressing, peanut butter, shampoo, etc. The lids have to be clean and any paper, inside or out, needs to be removed. It's amazing how many things have plastic lids. If you would like to donate there is a container on a shelf near the women's bathroom in Fellowship Hall.

Bags 4 Beds The Evangelism Board wants you to bring in your old plastic grocery bags to donate to Cindy Middleton, who crochets sleeping mats for the homeless from them. There will be a box in Fellowship Hall where you may place your donated plastic bags.

Medicare

Open enrollment is until December 7. Make sure you have coverage that meets your needs. SHIP can help you sort things out 832-7769.

Thanks

"I am with you"

"We are not alone"

These quotes from Pastor Craig have provided a guide for me as I learn to live life without my son, Kent.

Pastor Craig and you, my church family, have shown concern, support and comfort, for which I will always be grateful.

In Christian Love,
Kay Harfst

Treasurer's Report

INCOME	October	YEAR TO DATE
Pledges and Offerings	\$19,018.00	\$146,692.14
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$19,018.00	\$146,692.14
EXPENSES		
Outreach and Mission	4,750.02	\$16,289.02
Pastoral Services	8,195.94	77,618.31
Maintenance and Repairs	935.00	26,091.66
Church Office	3,450.39	28,794.54
Music Ministry	873.92	7,013.23
Christian Education	8.00	277.51
Local Ministry	0.00	73.09
Misc. Expenses	0.00	1,293.42
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$18,213.27	\$157,450.78

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Webster City, Iowa

Cabinet Meeting held on November 12, 2019

Minutes will be sent out as a separate document at a later date.

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1000 Willson Avenue
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Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:



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