

December 2020 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
515-832-2232
<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord— and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” —Isaiah 11:1-5

Spoiler alert--Christmas is coming! Are you going to make a Christmas wish-list this year? Do you still make them anymore? Whenever I think of Christmas wish-lists I think of my son Jim, who for many years past his childhood would still make up long and elaborate Christmas wish-lists. He would start in August—or earlier...telling us what he would love to have for Christmas ...and the list would grow longer week by week. Now sometimes we would tease him, telling him that he was forty, not four--but there was something heartwarming about a grown man who could still dream about Christmas like a child; a grown man who had not become so jaded or cynical that he could still dream of impossible wish-lists for Christmas. Perhaps that says something about the child in him, but it also says something about the power of Christmas to inspire an enduring hope—even in the face of disappointment. (Poor Jim never got everything on his wish list!)

I thought about Jim and his expanding Christmas lists as I was reading the passage from Isaiah that I cited above—a passage which reads very much like a wish-list...although a much more ambitious list than even Jim would dare attempt to create. Isaiah's wish list was the foretelling of a righteous shoot emerging from the shattered stump of Jesse—an heir to his people's kingly line which had disgraced itself and had been subject to foreign invasion, humiliation, and defeat. This righteous shoot was to be the leader whom God had in mind for God's people: a leader who judged all people with equity and righteousness, a leader who had a spirit of wise counsel and understanding, a leader who had knowledge and fear of the LORD. This leader of God's people would emerge to bring the world into a new and golden age of justice and godliness; a re-born world in which wolves lie with lambs, lions harmlessly graze on straw, and children play without danger near the holes of venomous snakes. It was a vision of a world that was completely different than the world Isaiah lived in! It was a vision of a world in which every life was valued, where none were hurt or destroyed and the knowledge of God was as plentiful as the waters of the seas. Isaiah's prophecy of a new and righteous leader ushering in a new world was a wish-list unparalleled in its time, but it was a wish-list that would ultimately go...unfilled.

And now it is nearly Christmas in the year 2020, and 2,700 years after Isaiah's time we still continue to make our wish-lists. Perhaps our wish-lists can be somewhat child-like, like Jim's...***but perhaps this year our wish-lists are more seasoned, more mature, more somber, and more difficult to fill than a child's wish-list.*** My wish-list this year includes the arrival of a speedy vaccine for Covid-19; the return to our pre-pandemic lives--including returning to our church; a new era of non-partisanship and cooperation in every statehouse and in our nation's capital; a prosperous economy that offers the means to life to any willing to work and to those who cannot; a higher reverence for our planet, its ecosystem and its creatures; less violence and more love...and so the list goes. Like Jim I add to it all the time-- even if only in moments of wistful thinking or zealous anger! And as Christmas approaches I feel more emboldened to dare to dream again, to hope again, and to wish that my wish-list might finally be granted!

And yet every year at Christmas it seems inevitable that some parts of our wish lists—or all of them—will go unfilled, as Isaiah’s did... as did the wish-list of the one whose birthday we shall soon celebrate, when he prayed: “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done...on earth as it is in heaven.”

And yet the message of Christmas continues to be a message of hope! We who call ourselves Christians are first and foremost a people of hope because we live with a different vision of life than those who look around them, see a broken and hurting world, and become lost in cynicism, helplessness, or despair. It’s not that we don’t see these things...and it’s not that we don’t feel the pain of others and of the world. We do! But we hold on to something greater than the world *as it is*...we hold on to a vision of what the world could and should be:

A vision of a world where, to borrow Longfellow’s lyrics, “*God is not dead nor doth he sleep*”;

A vision of a world in which the pain, heartbreak, injustice and evil that we see today will not have the last word in human life;

A vision of a world glimpsed by an ancient Hebrew prophet and proclaimed by a Galilean carpenter who believed that love, righteousness and justice would ultimately re-create our world into a place of peace, concord, love and joy!

That new and better world isn’t here yet...and perhaps we wonder if it will ever come at all. But at Christmas we are reminded by Isaiah, and by the birth of that small child who grew to be the Christ, that we belong to that other vision; that other world...God’s world.

And Christmas reminds us that if we will live out of that vision; if we will live as if *that* world is our reality, rather than this world...then we will bring a piece of that new world to life as Isaiah did when he offered his words of hope to a hurting world, and as Jesus did with the whole of his life—even to his death.

Friends, Christmas is now less than a month away, and my son Jim is already filled with hope and anticipation thinking about his Christmas wish-list being filled at last! Yet he knows—as we all know--that Christmas will come and go and there will be things on our wish lists that will not get filled this year.

But friends, Christmas is coming! And the birth of the one who fulfilled Isaiah’s vision can still fill us with hope and enlarge our hearts and minds with a better way of life that will lead us to a new and better world. May each of us hang tightly onto that hope as we dream of our Christmas wish-lists this year...and may each of us live out that hope in our lives, so that we may be part of the fulfillment of that ancient vision, that ancient promise...that ancient “Christmas wish list!”

May your Advent season be filled with much hope as you prepare for the Good News of Christmas! –Pastor Craig

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

M 8 am - 11 am

Church Staff

Rev. Craig Blaufuss, Pastor

Office: **832-2232** Cell **297-4316**

Pastor’s email: **revcraigblaufuss@gmail.com**

Michele Omvig: Admin. Assist. **269-7210**

Church’s e-mail: **administrative.office@fcuccwc.org**

Dale Olson: Stephen Ministry Ldr **839-5619**

Sunshine Duffy: 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**

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

20 - Don Bruner

23 – Sara Imhoff

26 - Alan Yungclas

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

18 - Sharon & Bruce Perry

28 - Dale & Gayle Olson

30 - Lynn & Debbie Jaycox

30 - Ed & Andrea Mosbach

31 - Mark & Connie Gustafson

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

1 - Tracy Wehrhan



Parish Nurse News
How to stay young,

- Keep only cheerful friends.
- Keep learning. Never let the brain idle.
- Enjoy the simple things.
- Laugh often, long and loud.
- Tears happen. Endure, grieve, and move on.
- Surround yourself with what you love.
- Cherish your health.
- Don't take guilt trips. Take a trip to the mall.
- Tell the people you love that you love them.
- Don't sweat the little things.
- And remember, there's no way you can look as bad as that person on your driver's license!

Annual Reports Due December 13

Budget

The proposed budget has been ratified. The final tally was 50 yea and 0 nay. I want to thank all who participated in this on-line vote. You did a wonderful job!

Gretchen McGlynn, Moderator

Live Nativity

Live Nativity will not be held this year.

Indoor Worship Services Suspended

Because of the rising cases of Covid19 in our county and beyond, the Cabinet voted to suspend all in-person worship services through Advent and including Christmas Eve. Audio recordings will continue to be sent out.

Pecans

They are \$12 a bag for halves or for pieces. You can make your check out to Haystack Circle. They are in Fellowship Hall so you can stop by and pick some up.

Boards and Committees

It is time for us to begin filling openings for our various boards and committees for the 2021 calendar year. An all-church email will be sent out with further details regarding what open positions exist on which boards, who carries over from this year to next, etc. Expect phone calls and/or emails to be coming from the Nominating Committee (Nick Oberender, Erica Pawletzki (Oberender), and/or Pastor Craig) until all vacancies are filled. Please note that in 2017 the constitution was revised and as such now states that anyone serving on a board for two consecutive full terms will automatically roll off of that board and be asked to not re-up for that board again until they have been off that board for a year. Given that most board terms are two years, 2021 will be the first year that this change comes into play. Due in part to this change, but more so due to the current environment in which we are living, for continuity's sake we will likely ask for those that are eligible to re-up for another term on the same board that they are currently serving on (even though their term may be expiring) to do so if they are willing. If you'd like to get a jump start on signing up for a specific board or committee or to inquire about where we have current openings before all of the details are sent out in the church-wide email, feel free to contact Vice Moderator, Nick Oberender. Nick can be reached at 515-297-2982 both via call and text (feel free to leave a voicemail with return phone number if you don't get him) and by email at nickoberender@gmail.com

Meetings

Meetings in the church building may resume! To schedule a meeting please contact Michele by email: administrative.office@fcuccwc.org or at 832-2232 on Monday mornings. Please note that meeting dates are limited to Tuesdays through Thursdays.

Advent

We are again asking for volunteers to lead the Advent Candle Liturgy that will be part of the worship service. Volunteers will be asked to come into the sanctuary on Wednesdays or Thursdays to read the liturgy and make the recording that will be a part of the following

Sunday's service. If you are willing to lead a week's Advent Candle liturgy, please contact Pastor Craig.



90 tokens of appreciation were delivered to the school administration building the week of Nov. 16 to be added to the 90 from Trinity Lutheran and 90 from Asbury Methodist to then be taken to the different buildings in the WC school system. A big thank you to all who delivered popcorn to be used to show our appreciation for all our teachers.

We even had a few left-over popcorn bags which will be delivered to UDMO.

Thank you all!

Mission Board

Salvation Army Bell Ringing Campaign

The Webster City Ministerial Association is again sponsoring the Salvation Army Red Kettle bellringing campaign in Webster City! Ninety percent of all donations to the Red Kettle campaign in Webster City will remain local and will go to support ministries endorsed by the WCMA, such as the Ecumenical Human Needs Fund, our local food pantries, All Cultures Equal, UDMO, and others. We will begin ringing December 5, Noon to 8 pm at Fareway.

Alternative Giving Fair

Even though our Advent celebration is going to look different this year the Alternative Giving Fair is still happening. Needs are still great and our hope is the projects we have chosen to focus on will help make the holidays brighter. Please choose what projects feel right for you this year and thank you for your support.

1st Sunday Nov. 29 - Angel Tree kids - the Christmas wish lists for the children we will purchase gifts for has been sent out in an email. If you have purchased gifts, please be sure to let Gayle Olson know what you have purchased, and please have your gifts to the church by December 6.

2nd Sunday Dec. 6 - Stepping Forward in Romania. Look for pictures of the kids to be on the tree in the entryway where you can stop and select your child, take their picture, and leave your donation in the box provided.

3rd Sunday Dec 13 - Lotus Women's shelter near Vincent. We are collecting all sizes of sweat pants to be gifted to them. There will be a box in the elevator room at the church where donations can be dropped off.

4th Sunday Dec. 20 - Almost Home animal shelter. We are holding a canned cat food drive for the felines at Almost Home! Please bring your cans of cat food to the elevator room.

Thank you for again supporting our Alternative Gift Fair! --the Mission Board



The Alternative Gift-giving Fair is up and running--in the West Entrance! Stop in each week to see what giving opportunity is being highlighted-- and leave your gifts under the tree!

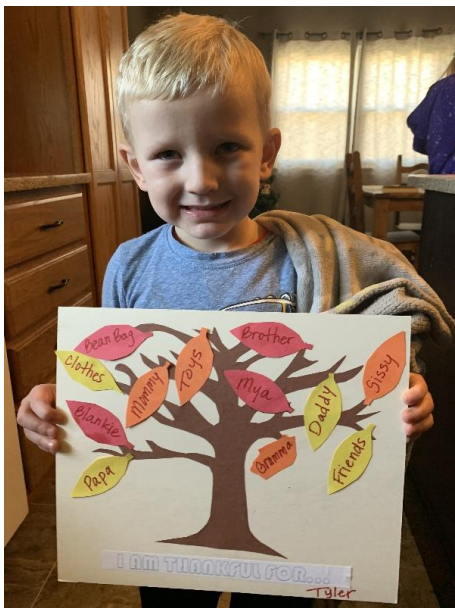
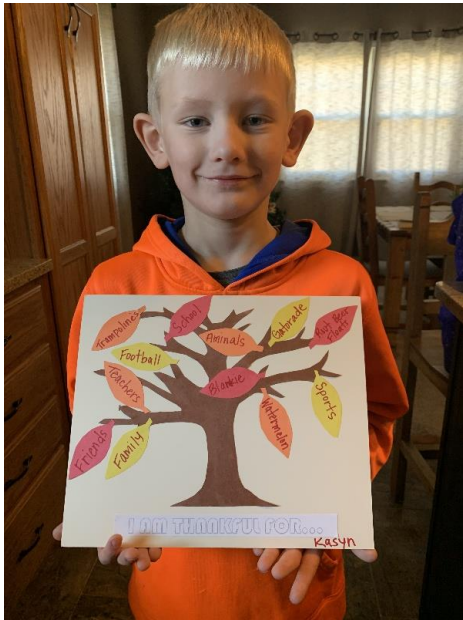
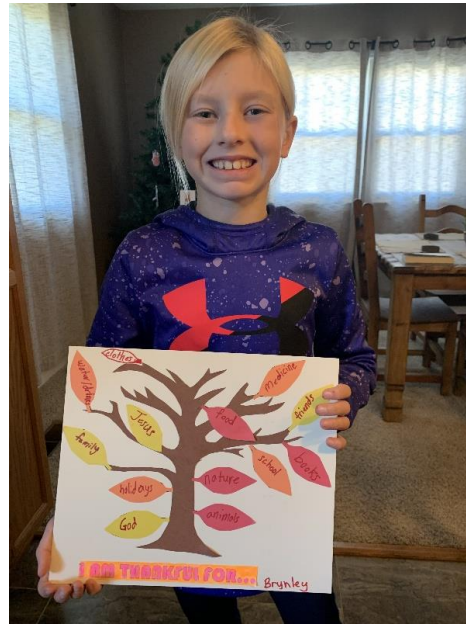
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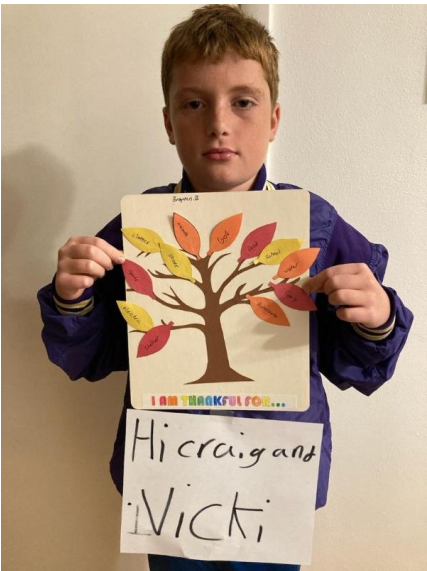
I would like to express my appreciation for the generous donation of scholarship money to assist my college expenses. I want to thank you for considering me for this scholarship as it helped me financially in narrowing down my future plans.

I am currently at NIACC in Mason City where I am taking my general education classes and competing on the softball team. Following my spring season and graduation in May I plan to transfer to either ISU or UNI to study marketing.

Thank you again for your generosity in considering me as an applicant for your scholarships. It will help me greatly as I continue my last year at NIACC and continue forward to a university.
Sincerely, Riley Diane Nelson

For November our KLAB and Sunday School kids received a We Care bag including a Thanksgiving Tree craft project. The children wrote what they were thankful for on the leaves of the tree.





Advent Challenge

This is a challenge for anyone. If you choose to do this take it to one of the food pantries. This will be a gift to many less fortunate. Vicki



NOTICE

All persons entering the building are warned the Hamilton County Public Health will not notify the church or pastor of individual positive cases of Covid 19. If there are multiple cases linked to the church location, a courtesy call will be made to the pastor, but no names given.

When an individual test is positive, they are asked to name the people they were in contact with-in the past 48 hours before receiving the positive test results. (Contact= within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more). IF the infected person supplies names, those individuals will be notified and asked to quarantine for 2 weeks.

Therefore, the cabinet requests individuals entering the church building and later testing positive for Covid 19 inform Pastor Craig.

Treasurer's Report

INCOME	October	YEAR TO DATE
Pledges and Offerings	\$17,005.00	\$141,045.18
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$17,005.00	\$141,045.18
EXPENSES		
Outreach and Mission	3,166.68	\$6,759.28
Pastoral Services	8,005.80	78,832.33
Maintenance and Repairs	604.94	20,904.06
Church Office	3,646.31	28,289.77
Music Ministry	924.00	6,941.75
Christian Education	0.00	121.75
Local Ministry	0.00	0.00
Misc. Expenses	6.42	1,045.38
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$16,354.15	\$142,894.32

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Webster City, Iowa

Cabinet Meeting held on November 17, 2020

Members Present:

Moderator:	Gretchen McGlynn	Pastor:	Craig Blaufuss
Vice Moderator:	Nick Oberender	Trustees:	Joyce Gelhaus
Finance Sec.:	Dale Olson	Women's Fellowship:	Holly Riemenschneider
Finance :	Tracy Wehrhan	Mission:	Lorraine McCoskey
Staff/Parish:	Stephanie Hill	Worship:	Gretchen McGlynn
Christian Ed:	Karinne Tudor	Evangelism:	Carol Crystal
Treasurer:	Tracy Wehrhan	Clerk:	Stephanie Hill

The meeting was called to order at 7:00pm by the Moderator, Gretchen McGlynn in Fellowship Hall with protocols in place. Pastor Craig opened the meeting with a devotional. The Mission Board representative is now Lorraine McCoskey. The minutes of the September cabinet meeting were read. Tracy Wehrhan moved and Lorraine McCoskey seconded a motion that the minutes be approved with minor corrections. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Offerings and expenses to date are nearly equal - \$140,795.18 and \$142,468.26 respectively. Tracy Wehrhan moved and Dale Olson seconded that the report be put to audit. The motion passed without challenge.

Pending Business:

a. 2021 Budget – Much discussion was held on how to meet our budget next year since our membership is down but expenses continue to rise. Our commitments, like OCWM, become reducible. Stephanie Hill moved and Lorraine McCoskey seconded a motion to approve the 2021 budget. The motion passed without challenge.

b. A Congregational Meeting will not be held this year. The budget will be emailed or mailed to the congregation. Votes will be cast either as return emails or can be dropped off at the church from November 22 through November 26th.

c. Whether or not to hold Advent and Christmas Eve services was discussed at length. Nick Oberender moved and Karinne Tudor seconded a motion to cancel these services this year due to the pandemic. The motion carried with 7 voting to cancel these services and 1 abstaining.

d. Annual Meeting: Nick Oberender presented the slate of nominees and submitted it to the Moderator. Souper Bowl soup drive-by will be held on January 24, 2021.

Other Business:

a. A Live Nativity event is being planned for December keeping in mind social distancing requirements. Wil Groves will head this and is looking for volunteers. The next cabinet meeting is expected to be in February. This cabinet meeting was adjourned at 8:00pm. Respectfully submitted, Stephanie Hill, Church Clerk

Worship Board October 2020

The Worship Board met at 10 a.m. Oct. 21, opening with a prayer by Pastor Craig.

Topics of discussion included Communion prep for Sunday, Nov. 1, worship as we move into cooler weather, Advent/Christmas decorating and services, and board membership for 2021-22. After discussion, the board made a recommendation to the Cabinet that due to recent state/county/city increases in Covid-19 numbers, the weather becoming cooler, and low attendance at the two indoor worship services held so far, that we suspend inside worship at this time. Mary Vavroch made the motion, seconded by Susan Andrew, all members approved. Gretchen McGlynn took the motion to the Cabinet, which approved it.

Pastor Craig sent an email to our membership informing everyone that we are suspending our indoor in-person worship services beginning immediately. An audio recording will continue to be sent out as it has for several months, and Michele Omvig will send out weekly announcements via email. The Cabinet will review the situation in a few weeks in order to determine if reopening the church for indoor worship is safe.

Circles, boards and committees can still meet in the church building and must be scheduled with Michele, with safety protocols followed.

Advent/Christmas decorating/services will depend on how worship continues to evolve, and will be discussed at the next meeting.

Regarding board membership, Gretchen and Mary will complete terms at the end of the year; Donna can decide what she wants to do, and Susan and Don Bruner have one more year left. It was decided that doing a conference call is the best way to hold our next meeting, with discussions via email as items come up.

Pastor's Cabinet Report November 13, 2020

Worship: We gathered for worship indoors on 3 separate occasions before the Cabinet voted to suspend in-person worship services again due to a surge in Covid 19 cases in the County and City. We've had some good luck weather-wise and have been able to meet outside nearly every week since then—making adjustments in the time and date to make best use of the weekend weather conditions. We again want to thank Chris and Izzy McNiel for the use of their sound system (and their operation of it!), Melissa Hindt for accommodating our varied worship schedules in order to accompany us outdoors, Don Bruner for leading us in song, and our volunteer liturgists who have helped shape our worship experiences outside. November 22 we will observe All Saints Sunday, but due to covid I will either light the candles for the departed (if we return indoors) or will read the submitted names in the audio recording of that service. Since at this writing we do not know if we will return to indoor worship during Advent, we will ask for volunteers to read the Advent liturgy and either make a recording of that for distribution, or if we are inside they will come to the lectern and lead the candlelighting.

Christian Education: Vicki and I continue to distribute monthly we care bags to the children and youth of our congregation. In October we distributed pumpkins (donated by the Crystal/Lahr family), carving sets, and sweets; in November we will distribute a Thanksgiving Craft, a lesson about giving thanks, and treats.

Live Nativity: Plans are being formulated to again hold a Live Nativity display in front of our northwest doors during the season of Advent. We will recruit volunteers to costume and pose for the tableau—all of this done with safety protocols to prevent the spread of Covid. We will publicize the event and have stations available for accepting donations for a local benevolence. Wil Groves will head up this event.

Salvation Army Bellringing: If Fareway and Hy-Vee agree to host, I will again chair this event, which will start November 27th and run Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays through Advent until December 20th. Masking and social distancing will be required of all ringers, and we will ring outdoors where it is safer. An article will be placed in the DFJ looking for volunteers. As in the past 90% of all proceeds will go to local ministries endorsed by the WCMA.

Ecumenical Human Needs Committee: In September we resumed taking applications and doing interviews by phone. Sharon Perry, our intake coordinator, has been replaced by Karen Hinderks while Sharon is in Texas. We are again applying for a grant from the Morrison Trust Foundation for the EHNC, which was written by Sharon. We continue to disburse up to \$400 annually to those in need in Webster City whose applications are approved: We have assisted 24 individuals and families in 2020 and expect that the demand will increase dramatically through the end of the year and into 2021! Current balances are: Morrison Trust Account \$9,868.16; General Account: \$3757.45

WCMA: Four clergy met November 5 at Trinity ELCA. I have assumed the interim treasurer position with the resignation of Rev Mark Eichler from St. Paul Lutheran. The school system is not allowing the food backpack program in the school buildings, and since there is no alternate way to distribute the backpacks, the WMCA voted to donate \$6,000 of back pack funds and \$2,000 of general funds to 4 local food pantries: St. Paul, Trinity, ACE, and UDMO. We are also in need of a new location to host storage and preparation of the backpacks, as Trinity reclaimed their basement space for their Christian Education programming.

Tri-Conference Annual Meeting: We met via Zoom on Saturday, October 17th. We had no delegate representing us. Two big issues stuck out for me: 1. We have lost/are losing 2 ACM's in the last 4 months—Jonna Jensen and now Darrell Goodwin. The search committee is interviewing candidates now to replace Jonna, and we were assured that the process is much speedier than traditional search and call. Let's hope so! Meanwhile our 2 remaining ACM's and Brigit are working very hard to try to cover the vacancies! 2. Giving is way down this year, forcing the Iowa Conference to spend down some of their reserves to offset the budget deficit. Clearly we won't be able to sustain this level of deficit spending indefinitely. Marjorie Groves continues to serve on the Iowa Conference Board of Directors for her second term; Alan Yungclas was elected to serve his first term on the Iowa Conference Board of Directors.

Computers: The Trustees purchased 3 computers to replace our aging (10 years old!) machines. I have installed and transferred data to the sanctuary computer and my office computer—I will work on Michele's (most difficult one) next week.

Memorial Service: I officiated at the memorial service of Robert Flaws Sr. on October 31 at Foster Funeral Home's Chapel. This is the first funeral/memorial service I have conducted since December of 2019.

I continue to remain connected to you all via phone, email, text, and social distancing! We all need to continue to stay connected to one another and pray for one another—and for our church—until this pandemic passes!

First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue
Webster City, IA 50595
Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

