

February 2021 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
515-832-2232
<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.” –Romans 12:9-16

I am a bit reticent to write this article as I am well aware that using this platform to highlight personal matters can seem very self-serving. And so I hope you will indulge me, and if you are a pet lover, you may well resonate with what I am sharing.

Yesterday we had our beloved male cat Sam put to sleep. He was diagnosed with heart failure January 10th, and he continued to deteriorate in the ensuing weeks--even with medications, 2 abdominal taps for accumulating fluid and most recently an IV for dehydration and a shot of vitamins and steroids to increase his appetite. He had all but stopped eating and drinking and was mostly hiding in the guestroom looking pitiable. We took him to see Doc Yanda, who agreed that it was time, and so last Monday morning Sam was euthanized. We will have him cremated and his ashes returned to us, to join two other pets whose memories and ashes remain in our household.

In a world filled with woes and tragedies and heartbreaks of every kind, it should seem a relatively small matter to mark the passing of one household feline. We still have a household of pets, so loneliness for animal companionship will not be an issue for many years to come. And yesterday the grim news broke that half a million Americans have now died from Covid-19! And yet if you have ever loved a dog or a cat you are likely aware of the surprisingly deep feelings and attachments that come with sharing a household with animals...and you too may have felt the tender grief that comes when one of these companions leaves this world, and our lives.

I have said many times that living with animals has made me a better human being, and I continue to be gently amazed at the magnitude of that grace--even in the hour of their deaths. Sam was an easy cat to love in part because he was so loving, and in part because he had so many endearing quirks, as pets often do. Sam never met a box he didn’t want to sleep in, and he never met a closet or closed off room he didn’t want to sneak into—even if it meant spending hours trapped in them before someone heard his cries. Sam loved the outdoors but he had an annoying tendency to jump our fence and roam the neighborhood, which we actively discouraged since we live on a busy street and wanted no harm to come to him. And Sam had the special ability to befriend just about anyone who came into our home, and I have pictures of him tenderly touching and comforting Vicki after a sickness or surgical procedure. All through his life Sam reminded us that *presence* is a great gift anyone can give to bless another—whether human or animal. And Sam’s death has reminded us that we so often don’t fully appreciate the blessing of that gift...until it is taken from us.

Friends, how have *you* blessed others with the simple gift of your presence? Who has blessed you in this way—whether human or animal? Part of the pain of this pandemic has been the long deprivation of the personal presence of others in our lives. This still remains necessary in order to keep Covid from spreading and taking yet more lives than the half-million Americans who have already died in a little over a year’s time. But as we ramp up the vaccinations and contemplate the eventual lifting of current restrictions, will we remember this particular lesson from the pandemic—the power of our presence— and share ourselves with others, or will we cocoon ourselves and distract ourselves with idle activities that eschew community? Will we impart a tender sense of love to as

many people as we can, or will we spend our days only socializing in our familiar circles, or worse—focused on competing with and belittling others? Will we affirm the preciousness of all life and embrace our human need to belong and to share love, or will we choose something other than love to guide our living and direct our days?

Even as Vicki and I will grieve the loss of Sam in the coming days, we will console ourselves with the memory of his quirky, loving, and thoroughly lovable presence in our lives. It is an amazing thing to consider that a 15-pound bundle of fur and whiskers could leave such a legacy—and such a lesson! May we all heed such lessons and remind ourselves every day that we have so much to give, so much to share with others that will bless lives even past our earthly living. What a wonderful lesson to learn from a cat! What a wonderful lesson for us all to enmesh in our lives! –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**



What Children Need -

- Support
- Empowerment
- Boundaries and expectations
- Constructive use of time
- Commitment to learning
- Positive values
- Social competence
- Positive identity

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

4 - Vicki Blaufuss
6 - Jennie Williams
8 - Vada Williams
13 - Shirley Yungclas
14 - Talon Stockdale
16 - Craig Blaufuss
19 - Kaleb Butz
20 - Verna Bierle
20 - Jacob Meinders
22 - Macklin Elkin
22 - Jayden Burgos
23 - Todd Sonsalla
23 - Jose Burgos
24 - Garrett Shelton
25 - Jackson Elkin
28 - Jackson Leman

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

7 - Robert & Mary Van Diest
15 - Curt & Lorraine McCoskey
21 - Alaina & Steve Imhoff

Let Love Flow

When you share your gifts with One Great Hour of Sharing, your generosity ensures that, even in the midst of uncertainty, love changes the lives of those most vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare inequities that contribute to poverty and injustice. On full display is the plight of the working poor who have lost jobs, are on the brink of homelessness, and wait in lines at food pantries. Deadly wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and wars have left people homeless, families grieving loss of loved ones and communities awaiting assistance for long term disaster recovery. In the midst of the despair, the United Church of Christ is able to offer hope. The UCC responds to a variety of global and local concerns by providing advocacy, sustainable development resources, long term disaster recovery support, and assistance for refugee and asylum seekers, in collaboration with our partners locally and globally. We collect your OGHS offering through the month of March. If you write a check, please make it to First Congregational UCC and write

One Great Hour of Sharing or OGHS on the memo line. Grateful recipients around the world thank you and so do we! – **The Mission Board**

From T-shirts to Food Totes



Do you have a sewing machine? Do you have a bunch of perfectly good t-shirts that you/your family don't wear? This Mission Board is once again embarking on a service project to make tote bags! The Mission Board started this project with the Food Bank of Iowa last year, and we have decided to have another go at it.

You've likely heard of the Food Bank of Iowa because all of the four food pantries in Webster City are able to get food from the Food Bank of Iowa at pennies on the dollar. The Food Bank of Iowa is asking folks looking for an at-home volunteer project to make shopping bags from t-shirts. Basically, you cut off the sleeves, trim the neckband and run your sewing machine across the bottom a time or two. The tote will need to hold up to 30 pounds of cans, bags of rice or beans, potatoes, etc., so don't use worn out t-shirts with holes, kiddie tees or thin/gauzy ones. If you have questions, email Sherry Leksell at mrsleksell@gmail.com If you can sew but don't have t-shirts or have t-shirts but can't sew, email her and she'll see if she can match you up. She'll take t-shirt totes from First Congregational UCC of Webster City to All Cultures Equal or the Food Bank of Iowa at the end of March. Food Bank of Iowa information is linked below. There's also more information on making a tote. You'll find many YouTubes and links online on how to make a tote.

We will have a box set up in the church vestibule for t-shirt donations. There will also be a wooden box outside of the church where you can drop off t-shirt donations. Sherry will contact

those of you who are willing and able to sew. Thank you so much for your continued support!

<https://www.volunteermatch.org/search/opp3283131.jsp>

www.thebalanceeveryday.com

Beacon

Our next scheduled Beacon of Hope Meal will be March 17th, and the Mission Board has chosen to create a taco meal to serve 30 + men. A list of items needed was sent out via email.

EHN

A thank offering grant of \$1000 was recently awarded from the Iowa Conference to our church, to be designated for the Ecumenical Human Needs fund. Thanks to Marjorie Groves who wrote the grant on behalf of the Mission Board.

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. 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.

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.

Knights of Columbus Lenten Fish Fry

Drive-Thru 5:15pm – 6:30pm, March 5 and March 19. \$10 St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Center 1000 Des Moines St. Everyone Welcome! MENU: Flaky Fried Fish, Crispy French Fries, Crunchy Coleslaw, Tartar Sauce & Dessert

On Valentines' Day 21 children and youth received "we care bags" from the Christian Education Board-- and YOU! Thank you for the amazing outpouring of generosity-- a great way to say "I love you!" to our kids!



Thanks

The Lotus House thanks the congregation and the Endowment Board for contributions given in 2020. They appreciate the support.

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	January	YEAR TO DATE
Pledges and Offerings	\$9,534.00	\$9,534.00
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$9,534.00	\$9,534.00
EXPENSES		
Outreach and Mission	0.00	\$0.00
Pastoral Services	7,053.27	7,053.27
Maintenance and Repairs	1,822.34	1,822.34
Church Office	3,113.98	3,113.98
Music Ministry	1,123.66	1,123.66
Christian Education	0.00	0.00
Local Ministry	0.00	0.00
Misc. Expenses	6.42	6.42
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$13,119.67	\$13,119.67

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Webster City, Iowa

Cabinet Meeting held on February 9, 2021

Members Present:

Moderator:	Nick Oberender	Pastor:	Craig Blaufuss
Vice Moderator:	Joyce Gelhaus	Trustees:	Joyce Gelhaus
Finance Sec.:	Dale Olson	Women's Fellowship:	Holly Riemenschneider
Finance :	Tracy Wehrhan	Mission:	Stephanie Hill
Staff/Parish:	Cindy Henning	Worship:	Gale Olson
Christian Ed:	Vicki Blaufuss	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 minutes of the November 2020 cabinet meeting were read. Tracy Wehrhan moved and Joyce Gelhaus seconded a motion that the minutes be approved. The motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: All expenses were paid in 2020 with a transfer of less than \$1,000. Offerings for January are \$9,284.00 and expenses are \$12,152.43. Tracy Wehrhan moved and Dale Olson seconded that the report be put to audit. The motion passed without challenge.

Pending Business:

a. Current church closure status was discussed. Gale Olson made the motion that service continue in the virtual mode until the positivity rate is 5% or less in the county. Carol Crystal seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

b. The Protocols set up by Worship Board were reviewed. Slight changes were made that did not require a motion.

Board Summaries: Women's Fellowship suggested the possibility of a spring Thrift Sale. However, since the church continues to be closed, a spring sale is not possible; but hopefully an October sale will take place. **Christian Education:** is requesting candy for Valentine's Day, but has enough for Easter. This would be for the 'We Care' bags given out each month to 19 youth. **Mission:** No report given. **Staff Parish:** Has not met yet. **Trustees:** For insurance purposes, heat sensors were installed throughout the church. **Worship:** The suggestion was made that we continue meeting outside as weather permits. **Women's Fellowship:** The lack of funds to distribute is their main concern. **Finance:** Dalene Schlitter is now chair. Some low interest funds were moved to higher interest bonds. **Christian Education:** There will be 2 graduates this year and 4 confirmands. **Pastor's Report:** Ash Wednesday service will be via recording. Hopefully, we will have in-person service by April 4th. There is new leadership of the Salvation Army which may cause a change in our fundraising ability.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

Christian Education Board The Christian Education Board met January 27, 2021 at 5:00 P.M. via the ZOOM Conferencing System. Participants included: Wil Groves, Vicki Blaufuss, Craig Blaufuss, Dawn Holdgrafer, Linda Lahr and Patty Gescheidler. Officers for 2021 are as follows: Wil Groves, Chair; Vicki Blaufuss, Cabinet Representative; Patty Gescheidler, Secretary. Vicki updated the Board on the Youth Bags being distributed each month to the youth of the Church. January theme was the Epiphany, February theme, Valentines, March

tentatively will be Easter. She asked for ideas for what could be done for April. Any ideas are welcome for things to do to keep the youth connected and engaged with the Church. She reported that there are lots of craft materials at the Church. At the present time we are distributing bags to 19 youth.

There was discussion on age-appropriate bags. Linda will check with her Middle School youth to see what would be appropriate activities.

The Board meetings will be held on a as needed basis. We will stay connected through texting and emails.

Mission Board Fellowship Hall: Rev. Craig Blaufuss, Audrey Burtnett, Marjorie Groves, Lorraine McCoskey, Gayle Olson, Karin Yungclas and guest Stephanie Hill. Marjorie led us in prayer.

Unfinished Business

Annual Report: Marjorie submitted the Mission Board summary prior to the December 13 deadline.

Iowa Thank Offering: The Iowa Conference UCC Board of Directors meets January 16 and will vote on grant proposals, including our request for \$2,000 funding assistance for Ecumenical Human Needs.

Salvation Army Bell Ringing: Pastor Craig reported that the three weekends of bell ringing in December brought in \$3,609, including checks made out to Salvation Army. When the checks are subtracted, the total is \$3,034, eligible for 90 percent to local charities and 10 percent to Salvation Army. (\$1,960 was dropped in the red kettles hosted by our church.)

Christmas Fund: This 5-for-5 mission collection, traditionally taken at the Christmas Eve service, brought in \$1,040 – around \$600 less than last year but not bad for a coronavirus season when people had to mail or bring in their contributions.

Alternative Giving Fair: Bragging only a little, we thought the Advent promotions of one special cause a week went extremely well. The first week we bought gifts for four Angel Tree families, with the remaining cash donation of \$400 going to Angel Tree organizers at Upper Des Moines Opportunity for additional Angel Tree gifts. Thanks to Karin and granddaughters for shopping. Next was Stepping Forward Romania, with Gayle decorating the tree with photos of the children at the orphanage. All 26 pictures were taken, meaning each child will receive gifts valued at \$20. The Lotus shelter for homeless women and children was featured the third week. Gayle delivered the 11 pairs of women's sweatpants, 6 pairs of children's sweatpants, a couple of bags of hygiene products and a \$50 check that church members donated. Karin and Audrey publicized the collection for Lotus. Finally, we asked for cans of cat food for the feline guests at Almost Home, the no-kill animal shelter in Fort Dodge. 141 cans of cat food were donated, Pastor Craig reported.

Souper Bowl: After much brainstorming on how to make and distribute soups in environmentally-responsible containers during a pandemic, we voted to cancel our goal of serving soup. (Karin made motion, Marjorie seconded.) We still will collect cans and packages of soup and set out the Pickle Jar for local food pantries. Marjorie will write promo on collecting soups, put huge silver bowl with sign in west entrance, and announce cancellation of homemade soup drive-thru.

Brave Spaces: Tabled for now. We will wait before actively studying Open and Affirming, along with anti-racism, status for our church.

New Business

Beacon of Hope: January 29 is our next time to supply a meal to the Fort Dodge shelter for homeless men. We'll ask church members for money to buy pizzas and for

bars, carrots and ranch dressing to go with them. Pastor Craig will prepare the request and Marjorie will deliver the bars, carrots and dressing. Pastor Craig will work with Annette regarding ordering the pizza.

Gratitude: Can there really be a true Mission Board without Gayle to chair it, stretch our comfort zones and breathe mission? Plus, not only do we love Lorraine's little car, but we appreciate her passion for Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center, her willingness to be our face at Cabinet and her killer potato salad. If Worship Board and Staff Parish Board don't treat them right, we'll welcome them back with open arms and talk about the Constitution later. However, it's true that Stephanie Hill and Sherry Leksell will bring new skills and enthusiasm to the Mission Board.

Next Meeting: We'll determine this when we gather with new members.

Respectfully submitted, Marjorie Groves, Secretary

This cabinet meeting was adjourned at 7:50pm.

Respectfully submitted, Stephanie Hill, Church Clerk

Additional Minutes

Mission Board: Rev. Craig Blaufuss, Audrey Burtnett, Marjorie Groves, Stephanie Hill, Sherry Leksell and Karin Yungclas met February 18 by Zoom. Officers: Audrey and Karin, chairpersons; Marjorie, secretary; Stephanie, cabinet representative; Sherry, technology facilitator. Gayle and Dale Olson took tokens of appreciation (packages of M&Ms and microwave popcorn) to the school administration building the week of November 16. Pastor Craig heard from a Salvation Army spokesperson, who said we need to follow their protocol or not use the red bucket, bell and signage. Craig will talk with the Ministerial Association. On January 29, Community Tap & Pizza delivered 10 large pizzas to the Beacon of Hope, with our church picking up the tab of \$203.73 (including tip for driver). Advent Alternative Giving Fair results: First week we bought gifts for four Angel Tree families, with \$400 going to Upper Des Moines Opportunity for more presents. Next was Stepping Forward Romania; all 26 pictures were taken, meaning each child will receive gifts valued at \$20. The Lotus shelter received 11 pairs women's sweatpants, 6 pairs children's sweatpants, bags of hygiene products and a \$50 check for the third week. The final week 141 cans of cat food were donated to Almost Home, the no-kill animal shelter in Fort Dodge. \$1,040 was collected for the Christmas Fund. Church members brought in 62 cans, boxes or packets of soup during January. Marjorie delivered half to St. Paul's food pantry and half to Trinity's. \$60 in the Pickle Jar went to UDMO. The t-shirt totes were a hit with our congregation and friends, as well as with the All Cultures Equal food pantry and the Food Bank of Iowa. Sherry volunteered to head the project going forward, delivering totes to ACE the end of March. We'll promote Funding Future Leaders during February. Our church provides the March 17 evening meal for the Beacon, with Pastor Craig organizing sign-up for taco fixings. In charge of highlighting each 5 for 5 offering: Marjorie, One Great Hour of Sharing, March; Audrey, Strengthen the Church, May; Sherry, Neighbors in Need, October; Stephanie, Christmas Fund, December; Karin, Our Church's Wider Mission, budget line item. Mission Board meets March 18, 3:30 p.m. via Zoom.

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:

