

February 2022 Newsletter
First Congregational United Church of Christ
1000 Willson Avenue - Webster City, Iowa 50595
515-832-2232
<http://www.firstcongregationalwc.org/>

"I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." –1 Cor. 7: 35

I've come to the conclusion that we are not very "sexy" here at First Congregational! Now I'm not using that term in the general sense of being physically sensual or seductive, but in the idiomatic sense of "attracting attention," "catching the eye," and being drawn to something because it is "intriguing and appealing." I say this because we are immersed in a culture that is obsessed with what is "sexy" in all of its forms—and one form that obsession takes is our collective desire to chase after sexy news, topics, and personalities that capture our attention and titillate us. All you have to do is turn on the TV or scroll through any number of media feeds on your smartphone to realize the truth of this statement, for it seems that the more bizarre, enraging, or fear-inducing a news story or social media post is, the more likely we are to stay tuned or click through to read more. Today's headlines and news feeds make my point-- already today my phone has offered me a headline that reads "Pam and Tommy' recaps sex tape drama through a #MeToo lens" (see? Sexy!), a story about inmates in Germany being fined over a prison mashed-potato fight, an article telling me that "America's trust in science now deeply polarized," a news piece claiming that North Korea has now racked up 6 missile launches in 2022, and a story proclaiming "Hospital patient without COVID shot denied heart transplant." Good Grief!

Now I realize our penchant to be drawn to the "sexy" is nothing new in the human story, but what I fear is that our collective obsession with such material, along with its pervasiveness, is dramatically altering our outlook, our sense of wellbeing, and our trust in God and in Life itself. A steady diet of such material is creating a sense of collective anxiety, a sense of distrust and isolation from one another, a malaise born of a loss of confidence in the goodness and beauty of life, and an erosion of hope and faith as God and Spirit are replaced with the gods of the 24 hours news cycle and the spirits of fear, helplessness, and rage. And yet even as we experience this poisoning of our minds and hearts firsthand, we are still addictively drawn to all that is sexy...we still obsessively grab our phones and scroll...we still make sure we get our "news-fix" when we get up in the morning, and before we go to bed. Good Grief!

In contrast, our church and our Christian lives of faith and service aren't nearly as sexy as the daily news. With the exception of a news article covering our stained-glass window renovation in 2018 (the story even ran in U.S. News and World Report!), what we do here at First Congregational certainly doesn't make national headlines. Instead, what we do here is the day-to-day work in which Christ's disciples have been involved since the beginning of the faith. We gather to worship, to sing hymns and songs of praise, and we pray together for the world. We fellowship with one another and share our lives together as Christians. We pool our resources not only to keep our church open but also to help feed the hungry, assist the needy, and support worthy causes. We remember and visit one another when we are sick or disabled. We listen to one another and offer encouragement and support in hard times. We gather to learn more about God, our faith, and Life, and we strive to create authentic lives of faith. In short, we continue the work of Christ--and Christ's church--in the world! And while it is true that this work isn't often very sexy or glamorous, it is life-giving, not life-negating; it is harmonious, not acrimonious; it is benevolent, not self-serving or self-obsessive; and it ties us to eternity and the purposes of heaven rather than the purposes of CNN, or FOX news, or Vice News, or Newsmax --and all the dysfunction, misery, hatred and confusion they market that is both so repellent and so attractive to us.

Friends, I hope you will continue to remember the good news of the gospel and the hope we share together in these difficult and confusing times. I hope you will continue to make your church and your faith a priority in your life, which can be a challenge in the midst of so many competing priorities. Most of all, I hope that you do not give in to the spirits of fear, rage, helplessness, isolation, mistrust and hopelessness which seem to be infecting our world! For our good news is that God has not abandoned us or the world, and this good news can empower our hearts, hands, and voices as we minister in Christ's name...offering the world something beautiful, rather than just "sexy"--something positive, healing, and holy. –Pastor Craig

CHURCH OFFICE HOURS

M 8 am - 1 pm
T 9 am – 1 pm
W 8 am – 4:30 pm
Th 8 am – 4:30 pm
F 9 am – 1 pm

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

Notice of church protocols concerning covid-19

On January 17 the Worship Board voted to reconvene in-person worship beginning Sunday, January 23 (10 a.m.). Masking is still required for worship,

please social distance from one another, and coffee hour following worship remains suspended at this time.

The Cabinet then conducted an email vote to determine if our current safety protocols needed to be revised, and this is what they decided:

- **All Board and Committee meetings and other gatherings of church members may continue as before.**
- **Food/drink is allowed at these meetings and gatherings per each group's discretion.**
- **Other safety protocols such as masking and social distance seating is at the discretion of each group that is gathering.**

Please note that the covid situation remains unpredictable so these protocols may be revised upon short notice. Thank you for your continued patience in these uncertain and trying times!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO:

1 - Chris McNeil
4 - Leanna Ploeger
5 - Jane Klaver
6 - Sharon Perry
7 - Gene Royster
8 - Michele Omvig
9 - Les Ploeger
11 - Greta Oberender
12 – Blakely Ploeger
14 - Curt McCoskey
15 - Everett (Bud) Crystal
17 – Piper Williams
19 - Gretchen McGlynn
19 - Jenna Short
22 - Curtis Alan (PJ) Swanson
22 – Colby Butz
23 - Stephanie Hill
26 - Wilma Taylor
27 - Luverne Bierle
27 – Diana Oberender
27 – Adelyn Oberender
28 - Midge Tudor

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY TO:

13 - Dick & Midge Tudor
17 – Jose Burgos & Dilcia Franco

The 2022 Flower Chart is up, with space available for sign ups..... ALL of the space is available!

If you have a special date that you want to reserve, please feel free to add your name to the chart.



Simple ways to make life easier

- Kitchen tools that make it easier to open cans and bottles, peel potatoes, and cut and dice foods.
- Reachers or pincer-like tools for those who have a weak grasp or limited mobility.
- Levers instead of doorknobs to eliminate a twisting wrist motion.
- Bathing benches and handheld showers, liquid soap dispensers.
- Elevated toilet seats.
- Pill crushers for those who have difficulty swallowing medication.
- Talking clocks, watches, and calculators for people with poor vision.
- Button loopers and zipper pulls for dressing.
- Elastic shoelaces.
- Specialized dinnerware to enable eating with one hand.
- Single-lever faucets for kitchen and bath.
- Touch Tone telephones with large numbers, speakers or hands-free telephones and telecommunication devices for the deaf

Shalom Circle Resumes

Pastor Craig would like to reconvene the Shalom Circle when it is reasonably safe to do so. The Shalom Circle is a group of seekers who come together regularly for a time of meditation, prayer, and sharing, with the intention of cultivating Shalom in our individual and collective lives. At each gathering there will be time to “check in,” a group meditation, an opportunity for prayer, and time to process what participants have experienced. Our group meditations will vary and will include relaxation techniques, guided meditations, creative visualizations, and other techniques. Cultivating a sacred and safe space, confidentiality, spontaneity, and seeking the Spirit’s guidance

are the essentials of this Circle that will allow each participant to experience the blessings of Shalom.

Everyone is welcome to be a part of the Shalom Circle—no experience necessary! If you are interested in participating, please let Pastor Craig know what days/times you are available.

Funding Future Leaders

We raised \$405 for Funding Future Leaders.

Time for T-Shirt Food Totes

You say you got a fabulous new t-shirt for Christmas so are tossing the old ones – or your list of New Year’s resolutions includes sorting drawers and closets? Save that pile of unworn t-shirts and send bring them to church. The Mission Board asks your help again in making totes from t-shirts for the Food Bank of Iowa and All Cultures Equal. The totes are still requested. Each tote will need to hold up to 30 pounds of cans, bags of rice or beans, potatoes, and the like, so don’t save worn out tees with holes, kiddie tees or thin/gauzy ones for us. The t-shirt totes go to ACE at the end of February. The food pantry participants thank you – and so do we! – **The Mission Board**

Thanks to everyone who supported our January soup collection for All Cultures Equal!



Transition of Executive Conference Minister

After significant discernment, Executive Conference Minister (ECM) Rev. Brigit Stevens shares with us that the tenure of her leadership as ECM will end on July 31st, 2022. As of January 25th, 2022, the Tri-Conference Board of Directors has accepted and unanimously approved a plan of transition for Rev. Stevens. This plan sets into place Rev. Stevens' responsibilities until her resignation date on or before July 31st, 2022. An acting/interim ECM is expected to be in place on August 1st, 2022. Rev. Stevens letter follows:

January 28, 2022 Friends and Members of the Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota UCC Conferences, After significant discernment, I share with you that the tenure of my leadership as your Executive Conference Minister (ECM) will end on July 31, 2022. Our time in ministry together has been the most rewarding and challenging of my career. We created something new together, the partnership between our conferences that we call the Tri-Conference UCC Ministries (TCM)! We celebrated Members in Discernment and ordinations, church anniversaries and newly called pastors, creative new vocations and retirements from ministry. We embraced the gospel work of becoming Open and Affirming and Anti-Racist conferences and started practicing transformational conversations with resources of curricula, partnerships, and deep faith. We resourced congregations and clergy through technology like updated websites, social media, and databases and through a brilliant staff of diverse gifts and skills. We remained steady and faithful in our stewardship of the conferences' resources. We did all of this while everything about how we work and live changed because of the CoVid-19 global pandemic. Our ministry has been miraculous in a number of ways! It has also been very challenging. While we were accomplishing everything listed above and more, we also created new structures, roles, and practices to support that ministry among our three conferences. The boards of directors, staff and I updated Employee Handbooks, explored the roles of staff and board members, updated job descriptions, adopted new technologies, and

wrote policies and procedures to govern and guide our work. It is the work of creating the systems and processes of our ministry that have been the most difficult. Through months of prayer and discernment, I decided that it is time I move on so another leader may continue this important work with the TCM. In meaningful discussion, prayer, and discernment, the TCM Board of Directors approved a faithful transition plan. I will transition out of the role of Executive Conference Minister by July 31st and the TCM Board will search for an Acting ECM to begin work on August 1, 2022. They have already begun that work. The TCM BOD is well supported by the national UCC resources, especially national UCC staff person the Rev. Lee Albertson, as a guide for the Acting ECM search and call process. The TCM BOD will keep the conferences updated as to their progress along the way. In the coming six months, the TCM Board of Directors and I will diligently process our experiences of the past four years, mining them for insight and growth for what comes next. We will continue projects identified from our recent time with a consultant, such as refining and clarifying HR policies and practices, identifying needs and resources for ongoing board member on-boarding and training, and engaging ways to build trust among members and leaders of the conferences. For the work continuing beyond my tenure, there is high priority among board members to diligently engage a plan for assessing the TCM covenant that shapes this partnership of UCC Ministry, support, resources, and connections happen because of gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission and Friends of the Conference. Thank you for prayerfully considering a gift today!
www.ucctcm.org/donate/ conferences. This is not a small endeavor and will be a point of interest regarding skills and gifts sought in the Acting ECM. Please look for ways to participate in that important work. As we serve together in ministry in the coming months and we find ways to gather and say good-bye to one another, I am rooted in and proud of our commitment to live into God's extravagant welcome and advocate for justice, so that all know love, safety, belonging, and dignity. It has been a honor to serve as your Executive Conference Minister. I love you. I am praying for you. And I

know that God is here among and within us in this time of transition and change.
 In the blessing of being, Rev. Brigit F. Stevens
 Executive Conference Minister Pronouns:
 she/her/hers brigit@ucctcm.org 515-277-6369
 (office)

Treasurer's Report

<u>INCOME</u>	December	<u>YEAR TO DATE</u>
Pledges and Offerings	\$29,441.19	\$190,327.60
Other Income	0.00	.00
TOTAL INCOME	\$29,441.19	\$190,327.60
<u>EXPENSES</u>		
Outreach and Mission	1,666.67	\$17,693.00
Pastoral Services	8,171.56	95,860.83
Maintenance and Repairs	7,645.12	36,475.40
Church Office	5,680.39	38,920.01
Music Ministry	565.12	7,204.95
Christian Education	30.02	378.25
Local Ministry	2,000.00	2,016.67
Misc. Expenses	34.71	696.08
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$25,793.59	\$199,245.19

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1000 Willson Avenue
Webster City, IA 50595
Address Service Requested

God is still speaking
to everyone in the home of:

A stylized heart icon composed of overlapping shapes in shades of purple and pink.

FEBRUARY 2022